

Chapter 4

Examining Professional Development and Support for In-Service Teachers of English Language Learners: Systematic Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) teachers do not feel that the in-service training in districts addresses their needs. Research has examined professional development (PD) teachers of ELs receive, and found that teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELs. Given these concerns, district leaders need research-based strategies and approaches when structuring and facilitating PD to better support teachers. There was a great need for empirical research on EL-related teacher PD. In this review, the researcher met this need by compiling empirical research on district-level teacher EL-related PD from 2005 through 2020 so that district leaders have a better idea of what works for teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

With the English Learner population growing in the U.S. more teachers want professional development opportunities specific to ELs (Gallo et al., 2008; Matteson et al., 2013). Previous research demonstrates teachers of ELs are not prepared to meet the learning needs of diverse students (Batt, 2010) or bilingual learners (García et al., 2010; Reeves, 2006). To achieve higher outcomes for ELs and ensure that needs of ELs are addressed, researchers must identify the specific areas that are addressed in PD. However, a significant gap exists in research regarding professional development for teachers of ELs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). For instance, Knight and Wiseman (2006) conducted a review of literature on the topic of PD for teachers of ELs and pointed out the lack of research as a main finding. This finding aligns with more recent work that continues to highlight the scarcity of scholarship focused on PD needs of teachers who work with bilingual students (Ek & Chavez, 2015). In light of this, the proposed book chapter aims to raise awareness about the professional development needs of ESOL and bilingual teachers with a focus on addressing the needs of ELs.

Ek and Chavez (2015) argue that professional development in the U.S. targets white teachers and bilingual teachers receive a translated version of the training mainstream teachers receive. Often, such training does not cover the pedagogy of the bilingual classrooms (Ek & Chavez, 2015). Téllez and Varghese (2013) also discovered neglect of bilingual teacher PD. In their overview of literature on PD of practicing bilingual teachers, they state that PD that bilingual teachers received was redundant, not highly regarded and did not address their concerns (Calderón, 2002; Téllez & Varghese, 2013; Varghese, 2006).

Prior researchers have focused primarily on investigating the frequency of PD offered to teachers of ELs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; López et al., 2013) and the influence of PD on teachers' instructional strategy improvement (Song, 2016; Tong et al., 2015). Scholars also examined the challenges and the areas of need for teachers of ELs (Batt, 2008; Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Hiatt, 2016).

Professional development refers to practices that improve the job-related knowledge, skills, attitudes of school professionals (Wilde, 2010) and take several forms. PD activities vary widely and can range from more organized and structured forms such as sessions and workshops, education conferences and seminars, observation visits to other schools, professional development networking, individual and collaborative research, mentoring and peer observation. Additionally, a more formal and self-directed form includes reading professional literature and informal dialogue to improve teaching (Kemp, 2011). Further, effective PD may include meetings, follow-up, workshops, and hands-on practice opportunities, which are

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