Spring 2022

EFFECTS OF PRE-LITERACY ON HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELS) IN THE RURAL UPPER MIDWEST

Maciah L. Lorang
University of South Dakota

EFFECTS OF PRE-LITERACY ON HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELS) IN THE

RURAL UPPER MIDWEST

by

Maciah Lorang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the

University Honors Program

_____

Department of Psychology

The University of South Dakota

May 2022

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed

to examine the thesis of Maciah Lorang

find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

_____

Gabrielle Strouse, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Chair, Counseling & Psychology in Education

University of South Dakota

Director of the Committee

_____

Angela Helmer, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

University of South Dakota

_____

Dyanis A. D. Conrad, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Instruction

University of South Dakota

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to catalog the observed effects of pre-literacy on high school English learners (ELs) in the rural Upper Midwest and propose solutions on a local level. A phenomenological research design was implemented for this study. Participants were high school teachers who teach English learners in their classes. Participant demographics include four teachers, one who teaches an EL English course, one who teaches an EL algebra course, one who is an EL teacher, and one who is a Spanish teacher. Participants were interviewed until saturation was reached. The interviews were then transcribed as de-identifiable data (if participants chose not to use their real names), and that data was then analyzed using the five phase explicitation process provided by the phenomenological research design. The main results/findings of our study included the perceived effects of pre-literacy on these students' education (i.e., difficulty with academic reading/writing), the perceived effects on these students' emotional life (i.e., feelings of shame and embarrassment), the perceived effects on these students' social life (i.e., these students being generally disconnected from the school and community), and the perceived effects on these students' home lives (i.e., difficulty communicating home). The main results/findings of this study also included some proposed solutions, including the use of native language materials and the need for more adequate training, to name a few. The specificity of this study (namely, that it be for high school ELs in the rural Upper Midwest) and the list of cataloged effects (from the perspective of the teachers) were the main implications/significance of our study.

KEYWORDS: English Learners, Pre-Literacy, Spanish, Upper Midwest, High School

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my research professor and thesis director, Dr. Gabrielle Strouse, for her continued support, encouragement, and guidance on this project and throughout my undergraduate education. I would also like to thank Dr. Angela Hemler and Dr. Dyanis Conrad for their willingness to collaborate and serve as committee members for my thesis. My deepest thanks to all of you for taking on this project with me.

Thank you to all the study participants. I appreciate your willingness to share your experience, and I hope this research can lead to more advances within your field. Thank you for all that you do.

Within the Honors Program, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my incredible advisor, Sarah Wittmuss, for her ongoing support and advice throughout this process and my undergraduate studies. I would not be half of the student, learner, researcher, teacher, and leader if it hadn't been for your continued encouragement to take on opportunities presented to me. I owe so much to you, and I hope this contributes to that.

Thank you to Jody Wacker, my high school speech coach, for caring as much about this topic as I do. You are the one who ignited this passion in me, and it is because of you that I feel so passionately for these pre-literate individuals. I admire the care that you hold for these individuals. Thank you for using your voice to take a stand.

Thank you to all my friends who have walked with me through all the stressful hours I poured into this project. Thank you, especially, to Heather Cox, Kailena Anderson, and Brandon Pedersen for being understanding and flexible in allowing me the time I needed to complete this project. I appreciate your kindness, support, and prayers throughout this process.

Thank you to my family, who have never wavered in their constant support and belief in me. I could not have completed this project without your support through all of it. I hope I have done well in making you proud. I couldn't have done this without you.

And finally, thank you to my love, Joshua Nobles, for encouraging me daily and loving me so well through all that comes with taking on this project. I wouldn't want to do this life without you.

All glory to the Lord.

Introduction

Penn State's article produced by their College of Education entitled *How can I support ELLs in my classroom?* highlights the sheer number of challenges faced by English learners (ELs) in the classroom. For example, ELs may not understand verbal cues, may feel anxiety, may feel excluded from other students in the classroom, or may feel unintelligent, to name a few ("How can I support ELLs in my classroom?," n.d.). Additionally, many ELs also bear significant responsibilities in their home, more than most students, and also often carry with them trauma from previous experiences (Lawrence, n.d.). This multidimensional challenge has no easy solution. It also confirms that the situation can look vastly different for each EL in the classroom, further proving the dimensionality of this challenge; solutions can and will look different for every EL.

The terms pre-literate and pre-literacy will be used throughout this thesis in place of the more common terms of illiterate and illiteracy. Pre-literate and pre-literacy are emerging terms recently introduced as alternatives, as some say, the terms illiterate and illiteracy imply that there is simply no hope for individuals defined as such to ever become literate. The prefix "il" means no or not, while the prefix "pre" means before or prior to. Therefore, using the terms pre-literate and pre-literacy implies that although these individuals are currently not literate, they can yet learn to be literate.

Literature Review

Michelle Lawrence's (n.d.) *How to Support the Social and Emotional Health of Middle/High School ELLs* explains that "Even with great instruction, success in the classroom will become that much more difficult to achieve if the social and emotional needs of a student are not met. This is especially true for middle and high school ELLs, who often have significant

responsibilities at home." These students often have big expectations to fulfill at home, as well as the expectation of learning a whole new language at school. To successfully support these students in the classroom, it is important to understand their life outside of the classroom and to meet their social and emotional needs (Antunes, 2021).

Several possible solutions for the challenges that arise from teaching ELs have been proposed. Lawrence (n.d.) and Banse & Palacios (2018) suggest that to support ELs' social and emotional health, building relationships with the students, and understanding their previous experiences and their various responsibilities may be some helpful strategies to integrate in the classroom. Building relationships with the student can make your work more effective. Lawrence (n.d.) says, "the better you know your students, the more effective your work with ELLs will be." Additionally, when students trust their teacher, this allows them to feel more comfortable to freely share about their previous experiences and various responsibilities outside of school. This is necessary for many reasons, including that the student can feel supported and encouraged by the teacher, and that the teacher can better understand the student. This deeper mutual understanding can allow the teacher to foster success in that student, too. Additionally, Marsh (2018), in her research, develops an intricate profile discussing who exactly these students are. Some aspects of this profile include the higher likelihood of these students living in poverty, having a broken education history, and experiencing emotional trauma such as PTSD. This is helpful to better understand these students.

Additionally, there are multiple solutions that can be utilized within the classroom setting: fostering a welcoming environment, supporting growth in literacy, encouraging classroom participation, and adapting evaluations in order to set the student up for success ("How can I support ELLs in my classroom?," n.d., Lawrence, n.d.). These various strategies

support students in a number of ways. For example, fostering a welcoming classroom environment can allow the student to let their guard down and can aid in "helping a new student to feel comfortable through pattern and predictability, it is important to help other students to welcome the ELL into the classroom" ("How can I support ELLs in my classroom?," n.d.). Supporting growth in literacy helps to build the necessary foundation of the language. Encouraging classroom participation can improve both language skills and help to foster relationships with peers. Finally, the adaptation of evaluations can set the student up for ultimate success. This can "create a more approachable testing situation for ELLs" ("How can I support ELLs in my classroom?," n.d.). Additionally, Marsh (2018) discussed some solutions that have been put into practice for instructing ELs. She concluded both "research and theory are pointing to programs that focus on dual language support" (p. 14). Dual language support simply means promoting bilingualism (in English and Spanish in this case). However, she said "resources are often unavailable for dual language programming" (Marsh, 2018, p.15). This means that although this type of programming has been shown to be effective, it is widely unavailable for much of the population. Overall, these suggestions have been used as possible solutions to overcome the many challenges ELs face in the classroom.

Culturally responsive teaching or instruction is another classroom-based support suggested by researchers (DeCapua, 2016; Marsh, 2018). This proposal includes five different ideals that teachers should follow in order to instruct their students more effectively. These ideals include, "teachers must become culturally competent…teachers use their continually evolving cultural understanding to develop and refine culturally responsive curriculum…a supportive learning environment is essential…there must be cultural congruence in the classroom…[and] effective classroom instruction" (DeCapua, 2016, p.228-229). This proposed solution outlines

many important ideals, but it does not discuss how teachers can get to this place. The purpose of this thesis is to fill in those gaps, by proposing practical, step-by-step solutions to combat some of the classroom challenges. As emphasized by both Marsh (2018) and DeCapua (2016), this must include instruction framed by culture.

An even more refined framework to incorporate is one of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literacy Instruction. This framework emphasizes that it is essential for instruction to be culturally responsive. Klingner and Soltero-González (2009) explain, "When children start school, they are more likely to excel if the teaching practices and norms of the school match those the children have learned in their homes." They further comment, "When there is a mismatch [between school and home], children are more likely to struggle or be considered at risk, and not have their strengths recognized and appreciated" (Klingner & Soltero-González, 2009). A definition for culturally responsive literacy instruction is given here, stating that "culturally responsive literacy instruction focuses on helping students access and connect with their prior knowledge, build on their interests, and connect what they are learning in school to their lives" (Klingner & Soltero-González, 2009). This kind of instruction places value on each students' experiences, even if those experiences are different than those of their peers, which helps the students realize the connections between what they are learning at school and their lives.

While these articles have many strengths that make them great sources, each one also presents some weaknesses. There is a lack of evidence for the claims made in some of them. Data that the proposed strategies are actually effective would enhance the validity of the proposed solutions. Additionally, there is a lack of depth and exploration in the teachers' role and their perspective. None of these sources discussed the teachers' experiences in trying to

understand and solve this problem. Also, no source presented in-depth teachers' views about what the challenges were for these students or whether the solutions were even working. Furthermore, the presentation of numerical data does not come with any further exploration of the topic, which could be helpful to the reader. Through the articles previously discussed, it is made evident that there are widespread challenges facing ELs across the nation within the public school system. Although there are some proposed solutions in these articles, there is no clear guidance on how to best implement the proposed solutions or which is most effective.

It is from the knowledge gained above that this research will move forward, in hopes of adding more to the narrative of the effects of pre-literacy on high school ELs in the Upper Midwest and proposing possible solutions on a local level.

Methodology

Research Design Overview

This research was conducted to catalog the perceived effects of pre-literacy on high school English learners and to propose solutions on a local level. A phenomenological research design was implemented to explore the nature of the phenomenon, in this case, the effects of pre-literacy on high school English learners. This research design was employed for this study as this allowed for a deeper understanding to properly grasp the challenges and solutions seen by teachers who teach ELs every day. Phenomenology allows for the participants' own perspective on their experiences to be captured. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews via Zoom. Interview questions were "directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196) as per a phenomenological design. Interviews were transcribed into de-identified data (if the participant chose to leave their name anonymous) within one week of the interview. Additionally, to further support the findings of this study, participants were asked to fill out a brief reflection prompt discussing the instances (or lack thereof) of preliteracy in their classrooms in the week following the interview and were given the opportunity to submit evidence from their classrooms to further support their interview answers. A phenomenological design, through its five phase explicitation process, allowed for a proper explanation of data through organization of data into themes that arose from the interviews.

Researcher Description

The researcher's backgrounds in approaching the study were heavily influenced by research indicating the many challenges that pre-literacy imposes on an individual's life and a lack of consistently implemented solutions. This previously held solely negative view of pre-literacy may have influenced the research.

Participants and Other Data Sources

Four participants were interviewed for this study. The demographics of our sample were as follows: one teacher who teaches an EL English course, one who teaches an EL algebra course, one EL teacher, and one Spanish teacher. Five existing data sources were also reviewed in this study, showing the need for a composite list of the effects of pre-literacy on ELs and the need for some more proposed solutions. Additionally, the reviewed data sources highlighted the different areas that may be affected by an individual's pre-literacy, including education, emotional life, social life, and home life. Also, participants were asked to fill out a reflection prompt within the week after their interview, discussing any instances that occurred in their classroom in the previous week regarding the literacy (or lack thereof) of Spanish speaking ELs. This data further supported the instances of pre-literacy that these teachers are seeing in their classrooms and the claims that these teachers made during their interviews.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The researcher did interview some teachers from the high school which she attended, however none of them were ever her teachers in this context, as EL teachers. Furthermore, the previously established relationship with a few of these participants only allows for the interviewees to feel more comfortable opening up and sharing about what they experience in their classrooms.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were contacted initially through their school email, found on various school websites, and sent a recruitment email. Inclusion criteria included: must be a high school teacher in the rural Upper Midwest and must teach Spanish speaking high school English learners. Participants were screened for these criteria during the recruitment process. Participating in this

study might have proven beneficial for those involved, as they had the chance to voice their opinions on the effects of pre-literacy and to propose solutions for this widespread problem. Additionally, the subjects were given the choice to reveal their identities if they wanted to. Consent forms were sent through email, after participants agreed to take part. Verbal consent was collected at the beginning of the interview, and participants were allowed the choice to remain anonymous, choose a pseudonym, or use their real names. Four participants took part in this study, and we decided to halt data collection after the fourth, as this was the point where we reached saturation (namely, that no new information was being collected in the interviews anymore). Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2019) indicated that the number of participants in a phenomenological study could range from one to 325 participants. Data was collected from January 30, 2022, to February 3, 2022, through one-on-one Zoom interviews.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-time one-on-one private Zoom interviews, a brief reflective journaling prompt, and any evidence provided by teachers to support their interview answers. Interviews were held for 25 minutes to 30 minutes, with an average interview time of 28 minutes. The interview utilized open-ended questioning, supplying an opportunity for participants to expound upon their ideas. The questions were asked about the teachers' perceptions of the effects of pre-literacy on many aspects of their students' lives (emotional, educational, social, to name a few). My own prior knowledge and perspectives informed the types of interview questions I asked. Additionally, because of this prior knowledge, I was careful not to ask follow-up questions that would lead the participant toward a particular response. Interviews were recorded, then transcribed into de-identifiable data (if the participant chose to keep their name anonymous) within a week using a combination of Zoom automatic

transcriptions and the researcher's edits to that transcription. After data was transcribed, the original recordings were deleted, and transcription files were stored on my password-protected computer. Reflection prompts and submitted evidence were collected from each participant about a week after their interview was completed. Reflection prompts and submitted evidence were also stored on my password-protected computer as de-identifiable information if that's what the participant chose.

Analysis

Data was analyzed using the five phase explicitation process as described in Thomas Groenewald's *A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated*. These steps include bracketing and phenomenological reduction, delineating units of meaning, clustering of units of meaning to form themes, summarizing each interview, confirming it and, where necessary, changing it, and extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews to make a composite summary (Groenewald, p.49).

Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, the first step, refers to "not allowing the researcher's meaning and interpretations or theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the informant/participant" (Groenewald, p. 50). Groenewald recommended that the researcher listens to the interview a number of times to develop a "holistic sense" (p.50) of the interview. That was completed in this study, as the researcher performed the interview, then transcribed it, resulting in an in-depth listening of the recording. Then, after the transcription was complete, the researcher listened to the interview again to ensure the transcription was accurate and to understand the participants' answers in the way that they meant them.

Delineating units of meaning, the second step, is "a critical phase of explicating the data, in that those statements that are seen to illuminate the researched phenomenon are extracted or

isolated" (Groenewald, p. 50). To do this, the researcher reviewed the content and considered both the number of times a specific unit of meaning was discussed and how the unit of meaning was stated.

Clustering units of meaning to form themes is the third step in the explicitation process. In this step, "by rigorously examining the list of units of meaning the researcher tries to elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context" (Groenewald, p. 50). In this study, this was done by grouping together units of meaning that were discussed by most or all of the participants to determine various central themes that arose.

The fourth step in this process is to summarize each interview. In this step, the researcher does just that: summarizes each interview, validating and modifying where necessary. "A summary that incorporates all themes elicited from the data gives a holistic context" (Groenewald, p. 51). To complete this step, the researcher sent her summaries of the themes from each interview to the thesis director, and research was validated that way.

The final step of the explicitation process is forming general and unique themes for all the interviews and a composite summary. In this step, "the researcher looks for themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations" (Groenewald, p. 51). This step was completed in the results section below. A summary of all themes was presented, with unique perspectives from each of the participants through the use of their quotes.

Coding categories emerged from the analyses, and there were no themes developed prior to the analyses. In the analysis process, the entire transcripts were utilized, and themes were formed as discussed above, by common ideas that were discussed by most or all of the participants.

Methodological Integrity

Triangulation was used across the multiple sources of information (interviews, reflection prompts, additional supporting materials, and previously established research) to ensure methodological integrity was met. Researcher's perspectives were managed in both data collection and analysis. They were managed in the data collection by avoiding asking follow-up questions to lead participants to give a desired answer. They were managed in analysis through the previously discussed methods in the analysis section. Additionally, findings were grounded in the evidence. This was demonstrated with the use of quotes and excerpts throughout the results and discussion of this research. The contributions made by this study are also insightful and meaningful in relation to the current literature and the study goal.

Findings/Results

The purpose of this research is to catalog the perceived effects of pre-literacy on High school English Learners in the rural Upper Midwest and to propose some possible solutions to these challenges. In this section, data will first be cataloged into perceived effects and then data will be used to propose some solutions at a local level.

Effects of Pre-Literacy

Effects on Education

Data was collected about the effects of pre-literacy on these students' education. Every research participant mentioned the difficulty of the broken education history that many of these students have. Participant 1 (2022) explained, "…and they haven't been in school, even in their home countries and hometowns for years or it's very sporadic. Like yeah, they go to school, and then they don't want to go to school, they don't, so just their general education is very spotty and broken," while Hannah Carlson (2022) mentioned, "We definitely see challenges with…they come in with low skills. We see students who have to stay in school longer or their credits didn't transfer and so sometimes they drop out and they don't finish…if we could do-, like figuring out how to pinpoint what they've already learned would be very helpful in going forward. Because I regularly, I'm having to switch schedules or change kids' classes, because it's just too hard or it's too-, they don't have any background." Additionally, Stacie Wallace (2022) described "extended interrupted education…they were without any formal education for multiple years so maybe they're like, you know, I didn't go to school in Guatemala, for two years because of whatever circumstance, or we arrived in the United States and I didn't start going to school year here until I'd been here for a year or two, and so they have this interrupted education where they weren't being pushed academically in either way," and Participant 4 (2022) commented, "I don't know if

that has any connection to their lack of schooling or access to education." These responses show that this is a challenge seen across the board for these EL students.

Stacie Wallace (2022), in her reflection prompt, recounted her experience with this recently in her classroom. She wrote, "The prep involved researching their debatable topics, preparing notecards, organizing information, and then delivering their speeches in front of the class. One of these two students (Student A) I know was a successful student in his home country and did not experience significant gaps in education when traveling to the United States. He arrived here two years ago. The other student (Student B) comes from the same home country but arrived at an earlier age (6th grade) and did have a gap in education. In reflection, it is interesting to me to see the language development in these two kids. Student A is more independent and advanced in his use of English than student B, even though he has been immersed in English for a significantly shorter period of time. Student B struggled more with pronunciation and read a large portion of his speech rather than presenting it from memory. This is interesting given he has been immersed in English for a much longer time than Student A. Student B in the above example is far less proficient in reading in his home language than Student A. This seems to translate to rate at which he is becoming proficient in reading English." This is further data about interrupted education and a broken education history, that the age a student leaves his/her country may have an impact, however that is not always the case, as seen with student B's performance. More years in the host country may not necessarily mean higher proficiency in the host language.

Additionally, multiple participants discussed other challenges students encountered in their education because of their pre-literacy, including difficulty with academic reading and writing ("academic reading, I mean the amount of reading they can do is so limited" [Carlson,

2022], "They struggle with the reading whether it's Spanish or English," [Participant 1, 2022]), and challenges with tests and activities ("we have a reading assessment tomorrow that is five sentences in Spanish, that they have to translate into English, and they both are experiencing a lot of anxiety around that" [Participant 4, 2022]). Carlson (2022) comments on this in her reflection prompt as well, writing, "Student B is in a World Geography class. She does not have hardly any experience with academic Spanish and struggles to understand concepts and questions from the class. Geography seems like a course that would have a lot of common knowledge concepts and words that would transfer such as culture=cultura, religion=religión, and interaction=interacción. However, the student does not know these concepts in her own language so using cognates is completely unhelpful." This furthers the discussion on challenges with academic reading and writing, and the effects pre-literacy (in both languages, in this case) have on a student's education.

Finally, in regard to their education, these teachers described seeing students at a high school level who are coming in at an older age, and that is making it more difficult for those students to learn, as they do not have the time that they need to learn the language and the content well. Participant 1 questioned, "And then you know, some of them are 16 and 17 already, and so, how much time do they have here with us in high school to try to acquire the English language and also acquire content knowledge?" while Carlson (2022) adds, "if they're coming to me as a pre-literate freshman, there's not a lot of time." Data show that teachers perceive that the pre-literacy of these ELs has a large effect on their educational experiences.

Effects on Emotions

Within the interview, the effects of pre-literacy on the students' emotional states were discussed as well. Participants mentioned lack of confidence, embarrassment, feeling shame,

anger, frustration, and being distracted in class as effects of pre-literacy on these ELs emotional states. Two participants even mentioned that some students skip class as a way to run away from these feelings ("that same student also skips a lot of classes, partly because she's figured out she can, but partly because I think she's just kind of lost in a sea, you know, of language and that's hard to sit down for six classes after another and deal with that, so I think it is very difficult for them" [Wallace, 2022], "others skip school or don't go to class" [Carlson, 2022]). Data points to pre-literacy having a deep impact on these students' emotional states as well.

Effects on Social Lives

In discussing the effects of pre-literacy on these students' social lives, every participant mentioned that these EL students stick together throughout the entire school day, and implied that this may not always be a good thing. Participant 1 (2022) commented, "so they're really moving together. So, are we giving them as much exposure to the English language as we should or not, because they're traveling together and they're very comfortable speaking Spanish to each other... I do also again see some downside because they're traveling together then." Carlson (2022) described, "for the most part, our students stay within their own group, which is usually like my room and my other Co-teachers room, so they stay within their own group." Participant 4 (2022) communicated, "there's a pretty big communication barrier between them and their classmates…I feel like it can be a little bit isolating for them." Wallace (2022) further explains, "But I think it also tends to be that, then they hang out, talk with, only work with, that little group and community of students, and it prevents them from really getting to know other students in those classes…you see that their circles, because their schedules put them in classes with another throughout the day, and then whenever I would go through the lunchroom, they're only sitting with each other in the lunchroom, they play soccer with each other before school." Wallace

(2022) even went so far as to say, "in terms of really being involved in their school and feeling like I'm a part of [town name] high school, I think there's a huge missing link with that piece." As far as their peers' attitudes towards these pre-literate students, it seems that the pre-literate students are self-isolating. Participant 4 discusses that these students' peers try to include them, saying "I have noticed that some of my students are, are pretty good at at least showing them their papers and pointing, like what we're doing. Those nonverbal things that we don't really think about like sharing colored pencils, grabbing an extra piece of paper for someone else" (Participant 4, 2022), but as discussed above, these students are still not very involved in their school or community. It seems that because of these students' struggles with literacy and the English language, they are becoming largely disconnected from their schools and communities. Now this may not be the only reason they are disconnected, as previously discussed, but pre-literacy can contribute to this.

Effects on Home Lives

The final category of effects discussed was those effects on these students' home lives. The biggest discussion under this category was the difficulty of communicating home with the students' parents. Wallace (2022) commented, "if I want to communicate with these students' parents and help them feel like they know what's happening, there will be a number of them that don't have an email…so that's not an option. I think probably those families feel quite disconnected with the school when there's just no communication there." Participant 4 (2022) reflected that same sentiment, saying, "it's really hard to offer those services and to have the parent buy in with me if I can't communicate with them. And I've sent emails home, I have talked with the counseling staff, and they say that they just don't respond. We don't have a phone number on file. So that is a little bit difficult in that regard." Just as the students seem to be

disconnected from the school and community, these teachers are seeing a similar occurrence among the parents of these students as well. This also may hint at a lack of support from some of these families for their students, however, this may simply be framing these families through Western norms and a deficit lens. US teachers often assume that a lack of communication means a lack of interest or support from the families, but that may not be the case. Cultural and/or socioeconomic norms for interacting with teachers may be different. Families may also be dealing with immigration ("Among the 2.3 million children…23 percent were foreign born," [Zong & Batalova, 2020, para. 24]) or financial challenges ("On average, ELs are more likely to live in families in the lowest-income quintiles," [Takanishi & Menestrel, 2017]) that hamper access. More needs to be done to figure out the root cause of this challenge.

Proposed Solutions

Sheltered Courses

Along with cataloging these effects, participants discussed different tools that are working for them, and proposed these solutions. The first proposed solution is utilizing sheltered courses for these students. Sheltered courses are core content courses (like math and social studies) specifically meant for ELs to support them as they work towards fluency in English. They are more commonly referred to as Sheltered Instruction (SI) and are defined as "a method of teaching English Language Learners that fits the recommended model of culturally responsive education. The goal of SI is to help ELLs develop content knowledge, language proficiency, and academic skills at the same time" (Professional Learning Board, 2022). Three participants discussed these, saying, "we also are adding sheltered courses. Which is so helpful because…you can have really low students and really high students in that class, and you still have to modify. But you don't have to worry about non-ESL students…they already know the language; they

17

don't need it. So, it's just very ESL specific which is really, really, really, really helpful"

(Carlson, 2022), "they've kind of been very sheltered situation but there's also very good things

about that, because we can, I can specifically teach them as an English language learner, not just

an English student" (Wallace, 2022), and "the rest of their time is spent in like an English

intensive environment" (Participant 4, 2022). As Wallace suggests, there can be some downside

to these sheltered courses, especially for these students' social lives, but based on the responses

from these participants, there are times when the benefits of utilizing sheltered courses far

outweigh the drawbacks, allowing for these students to more successfully learn both the English

language and the content.

After further research on SI, it seems that some of the participants may have had a

misunderstanding about how sheltered instruction is meant to be implemented. While these

participants discuss sheltered instruction as a separate class for only EL students, according to

the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (2018) itself, sheltered instruction is differentiated

instruction that is meant to be utilized in a classroom setting with a combination of native

English speakers and ELs. Therefore, correct usage of sheltered instruction may address some of

the concerns that teachers raised.

Use of Native Language Materials

Another tool mentioned by every participant was the use of native language materials for

these students in every content area. Participant 1 (2022), who teaches these students in Algebra

class discussed that she even uses the students' native language while teaching them math. She

says, "so even when I have algebra content on the screen I have it in both English and Spanish."

In addition, Carlson (2022), when asked "What is working to help these students learn?"

responded, "I would say, using native language resources, all the time." This could be that the

use of the students' native language relieves the added stress of trying to read/write in English along with learning the core content for that area.

Use of Technology

In addition to the use of native language materials, participants also mentioned the use of technology and how that has changed the way that they teach and their communication home to the families. Carlson (2022) said, "And technology, I mean having computers all the time is just a game changer, like they don't have to look up words. When I first started, we didn't have that, and you had to look up words in the dictionary, it was just like ridiculously forever [to] do any activity…So now it's like Google translator, use my phone to do clarifying things in native language all the time, is the only way. Because they can still learn the English from that, it's not like you can't learn, so, so that helps a ton" while Wallace (2022) commented, "I would use an app called Talking Points, and that just required a cell phone number which most of them either share, some families would share a phone and a number, but it was a way I could communicate, and it automatically translated my messages into Spanish and their messages back into English. so, we could, we could do some communication that way." It is important to note, that while this is a great option, translation isn't always effective, especially if students speak a non-written language (indigenous languages, as an example) or if it is not common enough to be included (McElroy & Bridges, 2018). Additionally, as noted previously, some students may not be literate in their native language (Lloyd & Mitchell, 2020).

Additional Staff

Participants also mentioned that an increase of bilingual or EL-specific trained staff would be beneficial in helping these students receive a higher quality of education and in involving their families in the school and community. Wallace (2022) mentioned, "I think having

more people that are certified EL instructors that know the big picture…I think our teachers do a fantastic job, but it would be nice to have a person overseeing that had a really good grip on what it means to educate an EL learner and what are the requirements in our state. So, I think that would be nice to have a bigger pool of people that way, and also more bilingual staff to help support Spanish speaking families." Participant 1 (2022) commented similarly, saying, "trying to have a dedicated EL teacher which we haven't had for a couple years, but we do have one now again this year. But we need to hopefully have the consistency of having that person stay with our district for a while to, again see how these things are going and what sorts of adjustments need to be made to help these kids through their high school career." Participant 4 (2022), when asked "What more could be done, in your opinion, to combat these challenges you are recognizing?" answered, "Our ELL department is also only, I think, two people for the whole district. So, I think that if we had a building dedicated person, that could be very helpful because, if we're seeing these populations rise in the high school, we're probably seeing them rise in all of our schools, so it would make sense to be able to at least know just the students in this building, to be able to give just these students support." Carlson (2022) spoke to the effect that added staff has had in her school, saying, "they're actually learning things, you know, because we've just added staff." The effects that this solution can have on the school and for the students and their families is very beneficial.

More Training for Educators

The final proposed solution would be to offer more training to these teachers, as participants commented multiple times in the interview about their feelings that they've received inadequate training for their position. Participant 1 (2022), who has been teaching an EL algebra class for two years commented, "I haven't received specific training last year or this year to help

me out… maybe it would have been nice to have a little training and support along the way." Wallace (2022) also mentioned, "I think there could probably be more specific training for teachers… we're just certified teachers that are told, 'you're teaching an EL class.' It would be very helpful to have some training on what that looks like and how to approach that job." Similarly, Participant 4 (2022) said, "So recently I've realized that my undergrad program perhaps did not prepare me the best to be the full-time classroom teacher that I am now in a lot of ways, not just interacting with ELL students, but also just anything that is not how to write a basic lesson plan, I feel a little bit under equipped to deal with." Data here shows a clear consensus from the participants that more training would help them to feel better equipped and supported as they approach their job of teaching these ELs.

In summary, there are cataloged effects of pre-literacy on these students' educational, emotional, social, and home lives, including a history of broken education, feelings of embarrassment and shame, and disconnectedness from the school and community for both the students and their families, to name a few. Additionally, there are a few proposed solutions that may make a profound impact on these students' lives, including the use of native language tools, the way technology can be incorporated effectively, and the need for more adequate training.

Discussion

This data contributes a list, of sorts, of the effects of pre-literacy on high school ELs in the rural Upper Midwest. Although this list is not a complete catalog, there are some new effects not previously cataloged in this way, including the rise in conflict between ELs because of their heightened emotions and the challenges these ELs face when they come at an older age. Additionally, these proposed solutions have worked effectively in these teachers' classrooms to support their students, so there is at least some evidence of their value. The specifics of this research, it being from the rural Upper Midwest and the effects specifically on high school ELs also advances the disciplinary understandings.

There are various contributions this research made by its findings. This research supports prior research, including the elements of the students' feelings of disconnectedness and the use of technology and native language materials in aiding these students in their successes (Barber et al., 2018). This research also elaborates on and narrows down the research for specifically high school ELs, and more specifically yet, those in the rural Upper Midwest. These findings would be best utilized by administration and teachers in the rural Upper Midwest to better understand and prepare to educate EL students in their schools. Our research would also be best utilized to shed light on this problem and encourage others to take action to combat challenges that arise because of the pre-literacy of these ELs.

When comparing previous research to this study, there are some similarities and some differences. One similarity is the proposed solution of adapting content for the students. This was discussed by several prior authors ("How can I support ELLs in my classroom?," n.d., Roschmann et al., 2021) and by every participant in this study. Another similarity is the discussion of the effect of pre-literacy on the emotional states of these students (Lawrence, n.d.,

Antunes, 2021). One final similarity is the discussion of home life and the effects that it has on a student. This was discussed by our participants and also by Lawrence (n.d) and the theoretical framework of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literacy Instruction (Klingner & Soletero-González, 2009)., further advancing the point (made in our study and in previous research) that this is a multidimensional problem with no easy solution.

There are also some differences between previous research on this topic and this study. One difference is the cataloged effects piece, as that cannot be found elsewhere that we have seen. Additionally, viewing this topic from the perspective of teachers in the rural Upper Midwest is unique to this study. Another difference is this study proposes some solutions that have been known to work in the classroom. For example, the use of technology and native language materials has been proven to work by the study participants. One final difference between previous studies and this study is the multiple perspectives that this study offers. This study offers a view of the topic from four unique perspectives: an EL English teacher, and EL algebra teacher, an EL teacher, and a Spanish teacher. There are a few unique things about this study that make it very valuable.

There are, of course, other factors that may play a role in these findings, such as low socioeconomic status. However, the interview questions were framed to avoid discussion of other factors and their effects, as the questions began "Can you tell me a little bit about the effects of pre-literacy on…" This was done to remind participants of the one factor that we were discussing. Additionally, all of these effects are based on the teachers' perceptions of their students, meaning that these may not all be effects felt by the ELs. However, because all the study participants discussed many of these effects and because saturation was reached, it can be concluded that these experiences may be often shared by others in this environment.

This research has many strengths, including its specificity and its data collection method, hearing in-depth, the actual observed effects of pre-literacy on these students. Additionally, the findings can be trusted, as saturation was reached. Another strength of this study was the use of triangulation to assure validity and reliability of data. Triangulation was achieved through the various ways data was collected, including interviews, reflection prompts and submitted evidence, and previous research and theories. This study could be useful to administration and teachers in the rural Upper Midwest to get a better understanding of the effects of pre-literacy on high school English learners. Because there were different kinds of data collected in this study (the interviews and the reflection prompt), this data can be trusted. There are also a few limitations to this study. For example, there were only four participants in it. Although that is all it took for saturation to be reached, it may be more reliable to have more participants. Additionally, these effects are all from the perspective of the teacher, meaning these may not all be actual lived experiences for these ELs.

There are limits of the scope of transferability of this study. When using these findings across contexts, readers should bear in mind the specificity of this study. For example, these findings may not apply to urban areas. Additionally, they may not apply to other areas of the country or to different countries. However, some of these effects may be universal. Readers should just remember the specificity of this study.

From this point, future research can advance these discussions in multiple ways. Perhaps a discussion of what these effects of pre-literacy look like in a different location, like the urban Upper Midwest, and the comparison between the two would be interesting. Additionally, if some of these proposed solutions were acted upon, it would be interesting to know their implications, and whether (and to what extent) they are successful. A deeper dive into aspects of midwestern

life (norms, expectations, etc.) that are relevant here may also be beneficial. Finally, a look into whether or not the teachers fully understand what the students are going through would advance this research further.

Conclusion

This research study cataloged some effects of pre-literacy on high school ELs in the rural Upper Midwest, from the perspective of their teachers. Those cataloged effects fell under themes of effects on education, effects on emotions, effects on social life, and effects on home life. This study also proposed some possible solutions, including sheltered courses, the use of native language materials, the use of technology, additional staff, and more training for educators. From this point, administration and educators may consider ways that these proposed solutions can be implemented for the first time in their setting or implemented in a more effective way. Researchers from this point may expound on this study by researching schools where these are implemented and whether or not they are successful in combating some of the challenges that arise for pre-literate English learners.

References

About SIOP. SIOP - learn about SIOP. (2018). Retrieved March 27, 2022, from

    https://www.cal.org/siop/about/

Antunes, M. A. (2021). The Impact of Loss and Alienation in English Language Learners.

    Radical Teacher, 120, 42-49. https://doi-org.usd.idm.oclc.org/10.5195/rt.2021.886

Banse, H., & Palacios, N. (2018). Supportive classrooms for Latino English language learners:

    Grit, ELL status, and the classroom context. Journal of Educational Research, 111(6), 645-

    656. https://doi-org.usd.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00220671.2017.1389682

Barber, M., Cartledge, G., Council III, M., Konrad, M., Gardner, R., & Telesman, A. O. (2018).

    The Effects of Computer-Assisted Culturally Relevant Repeated Readings on English

    Learners' Fluency and Comprehension. *Learning Disabilities – A Contemporary Journal,*

    16(2), 205-229.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among*

    five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-

    and-research-design/book246896

DeCapua, A. (2016). Reaching students with limited or interrupted formal education through

    culturally responsive teaching. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *10*(5), 225-237.

English Language Learners in Public Schools. Coe - English Language Learners in Public

    Schools. (2021, May). Retrieved January 2, 2022, from

    https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf

Groenewald, T. (2004). A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated. International Journal
of Qualitative Methods, 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104

How can I support ELLs in my classroom? Penn State College of Education. (2014, June 12).
Retrieved January 21, 2022, from https://old.ed.psu.edu/pds/elementary/intern-
resources/esl-handbook/supporting-ells

Klingner, J., & Soltero-González, L. (2009). Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literacy
Instruction for English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities. *Multiple Voices for
Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 12*(1), 4-20.

Lawrence, M. (2021, July 16). *How to support the social and emotional health of Middle/High
School Ells*. Colorín Colorado. Retrieved January 2, 2022, from
https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/social-and-emotional-needs-middle-and-high-
school-ells

Lloyd, S. C., & Mitchell, C. (2020). English-Fluency in the Home: Why Does It Matter?
Education Week, 39(19), 14.

Marsh, V. L. (2018, July). *Best practices for educating English language learners ...* Retrieved
December 21, 2021, from https://www.rochester.edu/warner/cues/wp-
content/uploads/2018/10/ELLS-brief_FINAL-.pdf

McElroy, K., & Bridges, L. M. (2018). Multilingual access: Language hegemony and the need
for discoverability in multiple languages. *College & Research Libraries News, 79*(11),
617-620. https://doi-org.usd.idm.oclc.org/10.5860/crln.79.11.617

Roschmann, S., Witmer, S. E., & Volker, M. A. (2021). Examining provision and sufficiency of

    testing accommodations for English learners. International Journal of Testing, 21(1), 32-

    55. https://doi-org.usd.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15305058.2021.1884872

Takanishi, R., & Menestrel, L. S. (2017). The Demography of the English Learner Population. In

    Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising

    futures: Committee on Fostering School success for English learners: Toward new

    directions in policy, practice, and research (p. 80). essay, National Academies Press.

Welman, C., & Kruger, F. (2001). *Research methodology for the business & administrative*

    sciences. Oxford University Press

What is sheltered instruction? Professional Learning Board RSS. (2022). Retrieved March 16,

    2022, from https://k12teacherstaffdevelopment.com/tlb/what-is-sheltered-instruction/

Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2020, July 20). *The limited English proficient population in the United*

    States in 2013. migrationpolicy.org. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from

    https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/limited-english-proficient-population-united-

    states-2013#LEP%20Children