Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) and English Learner Teachers: COVID-19 and Pandemic Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to illuminate how English Learner (EL) teachers in the Great Lakes region responded to the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) at the onset of COVID-19 school closures in March 2020. We examined how EL teachers from Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin continued legal provisions of instruction and service through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. We use descriptive quantitative analysis of an online survey of EL teachers from the state of Indiana to identify the types, frequencies and delivery modes for instruction and service with and among EL students and families. We look closely at the state of Indiana, a state with a more recent immigrant population and where requirements for English Learner teacher licensure and preparation are not yet required. Although findings show that schools and districts violated legal requirements for English Learners, this is polarized by the lack of required training and licensure in Indiana among those serving in the role of EL teacher.

Keywords: *COVID-19, emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL), English learners, EL instruction, EL service.*

Emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) is education implemented during governmental, national security, economic, social, and/or environmental instability that disrupts the primary model of public education (Davies & Bentrovato, 2011; Milman, 2020). In this case, students attending physical, brick and mortar schools on a daily basis changed abruptly with a shift to multiple mediums of instruction including virtual instruction that was synchronous or asynchronous, the provision of worksheets and packets for self-directed learning, and other forms of distance learning, all of which relied on internal and external resources to the school. Further, some instructional delivery methods changed between March to June of 2020 as schools, families and internet companies built their online infrastructure for instruction. As such delivery models differed from brick and mortar instruction, EL teachers had to think, pivot and implement their energies toward unique provisions for service and instruction for their EL students and families.

Given these conditions, our research questions are two-fold:

1) *What are the roles that Indiana EL teachers took on during COVID-19 ERTL?*

2) *How did Indiana EL teachers respond in service and instruction for EL students and families during COVID-19 ERTL?*

Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning

Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning's (ERTL's) "…primary objective...is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis" (Hodges, et al., 2020; para 13). Thus, during ERTL, teachers responded to student and family's specific needs during this time of crisis (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). EL teachers adapted, focusing on service oriented roles that expanded beyond discrete language and

literacy instruction and working with general education teachers on effective content area instruction for ELs (Ajayi, 2011; Morita-Mullaney, 2019a; 2019b).

Pre-COVID-19, EL teachers as a profession were already positioned as tangential teachers, supporting instruction versus leading it (Morita-Mullaney, 2018; Harvey & Teemant, 2012). Conceived as 'helpers' or paraprofessionals, EL teachers are often viewed with less value relative to content area and grade-level teachers who are positioned as more legitimate (Harvey & Teemant, 2012). Yet practically speaking, EL teachers adopt roles, responsibilities, and identities that are unique, creative and sometimes subversive to meet the diverse instructional and service needs of ELs (Morita-Mullaney, 2018; Kanno & Norton, 2003). In the context of ERTL-March 2020, we examine how EL teachers responded to both the *instructional* and *service* needs of their students and families.

EL Teachers' Multiple Roles and Identities

EL teachers provide both direct instruction and service. *Instruction* is specific language/literacy support that facilitates access to academic content. *Service* includes any supports that facilitate access to instruction. For example, EL teachers serve students in accessing school through facilitating home/school communications or transportation routing. Service may also include acquiring technology and internet connections, or connecting youth and families to food resources or health and human services.

Whether the roles of EL teachers are constructed as service or instruction or both, their roles differ from general education teachers (Farrell, 2011; 2012). With the closure of physical schools and the immediate shift to distance learning, the construction of EL teachers' roles and responsibilities increased in parallel with EL family's needs increasing. The historic

marginalization of multilingual communities with recent (im)migration experiences are further exacerbated during a crisis.

As a new immigration gateway state, Indiana and others like it, are challenged with developing infrastructures within schools to address the rapidly growing numbers of immigrant families who speak languages other than English (Hilburn, 2014; Passel, 2005). Indiana schools primarily rely on existing staff, resources, and structures to meet the unique needs of immigrant youth, affirming previous research about lack of trained personnel in new gateway states (Terrazas & Fix, 2008) and reinforcing a sink or swim approach (Gay & Kirkland, 2013), Although these immersion strategies are not federally lawful, and ELs are to receive an education that is supported by language instruction furnished by highly trained and effective teachers, Indiana had no enforceable provision of EL licensure of EL teachers at the time of this study (Indiana Department of Education, 2014). In short, an EL teacher may bear the title of EL teacher, but not actually have any professional preparation to serve in this role. Although there are over 20 Indiana institutions furnishing the EL licensure add on (Morita-Mullaney & Stallings, 2018), they range in amounts of credits from as few as 12 credits to as many as 36 and many with no student teaching or clinical teaching requirement. In contrast, Minnesota and Wisconsin requires the EL licensure. For example, Minnesota has a robust preparation expectation of 36 credits or more with related student teaching. Further, Indiana historically had a provision of bilingual/bicultural licensure, but it was stricken during a teacher reauthorization, which conceived EL and bilingual licensure as duplicative (Indiana Department of Education, 2010), although efforts have begun for its reinstitution (Morita-Mullaney, Renn, Garcia & Wright, 2020). In contrast, Minnesota and Wisconsin have EL and bilingual teacher licenses. In

summary, Indiana's requirements for EL licensure and preparation are low and not enforced locally.

Methodology

We situate this study in the Great Lakes region to demonstrate that they all share the phenomena of having recent immigrant communities and thus, infrastructures to support immigrant families are still developing (Morita-Mullaney & Stallings, 2018; Hilburn, 2014). The survey study draws from 405 survey responses from EL teachers in three U.S. Great Lakes states: Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Indiana EL educators represented 27.9% of the total pool of participants for a total of 113 Indiana responses. Indiana is the specific focus of this article as its pre-service preparation requirements along lack of EL licensure provisions stand in contrast to Minnesota and Wisconsin, where both pre- and in-service preparation are further developed (Cushing-Leubner et al., 2021).

Participants

Survey participants were recruited from practicing K-12 EL teachers in public or charter schools in Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin who have served as EL teachers before and during ERTL. Participants in these states share similarly growing EL and (im)migrant populations, yet their states' infrastructures to support their newer (im)migrant communities are still developing. Additionally, EL teacher preparation across these states have similar components of primary focus on language and literacy instruction, an inclusion of 'advocacy' as a standard of effective teaching practice, and limited inclusion of service elements in preparation coursework (Cushing-Leubner et al., 2021). K-12 EL teachers were recruited through listserv and social media for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) affiliates in each state, where membership consists of 619 educators in Indiana, 908 in Minnesota, and 647 in Wisconsin. The

survey was shared via hyperlink, allowing for word-of-mouth sharing amongst EL teachers, beyond TESOL affiliate membership.

A total of 405 EL teachers responded: 113 Indiana teachers, 190 Minnesota teachers, and 103 Wisconsin teachers (Table 1). Fifteen percent of respondents taught in rural schools (state-level breakdown: 16% Indiana, 9% Minnesota, 24% Wisconsin). Forty-eight percent of respondents taught in city schools (state-level breakdown: 56% Indiana, 43% Minnesota, 48% Wisconsin). Thirty seven percent of respondents taught in suburban schools (state-level breakdown: 28% Indiana, 48% Minnesota, 28% Wisconsin). Teachers taught across elementary, middle school, high school, and K-12 contexts.

Table 1: *State-level and total survey participants*

State	Respondents	% rural	% city	% suburban
Indiana	*113*	*15.9%*	*56.6%*	*27.4%*
Minnesota	189	9%	42.3%	46.6%
Wisconsin	103	22.3%	48.5%	27.2%
TOTAL	405	14.3%	47.9%	36.3%

Survey

The multiple choice survey was divided into three distinct sections: teacher and school-level demographic information, instruction provided before and during ERTL, and services provided before and during ERTL (Table 2). Items related to instruction focused on the methods for delivery of instruction, the platform and materials used, and the frequency of both instructional planning and instruction itself. For example, "What mode(s) of instruction are you using with your ELs during COVID?" Responses could be more than one including, "via phone; via online medium; independent work; or none." In the area of service, items detailed how EL teachers provided services for Emergent bilinguals, families of Emergent bilinguals, and teacher and administrator colleagues at the school. As an example, "What challenges have your ELs

and/or their family members communicated to you that they are experiencing during the COVID-19 crisis?" Responses could include, "technology and communication; health and wellness; financial or legal; or I don't know."

Teachers also contrasted the percentage of time they spent on instruction and service before and during ERTL. Table 1 demonstrates how we invited teachers to calculate how they divided instruction and service before ERTL and during ERTL.

Table 2: *Use of time among EL teachers pre- and during ERTL*

Pre- COVID-19. When you were still in physical schools, what proportion of your day was spent on service and what was spent on instruction? **TOTAL must equal 100%.** For example, X% of my day was spent on service and X% was spent on instruction with ELs.	During- COVID-19 (your current reality). Now that you are conducting remote learning, what proportion of your day is spent on service and what was spent on instruction? **TOTAL must equal 100%.** For example, X% of my day is spent on service and X% is spent on instruction with ELs.

The electronic survey was done on Qualtrics, which could be completed by computer, tablet or smartphone. Participants were given the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview, however, data from these interviews are outside the scope of this paper.

Data Analysis

Using descriptive statistics, we first analyzed the raw data and looked for percentage of completion. Surveys with completion rates less than 33% were removed from the cumulative findings. Based on survey responses, we analyzed the types, frequency and effectiveness of 1) instruction and 2) services provided by, and requested of EL teachers pre- and during ERTL. Data were then disaggregated by state to examine patterns across these demographically similar contexts. While this study starts with an overview of the three states, its main focus is on the state of Indiana, where preparation to serve ELs is not yet required (Indiana Department of Education, 2014). Due to lack of licensure requirements, this may moderate the types of Indiana responses received on the survey, and present as a possible limitation.

Terminology

The term English learner or EL teacher is used throughout this study, as this reflects how Indiana teachers are referenced and titled, based on state licensure requirements. Further, there is a long history of English as a Second language program models with little history of any provisions for bilingual education, although dual language education has been increasing due to interests of a world language constituency (Springer et. al, 2017). We also use the term *Emergent Bilingual* instead of EL to highlight the multiple languages in students' repertoire and how these serve as assets within and toward their learning, also reinforcing that English is not the only aim (García & Wei, 2009; Menken & García, 2010).

EL Teacher Survey Findings

Survey results provide a portrait of how time and energies were distributed during ERTL. To begin, we introduce the types and roles of the Indiana EL teachers in the study. There were four types of participants in our study including 1) elementary EL teachers who served as co-teachers, pushing into elementary classrooms; 2) secondary EL teachers who also co-taught and pushed into content area classrooms; 3) an English Specialist serving in stand-alone situations where ELs were pulled out of classrooms or in secondary, were assigned for a class period; and 4) bilingual teachers, all of whom identified as dual language teachers (Table 3).

Table 3: Indiana EL teacher participants by role type

EL specific role	%
Elementary EL teacher	42.5
Secondary EL teacher	27.4
English specialist	29.2
Bilingual	9.0

Although pull-out and push-in are not recognized program models based on empirical naming conventions of program types, it is a local Indiana discourse, reinforced by annual Indiana data

collection. The Indiana Department of Education asks districts to report what type(s) of programs local schools use to serve their ELs, which includes 'push-in' and 'pull-out' (Indiana Department of Education, 2015). Thus, the reporting above reflects not only naming conventions, but the types of allowable language program models employed within Indiana.

The findings are arranged by our analytic heuristic of instruction and service (Table 4). Instruction references explicit time spent with students in teaching them across a variety of contexts and service is anything related to creating greater access to instruction.

Table 4:

Instruction and Service descriptions of Indiana EL teachers during ERTL

Instruction	*Instruction* is specific language/literacy support that facilitates access to academic content
Service	*Service* includes any supports that facilitate access to instruction

Indiana EL teachers spent their time between providing *instruction* and meeting socioeconomic and material needs of ELs and their families in *service* (Figure 1).
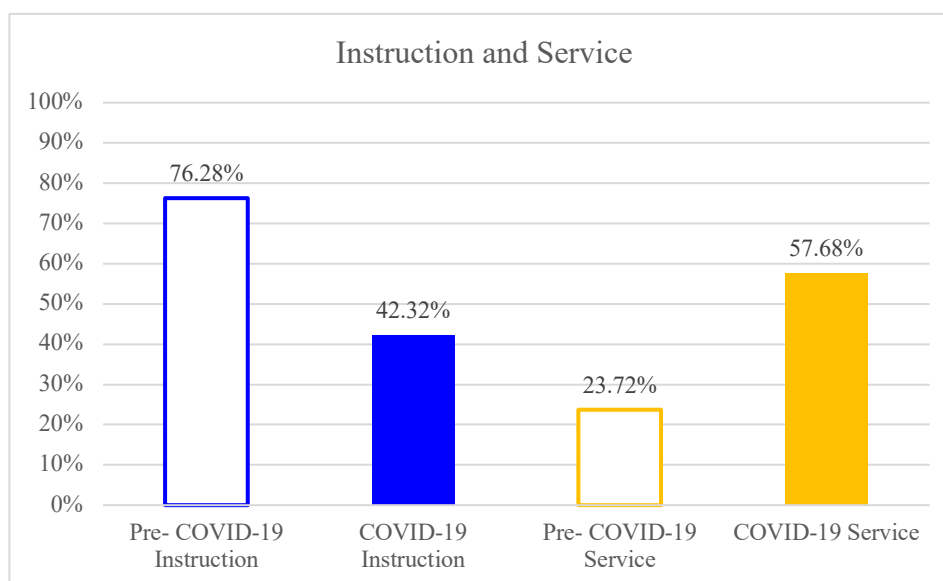

Figure 1: Indiana distribution of primary responsibilities pre-ERTL and during ERTL

EL teachers were asked to provide what proportion of their time had been spent on instruction and what proportion of their time had been spent on service prior to COVID-19 school closures. They were then asked to provide what proportion of their time was spent on instruction and what proportion of their time was spent on service during ERTL. Prior to physical school closures due to COVID-19, EL teachers reported that 76.28% of their time was spent on instruction and 23.72% was spent on service. Following school closures during ERTL, an EL teachers' distribution of time shifted dramatically with 42.32% of their time being spent on instruction and 57.68 % spent on service.

Service

During COVID-19 ERTL the majority of EL teacher's time was spent identifying and facilitating non-instructional services that they 1) recognized their ELs required; 2) learned their students or families needed access to, and/or; 3) were asked to do in place of instruction by their schools or districts (teacher colleagues and/or administration).

EL teachers identified what non-instructional services their Emergent Bilingual students and their families were in need of immediately after, and in the three subsequent months, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how they learned of their need for support accessing these services (Figure 2). Services were related to accessing school-based education in the form it was attempted following school closures, as well as other factors related to state stay-at-home orders.

Non-instructional Services Needed by EBs and Their Families during COVID-19 ERTL
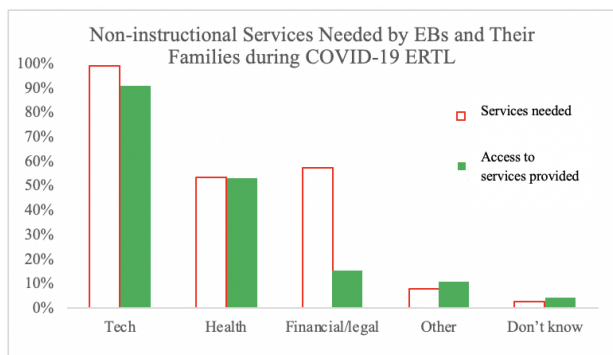
Indiana

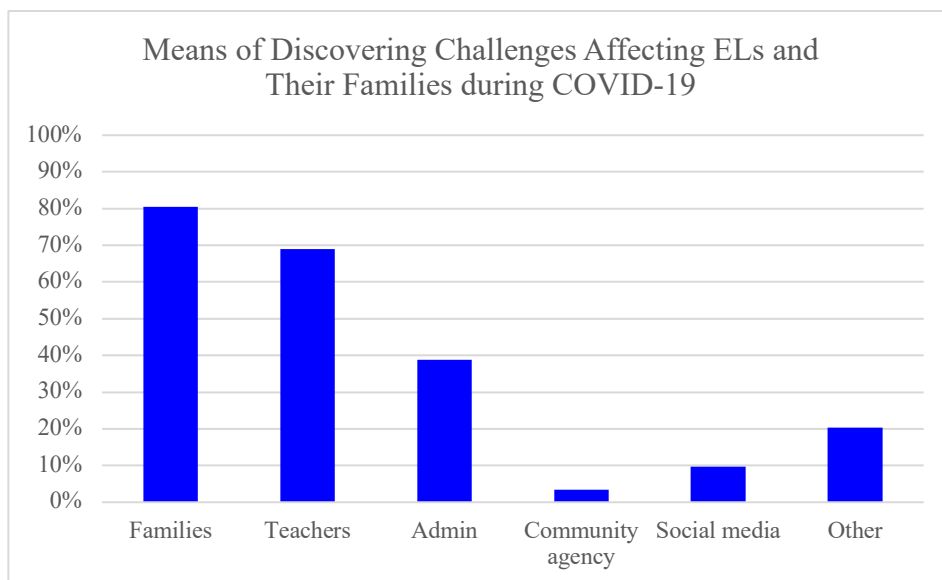*Figure 2: Indiana non-instructional services needed and provided by EL teacher*

Most Indiana EL teachers (99.1%) reported that their EL students required technology support and 91.2% identified that their time was spent providing access to school-required technology. These technology supports included connecting families with internet access, WiFi, and hotspots, and providing technology support when and if these did not work; getting electronic devices that were needed to access instruction to students (e.g. computers, tablets, and hotspot devices); creating, translating, and interpreting community- and school-based language resources; and mediating the expectations of the schools during ERTL.

EL teachers also spent a great deal of time determining and connecting families with health and wellness services. Fifty-three point one percent (53.1%) of EL teachers identified health and wellness as a need and 53.1% successfully facilitated access to these services for EL families, demonstrating that not all EL teachers could or did address these health-related needs. These services included sharing, translating, and interpreting rapidly changing information about COVID-19; connecting families with medical services; identifying mental health concerns and connecting children and families with mental health resources; providing resources for physical activity; food access; housing stability and safe living environments; connections with religious and spiritual communities central to the lives of some of their Emergent Bilinguals; connecting

children and families with reading and entertainment materials; and connecting with opportunities for physically-distanced social interactions.

The greatest disparity EL teachers reported between which services Emergent Bilinguals and their families were in need of and what they spent their time providing and were successful in providing access to were financial and legal services. Over half of teachers (57.5%) reported the families of their Emergent Bilinguals were in need of financial and legal services to ensure stability and security that is important to participating fully in school. Only 15% of EL teachers reported that these services were provided or that these needs were addressed. Financial and legal services included income-based services due to loss of family member employment and income, school-aged youth taking on additional employment to supplement family income, school-aged youth taking on additional childcare responsibilities for younger family members, community services related to employment and/or unemployment benefits, services related to immigration processes, legal services, access to transportation, and services in response to family separations.

EL teachers were asked "how did EL teachers learn about the non-instructional services of their Emergent Bilinguals?" Teachers learned about the services their Emergent Bilingual students and their families required, whether they were able to successfully facilitate access to these services, and the pulls they experienced from other teachers and administrators to provide services on behalf of colleagues, schools, and their district beyond individual discrete support for specific students (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Indiana Methods of discovering challenges affecting Emergent Bilinguals and their families during COVID-19

Teachers primarily learned about the non-instructional services Emergent Bilinguals and their families were in need of directly from family members (80.5%), followed by other teachers who approached them to provide these non-instructional services (69.0%), school administration (38.9%), information shared through social media (9.7%), reports from community agencies (3.5%), and a range of other sources (20.4%).

A large percentage of EL teachers reported that they were not only spending their time providing direct service with their own Emergent Bilingual students and their families, but were also assisting other teachers in their schools with providing services for Emergent Bilingual students who were in those teachers classes. 69.9% of EL teachers reported that, instead of providing instruction for their Emergent Bilinguals, their time was spent responding to requests from other teachers in their buildings to provide services for students in their classes who they considered to be English language learners, but were not receiving EL supports through the school's determination of EL teacher student caseload.
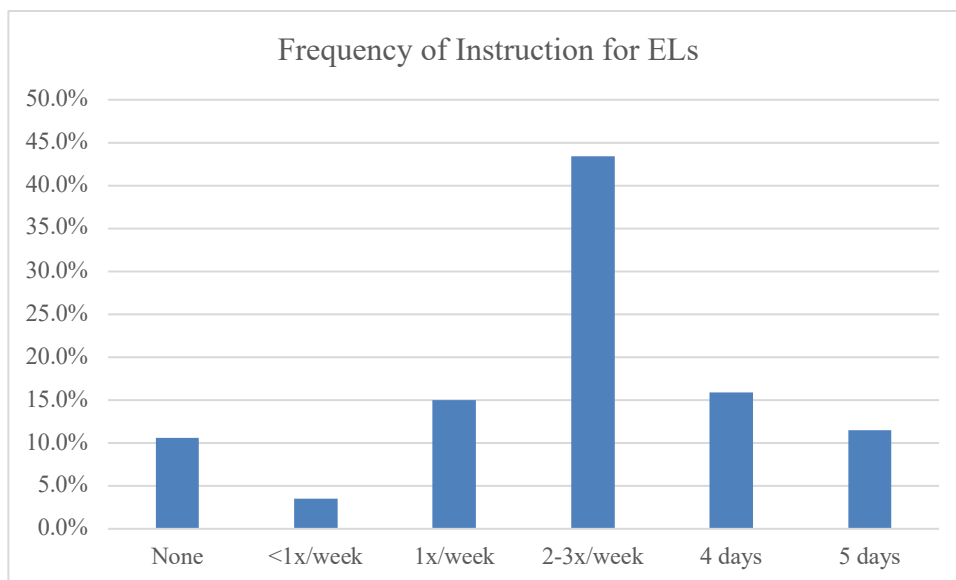
Instruction

EL teachers reported how instruction was attempted, frequency and length of attempts at instruction, and their instructional goals and concerns. Identifying these instructional attempts is also related to understanding what Emergent Bilinguals experienced in terms of access to school-based education during ERTL.

On the survey, EL teachers were asked "were EL students provided access to instruction?" EL teachers reported they attempted to provide instruction through a combination of phone calls with students (44.2%), online platforms (92%), and giving Emergent Bilinguals independent work (e.g. packets) (49.2%) (Figure 4). A tiny percentage EL teachers (1.8%) reported providing no instruction to Emergent Bilinguals once physical school buildings closed, demonstrating that the majority of EL teachers furnished some of type of instruction during ERTL to their Emergent Bilingual students.
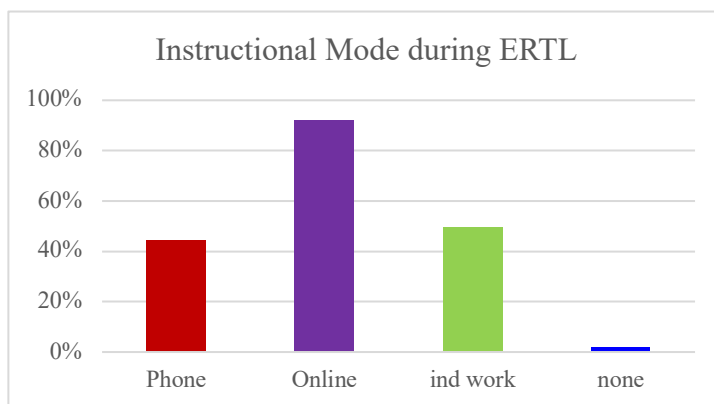
*Figure 4: Indiana Instructional Modes used by EL teachers during ERTL*

EL teachers who attempted to provide instruction identified that there was a wide range in the degree and amount of instructional contact with students (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Indiana Frequency of EL instruction during ERTL

Almost half or 43.4% of EL teachers reported they provided instruction for Emergent Bilinguals 2-3 times a week. Another 15.9% reported that they provided instruction to Emergent Bilinguals 4 times a week and only 11.5% furnished instruction 5 days a week. Another 15% reported that they taught their Emergent Bilinguals one time per week, followed by another 3.5% who taught less than one time a week or inconsistently. Lastly, 10.6% of Indiana EL teachers shared that they provided no instruction during ERTL.

EL teachers reported spending as much, if not more, of their daily time in planning for instruction (Figure 6).
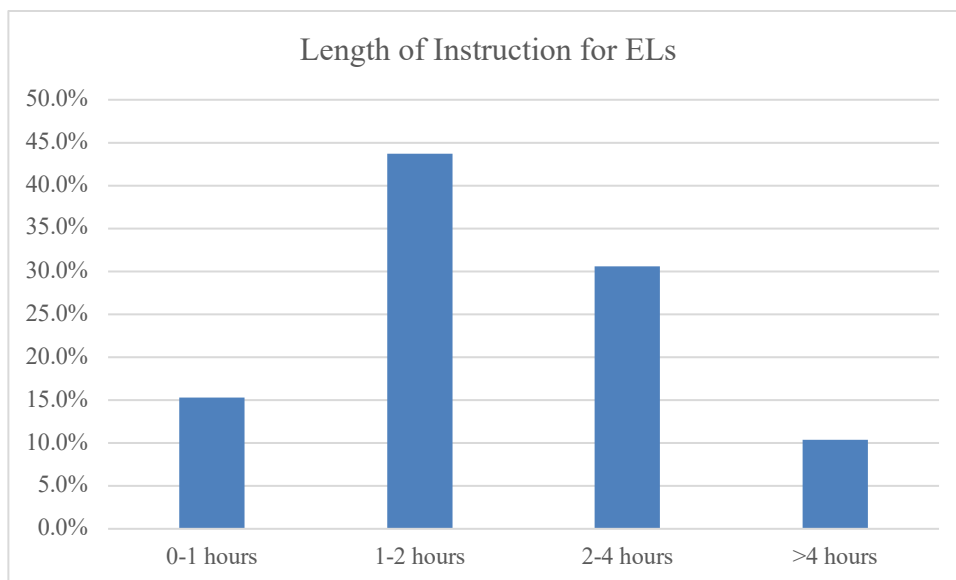
Figure 6: Indiana time spent on instruction and time spent planning and preparing instruction

Ten point four percent (10.4%) of Indiana EL teachers identified spending more than four hours every day on planning and preparation. Here, we highlight that teachers were reporting daily time spent – compared to time spent on instruction *on the days when instruction was provided*. 30.6% of teachers reported spending between two to four hours on planning and preparation every day. Indiana EL teachers mostly reported that they spent 1-2 hours daily on instructional preparation (43.7%). Lastly, 15.3% of Indiana EL teachers spent less than an hour daily preparing for EL instruction.

EL teachers were asked on the survey, "What kinds of instruction were EL teachers able to provide?" EL teachers reported striking shifts in the type of instruction they were able to provide Emergent Bilinguals, and thus EL students access to education regardless of the language barriers in place due to an English-dominant or English-only school environment. Pre-ERTL, 48.7% of EL teachers reported that they were able to partner with content area or grade

level teachers to provide co-taught content-based language and literacy instruction. But during

ERTL, the percentage dropped dramatically to just 13.3% (Figure 7).
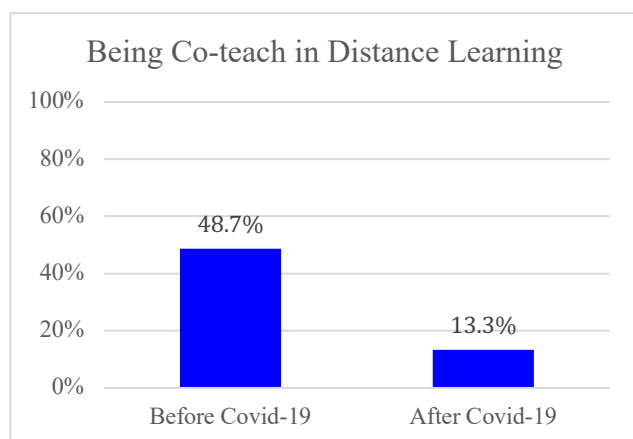
Figure 7: Reported pre- and during ERTL language/content teacher co-teaching in Indiana

In the instruction that EL teachers reported they were able to offer within the severely restricted

instructional environment of ERTL, they identified a range of instructional goals they attempted

to maintain (Figure 8). These included supporting students in understanding content created by

general education/content area colleagues who had Emergent Bilinguals in their classes (i.e.

"General education"; developing English literacy and biliteracy (i.e. "Develop English");

academic test preparation (i.e. "academic test prep"); explicit language development, including

holistic, academic talk and discussion, language specific to content areas, reading and writing

across content areas (i.e. "Language Development), and sustaining bilingualism and biliteracy in

languages other than English (i.e. "Bilingualism"). Respondents were able to select all goals that

applied to their instructional efforts. Overwhelming, Indiana EL teachers responded that their

main instructional goals were to support content area or grade level instruction (74.3%) with

appreciably less focused on dimensions of English (50.4%) or bilingual language development

(10.6%).
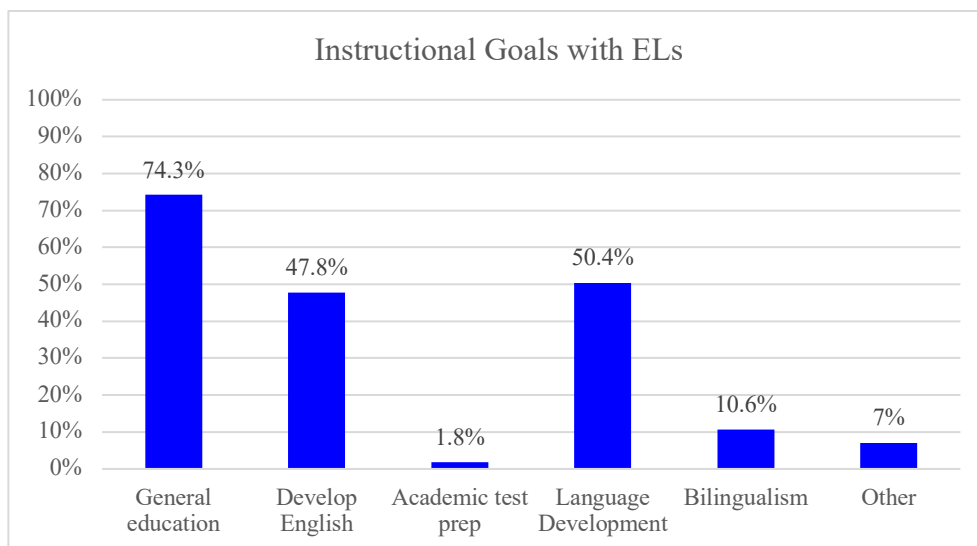
Figure 8: Indiana EL teacher's instructional goals during ERTL

Indiana EL teachers denoted that their largest concern during ERTL was their EL students'

academic achievement (79.6%), which parallels the ways in which they responded to their

instructional goals during ERTL with 74.3% reporting that 'general education' as their main foci

(Figure 7). This concern over academic achievement connected to academic readiness for the

subsequent school year. At the highest level of concern for Indiana EL teachers was their

Emergent Bilinguals' English proficiency not inclining with 89.4% of teacher reporting this as a

concern, which also connected to concerns about language shift, or a retrograde from English to

their home language due to less of English exposure during ERTL.

ERTL and EL Teachers: Covid-19
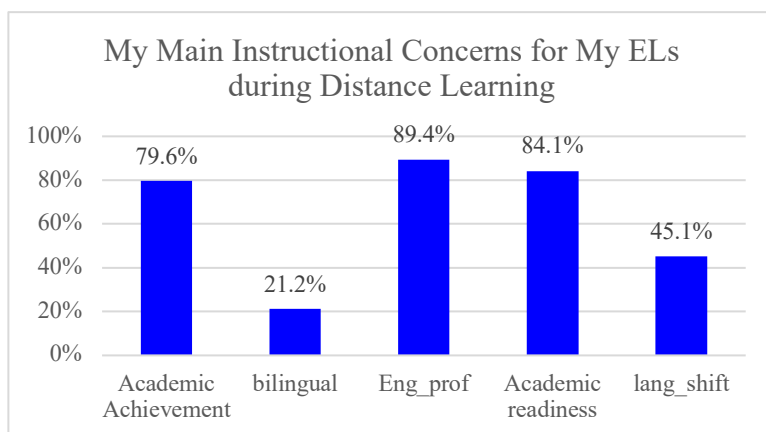
Figure 9: Indiana EL teacher concerns for ELs

Discussion

Overall, this study shows the amount and types of instruction and service EL teachers furnished prior to ERTL. Once schools closed and ERTL began, Indiana EL teachers spent appreciably more time advising their schools on how to best connect and teach Emergent Bilingual students and families, reducing their support of instruction (e.g. in co-teaching) and their focus on English language development. Further, instructionally, ERTL reformulated the content of their instruction as well as the methods EL teachers employed. This reformulation and recalibration led to instructional concerns about academic achievement, academic readiness for subsequent school year, progress in their English proficiency and bilingual development. With the need to change instruction aggressively, EL teachers responded with the needed resources and services to create greater access to instruction. Invariably, these types of instructional changes corresponded to EL teachers' shifts toward more services, so instruction could be accessed by Emergent Bilinguals and their families. As the lead mitigators of service during ERTL, their instructional foci mainly focused on grade and subject level general education content as a baseline, which is insufficient in meeting the complete and complex needs of Indiana's Emergent Bilinguals.

Implications for Schools, Districts, and Stakeholders

Findings demonstrate the perilous instructional conditions not in place for Indiana's Emergent Bilingual students and families, but also reveals the inequities that preceded the move to ERTL. EL teachers were not providing or able to provide language, literacy, and content-based language instruction, placing schools and districts in direct violation with federal law (Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981). Specifically, in the 1981 Supreme Court ruling of

Castañeda vs. Pickard (1981) requires adequate programming for Emergent Bilinguals. Program adequacy is determined across three dimensions that: 1) is based on expert-recognized sound educational theory; 2) programming, practices, resources, and personnel are sufficient to effectively implement sound educational theory; and 3) the school district regularly evaluates its programming and adjusts to ensure that barriers that limit access to education for Emergent Bilinguals are addressed.

While our Indiana inquiry found that there was lack of compliance during ERTL to above stated federal laws, this shed light on the pre-existing inadequacies of language programming for Indiana's Emergent Bilinguals, long before COVID-19 placed schools into closure. Federal laws do require provisions for the instruction of Emergent Bilinguals, but due to a decentralization to states, it is incumbent upon local departments of education or schools to enforce. When there is no specialized licensure, nor requirement for pre-service preparation and none within administrative preparation, simple baseline knowledge of the laws evades the notice of school districts. If there is ignorance about the federal laws, and there are limited number of EL specialists to convey such baseline knowledge, then ignorance exacerbates the inequalities in times of crisis.

ERTL and current virtual teaching is not just a problem to be solved at the site of school. Collaboration, and communication is needed across multiple systems and stakeholders to address systemic infrastructures that foreclose on the inequities experienced by EL educators and their Emergent Bilingual students and families. Schools are not the only place for such solutions and needs to include internet service providers, public institutions, such as libraries and local universities, housing and health care. Thus, lessons learned from ERTL-to-date must inform

ongoing educational realities for Emergent Bilinguals, and can inform necessary changes to ensure EL access to education more comprehensively and equitably.

Our next phase of this inquiry is an in-depth qualitative study of Indiana interviews conducted with EL teachers in the midst of implementing ERTL EL instruction and service. As it was collected between March to May, 2020, we captured a unique window in time with EL teachers enthusiastically committing to this component of the study.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Trish Morita-Mullaney, Ph.D is an Associate Professor at Purdue University where she teaches graduate students in EL and bilingual teaching methodologies and is the Principal Investigator in two large scale federal grants. Her research focuses on the intersection of race, language, gender and immigration and how this informs the individual and structural ideologies of policy stakeholders, including emergent bilingual students and their families.

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Amy Stolpestad, Ed.D currently serves as the director of The ELM Project at Hamline University and consults with local, regional, state, and higher education institutions. Stolpestad is a Minnesota licensed K-12 ESL teacher and experienced teacher educator. Her research interests include teacher leadership, instructional coaching, teacher identity, and organizational change management.

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