

Exploring Elementary Bilingual Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy in Teaching Spanish Across Content Areas: A Multi-Method Study

Delia Carrizales
Texas Tech University

Sarah De La Garza
Texas Tech University

Denise N. Lara
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi

Fernando Valle
Texas Tech University

Linnie Greenlees
Texas Tech University

Weverton Ataide Pinheiro
Texas Tech University

Abstract

The shortage of bilingual teachers in Texas has persisted for over 30 years, disproportionately affecting the educational outcomes of emergent bilingual (EB) students, who represent 86% of the state's English learner population and predominantly speak Spanish. This study investigates the self-efficacy of bilingual teacher candidates (TCs) in teaching Spanish in dual-language settings, addressing a critical gap in educator preparation programs (EPPs). Utilizing a multi-method approach, 20 bilingual TCs at a Hispanic-serving institution participated in a content area Spanish self-efficacy survey and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings indicate that TCs feel most confident in comprehending academic vocabulary but less efficacious in developing written lesson plans. Qualitative analysis highlights the positive impact of residency experiences on self-efficacy and identifies EPP strategies to enhance confidence. These results underscore the need for targeted support to prepare bilingual educators, addressing the "educational debt" EB students face.

Keywords: *bilingual teacher candidates, emergent bilinguals, self-efficacy, dual-language education, educator preparation programs*

Current data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) indicates that there are 5.1 million emergent bilinguals (EBs; defined by the Texas Education Agency (2023) as *a student who is in the process of acquiring English and has another language as the primary language*) in K–12 public schools in the United States, with Spanish being the language most spoken with approximately 3.8 million speakers. Consistent with national trends, Spanish is also the most spoken language among EBs in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2023). Due to Texas's historical background as part of Mexico and its proximity to the Mexican border, the state consistently has a significant population of Spanish-speaking EB students; currently comprising 86% of the total EB student population. Horn et al. (2021) highlight the historic shortage of bilingual education teachers in Texas that spans over 30 years, given this shortage there has been no

opportunity to construct a lasting pipeline for the development of a strong bilingual education teacher corps. The bilingual education teacher shortage has contributed to what Ladson-Billings (2006) referred to as an "educational debt" for EB students: historical underachievement, reduced participation in gifted/talented programs, lower graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment (p. 5). A strong self-efficacy has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement and thus is crucial for EB students as the inclusion or exclusion from the society they live in is dependent on the level of support they receive in K-12 education (Ross, 2007; López & Santibañez, 2018). The shortage of bilingual education teachers is a systemic issue, as at an early age EB students "develop negative views of themselves and their linguistic dexterity" (Fallas-Escobar, 2023, p. 3). Though this is a critical issue, currently the majority of research on self-efficacy amongst bilingual education teacher candidates (TCs) focuses on

language and linguistic ability, this is only a fraction of the skill-set needed to be an effective bilingual education teacher (Lee & Zhang, 2023; Mahalingappa, 2023; Szwed & González-Carriedo, 2019). Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) state that bilingual education teachers must master content in two languages and develop the ability to deliver it in an academic register in each language. Consequently, to ensure that they are adequately preparing TCs, and thus disrupting current systemic inequities, it is imperative that educator preparation programs (EPPs) examine bilingual education TCs' self-efficacy related to teaching Spanish in dual-language settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this pilot multi-method study is to investigate the self-efficacy of bilingual education TCs in teaching Spanish in dual-language settings. Bilingual education TCs completed a content area Spanish self-efficacy survey and interviews were also conducted to examine if the four sources of self- efficacy were present within the EPP to support bilingual education TCs.

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into three sections: bilingual education TCs' EPP courses, bilingual education TC residency, and bilingual education TC self-efficacy. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of critical factors influencing bilingual education TCs' self-efficacy in the context of their teacher preparation.

Bilingual Education Teacher Courses

Federal mandates under the Every Student Succeeds Act set standards for EB student identification, support, monitoring, and assessment. However, there is a great deal of flexibility in the certification and training of teachers who support these students, both bilingual and generalist teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, as of 2017 “20 states required teachers to have a bilingual certification ... over 30 states did not require any type of training for general classroom teachers to serve EB students beyond what is mandatory under federal law” (Quintero & Hansen, 2017, p. 2). In states where it is required bilingual education teacher certification is supplementary and paired with an initial generalist teaching certification. However, despite this supplementary classification Caldas (2021)

highlighted the critical role of bilingual education teacher preparation:

The dismantling and renaming of bilingual education (Flores & Murillo, 2002), the English-only movement (Macedo, 2000), anti-immigrant initiatives (Moya et al., 2016), the inadequate funding and services for emergent bilinguals, and the gentrification of dual language programs (Valdez et al., 2016) speak to a set of ideologies that see Mexican-American/Latinx students as a commodity at best, and as a liability and danger at its worst. Therefore, bilingual teacher preparation programs have the responsibility to prepare pre and in-service bilingual teachers to respond to the needs of their students by not only acknowledging their cultures and languages as additive resources but also by providing access to opportunities historically denied and working towards reversing the inequalities perpetuated by the dominant culture and ideology. (p. 1)

Accreditation and licensure require that EPPs be aligned to standards and thus the majority are competency oriented and utilize that data in program monitoring (Caldas, 2018). Programs are aligned to bilingual education certification tests that include content on policy, pedagogy, and practice as well as proficiency in Spanish. Aquino-Sterling and Rodríguez-Valls (2016) stated that EPPs must ensure that they are not only fostering the continued development of TCs' Spanish language proficiency but that they are also “providing them with ample opportunities to acquire the language competencies needed for teaching [specifically] content area knowledge across the bilingual curriculum” (p. 73). Although development of “pedagogical Spanish” (Aquino-Sterling, 2016) is essential, Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) highlighted the structural barriers (limited Spanish resources and faculty with the necessary Spanish proficiency) that limit the development of courses to facilitate this. As a result, research studies have shown that educators “often feel unprepared to meet the content-area linguistic demands of the bilingual classroom” (Zúñiga et al., 2019, p. 1).

Lara et al. (2024) highlighted the rarity of biliterate TCs (*unicornios*) who have the knowledge, skills, and

dispositions to address the critical need for bilingual education teachers. The equity of what is essentially a double certification process to become a bilingual education teacher has been questioned. Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) explained that “the expectation is that bilingual PST [preservice teacher] should be able to master general content, pedagogical knowledge, and bilingual education content, as well as appropriate academic Spanish within the same amount of time as monolingual-English candidates master only general content and pedagogical knowledge” (p. 16).

Bilingual Education Teacher Residencies

Bilingual education teacher residency programs (BTRs) offer a promising approach to addressing the critical shortage of qualified bilingual educators while improving teacher preparation and retention. BTRs build upon the successful model of traditional teacher residencies, which have shown positive outcomes regarding teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and student achievement (Armas & Lavadenz, 2024; Chu & Wang, 2024; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023). While BTRs share many characteristics with conventional teacher residencies, the focus is specifically on preparing educators for bilingual and dual-language classrooms utilizing strong local education agency–EPP partnerships; a full year of clinical preparation in bilingual education classrooms; co-teaching alongside expert bilingual education mentor teachers; competency-aligned coursework on bilingual education theory and practice; cohort-based placement in schools that model effective bilingual education instruction; ongoing mentoring and support for graduates; recruitment of diverse, high-ability TCs to meet specific district needs; and financial support for residents in exchange for a 3–5 year teaching commitment (Herrera, 2022; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023).

Research on BTRs, while still limited, has demonstrated success in recruiting and preparing a more diverse teaching workforce, which is crucial for serving bilingual and multicultural student populations (Herrera, 2022; Kennedy, 2019). Studies of teacher residency programs consistently report higher retention rates among graduates, even after several years in the profession (Fitz & Yun, 2024). Initial research has indicated that students of residency-prepared teachers outperform those of non-residency-prepared

teachers on select state assessments (Kennedy, 2018). BTRs also focus on fostering critical consciousness and culturally responsive teaching practices among residents while leveraging and building on the linguistic and cultural resources of the communities they serve (Fitz & Yun, 2024; Herrera, 2022).

In addition, BTRs emphasize the development of multilingual pedagogic content knowledge and cross-linguistic resource sharing among participants, which helps prepare teachers to facilitate learning across two languages and maximize the connections between languages for their emerging bilingual students (Herrera, 2022). BTRs also incorporate theories and practices of bilingual education, second language acquisition, and culturally responsive teaching into their coursework (Herrera, 2022; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023).

Despite their potential benefits, BTRs face several challenges in implementation. These include financial barriers for TCs, program sustainability issues, a need for better coordination and information sharing across agencies, and the requirement for tailored technical assistance and support to address their unique needs and contexts (Armas & Lavadenz, 2024; Herrera, 2022; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023). Ensuring the long-term sustainability of BTRs requires careful resource allocation and diversification of funding sources (Armas & Lavadenz, 2024; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023).

Researchers and practitioners have identified several recommendations to address these challenges and support the growth of BTRs, including refining systems to support BTR implementation and document impact, disaggregating data on bilingual authorization completion to highlight the BTR pathway, tracking BTR placements and retention, and investing in relevant BTR research and case studies to inform scalability and sustainability (Herrera, 2022; Kennedy, 2019). Additionally, there is a need to differentiate bilingual support networks, strengthen collaboration between statewide BTRs and other organizations focused on building the bilingual education teacher workforce, and prioritize opportunities for statewide technical assistance centers to provide cohesive and differentiated support for BTRs (Armas & Lavadenz, 2024; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023).

As the demand for bilingual education continues to grow, policymakers and educational leaders should consider investing in and expanding BTRs as a viable pathway to respond to the shortage of bilingual education teachers while improving the quality of teacher preparation. However, careful attention must be paid to program design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that these programs achieve their intended outcomes and contribute to the development of a strong, diverse, bilingual education teaching workforce (Armas & Lavadenz, 2024; Herrera, 2022; Lavadenz & Armas, 2023).

Bilingual Education Teacher Spanish Self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 3). In other words, self-efficacy refers to the individual’s belief in their ability to succeed in a situation. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) emphasized that such beliefs influence the course of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in a given endeavor, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (p. 3).

Studying teacher self-efficacy is important because teachers who feel confident in their pedagogical abilities are more likely to remain motivated when facing teaching obstacles (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Furthermore, studies have shown that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to implement effective teaching strategies that may yield higher student achievement (Ross, 2007). Given the shortage of bilingual teachers, studying their self-efficacy is crucial, particularly because the preparation of bilingual education TCs has implications for emergent bilinguals that can lead to reclassification and improved student achievement, including high school and college completion (López & Santibañez, 2018).

Recent scholarship has further highlighted the importance of Spanish self-efficacy for bilingual teacher candidates. Lee and Zhang (2023) found that TCs’ language beliefs directly shaped their confidence in teaching emergent

bilinguals, showing how ideology and practice are intertwined. Mahalingappa (2023) demonstrated that linguistically responsive approaches can strengthen TCs’ self-efficacy in working with multilingual learners. Most notably, Szwed and González-Carriedo (2019) found that bilingual education TCs’ Spanish self-efficacy is shaped by language ideologies that privilege English over Spanish, leading many to question their academic Spanish proficiency despite being fluent in Spanish. Their findings underscore how Spanish self-efficacy is not simply a matter of linguistic competence but also of navigating ideological pressures.

This study builds on these works by moving beyond general measures of self-efficacy to examine how bilingual education TCs perceive their Spanish instructional efficacy across specific content areas. In doing so, it explores how residency experiences and EPPs’ structures influence confidence in using Spanish for academic instruction. Hence, the literature on bilingual education TCs’ self-efficacy remains limited and warrants further exploration, particularly in contexts that intentionally support and enhance Spanish self-efficacy.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bandura’s self-efficacy framework. The authors believe it is important to clarify that self-efficacy is distinct from both self-concept and self-esteem. According to Bandura (1997), self-concept refers to how we view ourselves, while self-esteem involves “judgments of self-worth” (p. 11). It is erroneous to use the terms self-esteem and self-efficacy interchangeably, as self-efficacy specifically relates to our belief in our ability to accomplish a particular task (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy pertains to our “self-perception of competence rather than our actual level of competence” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 211). Since self-efficacy can be either overestimated or underestimated, it significantly influences how effectively individuals utilize their skills (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Bandura (1997) identified four sources of self-efficacy: vicarious experiences, mastery experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. The four sources of self-efficacy depend on each other, however; some sources are more influential in affecting self-efficacy

than others. For example, vicarious experiences are those experiences that are modeled. Modeling serves as an effective instrument to enhance self-efficacy. Moreover, when we see someone similar to ourselves succeed our self-efficacy normally increases (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) clarified that vicarious experiences are less impactful than direct experiences. However, under some circumstances vicarious experiences can prevail over direct experiences.

Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) defined verbal persuasion as receiving positive verbal input from friends, colleagues, and supervisors. The positive verbal input encourages a person's belief that they possess the capabilities to succeed. Bandura (1997) stated:

[S]ocial persuasion serves as a further means of strengthening people's beliefs that they possess the capabilities to achieve what they seek. It is easier to sustain a sense of efficacy, especially when struggling with difficulties, if significant others express faith in one's capabilities than if they convey doubts. (p. 101)

Although verbal persuasion alone may be limited in its power to convey long-lasting self-efficacy, it can help encourage self-change and hence increase self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) speculated that people who receive verbal persuasion are more likely to try harder when difficulties arise. Furthermore, when evaluating their self-efficacy, people rely on their physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) explained that people often interpret their "physiological activation in stressful or taxing situations as signs of vulnerability to dysfunction" (p. 106). To improve physiological indicators, Bandura (1997) suggested lowering levels of stress and negative associations. Tschannen-Moran (1998) indicated that the "perception that one's performance has been successful raises efficacy beliefs, which contributes to the expectations that the performance will be proficient in the future" (p. 211). In this study the self-efficacy framework was used to examine bilingual education TCs' self-efficacy to teach in Spanish by utilizing a survey and semi-structured interviews.

Methods

To examine our research questions, we utilized a multi-method approach. A survey to examine bilingual education TCs' efficacy to teach content areas in Spanish was administered to participants and interviews were conducted. Additional details of our methodological approach are described in the following sections. The following research questions were examined.

RQ1. What aspects of content area instruction in Spanish do bilingual education teacher candidates feel more efficacious on?

RQ2. To what extent were the sources of self-efficacy- mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states present within the educator preparation program to support bilingual education teacher candidates' confidence in using Spanish in the classroom or state mandated Spanish certification exam?

Context and Participants

Participants in this study were bilingual education TCs enrolled in their final year of a teacher preparation program at a 4-year Hispanic-serving institution. For this study, we defined bilingual education TCs as Spanish/English undergraduate students seeking a bachelor's degree in education and elementary bilingual education licensure. This study utilized convenience sampling to select the 20 bilingual education TCs who participated in the survey and interviews. Bilingual education TCs in this study were part of an accelerated teacher preparation program. They completed 2 years at a community college and then 1 year of online coursework at a 4-year institution. In addition to their teacher preparation courses, bilingual education TCs in this study completed a 1-year residency in school districts across the state of Texas. District mentor teachers and the university's site coordinator supervised bilingual education TCs during the year-long residency. Selection criteria for this study of the bilingual education TCs were based on enrollment in the accelerated teacher preparation program. Table 1 provides the bilingual education TCs' demographics and grade-level residency placements. At the time of the survey, bilingual education TCs reported their current grade level placements. In this program, candidates are intentionally assigned to lower grade levels

(Kindergarten through second grade) during one semester and to upper grade levels (third through fifth grade) in the other. Typically, they begin in the upper grades during the fall and transition to the lower grades in the spring. This rotation ensures that candidates gain experience with the literacy-focused curriculum common in early education. Additionally, in dual language classrooms, candidates benefit from extended exposure to Spanish due to the structure of the language program models.

Table 1

Bilingual Education Teacher Candidates' Demographics and Residency (n = 20)

	n	%
Gender		
Male	1	5
Female	19	95
Age		
18–29	12	60
30–39	4	20
40–49	3	15
50–59	1	5
Residency		
Kindergarten	6	30
1 st Grade	3	15
2 nd Grade	2	10
3 rd Grade	2	10
4 th Grade	5	25
5 th Grade	2	10

Data Sources and Data Collection

Data collected for this study was approved by the university’s IRB board. The Content Area Instruction in Spanish Self-Efficacy Scale (CAISES) consists of 21 items and was administered at the end of the teacher preparation coursework in May 2024. The CAISES is not a validated instrument and was created similar to the framework of the Bilingual Target Language Proficiency Test (BTLPT). The BTLPT is a licensure exam for prospective bilingual education teachers in Texas that measures their reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency in Spanish (Texas Education Agency, 2022). While the BTLPT specifically assesses Spanish proficiency in the four language domains, the purpose of the CAISES is to elicit information regarding bilingual education TCs’ self-efficacy to teach mathematics, science and social studies areas in Spanish. Specifically, bilingual education TCs were asked to rate their confidence in successfully completing tasks directly related to teaching content areas in Spanish. For instance, those tasks included the ability to implement content-area vocabulary aligned with state standards, develop written lesson plans, deliver instruction

orally, create instructional materials, and comprehend written materials containing academic terminology used in the state standards. Bilingual education TCs were asked to record from 0 no confidence at all to 100 completely confident in their ability to successfully implement the tasks for content areas in Spanish.

To gain a holistic understanding of bilingual education TCs experiences in the EPP the researchers utilized *testimonio* methodology. According to Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) *testimonio* methodology “involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within a particular social political reality” (p.364). *Testimonio* methodology is appropriate for this study because it provides in-depth details of bilingual education of TCs’ lived experiences in the EPP. To gather qualitative data, we first sent an invitation email to the 20 bilingual education TCs who completed the CAISES. Of the 20 bilingual education TCs, six responded. Then semi-structured interviews took place in June 2024 via Zoom, and they each lasted approximately 30 minutes. They were recorded and then transcribed. Authors 1 and 2 read the interviews line by line multiple times to ensure accuracy between the recording and the transcription.

Qualitative data analysis consisted of a multiple step process. First, the researchers applied deductive coding to the interview transcripts based on Banduras four sources of self-efficacy. To enhance validity, authors 1 and 2 met to reach agreement on the codes. Additionally, both authors spent time reflecting and actively engaging in the data to gain a deeper understanding of the bilingual education of TCs’ experiences. Finally, Author 1 and Author 2 created themes from the codes. Due to the small sample size and to protect the anonymity of the bilingual education of TCs, the authors decided to identify the participants by numbers. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Research Question 1: What aspects of content area instruction in Spanish do bilingual teacher candidates feel more efficacious on?

Descriptive statistics were utilized to examine the quantitative data elicited from the CAISES (see Table 2).

Bilingual education TCs' CAISES means were highest in the following items: "comprehending social studies written materials that include academic vocabulary" (item 12), ($M = 89.55, SD = 13.17$); "Create social studies instructional materials"(item 11), ($M = 88.35, SD = 11.58$); and "Analyze science learning materials to determine if they are relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills" (item 8), ($M = 88.20, SD = 12.08$).

Bilingual education TCs' CAISES means were the lowest in the following items: "Implement math vocabulary used in teaching Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills"(item 1), ($M = 82.1, SD = 17.21$); "Develop written math lesson plans" (item 2), ($M = 83.1, SD = 17.8$); Create math instructional materials" (item 4) ($M = 83.8, SD = 16.59$).

For further analysis, the means for each category by content area was calculated as well. The results indicate that, on average, bilingual education TCs feel the most efficacious in their ability to understand written academic vocabulary related to the Texas state standards. However, bilingual education TCs feel the least efficacious in developing written lesson plans.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Items on the CAISES

Items	M	SD
(1) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Implement math vocabulary used in teaching Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	82.10	17.21
(2) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Develop written math lesson plans	83.1	17.80
(3) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Deliver math instruction (orally)	87.2	13.54
(4) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Create math instructional materials	83.8	16.59
(5) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Comprehend math written material that contains academic vocabulary used in teaching the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	88.1	13.46
(6) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Identify appropriate authentic math materials relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	87.25	13.08

(7) When teaching math in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Analyze math learning materials to determine if they are relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	87.14	11.58
(8) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Implement social studies vocabulary used in teaching Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	88.15	11.83
(9) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Develop written social studies lesson plans	85.05	11.24
(10) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Deliver social studies instruction (orally)	87.55	14.13
(11) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Create social studies instructional materials	88.35	12.01
(12) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Comprehend social studies written material that contains academic vocabulary used in teaching the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	89.65	13.17
(13) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Identify appropriate authentic social studies materials relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	85.00	12.77
(14) When teaching social studies in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Analyze social studies learning materials to determine if they are relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	86.60	12.77
(15) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Implement science vocabulary used in teaching Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	86.20	12.73
(16) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Develop written science lesson plans	86.30	13.40
(17) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Deliver science instruction (orally)	87.55	13.86
(18) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Create science instructional materials	87.20	12.41
(19) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Comprehend science written material that contains academic vocabulary used in teaching the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	87.95	13.51
(20) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Identify appropriate authentic science materials relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	86.30	12.86
(21) When teaching science in Spanish how confident are you that you can successfully: Analyze science learning materials to determine if they are relevant to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	88.20	12.08

Qualitative Findings

Research Question 2: To what extent were the sources of self-efficacy- mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states present within the educator preparation program to support bilingual education teacher candidates' confidence in using Spanish in the classroom or state mandated Spanish certification exams?

The findings are organized according to the four sources of self-efficacy identified from the six semi-structured interviews.

Mastery Experiences

Bilingual education TCs indicated that experiences provided in their course work helped increase their confidence in speaking in Spanish and or in preparing for the BTLPT.

It helped a lot to speak with a teacher who is a native speaker and who was able to connect with the many different students she had, even though we were from different countries. She was very familiar with the words used in different regions- Participant 1

Similarly participant 2 and 5 indicated the Spanish methods course helped them become more comfortable and fluent with the language.

The material itself was in Spanish, was a little difficult when it came down to doing the assignments, but I actually enjoyed it. The more we were doing it, I noticed that, you know, a couple of weeks in, like, OK, I don't need to Google anything. I understand it, because I was just so used to reading in Spanish. So, I think that really helped me prepare because I was able to become more fluent in it. - Participant 2

The course itself helped me when it came to writing and speaking, specifically writing for the BTLPT, which was one of my weaker areas. Practicing my writing not only with Professor but also with classmates and applying that to our

assignments really helped me internalize that and helped me on my exam. -Participant 5

Some participants indicated that what helped make a difference and truly increase their confidence was their Spanish dual language placement in the field. For instance, participant 4 stated that while being in the classroom daily was intense, the experience contributed to increased confidence and a greater sense of preparedness.

I think I'm ready and all the things that I did, although it was very intense, really prepared me and made me feel comfortable to be in the classroom.

Likewise, participant 3, reported that the opportunity to apply content acquired from the courses significantly increased confidence.

What really built my confidence was actually having a bilingual placement. That's what helped me, because apart from all my courses, learning about these emerging bilinguals, learning in the actual Spanish course, I feel like actually putting it into practice with the students every day really helped me become more confident. I can learn everything, but if I don't practice it, it's just not the same. So, that's what helped me, and to continue building my confidence as I go into the bilingual teaching field, I just think it's better for me to practice Spanish every day.

Participant 5 reported the Spanish methods course helped become more comfortable with speaking in Spanish however what truly made a significant difference was the field placement experience.

I am a native Spanish speaker, entering this program gave me some practice, but just getting into my placement and practicing every day and having exposure to the vocabulary, particularly content vocabulary in science, math, and Spanish language arts, really helped boost my confidence. Just standing up there in front of the class and practicing the language and speaking to the students helped me more than anything.

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences are situations where others similar to us are successful in completing a particular task. Some of the following quotes are framed from the belief that if certain field-based experiences or content in the courses had been provided it would have benefited bilingual education TCs. As an illustration, participant 1 indicated that only one professor provided opportunities to submit assignments in Spanish. Thus, participant 1 believed that had more professors allowed assignment submission in Spanish it would have been helpful.

If other professors allowed that as well, I feel like that would also be very helpful because it really helped me with Spanish since I don't speak Spanish everyday and... I think just submitting and doing that, like transcribing in Spanish, would be beneficial.

Participants 3 and 4 indicated that field placement in Spanish for the entire academic year versus one semester in Spanish would be extremely beneficial and perhaps this opportunity should be offered to other TCs.

If it's possible for us to be placed in a bilingual classroom throughout the whole program. I feel like that would be a great implementation if it could be managed—a bilingual placement throughout the whole program. That way, TCs can get experience teaching bilingual in both upper and lower grade levels. - Participant 3

I think it was just the placement in bilingual classes for both semesters, like for fall and spring and summer. I think that was one of the things because it was a bilingual program, so everything was in Spanish except math. So I think that helped me again with the Spanish, like reading and speaking to science in Spanish, especially for language arts and all that. - Participant 4

Other participants emphasize the importance of having opportunities to practice and speak in Spanish. For example, participant 5 indicated that practicing in Spanish was helpful and that perhaps more meetings would help even more.

I think the biggest thing is just practicing it—practicing writing, practicing oral expression; all of it really helps. So maybe, I don't know, maybe having the meetings more frequently might help a bit more. Similarly, participant 6 indicated that increasing tutorials “that focus on accents and writing would be beneficial.”

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion refers to receiving encouragement, words of affirmation, or positive feedback from others. One bilingual education TC reported receiving positive affirmations and verbal support from a professor in Spanish methods course. As an example, participant 1 stated that the feedback received in the Spanish methods online synchronous course served as a motivation to practice Spanish.

We would receive feedback right then and there, right after we had done an assignment, like whether it was the oral expression or the written component of the BTLPT. Everything was just like instant feedback. So, I really liked that, and I feel like it kind of helped us, or it really pushed us to practice Spanish.

Bilingual education TCs indicated they felt supported by their site coordinators in their field placement however the interviews did not reveal explicit examples of verbal persuasion regarding Spanish implementation in their field placement. For instance, participant 6 indicated that the words of encouragement from the site coordinator helped shift the focus on students.

Look, you are there to help everybody. This is why you're there. You're learning how to teach different types of students." She even said, "If he has a problem, he can come and talk to me," and told me to do what I felt was right. That support gave me the confidence to focus on helping the students.

Other examples from bilingual education TCs focused on a lack thereof verbal persuasion regarding Spanish implementation. Specifically, participant 4 indicated that

while feedback was received during their lesson implementations, more support was needed.

The site coordinator would give us feedback and everything. But besides that, there was nothing else that the site coordinator would come and tell us, especially for the bilingual people, you know, for the people who were in the bilingual program that needed more information about it, it was just during the PAs (lesson observations), which I think we needed more support throughout the program. Because there was not a lot of support for us.

Furthermore, in speaking about verbal support related to Spanish implementation and the BTLPT participant 2 indicated there was a lack of guidance.

I don't think we did anything in the classroom or with the site coordinator that helped us. Of course, the site coordinator was fluent in Spanish. But never to the extent where I could see how it was helping me prepare for testing because I don't think we spoke Spanish ever in the classroom.

Physiological and Affective States

Certain bilingual education TCs indicated positive experiences regarding their physiological and affective states related to their Spanish self-efficacy. For example, both participants 1 and 4 indicated a sense of relief and preparedness regarding the BTLPT.

I was very nervous for all the other exams, but for this one, I feel the most prepared. That's because I was able to practice all the components with Professor. We practiced the oral part, the listening part, and the lesson planning. She went thoroughly through each component of the exam, and we were able to practice it. So, I feel pretty prepared for it. -Participant 1

The professor would always tell us, like you need to find your area of strength. If you speak well, then you need to make sure that when it comes to that part, you just have to make sure that you get

the most points on that, and then just try to get the most on the areas that we know we can do better. So that way, we don't worry—I mean, not that we don't worry, but so weren't as stressed about the others that we feel we are not as good at. - Participant 4

For one participant having a synchronous online course created additional stress due to hectic schedules. This type of environment may have lowered the bilingual education TCs self-efficacy due to the nature of the stressful situation.

One thing that I do feel, and I understand, why they were mandatory and that they had to be in a quiet place, but sometimes it's kind of unrealistic because of our schedules. That caused me a lot of stress because I had to go pick up my daughter. Getting out of school and having to rush home and doing everything else that you have to do in the afternoon. - Participant 6

When asked what could be done to reduce stress and improve the situation, participant 6 indicated that moving the class to a later time would be helpful.

Discussion

Bilingual Education TeacherCandidates' Self-efficacy in the Content Areas

Data collected from the CAISES were utilized to answer RQ1: What aspects of content area instruction in Spanish do bilingual education teacher candidates feel more efficacious on? Results from this study indicated bilingual education TCs felt the most efficacious in teaching social studies in Spanish. They also felt highly efficacious in creating social studies materials in Spanish. This could be attributed to an assignment in a Spanish course they took where they created a game for social studies content in Spanish. The third-highest area bilingual education TCs felt efficacious in was analyzing science materials and determining if they aligned to the Texas state standards. However, the three lowest self-efficacy scores came from math. For example, bilingual education TCs felt less efficacious in implementing math vocabulary, writing and developing math lessons plans, and using math vocabulary. Therefore, while bilingual education TCs felt efficacious in

reviewing math standards their efficacy was lower when it came to implementing the math standards by writing lesson plans, using the math vocabulary, or creating math materials in Spanish.

The bilingual teacher candidates' lower results in mathematics self-efficacy around implementing academic vocabulary related to the state standards is not surprising given that bilingual teachers need to differentiate, adapt, and modify language to match the students' language proficiency levels in groups and at the classroom level (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016). No survey item had a mean greater than 89.65. However, it is not uncommon for bilingual education TCs to express hesitancy in their ability to deliver instruction in Spanish (Guerrero & Valadez, 2011). While this study's sample had not taken the BTLPT at the time of data collection, the existing program structure aligns with the research suggesting the BTLPT be taken after their field placements where they have had an opportunity to practice their Spanish (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016). Candidates in this program are encouraged to take the BTLPT before they graduate.

The findings examine curriculum development efforts in Spanish in EPPs, which indicated bilingual education TCs felt most efficacious in teaching and creating materials for social studies in Spanish, due to targeted support and specific assignments that reinforced and developed these skills. Bilingual education TCs' higher self-efficacy responses in social studies compared to the other two content areas may have been influenced by the design on one course assignment and grade level placement. Candidates in one course create social studies games in Spanish through multi-dimensional assignments. These assignments follow a lesson plan template intended to simulate the BTLPT while simultaneously focusing on language competencies and a state curriculum standard of the student's choice. These assignments create an opportunity to practice vocabulary, reading, and writing in Spanish and are saved into an online repository accessible to all students and program graduates. In addition, bilingual candidates may have had fewer opportunities to practice advanced academic vocabulary during their placement at lower grade levels. More than half (55%) of the bilingual TCs surveyed were placed in kindergarten, first, and second

grades. The bilingual education TCs in lower grade levels may have had fewer opportunities to practice academic vocabulary assessed in the third, fourth, and fifth grade state's standardized assessments in reading and mathematics. However, additional data is needed to compare the frequency of exposure and application of academic vocabulary to the vocabulary outlined in the state's curriculum standards. Given that elementary students in Texas do not take a standardized assessment in social studies and science (Texas Education Agency, 2025), it is possible that accountability pressures around mathematics may create hyper-awareness or anxiety on their readiness for a tested grade level. Consequently, the survey data would need to be linked to teachers' grade levels for this pattern to be explored further.

Four sources of self-efficacy

This study provides valuable insights into the self-efficacy of bilingual education TCs regarding content area instruction in Spanish and identifies key aspects of their teacher preparation that enhance their confidence in using Spanish in the classroom. The bilingual education TCs' experiences shed light on how the four sources of self-efficacy shifted during their time in the educator preparation program. The bilingual education TCs described how their confidence increased in speaking Spanish and preparing for the BTLPT, the state's educator Spanish language proficiency exam, through a dedicated methods course and feedback they received from a fluent instructor knowledgeable with various Spanish dialects. Furthermore, the bilingual candidates' experiences applying coursework content knowledge in dual language placement settings and multiple grade levels also increased their confidence. Through daily application, the bilingual candidates created their own mastery experiences during the preparation program. Furthermore, the shared experiences of practicing their Spanish language skills allowed them to build their self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences

The bilingual candidates' enactive mastery experiences during their field placements were a critical foundation to developing their self-efficacy. The residency provided the bilingual candidates with authentic evidence they have the skills they need to succeed as bilingual teachers (Bandura, 1997). The semi-structured interviews revealed that while

course work helped bilingual education the residency boosted bilingual education TCs' confidence in using Spanish in the classroom. The placement in different grade levels during their year-long residency allows them to experience different settings that subsequently produces more generalized efficacy beliefs than solely relying on vicarious experiences, cognitive simulations, or verbal instruction (Bandura, 1997). The candidates' *testimonios* discussed how their placement in a dual language setting increased their confidence and preparedness while providing an opportunity to apply what they learned in the classroom and build their content vocabulary in science, math, and Spanish language arts. Their perceived self-efficacy on the qualitative and quantitative measures are better predictors of their ability to persist as bilingual teachers because of their prior experiences with multiple grade levels (Bandura, 1997). Thus, their authentic evidence were their daily lived experiences in the residency.

Vicarious Experiences

The visibility of successful models, especially individuals with similar profiles, is a critical factor in developing one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Consequently, the perception of task difficulty is a critical factor (Bandura, 1997). The interaction with difficult material, coupled with the internalization successfully applied modeled strategies in different circumstances, positively shift self-efficacy appraisals (Bandura, 1997). As one participant's testimony highlighted, repeated engagement with reading Spanish language materials led to their increased reading fluency. Bandura (1997) also notes that there are typically no concrete or absolute measures to measure progress for most activities, "people must appraise their capabilities in relation to the attainments of others" (Bandura, 1997, p. 86). As a second participant noted, practicing their writing skills, especially in preparation for the BTLPT, along with the other bilingual candidates, was an important experience to build their confidence. This shared cohort experience of writing practice for the BTLPT aligns is critical as perceptions of task difficulty led people to make inferences about underlying abilities and efforts subsequently impacting their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In other words, most of the bilingual candidates shared similar perceptions of task difficulty in preparing the BTLPT – which were visible in settings such as the tutorials on

accents. While Bandura (1997) notes that easily completing complex tasks that others find difficult can lead to increased personal self-efficacy, one candidate seeing other candidate's growth can serve as an effective model of coping strategies. Seeing others with a similar profile succeeding can inspire others to keep persisting (Bandura, 1997). In addition, the participants' *testimonios* about allowing Spanish submissions echoes the research on the necessity of assignments in Spanish (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017).

Verbal Persuasion

Affirmation and ability feedback are important factors in increasing bilingual candidates' self-efficacy via verbal persuasion. Both affirmation and ability feedback must be connected to the individual's progress on their capacity to accomplish their assignment tasks. The findings illustrated how the instructor and site coordinators' encouragement during their coursework and field placements, respectively, are important sources of affirmation regarding the candidates' capabilities to succeed as bilingual teachers. These stakeholders function as "significant others" that express confidence, especially for candidates struggling with specific skills (Bandura, 1997, p. 101). Ability feedback, framed as someone's progress reflects their capacity for the activity, rather than an emphasis on effort to improve their capability, had a greater and sustained long-term impact on an individual's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Evaluators, whether course instructors or other program personnel, are cautioned against providing excessive praise for average performances or offering surface-level feedback for performances that fall below expectations (Bandura, 1997). In this scenario, bilingual candidates could interpret such feedback as a reflection of the evaluator's low confidence in their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Instead, the instant, evaluative feedback the bilingual candidates received in their coursework highlights their personal capabilities (Bandura, 1997) in the four language domains. However, the absence of the specific performance feedback in the field placement regarding their Spanish implementation does little to increase their Spanish language self-efficacy. While the generalized support available to support bilingual candidates with other generalized tasks to support students in their field placement was well-received, the inability for bilingual candidates for provide specific examples of verbal

persuasion reflect on the need for all stakeholders, other than the course instructors and select program personnel, to build their knowledge base to provide affirmation and ability feedback on candidates' Spanish implementation. Bilingual teacher candidates need multiple sources of verbal persuasion, especially as it relates to their academic vocabulary in the classroom settings.

Physiological and Affective States

The bilingual candidates' stress levels and nervousness about upcoming certification exams are factors that educator preparation programs must attend to in their courses and field placements. Individuals can interpret their stress and anxiety as indicators of vulnerability, and their physiological and affect states play a major role in personal efficacy, especially when they experience physical symptoms (Bandura, 1997). However, stakeholders working with bilingual candidates must recognize that it is not necessarily the magnitude of the stressor but how they perceive and interpret their physiological and affective responses (Bandura, 1997). Individuals evaluate their self-efficacy based on prior performance under similar conditions, but how much weight given these prior experiences in evaluating their personal capabilities will vary by individual (Bandura, 1997). The two participants' *testimonios* about their certification exam readiness cite the instructor's asset-based approach and repeated practice sessions as useful in reducing their nervousness and stress in their exam preparation. The other participant's feedback regarding balancing home responsibilities and online course participation expectations is important. While the other participant's *testimonio* was not directly tied to their Spanish language fluency or development in the program, understanding the impact that program structures and expectations can have on their psychological state merits attention. Stress in reaction to program structures can create a heightened sense of vulnerability and consequently impact the bilingual candidates' ability to be fully engaged in the classroom experience – whether virtual or in-person. It would be appropriate for programs to evaluate program structures, such as course schedules, to maximize accessibility when serving an increasing number of non-traditional students located across the state. Overall, the candidates' experiences provided invaluable feedback on the need to ensure additional stakeholders are sufficiently knowledgeable to provide targeted feedback on candidates'

Spanish language implementation. This training may or may not be possible given program resources and other stakeholders' willingness to learn Spanish (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017).

Implications for Practice

This pilot study expands on the existing research on program-level adaptations to support bilingual education candidates in their Spanish development and certification exam preparation. For example, it is common for programs in Texas to create opportunities to practice the oral expression section of the BTLPT (Caldas, 2019; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017). The candidates who did not pass the BTLPT during the program often opt out of taking the exam well after they have completed the preparation program (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017). Bilingual candidates have expressed frustration at how their K-12 schooling experiences minimized or eliminated their opportunity to develop academic Spanish vocabulary yet must expedite their Spanish fluency within time constraints and limited opportunities built within coursework (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017). Therefore, by investigating bilingual candidates' readiness to teach Spanish in dual language settings from a self-efficacy lens, preparation programs have an opportunity to ensure their students receive affirmation and ability feedback to help increase the likelihood they will pass the BTLPT on the first attempt. Bilingual teacher residencies function as a vital structure to ensure candidates have enacted mastery experiences and the opportunity to develop their Spanish proficiency before their assessment attempts (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016). Therefore, this study's findings not only corroborate the importance of having course instructors fluent in Spanish with the ability to provide targeted language supports (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017) but also highlights the need for other program personnel to support candidates' Spanish language development.

This study's findings also create an opportunity to expand the under-explored area of self-efficacy related to teaching Spanish in dual-language settings. Aquino-Sterling (2016) noted that the five primary research areas investigating bilingual candidates and teachers' Spanish competencies focus on identification of their competencies, development trajectories as it relates to their language identities, conceptual frameworks, performance within content

lessons, and self-perceptions of their native languages. By exploring bilingual candidates' experiences and perceptions through a self-efficacy lens, we can valuable insight into specific actions preparation programs can take to build the confidence for those with lower self-efficacy related to tasks based on the bilingual teacher competencies. For example, by uncovering how the implementation of math vocabulary used to teach the state standards had lowest mean and second highest standard deviation, course assignments can be adjusted to fill in a targeted gap bilingual candidates may not get during their residency experiences, such as content and language objectives, to address the development of academic-pedagogical Spanish (Aquino-Sterling, 2016).

This study has implications for teacher preparation programs providing opportunities for TCs to submit lesson plans, materials, and lessons in Spanish to help them enhance their self-efficacy. emphasized the importance of instructor feedback in mixed classroom dynamics, language use and identity, and linguistic confidence. Professors who can teach in Spanish support future teachers in creating Spanish content lessons, thereby preparing future bilingual educators. López and Santibañez (2018) enhanced the policy discourse and implications of this study by examining how teacher certification requirements relate to both EB student achievement and teacher self-efficacy in three states with similar EB student populations: Arizona, California, and Texas. Their findings across teacher preparation requirements, self-efficacy, and achievement trends point to the importance of rigorous teacher preparation for all teachers of EBs.

Limitations

This pilot study has some limitations around its sample size, instrument, and need to include additional content areas in the instrument. The students in this sample were from one cohort and selected via convenient sampling. The convenient sampling method cannot assure the student voices here are representative of all students' experiences in this setting (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The sample size and convenient sampling may limit the generalizability of the study' findings. Nevertheless, as this sample of students are mostly non-traditional in their demographic profile and pathway to the bilingual educator preparation program, it can still provide invaluable insights for

traditionally underserved populations including first generation college attending, Latino/a, English learner, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The survey instrument administered is not considered a validated survey instrument. However, this pilot study provided invaluable information for the survey's next iteration (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). This study will inform future studies around bilingual candidates' Spanish self-efficacy. This information includes the need to include Spanish language arts and electives as elementary bilingual teachers are responsible for all content areas.

Future research studies around the survey development are needed to expand on Bandura's self-efficacy theoretical framework and the relationship with bilingual candidates' self-efficacy in their Spanish implementation. This pilot study can inform both a new variable development and survey development variant of future exploratory sequential research designs (Creswell& Plano-Clark, 2018). This pilot study offers the authors an opportunity to consider new variables (Creswell& Plano-Clark, 2018) in expanding Bandura's self-efficacy framework as it relates to Spanish implementation in the classroom. These results yielded additional questions arose around whether the bilingual candidates' self-efficacy evaluations did indeed isolate language or also reflected their academic self-efficacy. Additional measures and questions will need to be developed around the language arts. Future studies will also need to recruit two or more purposeful samples to enhance the generalizability of the results (Creswell& Plano-Clark, 2018).

Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of targeted assignments, residency experiences, and tailored support in enhancing bilingual education TCs' self-efficacy. The importance of self-efficacy in this study argues higher self-efficacy teachers will persist and have more success in the profession and the classroom. Future research should address expanding the scale to include additional content areas, such as Spanish language arts for kindergarten through fifth grades, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of bilingual education TCs' self-efficacy. Preparation programs can better equip bilingual educators to meet the diverse needs of their students and contribute to

the overall effectiveness of bilingual education programs through TC targeted efficacy development. While the study has limitations, it offers important implications for improving bilingual education teacher preparation programs and provides avenues for current successful practices for this crucial area of bilingual education teacher preparation.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Why do you want to be a bilingual teacher?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience in the Special Population courses?
3. What are you the most confident in implementing when it comes to supporting EBs and why?
4. What do you think you're the least confident in implementing when it comes to supporting emergent bilinguals, and why?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience in EDBL (this was the course you took in Spanish)?
6. Do you have any recommendations for how the EDBL 3320 course could be improved?
7. Do you have any recommendations for the Special Population courses?
8. What recommendations do you have for the educator preparation program?
9. Did you see what you were learning in the Special Population courses implemented in your field placement?
10. How did your site coordinator support you in building your confidence and implementing bilingual strategies in your bilingual Spanish proficiency?
11. What do you think the educator preparation program can do to help support your Spanish proficiency?
12. What do you think can be done to improve your confidence in the bilingual supplemental certification exam?