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Preparing tomorrow's teachers: A program analysis of teacher education in Iowa and its role in preparing preservice teachers for emergent bilinguals

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PREPARING TOMORROW'S TEACHERS: A PROGRAM ANALYSIS OF TEACHER
EDUCATION IN IOWA AND ITS ROLE IN PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS FOR
EMERGENT BILINGUALS

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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This Study by: Karrigan Mentzer

Entitled: Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers: A Program Analysis of Teacher Education in Iowa and its Role in Preparing Preservice Teachers for Emergent Bilinguals

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University Honors.

4/26/2021, Dr. Aliza Fones, Honors Thesis Advisor, Languages and Literatures

Date, Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Purpose

Throughout my time at the University of Northern Iowa, I have had the opportunity to befriend, live, and work with many future teachers studying a variety of fields. We have often discussed the things we were learning in class and what we saw in field experiences. Something we all noticed is that I, as a student majoring in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), was the only one receiving any training about emergent bilingual students that went beyond a passing mention of the topic. This led me to wonder why I was the only one receiving this education, when all of my peers will likely encounter these students at some point in their careers as teachers. This question is what inspired me to do this research.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the successes and shortcomings of teacher education programs at the three state universities in Iowa, specifically in regards to how they prepare all future teachers for working with emergent bilingual students (EBs), often referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs). Based on these findings, I provided suggestions for how these programs can be improved in order to prepare all future teachers to best serve all of their future students.

Literature Review

Significance of Appropriately Labeling Emergent Bilingual Students

Students that speak a language other than English as their first language have gone by a wide variety of names throughout their time as a distinctly recognized student population. In the past two decades, these students have been referred to by labels including limited English proficient, English language learner, and English learner (Martínez, 2018). While these labels help identify these students and acknowledge that they are different and are eligible to receive

specialized education, they also portray these students in a negative light. For example, the label limited English proficient, or LEP, views these students in a deficit perspective by acknowledging that they are not proficient in English and failing to acknowledge that they may be proficient in one or more other languages. This is an incredible skill and resource, but according to Martínez (2018), when we use the LEP label, “we see their bilingualism as a deficit or an obstacle, and we tend to focus on what they cannot do” (p. 516). This has negative impacts on students, who may begin to develop a negative perception of themselves.

The other two labels mentioned above, English language learner (ELL) and English learner (EL), are slight improvements from labeling students as LEP. However, what these labels fail to do is acknowledge the rich linguistic backgrounds that these students have, because these labels place English at the forefront (Martínez, 2018). The labels of ELL and EL also have a deficit view of students, especially in the United States, because knowing English is something very normal here. By labeling students in this way, schools make it very obvious that students do not know the language, which may cause them to be viewed negatively by other students or community members.

There are some labels for students learning English that may be better alternatives. One example that is growing in popularity is emergent bilingual, or EB. García (2011) said that this label is a good alternative to some of the ones discussed earlier because it does not have a deficit view of these students, and it also acknowledges that they know more than one language. While this label does have some problems, such as portraying the idea that these students know only two languages while some may know many more, it is one of the better labels that is working its way into use. Because of this, I will refer to students who are learning English as an additional language as emergent bilinguals, or EBs. It is important to note that the EB label is new, so

when direct references to other sources are used, the terms limited English proficient (LEP), English Language Learner (ELL), and other similar terms may still be used.

Population Changes Around the United States and Iowa

The population of EB students around the country is rapidly growing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), in the fall of 2000, there were 3.8 million emergent bilingual students in public schools, or 8.1% of the total public school population. In the fall of 2017, there were five million students in public schools, or 10.1% of the total population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This represents a growth of about 1.2 million students in 17 years, which is a very rapid increase. Cities tend to have higher rates of EB students, and the percentage of students classified this way is higher on average in elementary school than in the upper grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

These national trends are very similar to what is currently occurring in the state of Iowa. The Iowa Department of Education (2020) reports that 6% of public school students are considered emergent bilinguals, and that the state of Iowa's population is rapidly catching up to numbers around the nation. In Iowa public schools, there were over 140 different home languages spoken in 2017 (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). 37.5% of emergent bilingual students are served by 25 school districts that have the greatest number of emergent bilinguals in the state (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). While these 25 schools are mainly in urban areas of the state, it is important to note that the other 62.5% of Iowan EBs are served by other schools, some of which are smaller and in more rural settings where there may not be many of these students. For this reason, it is important that all teachers are prepared to work with emergent bilingual students, as they may be present in any school around the state or the country.

While this linguistically diverse student population is rapidly growing and contributing to the overall diversity of the total public school population, there is also rapid diversification occurring within the EB population. This concept, known as superdiversity, is defined by Bloomaert and Rampton (2017) as:

A tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on. (p. 22)

Put more simply, immigrants and refugees are arriving from an increasingly diverse range of places with an even wider variety of motives and experiences. The language representation among these individuals is also rapidly diversifying. For example, over the past 30 years, Spanish and Chinese have been the top two most spoken languages by immigrants to the United States, but other common languages have changed drastically (Pandya, McHugh, & Batalova, 2011). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2011), languages like Italian and German have been replaced by Vietnamese, Russian, and Korean, and the rankings are constantly shifting from year to year. With such a rapidly evolving situation, it is extremely important for all teachers to be prepared for emergent bilingual students to enter their classrooms.

The Need to Prepare Preservice Teachers for the Students of Today

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, it is important that teachers enter the field prepared to work with all students, including those from different backgrounds and those that are linguistically diverse. However, not all teachers receive adequate training for the student population that they will encounter. Studies have found that teachers that are able to educate

EBs with the greatest success are those with “identifiable pedagogical and cultural skills and knowledge including the ability to communicate effectively with students and to engage their families” (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005, p. 3). These are skills that are likely covered in a program for preservice emergent bilingual teachers, but not in the general curriculum for all preservice teachers. This is problematic because all teachers, not just those with an English as a second language (ESL) certification, play an active role in educating EB students. Gándara, Maxwell-Joly, and Driscoll (2005) conducted a study of California teachers and found that of teachers with more than three EB students in their room, only 29% had an ESL or bilingual education certification. With the way that teacher education programs are currently designed, teachers without ESL certifications have little to no training in this area, leaving them unprepared for the students they will encounter.

In order to send well-rounded teachers into the field that are prepared for today’s student population, Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that there needs to be significant reform in higher education. Institutions and programs of teacher education need to “make issues of diversity central to [their] mission” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 151). By bringing diversity to the forefront of conversations within these programs and within institutions as a whole, there can be space for change.

Many suggestions also exist for how to revise current curriculum in order to create teachers that are better prepared for the students in schools today. In the book *Educating Culturally Responsive Teachers: A Coherent Approach*, Villegas and Lucas (2002) propose a six strand model for creating teachers that are culturally responsive. The six strands include:

Gaining sociocultural consciousness..., developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds..., developing the commitment and skills to act as

agents of change..., understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching..., learning about students and their communities..., and cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices. (p. 26)

With considerable teacher education reform in a way that works to address current issues and instill these skills and values in preservice teachers, the teaching force can become more well-rounded and prepared for future demographic shifts that will continue to change student populations and needs around the country.

Why is EB Preparation Excluded from Teacher Education?

Many teacher education programs do little to prepare future teachers for working with EB students in the classroom. This is partially due to the assumption that linguistically diverse students can succeed in the classroom with “pedagogical adaptations that can easily be incorporated into a mainstream teacher's existing repertoire of instructional strategies for a diverse classroom” (deJong & Harper, 2005, p. 102). However, what this assumption fails to acknowledge is that EB students do not have the cultural experience that can make these educational practices work. For example, cultures around the world have very different perspectives and ways of interacting with literacy (deJong & Harper, 2015). For students in American schools, reading is a crucial skill that is necessary for almost all other content areas. If students struggle to read, they likely struggle to succeed in other areas. For students that come from cultures where literacy is orally constructed, reading may be foreign and extremely difficult. No pedagogical adaptation will suddenly make a student familiar and skilled at interacting with written literacy. However, because this assumption is still prevalent, teacher education programs have been slow to make changes that will provide pre-service teachers with the valuable tools they need to support EB students in the classroom.

Florida as a Model for Change

Across the country, there are very few teacher education programs that require all preservice teachers to receive training in emergent bilingual students. There are only three states that require all preservice teachers to be trained in this way (Coady & de Jong, 2011). One of these states is Florida, which is a rapidly diversifying state. According to Coady and de Jong (2011), the state reported over 220 home languages in the 2009-2010 school year with over 232,000 EB students. With this large number of linguistically diverse students, it is even more crucial that all teachers are prepared for the needs of these students.

State-approved teacher education programs in the state of Florida have an interesting way of ensuring that all preservice teachers are trained to work with emergent bilingual students. Since 2001, many teacher education programs have been infused with “ESOL teacher competencies,” meaning that teachers take two or three courses specifically focused on emergent bilingual students, while many other courses incorporate information on how to best work with EBs in the classroom (Coady & de Jong, 2011, p. 225). This could include teaching reading strategies and scaffolds for EBs in a literacy class that all elementary education majors need to take.

Teacher education programs across the country could benefit from taking an approach similar to what Florida requires of its state-approved programs. By infusing information about emergent bilingual students into courses already required for many teaching majors, students are still getting the necessary knowledge to be successful teachers in their chosen discipline, but they are also developing the skills needed to serve a rapidly diversifying student population. Classes that are specifically focused on emergency bilinguals also allow preservice teachers to specifically learn about this diverse segment of the student population. While many preservice teachers would benefit from instruction similar to what is used in the context of Florida, it would

likely require a complete reevaluation and overhaul of existing curriculum; however, this is a necessary change in order for future teachers to be successful with the student populations they are going to encounter once they enter the field.

Perspectives on the Need for Teacher Education Reform

Some teacher education programs are beginning to make changes that will help pre-service teachers better serve linguistically diverse students in their future classrooms; however, this effort cannot be limited to just a few states. This change needs to occur nationally, and for all future teachers, not just those who want to work with EB students.

In recent years, there has been a move towards the inclusion of EB students into the mainstream classroom. This is largely due to the inclusion movement in special education (Lucas, 2010). However, including EB students does not mean they can just be left to figure out language on their own, like in the “sink-or-swim” settings that were common in schools up until quite recently. This type of immersion does not benefit students. It has been found that language learners receive the greatest benefit when home languages are supported in the classroom, and that this support sends a message of membership and belonging to linguistically diverse students (Cruz, 2005). However, if teachers are not prepared to support their students’ home languages, EB students may find themselves in an environment where they feel a sense of isolation, making it much harder for them to learn.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study that will look specifically at the teacher education programs at the three public universities in the state of Iowa: Iowa State University, University of Iowa, and University of Northern Iowa. I chose to use the qualitative research method for this study because it allowed me to look inductively at a small sample and make holistic, descriptive

statements about what I discovered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have chosen to study these three schools through nonprobability sampling because of their role in educating future teachers for the state of Iowa. The University of Northern Iowa specifically is known for having one of the best teacher education programs in the region, graduating a significant number of teachers every year. The University of Iowa and Iowa State University were chosen because of the number of variables that are held constant among the three schools. All three are public universities within the same state, and are under the same governing body, the Board of Regents. However, even with these similarities, the three programs are educating future teachers in different settings, and have some freedom to design their curriculum as they see fit.

Timeline

The timeline for this research can best be described in terms of two phases. Phase 1 included the program analyses using the institutions' course catalogs and four-year plans that are available online, as well as the vision statements for the teacher education programs at all three universities. It also included interviews with faculty and staff in these teacher education programs. Phase 2 included research surrounding suggestions for improvement for these different programs. This timeline spanned from late November to mid-April.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of this research began shortly after the end of the Fall 2020 semester. I completed an analysis of the various teacher education programs at the three state universities in Iowa using the course catalogs, four-year plans of study, and program vision statements by mid-January. I also created the interview questions that I used for each school's interview. I created these questions based on the perspectives I wanted to hear from each of my participants, as well as additional information or clarifications I needed based on the earlier analytic research I

conducted. These questions were designed to elicit the subjects' opinions, so I did my best to ensure that the wording did not sway participants in a certain direction. I began contacting interview subjects in early February.

For my interviews, I met with one program representative from each institution. Interviews were conducted via Zoom from mid-February to early March. From these interviews, I was able to learn about the nuances of the program descriptions that may be more difficult to understand as an outsider looking at the program websites. These individuals also provided valuable information about program strengths and anticipated changes, as well as insights about the current state of educator preparation for emergent bilingual students. Phase 1 was completed in about three months.

Phase 2

Upon completion of the program analyses and interviews, I began researching suggestions for improvement for the three programs. These suggestions are supported by evidence of what has worked in other programs around the nation. Phase 2 was completed in about 2 months.

Participants

My participants for this research were all faculty members working with the ESL endorsement at their respective institutions. Participants were recruited through contact information located online or through referral from one of their colleagues. In order to protect the confidentiality of these participants, all names included in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Finding participants to interview for this study was not without its challenges. The participant at the University of Northern Iowa was the easiest to identify and schedule a time with, which is likely due to my role as a student at this institution and my connection to the

program. With the University of Iowa, the first faculty member I contacted referred me to someone who has a more direct role within the program, and this individual and I were able to schedule an interview time with relative ease. Iowa State University provided a unique challenge. The first faculty member I contacted was listed on their website, but they mentioned that they have been removed from the endorsement program for quite some time. From this point, I was referred to five different individuals before I found someone with a role that made them a suitable candidate for the interview. This long chain of referrals is concerning, as it seems to show a sense of disorganization within the endorsement program. While there were factors that may have contributed to this confusion, such as the ongoing pandemic and recent job changes within the endorsement program, it does not take away from the fact that it was incredibly difficult to get information about this program.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first step I took in the data collection process was to look at the mission and vision statements of the teacher education programs at all three institutions. When looking at these statements, I used discourse analysis to closely examine the words that were used and the connotations associated with them. I selected this method because it allowed me to focus not only on the language but also on the meaning of that language in context (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This step was crucial in allowing me to see what each program values and intends to instill in its students.

Next, I studied the four year course plans for the ESL endorsement at each institution. In the case of the University of Northern Iowa, I compared the plans of study for a TESOL major and an elementary education major. For both Iowa State University and the University of Iowa, I compared the plan of study for an elementary education major with an ESL endorsement to the

plan of an elementary education major without that endorsement. I used open coding to mark any information that stood out to me as being related to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After completing this, I went back and compared what I had observed in the plans of study to the mission and vision statements, and, using discourse analysis, I examined how the coursework at each institution aligned with its mission and vision.

After completing an analysis of the information that was available to me through the websites of each institution, I began conducting interviews with a faculty member involved with the ESL endorsement or TESOL major at each institution. These interviews were conducted via Zoom, and they were recorded in order to help me with my analysis. I asked participants from all three institutions the same set of questions, and then I asked institution-specific questions to clarify any confusing data I collected in previous phases. The Zoom platform has the ability to transcribe recorded meetings, so I used these transcripts to complete open coding of the interviews. After this, I was able to begin writing up my findings.

Findings

Case 1-University of Northern Iowa

The University of Northern Iowa's Teacher Education program website defines the university as a whole as an educator preparation program because of its dedication to educating future teachers. According to the plans of study available online, they provide students of all majors with ample opportunities for field experience. There are three different levels of practicum experience that are required for all education majors to complete before graduation. This allows preservice teachers to experience firsthand what today's classrooms are like. With the location of the University of Northern Iowa, students have the opportunity to complete field experiences in the Waterloo Community School District, which educates a linguistically and

culturally diverse student body of over 10,000 students. In Waterloo, 30% of the population is a race other than white, and over 9% are foreign born (United States Census Bureau, 2019). This provides future teachers with a wide range of experiences in classrooms before they are fully licensed teachers.

The University of Northern Iowa offers Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as a major and minor. The minor allows students to receive an ESL endorsement as a part of their teacher licensure. In order to earn this, there is a sequence of six classes that students must take. While this may seem easily attainable, there are several issues that I believe draw students away from this option. For example, the TESOL program at the University of Northern Iowa is not housed in the College of Education. It is instead located in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences under the Department of Languages and Literatures. While this difference in location may seem insignificant, I think it creates a sense of disassociation. For majors that are housed in the College of Education, such as elementary education, it is easy to see TESOL and EB students as something out of their field of study. This is problematic because all teachers will likely work with EB students at some point in their career, and if their preparation program instills in them that these students are not their responsibility, EB students will face the consequences in the future. In addition, because of this separation, students with an elementary education major that want to pursue an ESL endorsement have to meet with two separate individuals for the purpose of planning for future courses and ensuring that graduation requirements are met. This can seem like unnecessary work for students, further deterring them from the ESL endorsement option.

When comparing the University of Northern Iowa's mission and belief statements with the plans of study for both elementary education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other

Languages majors, there are several issues. The mission statement states that the teacher education program prepares future teachers to “advocate for students, schools, communities, and the profession in a dynamic and changing world.” However, when looking specifically at the plan of study for the elementary education major, the only courses that deal with “diverse learners” (which often includes populations other than emergent bilingual learners) are Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners (SPED 3150) and Human Relations (TEACHING 4170). If teachers are not being adequately prepared for EB students, I argue that they are not prepared to do the kind of advocacy the mission statement claims they are ready for. A similar problem can be seen in the vision statement, which states that future teachers are prepared to “navigate changing social and political contexts to promote social justice”. Limited preparation for EB students again fails to prepare teachers in this way.

UNI’s Educator Preparation Program also has six belief statements, some of which are well-supported by the plans of study. However, some of the belief statements are not supported. For example, one statement states that “Candidates have a responsibility to understand historical, social, cultural, and political contexts and how they impact education.” This directly ties to the idea of superdiversity mentioned earlier in this paper (Blommaert & Rampton, 2017). Teacher education candidates are going to enter a field where student populations are rapidly changing, and without adequate preparation, these new teachers may feel overwhelmed and unsure of how to handle the wealth of diversity in their classrooms. One course, Human Relations, does cover the concept of culturally responsive teaching and working with diverse students; however, this is not enough. Future teachers should be educated about diverse students, including EBs, in all courses, including methods classes in order to give teachers the skills they need to lead a diverse classroom.

When looking at the TESOL plan of study, there is much more attention given to understanding how the aforementioned contexts impact education. In addition to Human Relations, TESOL majors have to take Bilingualism and Bilingual Education (TESOL 4720), which educates students on the history of bilingual education and the evolution of theories of second language acquisition. This allows future teachers to gain a better understanding of the situations they will be teaching in, as well as the history that has gotten bilingual education to the point where it currently is.

Another belief statement that has some problems with alignment to the plans of study reads: “Candidates must understand the importance of diversity and equity and engage in opportunities to promote social justice.” This statement seems very broad, even for a belief statement. I could not find how UNI defines the terms “diversity”, “equity”, and “social justice”. Because of this, it is difficult to see how the program is helping students meet these goals.

In my interview with an individual at the University of Northern Iowa who works with the TESOL program, I was able to learn more specific information about the program. This person was not sure how long the program has existed, but stated that it has been around for quite some time, and that it grew out of the English program. Because of this, the TESOL program was very English language-focused, as it consisted of linguistics courses adapted to meet the needs of teachers. However, this has changed quite recently, as some requirements for literature courses were removed and the requirement to study a foreign language for two semesters was added in around 2015. This allows preservice teachers to experience what it is like to learn a new language. The interview subject also stated that many of the faculty involved with TESOL at the University of Northern Iowa are very new, so they foresee that the program

will change some in the coming years as professors get settled and have the ability to make the program their own.

When asked about the strengths of the TESOL program at the University of Northern Iowa, the individual I interviewed cited that the program is very strong in the area of linguistics, while also providing courses about teaching methods and giving opportunities for experience in the field. This allows preservice teachers to develop a skill set they will need in the classroom while also giving them the knowledge of the English language, which is essentially the content aspect of what they will be teaching. This participant also mentioned that because the University of Northern Iowa is known for its College of Education, there are strong connections with local schools for students to partake in field experiences. There are also plenty of community engagement opportunities, and with the diversity present in Waterloo specifically, preservice teachers have the chance to work with a wide variety of populations and students with many different backgrounds. The TESOL program also has great overlap with different foreign languages like Spanish (and a potential for French), making it easier for students to study both. When I asked this participant if there was anything they would change about the University of Northern Iowa's TESOL program, they said that mainly they would like to see some major courses dropped to a lower course number. Currently, many TESOL courses are 4000-level, meaning that students cannot get into them independently until their junior year. This individual thinks it would be helpful for students to be able to take some entry-level courses earlier in their coursework at the university.

A final question that I asked this interview participant was whether or not they believe that preservice teachers outside of the TESOL major are prepared for EB students in schools. They said that while they believe the major and minor are strong programs, students outside of

them receive little education in this area. They also believe that the major and minor attract people who are aware that there is a need for teachers that know how to work with EB students. However, for students that do not know about this need or do not recognize its significance, the major or minor have little appeal.

Case 2-Iowa State University

Iowa State University is located in Ames, Iowa, and its School of Education is housed under the College of Human Sciences. Contrary to what can be found at the University of Northern Iowa, there is no TESOL major at Iowa State University; instead, students have the option of adding an English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching endorsement to another teaching major, such as elementary education. Students enrolled with teaching majors at this institution also participate in three levels of field experience before their student teaching experience. There are many opportunities for experiences in the city of Ames, in which 22% of the population is a race other than White, and nearly 13% are foreign born. Ames is also very close to the Des Moines metro area, where 35% of the population is a race other than White and 13% is foreign born (United States Census Bureau, 2019). This allows preservice teachers to experience a wide range of diverse schools.

The first area I chose to examine when analyzing Iowa State University's School of Education was their mission statement, which is fairly brief. Something that is outlined in this statement is that this school prepares teachers to "support rich and equitable learning opportunities for all students." This is a crucial part of teaching, and something that all teachers need to be able to do. However, if students do not receive adequate instruction and preparation for EB students, they cannot be prepared to give these students equitable opportunities in their

own classrooms, or advocate for EB students to have equitable opportunities in other aspects of education.

Something that I admire about Iowa State University's School of Education mission statement is that they have a focus on the P-20 continuum. This is the idea that education begins in preschool and continues throughout the lifespan (Northern Illinois University, 2021). I think this focus is essential for the education of all students in today's constantly evolving world. However, I also believe that students become lifelong learners when they have positive educational experiences that help foster a love of learning, and positive educational experiences begin with highly qualified teachers that work to educate all students, including EBs. In order to make EB students into lifelong learners, it is important that they are placed in classrooms with teachers who know how to best serve them.

Another piece of information that I used to conduct this program analysis was a comparison between the elementary education major at Iowa State University and an elementary education major with an ESL endorsement. Something important to note about the elementary education major at Iowa State is that students are strongly encouraged to pursue at least one endorsement area. Endorsement options include English/language arts, health, science, social studies, ESL, math, and special education. While the ESL endorsement is not in the School of Education, it seems to be promoted in the same way as other endorsements, and since students are so strongly encouraged to pick up at least one endorsement, ESL seems to get the same amount of attention as other endorsement areas.

Something that is beneficial about the ESL endorsement at Iowa State University is that students do a practicum that is specific to ESL education. At the University of Northern Iowa, this practicum experience is not required for students pursuing the minor in order to be endorsed.

In this way, students at Iowa State University have an opportunity that students at the University of Northern Iowa do not. A practicum designated solely to the ESL endorsement and therefore, to EB students, gives preservice teachers the opportunity to gain experience with this unique population. This also gives teachers an idea of what it will be like to have EB students in their classrooms one day.

In my interview with an individual who works with the ESL endorsement at Iowa State University, I learned that this endorsement has existed there for at least 10 years, and within that time, the program has seen few changes. The only currently proposed change that this individual could recall is that there is a push to have the ESL methods course and practicum offered in the same semester. Currently, they are not typically offered at the same time. I think this would be more beneficial for future teachers because they would be better informed about best practices to use in the classroom with EB students, and they would have a supportive environment to experiment with what they are learning in their methods class.

When I asked this individual what they believe the strengths of this endorsement program are, they cited that they believe students graduate with strong ESL content knowledge. They also stated that they believe these students have a strong skill set that allows them to effectively differentiate instruction for their EB students. This is great knowledge for all preservice teachers to have; however, currently the only future educators that receive this training are those that choose to pursue an ESL endorsement. On a related note, this individual mentioned that if they could change anything in this endorsement program, they would strengthen ties between the School of Education and the ESL endorsement. They stated that sometimes it feels as if the School of Education just trusts the endorsement faculty to do what they need to do, which has its advantages, but it also creates the sense of distance I observed in my program analysis with the

University of Northern Iowa. With the sense of separation between ESL and other education programs, it perpetuates the notion that EB students are not the responsibility of mainstream educators.

Finally, I asked this individual if they believe that the School of Education adequately prepares all future teachers for EB students in the classroom. They mentioned that there is a definite gap in this area of educator preparation. They also stated their belief that all preservice teachers need to be prepared for EB students in the classroom, because today “all teachers are language teachers” (Interview w/Wendy Andrews, 3/2/21). I think this statement is a great reflection of the way that the student population in American public schools is rapidly diversifying, and as this continues to happen, the roles of teachers will shift as well. This participant also cited that in all content areas, teachers are “teaching through English,” so all teachers should have an education that revolves around working with EB students (Interview w/Wendy Andrews, 3/2/21). Regardless of a teacher’s content area, they are all responsible for the education of their EB students.

Case 3-University of Iowa

The University of Iowa is located in Iowa City, Iowa, and its ESL endorsement is housed in the College of Education. Similar to Iowa State University, there is no option to major in this teaching field like there is at the University of Northern Iowa. Students here have the opportunity for multiple practicum experiences before students teaching, similar to what can be found at other institutions in this study. Iowa City has a very diverse population, with 14.3% being foreign born and 14.7% identifying as a race other than White (United States Census Bureau, 2019). This makes it a great location for students to gain experience in diverse classrooms.

In my program analysis of teacher education at the University of Iowa, I first examined their mission statement. In this statement, they claim to train students to “solve problems and effect change in the field of education.” The type of change that is needed in education right now is change that will help normalize and improve the experiences of EB students in our classrooms. However, students without an ESL endorsement at this institution receive very little education on how to work with these students, I do not think students are prepared to effect change in this way.

The University of Iowa College of Education also has a set of value statements. Something noticeable about these statements is the focus on research-based practices and data-driven decisions. For example, they have a statement of commitment to community that states that the program is “committed to using evidence-based practices to improve the lives of individuals, the effectiveness of our schools, and the quality of life in our communities”. While it is important to conduct research and use data to make the best decisions possible, I wonder how this impacts the quality of education that students receive. Obviously, data-driven decisions have the potential to have future educators’ best interests in mind; however, if the professors in the College of Education at the University of Iowa are the ones doing the research, this could negatively affect future teachers’ education. With research being such a focus in the value statements, it seems as if that could be viewed as a priority for faculty, meaning that their duties as educators could be a secondary priority, with less focus given to it than at other institutions.

Next, I looked at the plan of study for the elementary education major at the University of Iowa. While these students take many classes to prepare them for working with students who do not have diverse language backgrounds, they receive little to no education on EB students. This is problematic because it is very likely that preservice teachers will have linguistically diverse

students in practicum experiences, student teaching, or in their own classrooms in the future. In addition, the ESL endorsement is fairly small as well, which is not uncommon. Students have some methods courses, a practicum, and some ESL electives. However, something interesting about the electives is that students may be missing out on very important knowledge related to EB students depending on the elective they choose. For example, based on the listed options, if a preservice teacher pursuing the ESL endorsement decides to take a course on social inequalities, they do not have to take a course on language assessment because their elective requirement has been fulfilled. This is an issue because all of this information would benefit all teachers, and by allowing students to pick and choose, they miss out on knowledge in crucial areas related to EB students.

From my interview with a faculty member at the University of Iowa, I learned that the ESL endorsement program is fairly new, having likely been started within the past ten years, as there were no ESL faculty at the institution prior to then. This participant stated that the endorsement program is very healthy, with about 40-50 students currently enrolled. Recently, the endorsement program also added the option for students to get a specialization in bilingual education, which provides more opportunities for students who choose to pursue the endorsement.

When asked about the strengths of the ESL endorsement program at the University of Iowa, this individual cited that students have the opportunity to work with “faculty who are leaders in their field of research” and “faculty and graduate students who have experience as teachers” (Interview w/Johnathan Dennis, 3/5/21). This combination would provide a very well-rounded experience for students in the program. They can hear real-world experiences that their professors have encountered in classroom settings, as well as learn about the most up-to-date,

research informed practices. This allows future teachers to learn “how to translate research into practice” (Interview w/Johnathan Dennis, 3/5/21). However, as mentioned earlier in this section, it could be problematic if professors spend too much time focusing on research.

When I asked this individual what they would change about the endorsement program if they could, they mentioned that they would like to see “a bigger focus on social aspects of language learning,” such as sociolinguistics (Interview w/Johnathan Dennis, 3/5/21). They believe that this is an important part of understanding what EB students face, and the power imbalances and marginalization that affect these students every day. This also better equips teachers to do what this participant calls another important part of their job: “advocat[ing] on behalf of students who have historically been marginalized, and are still” (Interview w/Johnathan Dennis, 3/5/21). This participant later cited the need for all preservice teachers to receive an education in this field, because currently, there is no education related to emergent bilingual students for any preservice teachers that do not pursue the ESL endorsement. They also mentioned that they are hoping to change this, but that there is still a lot of work to be done.

Overall Findings

Something that is common across all three universities is the lack of communication between their ESL education and the greater College or School of Education. The University of Northern Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Iowa all have strong ESL options available for study, but these options are relegated only to the endorsement. The programs that prepare future teachers to educate marginalized students end up marginalized themselves, often located out of the main focus of the College of Education and many future teachers. This perpetuates the harmful idea that EB students are not mainstream teachers’ responsibility; because these teachers receive very little to no training on how to work with these students, they

assume that the responsibility of educating them falls on the shoulders of teachers who do receive this education. This leads to a cycle of ineffective teaching and negative educational outcomes for emergent bilingual students in our public schools, a population that is rapidly growing and will likely not diminish any time soon.

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this research indicate that what is true across the United States holds true in the state of Iowa: the population of our public schools is rapidly diversifying, and teachers are not prepared for how this will shape education moving forward. As Coady and deJong (2011) found, only three states require preservice teachers to receive education on emergent bilingual students and how to best teach them. While some areas of the country are seeing super-diversification at much higher rates than others, this population shift is occurring nationwide (Blommaert & Rampton, 2017). This demonstrates that the lack of preservice teacher preparation for EB students is a problem that must be addressed.

Recommendations- Bridging the Gap to Ensure Student Success

In order to ensure that emergent bilingual students receive the same quality of education as their native English speaking counterparts, colleges of education must communicate with and include their ESL endorsement programs. All three of the participants that were interviewed in this research cited that they often feel separated from the greater teacher education programs at each institution. If programs that are designed to prepare future teachers for work with marginalized students continue to be marginalized, a cycle is perpetuated that has the potential to have very harmful effects. These negative consequences impact emergent bilingual students, who consistently face negative educational outcomes solely due to their position in society. It is imperative that emergent bilingual students are discussed and valued in teacher education

programs in order to ensure that they receive the same quality of public education that their English-speaking peers receive.

One possible solution to stop the marginalization of ESL endorsements is to embed some components of the endorsement into existing curriculum. For example, students studying elementary education at the three universities examined in this research have to take methods classes, where they learn about best practices for teaching different content areas, like math or social studies. In addition to these methods courses, an ESL methods course would be extremely valuable to future teachers. These courses already exist in some capacity at all three institutions studied, so the course material could be adapted slightly and the course could be made into a requirement for all teaching majors. This would provide an important knowledge base about emergent bilingual students for all future educators, and for those that want to expand their knowledge base, they could still pursue the endorsement if they choose to. While including one course may not seem very significant, I believe that it is a crucial step on the path to bettering teacher preparation and creating more positive educational experiences for EB students across the country.

This research is only the beginning of what could be a much more expansive study. One limitation of the research presented in this thesis is that interviews were only conducted with faculty members who work directly with the ESL endorsement at their respective institutions. Further research could expand the scope of interviews to include faculty within the great teacher education programs, as well as student perspectives. This would provide a more complete picture of how the exclusion of emergent bilingual students in teacher preparation impacts future teachers.

Conclusion

The public school population in the United States is rapidly diversifying. With this comes an increase in the number of emergent bilingual students that need language supports in schools. However, teacher education programs at the public universities in Iowa include little to no training on emergent bilingual students for the future teachers that they educate. While there are opportunities to study ESL for preservice teachers that are interested, there is little to nothing that is required for all future teachers. This creates a gap that is harmful for emergent bilingual students, as it decreases the quality of their education as they go through public schools without adequate support. In order to improve the state of education for emergent bilingual students in Iowa public schools, it is crucial that the colleges of education at the state universities include better preparation in this area for all future teachers, which begins with opening lines of communication between the greater education programs and ESL endorsement programs. Superdiversity will likely become the new norm in U.S. public schools, so it is time for teacher education programs to ensure that future educators have the tools they need to teach the students of today.

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