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Donna Dias

*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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Effects of Multicultural Education on English Language Learners

Donna Dias

California State University, Monterey Bay

## ABSTRACT

It is no surprise to step into a classroom with little to no multicultural education being implemented in the curricula, but when there are English language learners (ELLs) in these classes, the stakes run high. In a predominantly Eurocentric society, the U.S. population has become more diverse. It is important for diverse ELL students to feel heard and understood in their classrooms. This senior capstone will examine and discuss the effects of the different types of multicultural education on English Language Learning students through the use of literature review, interview with teachers and principals, and student surveys. The findings indicate that schools that implement rich multicultural education in their classrooms positively benefit ELL students psychologically, socially, and academically.

### **Background and Introduction**

Multicultural education has one important message to give to all the students it serves, and it is that regardless of their differences in gender, social class, ethnicity, race, etc., they all deserve an equal opportunity to attain an equal education (Banks & Banks, 2001). It is important to acknowledge the roots of multicultural education because the history itself already provides an illustration for its significance. Although this research paper further looks at the effects of multicultural education specifically on English Language Learners (ELLs), the history begins with African Americans during the Civil Rights movement. “The consequences of the civil rights movement had a significant influence on educational institutions as ethnic groups—first African Americans and then other groups—demanded that the schools and other educational institutions reform their curricula so that they would reflect their experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives” (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 5). The entire purpose of the civil rights movement was to attain desegregation and equity for African Americans within the law in the United States, so it makes sense that changes would also have to be made in the educational aspect for these groups of people, along with other people of color. Without the efforts of this group, multicultural education would probably have been postponed until years later. Multicultural education since then has been the backbone of cultural survival for students of color and the English language learning students amongst them.

In order to meet the needs of these diverse groups of students, adjustments in content and practice must be made in several areas including, but not limited to reading, writing, and language (Cook & Lodge, 1996). Although the adjustments and incorporations of multicultural education in schools serve to empower students of color and language minority groups, it has received push-back from a couple groups in America, the Madison Center and the National

Association of Scholars, whom interpret this form of education as a “special interest” for these groups of people (Sleeter, 1991). Both academic groups have a great influence in what curricula and standards are placed in public schooling, therefore their ideas on multicultural education are damaging for the enormous population of people of color in the United States because their experiences, histories, interests, and cultures are not explicitly being told in classrooms.

Furthermore, students, such as Mexican Americans, who already face language barriers in their classrooms must tackle one more factor holding them back from pursuing an equitable, educational experience that truly sees them and acknowledges their stories. When students see themselves in stories that are read in classrooms or can identify with the curriculum being taught, their voices become empowered and they establish a firm ground for their self-identity. “Native language instruction in schools can be an important factor in ethnic communities shedding their minority status by sharing power with the dominant group” (Sleeter, 1991, p. 217). A handful of studies have shown that an educational experience filled with cultural curricula and bilingual instruction establishes empowerment for ELL students through different ways and therefore, has different effects on them socially, psychologically, and academically.

As a future bilingual teacher that will play a role in creating a better-informed community, as well as a welcoming environment for ELL students, my primary research question is: How does multicultural education affect English language learners? The following secondary questions will help refine my topic and further answer my primary research question: What does research say about the effects of multicultural education on English language learners? How does it affect them psychologically, socially, and academically? How is multicultural education being implemented at the school district level for English language learners? How does multicultural education affect English language learners psychologically,

socially and academically according to principals and teachers? Are there resources for teachers if they want to incorporate multicultural education for English language learners? What could school districts do to incorporate multicultural education in the curriculum at to benefit English language learners? Answering these questions will consist firstly of a literature review, followed by an analysis of interviews and surveys.

### **Literature Review**

From the founding days of America, immigrants have been integrated into society from different cultural backgrounds that have contributed to the birth of the nation (Renshon, 2011). With an increasingly diverse population, education has also had to make changes to become more inclusive. Multicultural education has become a framework for the curriculum necessary to implement the stories and histories of different cultural experiences. Not only does this growing population call for inclusiveness through cultural academia, but language barriers are present and may or may not be addressed in classrooms across the United States. When multicultural education is included in the classroom for groups with linguistical differences, it can be impactful. Although, the effects can be beneficial for ELL students in seeking representation, the inclusion of multiculturalism in the curriculum they are being taught is either rarely present or it is misrepresented. There are different effects of multicultural education that influence English language learners (ELL), but research shows that those effects could be broken up into different categories: psychological, social, and academical.

In order to comprehend the relation of multicultural education to English language learners, its origins must be examined. Although multicultural education was being practiced at a local scale in few areas around the country, Banks (1996) depicts the most significant introduction of its implementation to the United States in the 1950s. This was a memorable time

because the civil rights movement gave way to equal rights for African Americans which brought some acceptance to people of color. Before this movement, schools were segregated between African Americans and white people. Even though the movement's primary goals were to abolish Jim crow laws, gain equal legislative rights, and voting rights, educational rights ignited with its protests as well. During and before this historical event, there were African American scholars, such as Dubois, Woodson, and Franklin, that taught ethnic studies only on the campuses they could teach at which, of course, consisted of an all African American population (Banks, 2001). After fighting for their narratives to be heard and understood, their efforts gave way to the awakening of multicultural education.

For the relevance of this paper, multicultural education is defined as education that provides students with multiple cultural perspectives and collectively views American history generated by the growing diverse population from the past and the present. Multicultural education is a broad spectrum of knowledge that identifies and explains the narratives of different cultures in classrooms. Multicultural education, according to Webb (1990) states that its purpose is "(1) to remedy ethnocentrism in the traditional curriculum; (2) to build understanding among racial and cultural groups and appreciation of different cultures; (3) to defuse intergroup tensions and conflicts; and (4) to make the curricula relevant to the experiences, cultural traditions, and historical contributions of the nation's diverse population" (p. 2). Today, the implementation of this education is seen in public schools only when it is preferred, but there is no requirement for multicultural curriculum in the standards nation-wide like there is for other subjects.

ELL students are one of the main groups of students being affected by the lack of or the implementation of multicultural education. For the purposes of this paper, ELL students will be

described as students who have little to no English proficiency, who belong to a diverse ethnic group with different native languages. ELL students make up at least five million (5,000,000), ten (10) percent, of all students enrolled in public schools in America (Bialik, Scheller, et al, 2018). In California alone, ELL students make up twenty-two (22) percent or more of the population of students enrolled in public schooling (Bialik, Scheller, et al, 2018). These statistics emphasize the importance of multicultural education because of such a large proportion of ELL students residing in an English dominant, Eurocentric centered nation that can diminish their voices and culture.

Although studies show that multicultural education can serve as beneficial for ELL students, there has historically and presently been push-back for its implementation. In particular, Banks (1996) explains how the Madison Center and the National Association of Scholars have debated and argued that multicultural education is harming the nations Western civilization. Public Schools were made to promote democracy and citizenship; Therefore, both groups find that multicultural education is doing no service in preparing students for the expectations or needs of a Western, English dominant society (Deprez, 2010). Furthermore, Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte (2014) argue that the implementation of multicultural education is still only incorporated in schools with a higher share of ethnic minority students, meaning that only a small portion of students in the United States will be exposed to multicultural education anyways. Agirdag et al (2014), then conclude that there is little to no benefit for its implementation because on a grand scale, the benefits will not be shared wholly across the nation, and negative ideologies on cultural differences will continue to occur naturally. In comparison to this notion, Levinson (2009) argues that multicultural education will leave out certain cultures regardless. He discusses that no matter how inclusive teachers try to be with their

ethnic curriculum, not all the student's cultures shared in the class will be expressed in the daily lessons.

According to further research, the cons presented do not outweigh the pros for the implementation of multicultural education for ELL students. The relation multicultural education has with ELL students are intertwined with several benefits for their success rates in and out of school. Ruiz (1988), argues that the implementation of both bilingual education and multicultural education in a classroom containing ELL students empowers them to achieve their intellectual potential not just inside classrooms, but also in their outside worlds as well (as cited in Sleeter, 1991, p. 217-218). The focus of Ruiz's (1988) study looks beyond the effects of multicultural education on ELL students in a classroom; He discusses how it creates a firm foundation for ELL students to recognize their achievements historically and in the present. He also confirms that "native language instruction in schools can be an important factor in ethnic communities shedding their minority status by sharing power with the dominant group" (as cited in Sleeter, 1991, p. 218). Language is important in defining a person's living experience within a community; when there are language barriers, feelings of helplessness can arise through lack of linguistical understanding with one's community or society (Ruiz, 1988, as cited in Sleeter, 1991).

Furthermore, the implementation of multicultural education for ELL students helps them psychologically. When students see themselves in stories that are read in classrooms or can identify with the curriculum being taught, their voices become empowered and they establish a firm ground for their self-identity (Sleeter, 1991). Often, ELL students that already struggle with language barriers experience feelings of loss of hope or culture shock in classrooms that lack representation of their culture (Sleeter, 1991). Therefore, multicultural education serves as a

motivation for students to continue their academics with confidence and high self-esteem when they can identify themselves with the curriculum being taught (Ruiz, 1988, as cited in Sleeter, 1991).

Not only does multicultural education have benefits for students socially and psychologically, but an increase in their academics is evident when it is implemented. Ruiz (1988) states that “when schools are inclusionary, when their pedagogy encourages critical, independent thinking, and when they aim to find and build on a child’s strengths rather than identify weaknesses” ELL students do far better than they anticipated in an English dominant community (as cited in Sleeter, 1991, p. 221). Teachers, themselves, also play a big role in expanding their student’s success in their academics, so when multicultural education is implemented, benefits are reaped for ELL students through their learning. Considering the fact that eighty (80) percent of public-school teachers are White, they can enter a school with many misconceptions on ELL students. The study of cultural and linguistic diversity is important because there are many preservice teachers who hold various misconceptions, false beliefs, stereotypes and erroneous attitudes about minorities (Keengwe 2010). Furthermore, (Mbugua, 2010) states that “in order to maximize learning opportunities, teachers must gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classroom, then translate this knowledge into instructional practice” (p. 89). When teachers are well-informed, they can avoid putting their ELL students down, even in subtle ways, and promote their academic success rates.

The future direction of multicultural education continues to be more of a discussion, but many scholars conclude that it is necessary because its effects are beneficial for ELL students. Even in the grand scheme, Grant & Sleeter (2009) state that “you can help students develop fairness, flexible thinking, an expectation that other viewpoints exist, and an appreciation of the

similarities and differences among people” (p. 180). This means that, not only does the ELL population of students in America benefit from multicultural education, but the rest of the students exposed to this form of education benefit as well by becoming aware and informed. Gay (2010), describes the present and future mandates for educators in America to follow to create a welcoming environment for ELL students in our Western society:

As cultural organizers, teachers must understand how culture operates in daily classroom dynamics, create learning atmospheres that radiate cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate high academic achievement for all students. Opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes on a regular basis. These accommodations require the use of various culturally centered ways of knowing, thinking, speaking, feeling, and behaving (p. 45).

In other words, the future of multicultural education truly lies in the hands of present and future educators and it is up to them to implement this educational pedagogy to engage their ELL students and to generally develop informed students in their communities.

### **Method and Procedures**

Answering the primary and secondary research questions for this paper consisted of various procedures that followed strategic methods. Literature review, as well as library research was conducted to gain a perspective from scholarly research, insights on historical vs. contemporary views of multicultural education, and the development of ELL students in America. To understand how this topic is affecting ELL students at a local level, interviews were executed with teachers and principals, and students were surveyed with a questionnaire. Altogether, the literature review with the library research, the teacher/principal interviews, and the student surveys contributed to the findings for this research paper. To begin with, the

participants will be described, followed by the materials needed to gather information, and the procedures implemented to complete the findings for the primary and secondary questions.

### **Participants**

The participants involved were three (3) teachers, two (2) principals, and twenty-four (24) students. The three teachers included two women and one man; the principals were both men, and the students included fifteen (15) girls and nineteen (19) boys. The age of the teachers and the principals are unknown, but the students, on average, were within the range of twelve to thirteen years of age since they were all in seventh grade. The classroom of the students who participated held bilingual instruction and mostly consisted of Hispanic students. One teacher was a White, bilingual math teacher at an Elementary school, while the other two were Hispanic bilingual teachers at an Elementary school, and they all spoke English and Spanish. One assistant principal was White, working at a dual language academy, and the other principal was Hispanic, working at a school that provided bilingual education, but they were both also bilingual, themselves, speaking English and Spanish.

These participants were recruited through convenience; two were bilingual teachers introduced by friends, I had previously met the assistant principal, one teacher who participated in my project was allocated because of my previous service learning duties at their school, and the students who participated were accessible through the teacher that I did service learning for. The only participant that was chosen randomly was the Hispanic principal, but even they had a bilingual background. The purpose in gathering teachers, principals, and students with a bilingual background was to attain relevant data for this research paper's topic of the effects of multicultural education on ELL students. The teachers and principals were crucial in collecting data for the primary and secondary research questions because when one sees how the

implementation of multicultural education is being done at a local level, one can understand and gain a sense of how it might be functioning at a grand, societal level. The participation of the students was important as well because, although the numbers do not project the experiences of all ELL students in the country, their feedback on multicultural education at their school was useful in understanding the pros and/or cons of its implementation. Furthermore, the data collected for this study using literature review, interviews, and surveys could not have been carried out without the materials.

### **Materials**

The materials used in gathering the tangible, qualitative and quantitative data were in forms of scholarly articles and journals, library books, interviews, and surveys. The interviews asked the same questions to all teachers who participated (See Appendix A), but the questions were different for the principals (See Appendix B). The surveys were directly intended for the students and each student responded to the same survey questions (See Appendix C). The interview questions for the teachers contained eight questions which mostly touched on their direct observations on the different effects of multicultural education on ELL students. For example, the very first question of the teacher interview is: “How do you think multicultural education affects English language learners?” (Appendix A). It also asked their opinions on multicultural education and whether they had the resources required or if they desired to incorporate this education instruction in their classes (See Appendix A). Their observations, opinions, and knowledge of resources served of great importance to the topic being researched because their responses gave a first-hand perspective to the bigger picture that is multicultural education.

The interview questions for the principals were shorter in length, consisting of five questions (See Appendix B). Each question touched on their observations of the implementation of multicultural education, how it was being implemented, and what the school district provided as resources for the students and teachers in terms of this type of educational instruction. For example, one of the questions directed to the principals was “How is multicultural education being implemented at the school district level for English language learners?” (Appendix B). Their responses were important for this project because it gave qualitative feedback, at a local level, of how multicultural education is being implemented for ELL students. The questions for both the teachers and the principals were open ended and allowed for original opinions/thoughts to form.

The survey questions for the students consisted of eight “yes or no” questions, except for the very last question which gives a third answer as an option – “I have never read a book with a character with my same background” (Appendix C). The wording of each question was carefully produced for a seventh-grade reading level, but they could have still been difficult to interpret for some students. They were given a questionnaire to take instead of an interview, like the rest of the participants, because there would be further implications in receiving their consent due to their age. Their feedback on the survey was valuable for this research paper because it took the qualitative data to a deeper level of understanding. This research paper revolves around how impactful multicultural education is for ELL students, so receiving first-hand input creates a vision of how it may be affecting ELL students across the nation.

## **Procedures**

After gathering the participants and the materials, the procedures were followed step by step to collect the data. First, the literature review and library research were conducted to attain

relevant, scholarly information on ELL students and multicultural education. The collection of this research was made possible by the CSUMB library and numerous scholarly articles online. The information accumulated was synthesized to develop foundational knowledge for the audience to grasp while reading the rest of the research paper. This allows them to reflect on key concepts that are vital for analyzing the results and discussion on the effects of multicultural education on ELL students later in the paper.

Secondly, ten teachers were emailed around the Monterey county, but only three emailed back willing to participate. After the exchange of information, consent forms, and emails, the teacher interviews were conducted mid-April also through email due to complicated schedule differences. Most of the teachers were either preparing for testing or already had to do testing with their students, so they could not make time to answer the interview questions. It would have been more personal to conduct the interviews with the teachers who did participate in person to attain a more conversational interview, but their responses were valued, nonetheless. Their responses were each recorded through text format on the interview sheets containing the questions that were emailed to them. They each copied and pasted their responses on word or google documents, and then emailed them back to me. Along with their responses, they sent back scanned copies of their consent form through email. The data collected from each of the interviews was analyzed and served as further evidence on the implementation of multicultural education in local classrooms.

Thirdly, ten principals were emailed and were asked if they wanted to participate in this research study, but only two replied saying they had the time. The rest of the principals either did not reply or they had very busy schedules. After emailing them information on my study, along with the interview questions and the consent forms, both principals agreed to do phone

interviews. One interview was conducted during lunch time, and the other was conducted after school. They each lasted about 15 minutes and the information shared was written at a fast pace as the conversations moved along. After the phone calls ended, a reminder of their signature on the consent form was emailed to both principals. A problem that occurred with this, which will be discussed later in the problems and limitations section, was the noncompliance of one of the principals because they did not email back a copy of their signed consent form. When comparing both interviews with the teachers and the principal, one immediately sees that the teachers were given the freedom to respond with no pressure on their free time, while the principals had to answer the interview questions through interactive, personal communication on the phone.

Lastly, one of the teachers that was interviewed gave permission to hand surveys to her students. After emailing her and scheduling a day in which this could be done, thirty surveys were printed out to distribute to the class. On the day of the distribution of the surveys, the students were informed that their responses were going to be anonymous, and they were also allowed to read the consent form if they wanted, but their signatures were not required. The surveys were handed out to 24 students that attended class on the day of the distribution, in a seventh-grade bilingual classroom. They all finished circling their responses in less than 12 minutes, and the surveys were then collected. Their feedback was then analyzed in a quantitative way to deepen the understandings of how multicultural education is affecting ELL students at a local level.

### **Results, Findings, and Discussion**

The method and procedures used to gather data for this research paper gave way to results with similar patterns in both the literature review and the personal interviews and surveys. There were especially similar trends in the responses received from the teachers, the principals

and the students. By following the method and procedures, the findings showed that multicultural education serves as a beneficial implementation in the lives of ELL students. The first secondary question will be answered with literature review and the rest of the secondary questions will be answered with the interviews and surveys.

*What does research say about the effects of multicultural education on English language learners? How does it affect them psychologically, socially, and academically?* This question was largely answered in the last portion of the literature review section (refer to p. 8-10), however, further research shows that multicultural education only reaps benefits for ELL students psychologically, socially, and academically. Harste (2010) states that multicultural education helps enrich understandings of history and life and gives a voice to those traditionally silenced or marginalized. ELL students are often looked at with prejudice, misinterpreting their low English proficiency as a weakness instead of a strength in their native language. Harste (2010), identifies multicultural education with the social empowerment of ELL students because the teachers and the general student body is aware of the cultural and linguistical differences, but they are aware that these differences do not mean ELL students lack strengths in their community.

The psychological effects of multicultural education on ELL students show improvements of their engagement and self-confidence inside and outside classrooms. Grant & Sleeter (2009) state that this form of education helps them by giving them a sense of belonging in an English dominant society since it “recognizes that there is more than one ‘right’ cultural practice” (p. 180). Despite their English language hardships, ELL students are able to gain confidence and boosts of motivation and morality when they are made aware, through multicultural education, that their culture is important and relevant.

The academic effects of multicultural education on ELL students show obvious improvement in their success rates. According to Fulton-Scott & Calvin (1983), when the implementation of multicultural education coincides with bilingual education, the benefits are even more prevalent in their academics. A study by Fulton-Scott & Calvin (1983) discovered that several elementary programs for Hispanic students who were not proficient in English, showed that their scores in math, reading, and writing were evidently higher for them since they were placed in a bilingual and multiculturally-integrated program in comparison to the scores of students enrolled in bilingual only classes without the multicultural education.

*How is multicultural education being implemented at the school district level for English language learners?* This secondary question was answered through teacher interviews and the results showed an agreement in the unrequired implementation of multicultural education at their schools. When asked how it was being implemented in her school district, Teacher A said, “I am not sure, but our school has implemented Hispanic Heritage Night and International Night, which most students participate in” (Teacher A, personal communication, April 8, 2019). Teacher B said, “There are specific Social Studies and Language Arts standards that include some aspects of multiculturalism studies, but there are no multicultural requirements in Math, Science, Art, P.E. State Standards” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Teacher C said, “Unfortunately, not many requirements are given to us to integrate multicultural education into the classroom” (Teacher C, personal communication, April 9, 2019). All the teachers who participated in this study concluded that at a district level, there was absolutely no requirement to implement multicultural education in their classrooms, even with the presence of ELL students.

*How does multicultural education affect English language learners psychologically, socially and academically according to principals and teachers?* This secondary research question was answered by both teachers and principals and they all acknowledged the many benefits that the previous literature review showed as well. Teacher A said, “I think multicultural education can be beneficial for all students, but particularly English language learners. It allows more opportunities for these students to see themselves represented, which I think is really powerful. I think, historically, a lot of U.S. classes (especially Language Arts and History) have been mostly White students read stories by White authors about White characters or history from the perspective of an old White man. I think multicultural education allows for new voices to be heard and honored” (Teacher A, personal communication, April 8). She developed an analytical response mixed with her own opinion that derived from observations in her own classrooms and her own educational experience.

Teacher B said, “When teachers successfully represent their students in a positive manner, students feel a sense of pride in themselves in relation to their culture and heritage. Without the inclusion of different aspects of multicultural education in the classroom all students have the risk of feeling ostracized or excluded by their peers. ELLs especially can be bullied for being different, have limited language abilities or unable to speak the language all together. When teachers fail to correct prejudices, stereotypes or misconception about a certain culture, it fosters biases among students that may be ignorant about the culture. I have also experienced some ELL students exclude themselves completely socially” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Teacher B was able to conceptualize the feelings of their students through observation and personal connections with their students.

Teacher C said “Multicultural education is extremely important for English language learners because it serves as an example of the diversity that might exist within the classroom and school environment. This inclusion of multicultural elements and diversity might also help the ELL student feel like they are welcome and have a place in the English only or majority population. I think that it also helps them understand that its ok for them to only be English learners and that they do not feel as if they are set aside based on their level of English. Instead, they are integrated with all other students regardless of their English ability” (Teacher C, personal communication, April 9, 2019). This teacher not only envisioned the effects within their classroom, but also considered how societal factors impact ELL students.

In regard to the same question, Principal A said, “There is an idealistic concept happening where we see it as the appropriate approach, but as students get older we see a trend in their lack of Spanish speaking skills because they are embarrassed to use them in class or they lose their language and completely assimilate to the dominant language. When it is effective and maintained, students have a sense of community, belongingness, and appreciation” (Principal A, personal communication, April 4, 2019). This principal had realistic views on how the idealistic outcomes for ELL students don’t always play out the way a school that does implement multicultural education wants them to. In comparison Principal B said, “All students need to see themselves in the classroom lessons because it helps them engage in the texts provided. History has been told by old White men too many times and it is time to give students a diverse narrative that allows them to see their cultural contributions to the country. Multicultural education is empowering students in all aspects socially, academically, and mentally” (Principal B, personal communication, April 7, 2019). This principal seemed to hold high respects to the benefits of multicultural education through his response to the question.

In the student survey, consisting of twenty-four (24) students, for the question: “Do you ever feel like you don’t belong in your school because of your cultural background?” (See Appendix C), ten (10) students said yes, five (5) students said sometimes, and nine (9) students said no. The second question in the survey that connects with the third secondary question was: “Does your culture get enough recognition in the class or in the school?” (See Appendix C), thirteen (13) students said no, eleven (11) students said yes.

*Are there resources for teachers if they want to incorporate multicultural education for English language learners?* This fourth secondary research question was answered by all the teachers and one principal. Teacher A said, “Each teacher does get money for classroom supplies, which can also be used to buy activities and lessons on Teachers Pay Teachers- so that money could be used to buy multicultural resources” (Teacher A, personal communication, April 8, 2019). Teacher B said, “There are no resources provided to teachers to incorporate multicultural education specifically to ELLs” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Teacher C said, “It is possible to research lessons and ideas online, but it sometimes takes a lot of planning and preparation in order to make or develop an effective lesson. I, personally, try to make as many connections to it as possible but sometimes there is just not enough time to cover everything” (Teacher C, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Principal A said, “There is this curriculum we ask teachers to incorporate called TCI and it is a multicultural approach at educating students through lesson plans that incorporate and promotes diversity” (Principal A, personal communication, April 4, 2019).

*What could school districts do to incorporate multicultural education in the curriculum to benefit English language learners?* This secondary research question was intended for principals to answer through personal knowledge of their academic requirements at their schools

and their own personal opinions. Principle A said, “They could and should provide more funding to send our teachers to programs that can help with their biliteracy skills, and they could also demand more qualified teacher through rigorous requirements in terms of their credentials for diversity and inclusion” (Principal A, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Principal B said, “They could make multicultural education a requirement in classes, especially history classes. But I know that that won’t happen unless the state comes up with an actual policy. Teachers see multicultural education as a preference rather than a necessity” (Principal B, personal communication, April 7, 2019). The following discussion will show what this data means to the author and the interpretations of their findings.

### **Discussion**

The three (3) teacher interviews and both principal interviews with the teachers all showed similar responses and opinions in forms of qualitative data. Their responses were valuable in understanding how multicultural education affects ELL students. Their responses all came from personal observations, experiences, and knowledge. Similarly, the student survey feedback reinforced the findings of how beneficial multicultural education is for their academic success, their psychological well-being, and their social competency. In my personal opinion, the results and findings for the implementation of multicultural education for ELL students significantly show a necessary requirement for it in all schools across the nation, even in classes that do not contain ELL students.

From personal experience, as an ELL student in my elementary school years, multicultural education could have helped me fulfill my academic requirements with more ease, mentally, socially, and academically. All teachers agreed on the questions asking about the different general effects that multicultural education has on ELL students (See appendix A) and

said that it gives students valuable reinforcements academically, socially, and psychologically. Teacher A stated that multicultural education gives ELL students representation, direct connections to the curriculum, and a sense of ownership for their education (Teacher A, personal communication, April 8, 2019). This reinforces my personal experience with the widely shared opinion among the teachers I interviewed and the literature review, that multicultural education gives students confidence in completing their schoolwork without feeling unwelcomed or judged.

In an English dominant society, the students need a foundation for their self-identities and linguistical differences. ELL students who already struggle with language barriers can experience a loss of hope when their teachers do not acknowledge their struggle, but when multicultural education is present, they are more willing to ask for help without holding back because they feel empowered. This is evident when teacher B states that multicultural education is vital for ELL students because “it makes the students feel welcomed in an English majority population” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 9, 2019). They also stated that integrating a multicultural education where they can relate to the lessons, stories, characters in books, etc., they are able to be comfortable with their English language levels that may be lower than their counterparts.

The lack of multicultural education is not only harming ELL students, it is harming the nation as a whole. When there is no knowledge of the different cultures and language differences in a predominantly English-speaking community, misconceptions, prejudice, and bias can be implemented towards diverse groups of people. The solution for part of the discrimination these people face due to their differences can be the use of multicultural education in classrooms. As a previous ELL student, I would have appreciated more awareness being spread in classrooms to

stop the actions and words of prejudice of other students and teachers towards other ELL students. The research I found and the qualitative data I collected showed a significant, universal agreement that societal discrimination could be interrupted even at smaller scales through a diverse curriculum that keeps groups of people informed. I agree that if improvements are to be seen in our Western civilization, a celebration of cultures in schools must be implemented.

### **Problems and Limitations**

Although some of the data was collected through personal accounts, there were a few problems and limitations faced while conducting research and gathering data for this topic. One problem faced was the neutrality of responses. Although the interview questions for the teachers and principals (See Appendix A & B) were open ended, the teachers and principals targeted, all had some bilingual background whether it was through their ethnic background or their philosophies in teaching. Therefore, their responses could have been biased since their educational purposes revolve around inclusiveness of ELL students.

A limitation faced during this project was the time, hence there was only one semester to finish the entire study. If there was more time to conduct research, more resources and more interviews could have been conducted to generate a more powerful conclusion. This limitation also included the lack of time teachers and principals had to respond to the interview questions, especially because student testing takes place in the Spring. Another limitation was the amount of responses received from the directed population of students. One class is not enough to generally speak for the entire population of ELL students in the United States. For a study to be factual and used by other scholars, the data pulled from participants must include hundreds of thousands of people. Two principals and three teachers are also not entirely reliable to understand how different schools or different school districts view the effects of multicultural

education on ELL students. Their responses served value to this research paper, but their contributions are still not enough to finalize a widely accepted idea.

The teachers, principals, and students were all part of a convenience sample. One of the teachers was known through a previous service-learning experience, while the other two were gathered through friends. One principal worked at the previous service-learning site, and the last principal was chosen because of their dual language education offerings at their school. Since the sample is convenient, it may have generated bias qualitative data. Another aspect as to how this is a convenience study is seen through the way the data is gathered. Most of the interviews were done through email, which allowed the teachers to ponder and collect their thoughts in comparison to an in-person interview where they would have had to think of their responses on the spot.

### **Recommendations**

Multicultural education has been a beneficial pedagogy for ELL students, but its implementation is hardly seen in public schools across the United States. To help ELL students gain the positive effects of multicultural education, a few recommendations are given in this section. First, a variety of resources are vital for teachers to provide ELL students with an efficient, diverse curriculum. These resources could include multicultural books, lesson plans, poster, and diverse guest speakers. These tools and guest speakers would serve as a foundation for the introduction of multicultural education for students. The multicultural books, lesson plans, and posters would provide ELL students with a personal narrative that they could relate to, empowering their culture and sense of belongingness. Diverse guest speakers could be invited into classrooms with ELL students to make them aware that diversity is okay and that they are not alone, although it may feel like it at times due to negative events in our society.

Another recommendation that could help ELL students benefit from the effects of multicultural education would consist of having all public-school teachers go through a mandated assessment on diversity. This could diminish any prejudice or misconceptions that preservice teachers have before stepping into a classroom that contains ELL students. As, Ovando (1998) argues that, “within such an environment of constructive pluralism, it cannot be acceptable to blame the students genetic, environmental, cultural, or linguistical background for his or her lack of success in the English-dominated classroom” (p. 281). With this mandatory assessment, teachers will feel encouraged to be more accepting and patient with their ELL students, especially when their circumstances seem helpless at times.

The next recommendations are to once and for all make multicultural education a mandatory part of the curricula across the nation. This could be implemented in sections of common core standards. The creators of these standards, used in all public schools, could incorporate them even in subtle ways such as teaching students different mathematical strategies used by Mayans, introducing different ethnic foods when learning about historical events related to the groups of people they are studying, and more. Similarly, multicultural festivals should be promoted at all schools to celebrate the diverse groups of students at their schools and to allow them to share their cultural offerings and traditions to their peers. This recommendation could help build stronger unity in schools, allowing students to be more accepting and prideful of the cultural differences alive in their schools.

### **Conclusion**

Every student is unique in their own way, which includes unique characteristics. These qualities come with strengths and challenges such as deficiency in the English language. This unique need is attributed to the growing diversity in America. As a result, it is critical that

teachers understand these attributes and respond with skill and sensitivity to help support each student attain their full social, psychological and academic potential through the usage of multicultural education. The goal of this research paper was to answer the primary question: How does multicultural education affect English language learners? Using literature review, library research, interviews, and surveys the findings showed that multicultural education had positive effects on ELL students.

The effects of multicultural education on ELL students showed signs in academic improvement due to their empowerment through personal narratives being taught in classrooms. The studies showed that when multicultural education was implemented for ELL students, they achieved higher scores than their counterparts who did not receive this type of experience. It had positive effects on their social acceptance and belongingness through encouragement of their culture in classrooms. The studies and interviews showed that ELL students felt more confident being a part of a diverse group in their predominantly Eurocentric classrooms, despite their English deficiency. Lastly, multicultural education showed to have positive, psychological effects on ELL students. Its implementation creates mental preparation for cultural differences and/or culture shocks they often experience in our contemporary, Western civilization. Overall, the implementation of multicultural education serves as a beneficial pedagogy for ELL students that affect them in positive manners academically, socially, and psychologically.

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## Appendix A

**Teacher Interview Questions**

1. How do you think multicultural education affects English language learners?
2. How does it affect them academically?
3. How does it affect them socially?
4. How does it affect them psychologically?
5. Do you implement multicultural education in your classroom? If so, give a few examples.
6. Are there usually specific requirements in state standards to implement multicultural education in lesson plans?
7. What resources are provided for you if you want to incorporate multicultural education (for English language learners)?
8. Do you think it is harmful to not include multicultural education in classrooms for English language learners?

## Appendix B

**Principal Interview Questions**

1. How do you think multicultural education affects the student body in the school as a whole—socially and psychologically?
2. How is multicultural education being implemented at the school district level for English language learners?
3. What resources does the school or district provide for teachers who want to implement multicultural education in their classrooms?
4. What could school districts do to incorporate more multicultural education in the curriculum for English language learners?
5. Do you think it is important to acknowledge diversity in ELL classes?

Appendix C

**Student Survey**

1. Do you feel any personal connections throughout the lessons given in class?

Yes / No

2. Do you know what multicultural education is?

Yes / No

3. Do you ever feel left out or like you don't belong in your school because of your cultural background?

Yes / No

4. Does your culture get enough recognition in the class or in the school?

Yes / No

5. Do you think your second language is important to keep?

Yes / No

6. Do you feel like you have lost a part of your culture or Native language speaking skills?

Yes / No

7. Does learning about your own culture or other cultures help you feel some type of belongingness?

Yes / No

8. Do you like when you can relate to characters of the same background in books you read in class?

Yes / No / I have never read a book with a character with my same background