

# Models of Instruction for Multilingual Learners: Facets of the ESOL Co-Teacher Role

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## ABSTRACT

With nearly five million multilingual learners in U.S. schools, research is warranted for effective instruction that permits equal access to content standards through language diversification. Multilingual learners (MLs), students learning English who benefit from linguistic support to attain academic achievement, are served through models in U.S. schools that vary according to student needs and staffing capability, with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as the dominantly implemented format. ESOL is a federally and locally funded program that provides structured academic and linguistic support and accountability for MLs across all grade levels. The purpose of this literature review is to compare the utility and effectiveness of the four program models approved by the U.S. Department of Education to effectively teach content and language to MLs in public schools: (a) structured English immersion, (b) bilingual education, (c) dual language or two-way immersion programs, and (d) English for Speakers of Other Languages (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Furthermore, this article is intended to examine the overarching model of ESOL—the most employed model in the U.S.—and the prominent delivery format of co-teaching. Each of the models mentioned above is discussed in this paper, followed by a delineation of state and federally-approved formats of ESOL: pull-out, push-in, resource labs, sheltered classes, innovative delivery models, and co-teaching. This article concludes with an examination of co-teaching, a subset of ESOL in which a general education educator and an ESOL teacher co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess an integrated classroom of MLs and non-MLs.

## KEYWORDS

multilingual learners; English learners; ESOL models; co-teaching

Constituting 10% of students in U.S. classrooms, multilingual learners embody a significant presence of culturally and linguistically diverse students who need appropriate, equitable education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Pertaining to school-aged individuals, an English learner (EL) is an extension of a multilingual learner (ML), a student whose first language is not English and who requires assistance listening, speaking, reading, and/or writing English to achieve equal opportunity for academic success in a classroom with English instruction (Ballantyne et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The need for language assistance is measured by an initial test, which varies by model of instruction and will be discussed in subsequent sections.

National data released by the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) indicate that MLs in U.S. schools speak over 400 languages, a statistic that generates inquiry about how to effectively educate students with such a broad spectrum of linguistic and cultural diversity. Addressing this need, Gottlieb (2006) admonishes that students “whose current English language proficiency preclude them from accessing, processing, and acquiring unmodified grade-level material in

English without scaffolding and instructional support” require keen attention for holistic success (p. 4). This literature review aims to cross-examine models and formats of instruction for school-aged multilingual learners. Research, pragmatics, and student needs guide the result of this paper to focus on co-teaching, a format of the popularly employed model of ESOL, as described in the subsequent discussion.

### Models of Instruction for Multilingual Learners

The U.S. Department of Education supports four program models to effectively teach content and language to MLs in public schools: (a) structured English immersion, (b) bilingual education, (c) dual language or two-way immersion programs, and (d) English for Speakers of Other Languages (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Each model will be discussed, although this article focuses on a key aspect of the final format, co-teaching within ESOL.

#### Structured English Immersion

Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs serve students newly arrived in the United States through adapted courses, the goals of which are to learn English, gain cultural competency of school norms, and develop academic readiness to transition into mainstream classes (Lewis & Gray, 2016; Zacarian, 2011). SEI instructors deliver both English language and adapted content instruction to students all day in an isolated setting, such as a specific wing of a school or a separate building (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). At the secondary level, this delivery model is often termed a *newcomer program*, or a program offered only to students in their first or second year in a U.S. school (Short & Boyson, 2004). The primary benefit of SEI is an academic course load that is specifically adapted according to the language and academic needs of MLs. An additional benefit of SEI is the intentional outreach to families who, like the students, are new to the country and need assistance adapting through pragmatic means (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Short & Boyson, 2004). Since all the students served through SEI are equally in need of transition assistance, less shame or fear impedes school-family relationships compared to other models that serve both newcomers and native English speakers (Short & Boyson, 2004).

Offered to immigrant students newly arrived in the U.S., SEI involves a linguistically diverse student population (or a set of students with many different home languages), which often results in English-only instruction. This English-only format is a direct result of staffing practicality. The practical aspect of staffing an SEI program considers how one English-speaking teacher can teach several students with different home languages through an English-only format. However, attempting a bilingual approach with such diverse languages would necessitate numerous instructors and, consequently, more funding. Nonetheless, SEI welcomes using the students’ primary language as practicable (Zacarian, 2011).

The limitations of SEI reside in the isolation of social and cultural interaction from native English-speaking peers, which are encapsulated in Honigsfeld and Dove’s (2010) exclamation, “academic gains were reported at the expense of social integration” (p. 9). Social identity development of school-aged children will be discussed in forthcoming sections; however, it is worth noting that students’ social and interpersonal facets, particularly adolescents, significantly impact their learning ability (Ullman, 2010). Therefore, the SEI model has both benefits and disadvantages for MLs.

### **Bilingual Education**

Bilingual education programs provide classroom instruction in two target languages—English and a non-English language—to students with a homogeneous native language and with the goals of biliteracy and bilingualism (Lewis & Gray, 2016). The goals are achieved by tapering the amount of instruction in each language through either a 90/10 or a 50/50 format (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). In the 90/10 format, students initially receive instruction in their first language for 90% of the day and instruction in English for 10% of the day; with a gradual increase of English instruction time each year, the anticipated goal is 50% instruction in the first language and 50% in English during the third year of the bilingual program (Zacarian, 2011). In the 50/50 model, instruction is provided for equal durations throughout each year in the bilingual program. For clarification, the percentages of time are quantified by how many courses are instructed in that language. For example, in the 90/10 model, one of the six content courses may be initially instructed in English, and by the third year, three classes are taught in English. This gradual increase in English instruction during the school day is intended to match students' readiness for additional development in the language (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010).

Large-scale, longitudinal research by Collier and Thomas (2017) in 36 school districts over 32 years supports outcomes of bilingual education more than all other formats of language instruction to close the achievement gap for MLs, insofar as the students remain in the program for at least 5–6 years. Earlier research by Collier and Thomas (2002) revealed over half of the student participants in a bilingual program met or exceeded state benchmarks in reading on standardized tests in English, exceeding the outcomes of participants of any other English instructional format. While research confirms the effectiveness of bilingual education, a prominent restraint of this model rests in the feasibility of staffing sufficient bilingual educators to maintain such programs sustainably. Furthermore, the student body in bilingual programs must be homogenous, all speaking the same native language. In school districts with a diverse plethora of spoken languages, such as those in some U.S. urban centercities, the bilingual model is not realistic to serve all students equally.

### **Dual Language Immersion**

The dual language (or two-way immersion) design is a branch of bilingual education. In the dual language model, which exists in more than 70 Georgia public schools, the student body contains students who are native English speakers as well as English learners; this linguistically heterogeneous student population aims to achieve bilingualism and biliteracy (Georgia Department of Education, n.d., 2023; Lewis & Gray, 2016). The student population is the sole differentiating factor of dual language immersion from the abovementioned bilingual education format. Ideally, the student body will contain a balance of homogeneous MLs (students who share a native language that is not English) and students who are native English speakers (seeking to learn the home language of the MLS). For example, all MLs in a dual language immersion program may speak Spanish as their native language. The native Spanish-speaking MLs aim to become bilingual in Spanish and English; meanwhile, native English speakers in the program also seek bilingualism in English and Spanish.

Common to the bilingual model, this instructional format faces the hindrance of feasibly staffing and sustaining dual language practices, especially as public schools are mandated to instruct students who speak many native languages. Additionally, similar to bilingual education, the dual language immersion model requires a long-term commitment of 5–6 years from the students and families because the stable presence of language learners in the classroom benefits

the model's dynamic of language progression (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Zacarian, 2011). Data discussed by Collier and Thomas (2002, 2007, 2017) indicate that the dual language immersion model is less effective for closing achievement gaps than bilingual education. However, it yielded better results than students participating in English-only models.

### **English for Speakers of Other Languages**

The model most prevalent in U.S. public schools, and the model examined in this paper, is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). ESOL is a state-funded instructional program for eligible English learners in grades K–12 (Georgia School Law Code 1981, § 20-2-156, enacted in 1985). The ESOL program is a standards-based curriculum emphasizing academic and social language development (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a). ESOL programming constitutes a variety of formats of implementation, including pull-out, push-in, sheltered instruction, co-taught classes, resource centers, and innovative delivery models (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). ESOL is most suitable for the majority of U.S. schools, as it utilizes one language—English—to instruct a linguistically diverse student population (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Zacarian, 2011). Representing the most popularly employed model for serving MLs in the U.S., this article focuses on formats of ESOL, which the ensuing discussion will further examine.

### **Formats of ESOL in U.S. Schools**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 68% of high schools serving MLs in the 2015–16 school year employed formats of the ESOL model (Lewis & Gray, 2016). ESOL is a federally and locally funded program that serves qualifying students through linguistic and academic instruction by English language and content teachers for an entire or partial school day (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Thirty-nine states, including Georgia, are members of the WIDA Consortium, a corporation that sets forth the English Language Development (ELD) standards, the qualification assessment (WIDA screener), the annual progress assessment (ACCESS for ELLs test), teacher training, and a wealth of resources and tools for the classroom (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a; WIDA, 2023). Unlike bilingual models, ESOL focuses on instruction in English only, thus qualifying as the most adaptable model for a linguistically diverse student and staff population. Although English is the dominant language of instruction, it is worth noting here the Georgia Department of Education's (2018a) statement: "It is appropriate, when practicable, to use the English learner's home language as a means of facilitating instruction" (para. 1). Thus, students' home languages may be utilized when "practicable," not as prominent vehicles of instruction. When districts and schools consider how to serve MLs within their student bodies, a wealth of factors come under consideration, including student characteristics and needs, students' level of English proficiency, teacher capacity, state policies, number of MLs in the school, least restrictive environments, research, and decision maker attitudes and goals (Georgia Department of Education, 2020; Sugarman, 2018). With significant linguistic diversity, including over 400 languages spoken in U.S. schools, most districts have greater capacity for meeting student needs through an English-only format such as ESOL than through bilingual models (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

ESOL offers a plethora of formats, including pull-out and push-in instruction, sheltered (or self-contained) classrooms, resource centers and labs, innovative delivery models, and co-teaching (Georgia Department of Education, 2020; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). The pull-out model is frequently practiced at the elementary level and requires that MLs are pulled out of a content class into a small group setting to focus on English language acquisition (Sugarman, 2018). While the

pull-out lessons may be centered around linguistic elements of the classroom content, sometimes this model causes students to miss classroom content to receive language instruction. The push-in design is also prominently employed at the elementary level. A depiction of the push-in model would be students remaining in their core content classes (to not miss instruction); an ESOL teacher comes into the classroom to provide language instruction during content lessons (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). The sheltered classroom is an English language course or a content course constituted solely of ESOL students. The sheltered format is frequently employed at the middle and high school levels. It effectively serves MLs with lower English language proficiencies, such as students in their first or second year in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). A depiction of a sheltered high school class would be a Geometry course containing 10 MLs with beginning levels of English proficiency, in which the instructor simultaneously teaches content and language. Resource centers and labs serve a dynamic group of MLs (who may vary in their level of English proficiency) through multimedia materials (computer software, books, teacher interaction, etc.); such labs are fitting for itinerant ESOL teachers serving students from various schools and grade levels. Innovative delivery models (IDM) allow schools and districts to construct an effective means of serving MLs with local staffing and funding availability. For example, the author of the article at hand is certified in secondary mathematics and ESOL; therefore, she currently teaches an IDM Algebra II class that consists of 9 MLs and 14 non-MLs in a manner that advances students' academic and linguistic progress without a co-teacher. Finally, the co-teaching model is a format of ESOL commonly employed in the middle and high school settings in which an ESOL and a content teacher co-teach a content area course, such as English language arts, math, science, or social studies, to an integrated classroom of ESOL students and non-ESOL students (August & Shanahan, 2008; Lucas et al., 2008; Sugarman, 2018). The term "push-in" is utilized in legal documents to refer to both the delineated (predominantly elementary) form of push-in outlined above as well as co-teaching, although the latter terminology (co-teaching) is more prominent among educational practitioners (Georgia Department of Education, 2018b, 2020).

### **Co-Teaching**

Co-taught models emerged in popularity in response to national regulations promoting equitable education for students with exceptionalities. When the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) pushed for students with disabilities to be served in public schools through the least restrictive environment, co-teaching became a prominent means of instruction in special education departments. Serving English learners has followed a similar approach, whereby MLs with higher English proficiency receive content instruction and language assistance in co-taught classrooms. Thus, while students learning English are not mentally deficient or considered to be students with disabilities, the dynamics in which this student population is served through federally funded public school operations share a similar framework to that of students receiving special education services (Bauler & Kang, 2020). The depiction of co-teaching involves two teachers (one specializing in content and the other specializing in student sub-group needs, such as ESOL or special education) collaboratively teaching a core content class (Sugarman, 2018). Furthermore, a greater expanse of research has been conducted to date on the effectiveness of special education delivery models than has yet to be investigated for the formats of ESOL instruction. Ergo, the literature surrounding co-teaching in the special education classroom is an applicable platform for building this examination for serving MLs through the co-teaching model.

Co-teaching involves two professionals collaboratively planning and delivering instruction to a group of students in the same classroom (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010). Hang and Rabren (2009) expound on the definition of co-teaching to include:

(a) two certified educators, usually one general education teacher and one special education teacher; (b) instruction delivery by both teachers; (c) a heterogeneous group of students (i.e., students with disabilities are taught with their peers without disabilities); and (d) a single classroom where students with disabilities are taught with their peers without disabilities. (p. 259)

Furthermore, the above-mentioned co-taught classroom may employ a variety of collaborative instructional models, including the six models presented in Friend and Cook's (1992) seminal text on collaborative classrooms: one teaches, one observes (in which one observes the other teaching and gathers necessary data); one teaches, one assists (in which one teacher primarily teaches the content while the other circulates the room to assist struggling individuals); parallel teaching (in which each teacher presents the same content to one of two students groups); station teaching (in which students rotate through stations to receive instruction and practice the material); alternative teaching (in which one teacher works with a large group to provide instruction while the other teacher works with a select small group); and team teaching (or co-teaching, in which both teachers simultaneously practice equal roles in delivering instruction). All these formats may be employed in the same co-taught classroom setting throughout a school year, as content and student needs may necessitate changing instruction formats. While instructional formats may vary within a classroom, research supports that the qualities of effective co-teaching are consistent.

In their book on collaboration and co-teaching, Dove and Honigsfeld (2018) delineate the significance of intentional and effective co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing in a team-taught classroom. Working together on all facets of instruction requires time and effort, and the quality of collaboration correlates with student achievement (Bell & Baecher, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In addition, the research of Peercy et al. (2015) illuminates the effectiveness of co-teaching not only on student success but also on teacher development. Teachers working collaboratively to share expertise enhances both teachers' skill sets. An integral element of effective collaboration is the negotiation of roles and responsibilities (Hersi et al., 2016). Co-teachers must discuss and decide what is expected of each educator in the partner classroom experience. The role of the ESOL teacher is significant in contributing to the success of English learners in the content classroom.

### ***Role of the ESOL Co-Teacher***

An ESOL collaborating teacher is certified in teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) but is often not certified in the content area. Consequently, the role of the ESOL co-teacher is to promote language acquisition throughout the class and ensure course materials and assessments are linguistically and culturally appropriate for MLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Beyond ensuring student accommodations are met (such as small group testing, use of bilingual glossaries on assessments, extended time, etc.) and instructional strategies are incorporated that promote language learning through content material, ESOL teachers are advocates for their students. ESOL teachers advocate for MLs by seeking to close barriers caused by socio-cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and academic background differences that affect equitable opportunity for academic achievement (Evans, 2004; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Lachat, 2004; Staehr Fenner, 2014).

**Language Acquisition.** Multilingual learners in the U.S. must acquire social and academic English to access and master content standards appropriately. Hence, the ESOL teacher incorporates opportunities to develop social and academic language throughout each co-taught course. Echevarría et al. (2013) recognize that “the foundation of school success is academic language and literacy in English. Age-appropriate knowledge of the English language is a prerequisite for attaining content standards. We learn primarily through language, and use language to express our understanding” (p. 10). To address this need, the ESOL teacher creates language objectives to accompany each content objective, provides timely feedback for both language and content production, generates opportunities for student-student interaction that promotes academic discussion (and subsequently language development), pre-teaches and reviews academic vocabulary necessary for success in the content classroom (Echevarría et al., 2018; Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010; Staehr Fenner, 2014).

The ESOL teacher aims to ensure that course content and assessments incorporate comprehensible input. Second language acquisition theorist Stephen Krashen (1977) spearheaded research on the significance of providing understandable language to promote deeper language acquisition. In this way, language used in the classroom must be within or just beyond a student’s linguistic comfort zone, as Krashen (1977) terms  $i + 1$ , where  $i$  signifies currently mastered language and  $+1$  represents target language one step beyond that is yet to be acquired. If academic content and assessments are conveyed within a student’s range of comprehensible input, then the student can understand, learn, and master the material.

**Classroom Strategies.** The widely acclaimed Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model encompasses strategies for teachers of MLs to employ to make content comprehensible for multilingual learners (Echevarría et al., 2018). These strategies, viewable in Table 1, promote content learning through accessible and appropriate language and classroom constructs. Furthermore, the implementation of strategies to assist MLs has been found to benefit non-MLs as well (Meltzer & Hamann, 2005).

**Table 1: SIOP Strategies to Promote Comprehensible Input**

Design language and content objectives for lesson plans	Emphasize key vocabulary	Give appropriate, consistent feedback on language and content production
Provide adapted materials for content and language proficiencies	Build cultural background knowledge for students to access the material	Ensure directions, materials, and assessments are comprehensible, allowing sufficient wait time
Promote peer interaction through intentional groupings and class discussions	Use manipulatives to promote deeper understanding of concepts	Administer context-rich formative and summative assessments

*Note.* From *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners: The SIOP Model* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) by J. Echevarría, M. Vogt, & D. J. Short. Copyright 2018 by Pearson.

**Cultural Adaptation.** For multilingual learners, the learning experience is often compounded by the anxiety accompanying new environments (Gabryś, 2013). Anxiety for MLs may arise from socio-cultural, socioeconomic, or academic background differences and affect learning (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). The ESOL and content co-teachers share responsibility for

attentively diminishing MLs' "affective filter," or a mental barrier caused by anxiety (Krashen, 1982). According to Freeman and Freeman (2014), the effort put forth by teachers to provide comprehensible input and appropriate materials may be negated if a student's affective filter causes them not to learn. Efforts to diminish anxiety may include assisting students through the process of acculturation by providing an outlet for expression, support, and affirmation; welcoming students' home cultures into the classroom activities and content discourse; offering multiple alternative pathways for success in the class for students who work to contribute to the family income and thus struggle to complete homework after school; providing information to students and families regarding community resources for healthcare, educational materials, translation assistance, and discount clothes or food (Evans, 2004; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Lachat, 2004; Staehr Fenner, 2014). Addressing students' socio-cultural and economic needs dismantles the effects of significant barriers to student achievement (Freeman & Freeman, 2014; Gass & Selinker, 2008). A welcoming classroom dynamic with continually appropriate material and instruction can generate a sense of comfort and acceptance that will diminish students' apprehension and thus permit readiness for effective learning.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

While research demonstrates the effectiveness of linguistic models incorporating one's home language, such as (a) structured English immersion, (b) bilingual education, and (c) dual language or two-way immersion programs, the practicality of each is not well suited for the majority of urban and suburban public schools. With over 400 spoken languages in U.S. schools, the English-only format of ESOL is most employed nationwide (Lewis & Gray, 2016). This article explains why human resources (limited bilingual educators) and student needs (diverse home languages invite an English-only format) make ESOL the most prominently executed model for serving multilingual learners in U.S. public schools. Furthermore, the role of an ESOL co-teacher within the latter model extends beyond the classroom content to develop the multilingual learner's socio-cultural identity. The ESOL teacher aims to diminish the anxiety experienced by MLs in the classroom and serves to advocate for their equity in education.

Educators of MLs may grapple with the plethora of responsibilities in addressing student needs—linguistic instruction, content differentiation, acculturation, and others detailed within the scope of this discussion. Exploring the constructs of effective co-teaching and research-based collaboration may contribute to one's sustainable practice of effectively serving MLs. Districts and building-level administrators may invest funds in professional development opportunities to empower co-teaching relationships and effectiveness. In such professional development, teachers may choose to examine the list of strategies outlined in Table 1 to build a shared repertoire of tools to meet the needs of MLs in their classroom(s). Additional research is warranted on the efficacy of the co-teaching model and the outcomes it yields on student achievement academically and linguistically for MLs.

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