Article

Examining bilingual school psychologist demographics, training experiences, and multicultural competencies

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Abstract

The number of emergent bilingual (EB) students in U.S. schools is growing rapidly; as a result, many have explicitly looked to bilingual school psychologists (BSPs) to meet their needs. Often, there is an assumption that being bilingual also equips one with the appropriate competencies for bilingual school psychology practice. BSPs, like monolingual ones, still require specific training in the competencies needed to meet EB students' unique needs. However, little is known about their training experiences, and much variability in credentialing requirements and coursework directly impacts how EB students are served in schools. Thus, utilizing the National Association of School Psychologists' Bilingual School Psychologist Directory, the present study sought to better understand BSPs across the United States ($N = 235$) using questionnaires to gather their demographic information, training experiences and needs, and self-reported multicultural competencies. Results indicated marked variability in how BSPs are trained, with many university training programs lacking the coursework, supervision, and/or practical

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experiences necessary to obtain appropriate practice competencies. Relatedly, participants reported a high level of multicultural competency overall, but more in regard to theory than skills and knowledge for practice, indicating the need for further training. Recommendations and implications for the training and supervision of BSPs are provided.

Keywords

Emergent bilingual[1] (EB) students represent 10.6% of the U.S. public school student population as of the 2021 school year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024a). While this category homogenizes the bilingual student population, much diversity exists. In terms of the racial and ethnic background of EB students, they are majority Latinx (77.9%), followed by Asian (9.7%), White (6.1%), and Black (4.2%). Additionally, EB students identified with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) represent 15.8% of the total bilingual student population relative to 14.7% of students with disabilities within the total public school population in the 2021 to 2022 school year (NCES, 2024a). Given EB students' growth and diversity, educational professionals such as school psychologists must be well-prepared with relevant cultural knowledge and skills to meet their needs.

School psychologists play an important role in supporting the needs of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically minoritized students. Unfortunately, the composition of the school psychology workforce has not kept pace as the demographics of U.S. public school students become increasingly diverse (Goforth et al., 2021; NCES, 2024b). The field of school psychology has experienced increased diversity but remains homogenous, as most school psychologists are White (85.9%), monolingual (92%), able-bodied (93.5%), and female (87.3%; Goforth et al., 2021). The limited diversity of the profession presents concerns about school psychologists' capacity to effectively address the needs of students from minoritized backgrounds, including EB students. Extant literature has documented school psychologists' limited preservice training in culturally competent service delivery as well as the need for school psychology programs to address this issue by improving training opportunities (Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Malone & Ishmail, 2020; Newell et al., 2010). Thus, the extent to which school psychologists are prepared to support EB students is minimal. Unfortunately, this limited scope of training can be harmful to students and their families.

In theory, bilingual school psychologists (BSPs) should be prepared with the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary to meet the needs of EB students; however, not much is known specifically about BSPs' training and preparedness to serve bilingual learners. Additionally, given the limited training in cultural competency for school psychologists, BSPs need more robust training experiences at the preservice level. Thus, this

study aimed to better understand BSPs' training experiences and needs and their self-reported multicultural competencies. This study focuses on the United States; however, EB students exist globally, and while their unique needs may differ based on their geographic location, trained BSPs are necessary to support them. All school psychologists worldwide must engage in culturally responsive practices (Shriberg & Clinton, 2016) and have the training to engage in continued education to advance their skills toward becoming culturally competent practitioners. Therefore, this study has global implications for bilingual school psychology training and practice.

Bilingual school psychology practice and multicultural competencies

With appropriate training, BSPs have the potential to play a significant role in ensuring EB students receive necessary services that meet their unique needs. However, while BSPs may speak more than one language, they may lack the cultural knowledge necessary to support EB students effectively. Thus, BSPs must also be culturally competent (Olvera & Olvera, 2015). This section explores what is known about BSPs and bilingual school psychology practice. Additionally, given the need for culturally competent BSPs, we discuss multicultural competencies and their impact on EB students.

Bilingual school psychologist preparation

Ideally, all school psychologists who want to become BSPs would demonstrate rigorous background knowledge and training experiences to be credentialed for bilingual practice. However, this is not the case, and it is complicated because only two states in the United States (Illinois and New York) provide such credentialing (Sotelo-Dynega, 2015). Therefore, school psychologists speaking more than one language can self-identify and practice as BSPs outside these two states. Additionally, the limited number of school psychology programs with a bilingual specialization in the United States creates barriers to robust training opportunities for aspiring BSPs. Between 8 (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], n.d.-a) and 13 (Stathatos et al., 2020) school psychology programs out of over 240 school psychology programs in the United States have a bilingual specialization (NASP, n.d.-b).

The breadth and depth of BSP preparation vary. Among the 13 school psychology programs with bilingual specializations identified by Stathatos et al. (2020), differences and similarities existed in admission, course, supervision, and degree completion requirements. Some programs required language examinations for admission to the bilingual specialization. Course requirements to complete the bilingual specializations varied from six to sixteen credit hours. Some programs required supervision from a BSP during both practicum and internship, while some only specified the need for supervision from a BSP in either practicum or internship. Some programs required study abroad or cultural immersion experiences to supplement their learning and enrich their cultural competence outside the classroom (Green et al., 2009; Vega & Plotts, 2020). Notably,

however, data gathered by Stathatos et al. (2020) were from programs' websites and relevant materials (e.g., program handbooks); therefore, it is possible that requirements changed, were not up-to-date at the time of the study, and/or did not capture the depth and breadth of training experiences provided.

In a pilot study (Vega et al., 2019) examining the training experiences of self-identified BSPs in the United States, the consensus among six participants was that their preservice bilingual training was limited in scope and that they spent much of their time developing the knowledge and skills needed to practice as BSPs after they graduated. Participants shared that their school psychology program faculty had minimal experience working with EB students, limiting their learning and training opportunities with this population. Some participants opted to complete additional coursework outside of their school psychology programs to gain knowledge about bilingual education practices, and some participated in study abroad programs to advance their language competency. Due to these curricular and programmatic limitations, participants underscored the need for faculty with the knowledge and experience (e.g., bilingual faculty) to prepare school psychologists to effectively support EB students and their families. Participants also deemed it critical for faculty to infuse culturally responsive content across all school psychology coursework so bilingual trainees could be better equipped to comprehensively serve EB students.

Unfortunately, much remains unknown about the preparatory experiences of BSPs who completed their training in programs with and without bilingual specializations. The profession does not have established bilingual school psychology training guidelines, which can create discrepancies in preparation and practice among BSPs. It may also lead to ethical and/or legal issues when practicing outside the scope of one's competencies, which can negatively affect EB students and their families. Understanding how BSPs are trained is an important area of need within the profession and an impetus for the current study. School psychology programs with and without bilingual specializations may lack critical training areas, and feedback from BSPs can help improve training experiences. This information can also aid in developing more consistency across existing training models and facilitate school psychology programs' adoption of best practices in bilingual school psychology training.

Cultural competency and multicultural training

In their seminal piece on multicultural competence in counseling, Sue et al. (1992) discussed the importance of constant development and growth across three areas: awareness, knowledge, and skills. While focused on counselors, this model also applies to school psychology practice and aligns with professional and ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 2017; ISPA, 2021; NASP, 2020). School psychologists must be aware of biases, values, and assumptions that may interfere with how they engage with minoritized students and families. Awareness involves being culturally sensitive, respecting cultural differences, and being conscious of stereotypes. It also involves practicing within the scope of one's competencies and, therefore, requires recognition of personal knowledge and skill limitations (Sue et al., 1992). Knowledge goes a step further

than awareness and refers to knowing one's beliefs and how they may affect one's practice. It also encompasses knowledge about the different populations school psychologists work with and their historical backgrounds and lived experiences. Knowledgeable practitioners also understand sociopolitical and systemic issues impacting minoritized groups' lives (Sue et al., 1992).

Being culturally aware and knowledgeable is necessary but insufficient; school psychologists must also have the skills to effectively serve culturally and linguistically minoritized (CLM) groups. Culturally skilled school psychologists continually engage in professional development opportunities and seek information to effectively work with diverse populations. They also utilize culturally responsive approaches across various practice domains (e.g., assessment, counseling) to ensure they are individualizing their services to meet the distinct needs of CLM students and their families (Sue et al., 1992).

The depth of infusion of multicultural competencies into school psychology training programs has been a longstanding area of concern (Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Malone & Ishmail, 2020; Newell et al., 2010). However, recent research demonstrates improvements in the training experiences of school psychologist trainees. For example, in a multi-method study in the United States, Vega et al. (2018) examined the outcomes of a multi-cultural school psychology course among first-year school psychology graduate students and their feelings of sensitivity and empathy toward racially and ethnically minoritized groups. Findings showed that White participants held lower levels of racial identity awareness, which aligned with their reports of often not thinking about their racial identity. The lack of awareness and consideration of one's identity has implications for working effectively with populations different from oneself. If school psychologists do not examine their own identities, values, or biases, their interpretation of academic and/or behavioral issues may lead to disproportionate discipline or placement in special education for minoritized groups (Aston et al., 2022). This finding underscores the need for all school psychologist trainees to receive direct opportunities to reflect and learn about themselves as well as the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds (Vega et al., 2018).

In a similar study, Jones and Lee (2021) explored the effects of a 10-week multicultural school psychology course over five years in the United States. Based on pre- and post-test data, participants reported increased levels of multicultural competence in regard to awareness, knowledge, and skills. Consistent growth was noted across the five cohorts in the knowledge domain, and the greatest growth in competency occurred in the skills domain. These findings convey that multicultural courses are a beneficial and critical part of training in school psychology programs. However, students must continue learning about multicultural aspects of school psychology practice in all courses.

In an investigation of how 28 U.S. school psychology programs incorporated multicultural training, Malone and Ishmail (2020) found that programs frequently utilized the separate course model (e.g., a standalone course on multicultural school psychology) and integration course model (e.g., multicultural competencies incorporated into various courses). However, faculty's lack of multicultural training limited their ability to effectively provide this instruction throughout the curriculum. Thus, while the frequent use of

adopting both models, or integration-separate course model, is critical to school psychology training, graduate educators may lack the skills to teach these courses; as a result, school psychologists receive minimal preservice training related to cultural competencies, thereby impacting CLM students in school settings.

Impact on emergent bilingual students

As the U.S. K-12 population becomes increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (NCES, 2024b), BSPs are critical in addressing the unique needs of EB students, particularly in regard to assessing language acquisition and the possible presence of learning disabilities. BSPs must be well-versed in selecting appropriate assessment instruments and examining language development and acquisition in such a context (Ding et al., 2019). Additionally, BSPs must be aware of alternative methods for assessment (e.g., use of observations, interviews) when traditional approaches are not appropriate, including the benefits and limitations of such methods for conducting valid bilingual assessments (Ding et al., 2019; Vega & Wolf, 2023). Given the complexity of the intersection between special education referrals and language acquisition, BSPs can provide much-needed insight into issues unique to bilingual learners (Klingner et al., 2008; NASP, 2023).

BSPs require unique training regarding second-language acquisition, acculturation, and multicultural and multilingual competencies (Harris et al., 2021; NASP, 2023; Sánchez Lizardi et al., 2024), making these practitioners critical advocates for EB students and their families. Through prevention, referral, evaluation, intervention, and consultation, the role of BSPs is expanding and paramount in ensuring culturally responsive and collaborative efforts between educational staff and families. However, the limited opportunities available for bilingual school psychology training and the dearth of BSP supervisors impact how well BSPs can serve bilingual students. Without these specific training experiences, such as being exposed to bilingual measures or administering assessments in another language, BSP trainees can feel unprepared for entering the field (Pollard-Durodola & Miller, 2021; Vega et al., 2019). Thus, a change in how BSPs are trained is much needed.

Purpose of the study

This exploratory study examined BSPs' training experiences and multicultural competencies. Existing research (Vega et al., 2019) has identified variability in how bilingual practice is defined among BSPs. Therefore, this study seeks to not only explore who BSPs are but also to identify concurrent themes in their training experiences and service delivery.

- Aim 1: Who are bilingual school psychologists in regard to their cultural identities and employment contexts?
- Aim 2: What are the training experiences and needs of bilingual school psychologists?
- Aim 3: Which professional experiences and credentials predict self-reported multicultural competency among bilingual school psychologists?

Method

Measures

To examine BSPs' training experiences and multicultural competencies, a 64-item researcher-developed cross-sectional survey (see supplemental material) was utilized. Survey items were derived from a review of the literature, previous research on bilingual school psychology practice (e.g., O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010; Peña, 2012; Vega et al., 2016, 2019), and consultation with practicing BSPs. To address each aim, three distinct question sets were developed. To address our first research aim, the first set of survey questions included 16 demographic items (e.g., age, geographic region of practice, highest degree attained, languages spoken). To address our second aim, the next set included 20 items related to graduate experiences (e.g., "In your school psychology training program, did you have to complete a language proficiency examination in a second language?") and needs (e.g., "In your training program, what experiences could have better prepared you as a BSP?"). This item set also allowed for open-ended response options so participants could add additional information if desired.

Finally, to address the third aim, the School Psychology Multicultural Competence Scale (SPMCS; Malone et al., 2016) was used to assess participants' competencies across four domains: cultural skills (e.g., "I can explain test information to culturally diverse parents"), cultural knowledge (e.g., "I know how to adapt instruments to assess linguistically diverse students"), cultural appreciation (e.g., "I respect and appreciate socioeconomic and cultural background of a child and his/her family"), and cultural awareness (e.g., "I understand how my cultural background has influenced the way I think and act"). The SPMCS is a 28-item self-report measure that assesses the multicultural competence of school psychologists. Items are on a Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree), where higher scores indicate more competence. For the current study, the SPMCS showed strong reliability overall ($\alpha = .92$). The reliability ranges across subscales: cultural skills ($\alpha = .83$), cultural knowledge ($\alpha = .84$), cultural appreciation ($\alpha = .81$), and cultural awareness ($\alpha = .78$).

Procedures

Participants were recruited for the study using the National Association of School Psychologist's (NASP's) Bilingual School Psychologist Directory following approval from the NASP Research Committee and university IRB approval. To be included in the directory, one must be a member of NASP and be able to speak (or sign) at least one language other than English (including American Sign Language) with native or near-native fluency to provide school psychological services.

NASP provided mailing labels for approximately 1,000 BSPs; recruitment was conducted via mail in November 2018. Participants were given several options to complete the survey either in paper form or electronically: (a) a paper survey to return in a prepaid envelope; (b) a postcard with a QR code to scan to take the survey electronically via Qualtrics; or (c) a hyperlink to enter into their browser to complete the survey

electronically via Qualtrics. Follow-up survey packets were sent via mail after approximately three months, and data collection concluded in August 2019 when new responses were no longer received. Responses were received from 235 BSP participants, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The sample size and response rate (23.5%) were comparable to similar research studies (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010; Peña, 2012).

Data analysis

Quantitative analysis. Data were cleaned and analyzed using SPSS 29 software. Data showed random missingness at less than 5% on the demographic variables (i.e., Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007); however, there was more missingness (12%) on the SPMCS variables. Here, the missingness appeared systematic: For all participants, the SPMCS questions came at the end of the survey. Some likely ceased participation at this point. To address the missingness on the SPMCS variables, multiple imputation was used following Austin et al.'s (2021) guidelines for clinical research.

Approximately 5% of participants indicated they were retired. Upon closer inspection, some endorsed being retired from the K-12 setting but reported continuing to provide services in academic or private practice settings. Nine participants reported being completely retired and not practicing in any capacity; therefore, they were removed because they were not representative of the intended population. Thus, the sample size was reduced to 226.

Given its ability to support categorical independent variables and unbalanced groups, univariate general linear modeling (GLM) was used to assess the relationship between BSPs' training experiences and their overall self-reported multicultural competency. All assumptions for the GLM analysis were met. Categorical independent variables with more than two levels (i.e., *Bilingual Supervision* and *Degree Type*) were dummy-coded. All other independent variables were categorical and binary (i.e., yes/no), and involved coding for the presence (1) or absence (0) of specific training experiences and credentialing.

Analysis of open-ended survey responses. The survey offered open-ended questions to allow participants to provide information that may not have been captured in the close-ended questions; it also allowed participants to respond in more detail, which supplemented the quantitative data (Rouder et al., 2021). Open-ended items were generally follow-ups for close-ended items (e.g., asking participants to specify the language tested for any language proficiency exams); thus, most responses were brief (e.g., a few words or a short sentence). The researchers conducted a conventional content analysis of the open-ended responses, an inductive approach to analyzing textual data (Cavanagh, 1997) and grouping large quantities of textual data into meaningful categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The open-ended responses were compiled in a spreadsheet to be organized into categories for each question. One team member coded the responses independently to develop preliminary category names and then worked with a second team member to reach consensus on the categorization of responses and finalize the category

names (Hill, 2012). The researchers also conducted frequency counts of the data in each category to determine how often responses occurred.

Results

Aim 1: Who are bilingual school psychologists in regard to their cultural identities and employment contexts?

Participants ranged from 25 to 73 years old ($M = 45$; $SD = 11.7$), and most identified as female (78%; $n = 177$). Most were Hispanic/Latinx (49%, $n = 111$), followed by White (41%; $n = 92$), Asian/Pacific Islander (8%; $n = 18$), and Black/African American (4%; $n = 9$). Roughly 75% ($n = 166$) of the sample spoke Spanish (in addition to English), but several other languages were also reported (e.g., Italian, Mandarin, American Sign Language). Data indicated that most participants held an educational specialist degree (41%; $n = 92$), followed by a doctorate (31%; $n = 69$) and master's (23%; $n = 53$) degrees. Some participants reported degrees in progress. Years in practice ranged from 0 to 46 years ($M = 14$; $SD = 10$). Most participants practiced in the pre-K-12 setting; the majority worked in elementary schools (83%; $n = 187$), followed by middle schools (70%; $n = 158$), high schools (58%; $n = 131$), and preschools (60%; $n = 135$). Others worked in adult transition services (12%; $n = 28$) or were in other settings (e.g., private practice, faculty; 8%; $n = 19$). The majority of the sample (62%; $n = 143$) indicated that the state in which they practice does not have a bilingual credential, and just 22% ($n = 49$) indicated being a credentialed BSP. See Table 1 for the majority demographic information of participants.

Aim 2: What were the training experiences and needs of bilingual school psychologists?

A variety of questions were used to assess the study's second aim. Items concerned topics such as program accreditation, courses on diversity and the language acquisition process, bilingual credentialing, and opportunities for bilingual supervision and practice during field experiences. Participants were also asked to identify how their training could

Table 1. Majority demographics of bilingual school psychologist participants.

Category	Majority response	Percentage
Gender	Female	80%
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latinx	49%
Languages Spoken	Spanish/English	80%
Degree Type	Educational Specialist	41%
Practice Setting	Pre-K-12	91%

have better prepared them to practice as BSPs. Participants' training experiences are summarized in Table 2.

Language proficiency examinations. Most participants attended NASP-approved graduate programs (80%; $n = 181$); moreover, most attended programs that did not include a bilingual specialization (70%; $n = 159$) or require a language proficiency exam in a second language (74%; $n = 166$). For those who indicated they were required to complete a language proficiency examination in another language ($n = 47$), open-ended responses indicated that close to half ($n = 26$) completed an exam in Spanish. Other languages reported included American Sign Language ($n = 8$), English ($n = 7$), and Portuguese ($n = 2$). Various other languages were reported by one participant each, including Hebrew, Mandarin, French, and Yiddish. Participants who completed an exam reported that it covered reading ($n = 39$), writing ($n = 38$), listening ($n = 44$), and speaking ($n = 41$).

Administration of bilingual assessments. Less than half (42%; $n = 95$) of participants received specific training in administering tests in languages other than English (e.g., Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey). Participants were provided the option to write a response to report the type of training they received to administer non-English language assessments; they stated on-the-job/professional development ($n = 14$), independent learning ($n = 3$), and coursework ($n = 2$). The remaining respondents indicated they received minimal or no training ($n = 3$), or their responses were unrelated to the question ($n = 8$).

Coursework: assessment of diverse learners. Most of the sample reported completing a course in assessing diverse students (73%; $n = 166$) as a program requirement ($n = 131$). When asked if any other courses covered content related to the assessment of diverse learners, participants most frequently reported their assessment courses ($n = 55$). Other courses incorporating this content included cultural diversity ($n = 22$), counseling ($n = 13$), most or all courses ($n = 10$), bilingual education ($n = 9$), and field experience ($n = 6$).

Coursework: bilingual education. Only 30% of the sample ($n = 67$) completed a specific course in bilingual education, which was required for roughly half ($n = 33$) of this subset of participants. Others took it as an elective ($n = 22$) or obtained the content via

Table 2. Majority university training experiences of bilingual school psychologist participants.

University training program	n (percentage of total sample)
NASP-Approved	181 (80%)
Offered Bilingual Specialization	54 (24%)
Required Language Proficiency Exam	47 (20%)
Offered Specific Training in Bilingual Assessment	95 (42%)
Offered One Course for Working with Diverse Students	166 (74%)

other means ($n = 12$), such as independent learning. For those who obtained the content via other means, open-ended responses indicated the content was learned through professional development opportunities ($n = 7$) or from a different degree program ($n = 6$; e.g., a teacher education program).

Coursework: language acquisition. Roughly half of the sample (56%; $n = 127$) reported that their courses covered content related to the language acquisition process, either via a semester-long course ($n = 66$) or as part of another course ($n = 60$). When asked which courses covered this content, most participants identified assessment courses ($n = 45$). Other courses that addressed this content included linguistics ($n = 15$), cultural diversity ($n = 9$), bilingual education ($n = 8$), development ($n = 6$), learning and cognition ($n = 6$), reading ($n = 5$) courses or courses taken in another degree program ($n = 5$).

Participants who did not learn about the language acquisition process through their coursework were asked to report how they learned the content. Most shared that it was learned through professional development ($n = 38$), independent learning ($n = 20$), on-the-job experiences ($n = 10$), from another degree program ($n = 9$), field experiences ($n = 7$), supervision and collaboration ($n = 6$), and other professional experience ($n = 3$; e.g., working as a bilingual or English as a second language teacher).

Coursework: nondiscriminatory assessment. Most participants (75%; $n = 169$) reported coursework related to nondiscriminatory assessment (NDA) procedures. When asked via an open-ended item which courses covered this content, most participants indicated their assessment courses ($n = 59$). Additionally, the remaining open-ended responses included cultural diversity courses ($n = 5$), most/all courses (3%, $n = 3$), and other courses/experiences ($n = 15$; self-study, ethics course, psychometric course). Participants who did not learn the content through their courses reported that it was learned through professional development ($n = 21$), independent learning ($n = 13$), and on-the-job experiences ($n = 10$).

Other relevant coursework. Some participants (23%; $n = 52$) reported completing other coursework related explicitly to acquiring skills necessary to becoming a BSP. Open-ended responses about the nature of this coursework indicated the following: bilingual education courses ($n = 5$), assessment courses ($n = 4$), most/all courses ($n = 3$), cultural diversity courses ($n = 3$), and other courses/experiences ($n = 10$; e.g., counseling, crisis intervention, professional development).

Improving bilingual training experiences. More than half (66%; $n = 149$) reported that their coursework could have better prepared them to become BSPs. Responses to the open-ended question also shed light on areas for improvement in training experiences through bilingual supervision ($n = 8$), mentorship and collaboration ($n = 7$), coursework ($n = 7$), opportunities to advance language skills ($n = 5$; e.g., study abroad, immersion), and access to a bilingual specialization program or bilingual credential ($n = 3$).

Valuable bilingual training experiences. Most participants (67%; $n = 152$) stated that their fieldwork experiences were the most valuable preparation for becoming BSPs because they provided them with hands-on experience working with EB youth and other BSPs. Participants reported using bilingual competencies (e.g., bilingual assessment, counseling, consultation) during practicum ($n = 135$) and even more so during their internship ($n = 168$). Interestingly, when applicable, many ($n = 107$) reported they did not receive bilingual supervision during practicum or internship. However, a substantial number ($n = 99$) reported training and/or supervising future BSPs (e.g., practicum students, interns).

Notably, not all participants identified fieldwork as their most valuable preparation for becoming a BSP. Open-ended responses identified several other experiences as most valuable to participants: professional development ($n = 12$), on-the-job experience ($n = 12$), collaboration and supervision ($n = 11$), independent learning ($n = 8$), cultural identity ($n = 4$; e.g., being Latinx), and other field experiences ($n = 3$). Coursework was least often identified by participants ($n = 2$) as most valuable.

Collaboration with bilingual personnel. Only 32% ($n = 73$) of participants reported receiving training to collaborate with other bilingual school personnel. When asked to specify whom, responses included collaborating with teachers ($n = 18$), interpreters ($n = 15$), speech-language pathologists ($n = 13$), psychologists ($n = 7$), bilingual counselors ($n = 5$), OT/PT/audiologist (3%, $n = 3$), and multiple professionals (bilingual teachers, school counselors, speech-language pathologists, interpreters; $n = 8$).

Aim 3: Which professional experiences and credentials predict self-reported multicultural competency among bilingual school psychologists?

Data from the SPMCS indicated that participants endorsed a high level of multicultural competency overall ($M = 3.53$; SD $= .32$). Subscales yielded the following mean scores: appreciation (3.81; SD $= .28$), awareness (3.72; SD $= .34$), skills (3.41; SD $= .39$), and knowledge (3.33; SD $= .50$).

Based on the extant literature outlining training guidelines for BSPs, the following were examined as predictors of overall multicultural competency: (a) completion of coursework in the assessment of diverse students, NDA practices, bilingual assessment, bilingual education, and the English language acquisition (ELA) process; (b) access to bilingual supervision during practicum and internship placements; (c) status as a credentialed BSP; (d) completion of a training program with a bilingual specialization; (e) degree type; (f) completion of training in bilingual consultation; and (g) access to opportunities to use bilingual competencies in field placements. Given that many BSPs reported obtaining competency via independent learning once in the field (i.e., Vega et al., 2019), years in practice were examined as a covariate. Results are summarized in Table 3.

The total variance accounted for by the model was .36. Completion of coursework in the following areas significantly and positively predicted overall multicultural competence: (a) the assessment of diverse students, $b = .130$, $t(1) = 2.437$, $p = .02$; bilingual education, $b = .121$, $t(1) = 2.564$, $p = .01$; bilingual assessment practices, $b = .159$, $t(1)$

Table 3. Predictors of overall multicultural competence (dependent variable).

Independent variable	*b*-Value	*p*-Value	Covariate (*b/p*)
Asmt. of diverse students	.130	.02*	.007/.00*
NDA practices	.106	.06	.007/<.0*
Bilingual assessment	.159	<.00*	.004/.08
Bilingual education	.121	.01*	.006/.01*
ELA process	.095	.04*	.008/<.00*
Bilingual supervision	–	–	.007/.00*
Both	.120	.03*	–
Practicum only	−.089	.26	–
Internship only	.041	.51	–
None (Reference)	0	–	–
BSP credential	.039	.46	.007/.00*
BSP specialization	.090	.07	.007/.00*
Degree type	–	–	.006/.02*
Doctorate (Reference)	0	–	–
Specialist	−.025	.66	–
Masters	−.012	.87	–
Bilingual consultation	.048	.23	.007/<.00*
Bilingual competencies	.039	.55	.007/.00*

* Indicates significant at $p \leq .05$

$= 3.354$, $p = <.00$; and the ELA process, $b = .095$, $t(1) = 2.095$, $p = .04$. Bilingual supervision during field training was also significant and positive, but only for those who received it during *both* practicum and internship, $b = .120$, $t(3) = 2.183$, $p = .03$.

Coursework in NDA, status as a credentialed BSP, training programs with a bilingual specialization, degree type, training in bilingual consultation, and the opportunity to use bilingual competencies in field placements were not significant predictors of overall multicultural competence. However, many of these associations were trending in the hypothesized direction (i.e., training in bilingual consultation was positively related to higher multicultural competency) and approaching significance. Across most predictors, years in practice were a positive and significant covariate.

Discussion

Overall, data indicate that BSPs have diverse background characteristics in regard to age, degree level, and years of practice. Though most were Latinx and Spanish-speaking, it is important to recognize that being Latinx and Spanish-speaking is not monolithic; instead, many identities and language dialects are represented within this category. Most participants indicated similar training experiences regarding program accreditation, bilingual credentialing, opportunities for bilingual supervision, and training specific to providing bilingual school psychological services (e.g., assessment for EB students). Overall, participants did not endorse a specific training protocol or credential for their status as a BSP,

which is consistent with previous research that found marked variability in how BSPs are trained and defined (Vega et al., 2019).

The majority of the sample (80%) reported preservice training from a NASP-approved program. Training programs must adhere to specific requirements for *all* of its students, such as providing coursework in the assessment of diverse students, to obtain and maintain NASP approval or accreditation. The results of the present study are promising in that much of this coursework does appear to increase self-reported multicultural competency amongst BSPs. For those who did receive this coursework as part of their training program, competency increased as they spent more years in practice. Overall, the content of this coursework should be critically evaluated to determine its efficacy. Notably, findings from open-ended items in the present study showed that only two participants viewed coursework as most valuable to their training as future BSPs, suggesting that such courses were likely linked to their program's general accreditation requirements and were not necessarily targeted at preparing trainees for practice as a BSP specifically.

Participants reporting that their coursework were least beneficial in their preparation to become BSPs is consistent with other studies (i.e., Vega et al., 2019). This finding is perhaps related to the lack of specific preservice training participants received (i.e., the coursework being a requirement for *all* trainees and not just for bilingual ones). Further, results were consistent with other findings (i.e., Stathatos et al., 2020) highlighting the variability of training in coursework, supervision, and examination and supervision requirements for BSPs. Because of this variability, many BSPs pursued independent learning or developed bilingual competencies through other opportunities to practice their skills (e.g., Vega et al., 2019). These findings indicate that, on its own, coursework is not sufficient to prepare one for practice as a BSP. Thus, BSPs generally rely on additional training opportunities to fill in the gaps once they enter the field. This finding is consistent with the observation that years in practice emerged as a significant covariate across predictors.

All school psychology trainees are provided with supervised fieldwork to obtain the necessary competencies for practice. Overall, participants in the current study reported that the opportunity to engage in bilingual school psychological services (e.g., assessment, counseling, consultation) during this fieldwork was their most valuable preparation for becoming a school psychologist. However, and notably, half did not receive bilingual supervision while engaging in this fieldwork, despite it being a significant predictor of multicultural competency. These findings provide another example of how BSPs are trained similarly to monolingual school psychologists. How can one ensure one's practice as a BSP is appropriate without bilingual supervision?

This finding has implications for the training of future BSPs as well, as 47% of the sample stated they are engaged in training and/or supervising current bilingual trainees (e.g., practicum students, interns). Notably, Malone and Ishmail (2020) found that faculty lacking multicultural training demonstrated limited ability to effectively provide this training to their students. This suggests that BSPs lacking in appropriate supervision themselves can be limited in their ability to provide appropriate supervision and training to bilingual practicum and internship students. Just as BSPs should not automatically be deemed competent in bilingual service delivery on the basis that they are

bilingual, neither should supervisors. Though not significant, results from the present study supported this, as not all bilingual supervision was associated with an increase in reported multicultural competency. This finding suggests that properly training bilingual supervisors is also important for increasing multicultural competency among emerging BSPs.

Implications

Overall, these results highlight the need for unique training and credentialing for BSPs, including school psychology programs with a bilingual specialization that maintains specific requirements for bilingual trainees. School psychology programs with bilingual specializations are important for training future BSPs in the competencies necessary to effectively serve EB students and their families (Vega et al., 2015). However, and importantly, there are no uniform guidelines or standards for bilingual training, and each program is free to construct its own curriculum (Stathatos et al., 2020).

Data from the current study suggested that most participants are being trained similarly to their monolingual colleagues by the practice standards necessary for program approval or accreditation by NASP. This should not be the case, however. Harris et al. (2021) and Sánchez Lizardi et al. (2024) describe integral components of training and evaluation for BSPs that all school psychology trainers should review. These components include language proficiency assessment and development, culturally responsive practice, and specific competencies to address core domains of school psychology service delivery (e.g., assessment, consultation, and intervention). This finding is particularly important given that participants report that they had largely not received specific training in administering bilingual assessments or in bilingual education. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the NASP practice standards, training programs should provide preservice training in specific competencies unique to bilingual practice.

Given the results of this study, it is also imperative that students are provided with opportunities for bilingual supervision, which requires the recruitment and retention of BSP trainers and supervisors. A necessary component of developing competency in the bilingual provision of school psychological services is on-site supervision from a bilingual supervisor (Ding et al., 2019). Bilingual faculty members should monitor students' fieldwork to ensure their training integrates opportunities for bilingual practice (Kelly et al., 2019). This is especially important given that participants in our study identified their fieldwork as most beneficial to their preparation as BSPs. However, fieldwork opportunities cannot make up for coursework limitations at the program level. Instead, fieldwork for emerging BSPs should allow them to apply what they have learned through their coursework to their practice.

Additionally, one's possession of the skills and knowledge needed for bilingual school psychology practice should not be assumed based on one's status as bilingual. This is true for practitioners, trainers, and supervisors. Like other school psychologists, BSPs need explicit training in multiculturalism. A course on multicultural issues can be beneficial for increasing students' awareness, knowledge, and skills (Jones & Lee, 2021; Vega et al., 2018); however, it is insufficient in and of itself, as trainees cannot learn everything

they need to know in one course. Therefore, the combination of the separate course and integration models is key for all school psychology trainees, including bilingual trainees (Malone & Ishmail, 2020). In addition to taking specific courses focused on cultural competency, school psychology trainees should be exposed to multicultural principles in all courses (e.g., counseling, assessment, intervention) in order to support their skills in serving EB students and other minoritized populations. Moreover, faculty must address their knowledge and skill gaps to teach these courses effectively, and steps should be taken to hire bilingual faculty with expertise in serving EB students.

While the present study was conducted in the United States, it also has implications for global school psychology practice. Out of choice or necessity (e.g., refugee status), international migration is more common than ever (United Nations, 2024), potentially increasing the global demand for BSPs. Moreover, this study underscores the critical need for all school psychologists, regardless of geographic context, to possess the awareness, knowledge, and skills essential for working with EB youth. All school psychologists must be prepared to serve the needs of CLM students and address injustices impacting their educational experiences (Fisher, 2020). Thus, all training programs must focus on providing curriculum and fieldwork opportunities needed for school psychology trainees to engage in best practices for CLM youth.

Limitations and future directions

It is a requirement that those in NASP's Bilingual School Psychologist Directory are both members of NASP and graduates of a NASP-approved/accredited program; thus, results may not be representative of BSPs without these characteristics. Participants' data were collected utilizing self-report questionnaires in a cross-sectional design. This design only allowed us to assess BSPs' self-perceptions of their multicultural appreciation, awareness, skills, and knowledge at one point in time. Thus, the timing of administration could have impacted participants' perceptions of these variables. This type of design is also susceptible to social desirability and overconfidence biases, which could have impacted participants' responses.

Although generally comparable to that of similar studies (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010; Peña, 2012), the response rate is another limitation of the present study. Relatedly, and due to systemic issues within the field, some participant subgroups were greatly unbalanced, which may have impacted the power of the GLM analysis. For example, very few participants attended a program that offered a bilingual specialization and/or were credentialed as BSPs. Bilingual specialization and credentialing were positively related to increased competence but not significantly so. While this imbalance limited the reporting of significant findings, it should still be considered valuable for future research and training. Similarly, though not significant, differences in self-reported multicultural competency based on degree type (e.g., doctorate versus specialist) were noted. Future studies should examine if differences in these degree programs (which inevitably differ in length but may also differ in regard to training opportunities) are significantly impacting the self-reported competencies of BSPs. Additionally, as this study was conducted in the United

States, there is a need for further research on how school psychologists across the globe are trained to serve students from CLM backgrounds.

Conclusion

Much remains to be learned about the present status of bilingual school psychology training as well as the experiences needed to prepare effective BSPs. This study provides a snapshot of bilingual school psychology training and helps trainers better understand which areas can be improved (e.g., skill development). It is important to remember why this training is critical and should be improved; EB students, while not overrepresented in special education nationally, experience local levels of disproportionality (e.g., district, school, state level; Office of English Language Acquisition, 2020; Sullivan, 2011) and comprise a larger percentage of students in special education in those contexts (NCES, 2024a). Therefore, to ensure that EB students' learning opportunities are equitable and socially just, it is imperative that BSPs, and ultimately all school psychologists, receive effective preservice training while also pursuing continual professional development beyond degree completion. Moreover, school psychology faculty must address training gaps by revamping course content to address serving minoritized students and to provide bilingual trainees with opportunities to apply relevant skills.

Informed consent statements

Participants provided written informed consent.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1 In this article, students classified as English language learners are referred to as emergent bilingual students to underscore and center their bilingualism as a strength rather than a label that centers on learning English (González-Howard & Suárez, 2021).

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