

Differences in English I End-of-Course Exam Performance by the Language Status of Boys: A Texas Multiyear Investigation

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Abstract

Addressed in this multiyear study was the extent to which differences were present between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys on the Texas state-mandated English I End-of-Course exam for two consecutive school years (i.e., 2017-2018 and 2018-2019). On all three grade level standards (i.e., Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level), statistically significantly lower percentages of Emergent Bilingual boys met each of the three grade level standards than did non-Emergent Bilingual boys. Of importance to readers were the very low percentages of boys, regardless of their language status, who met the Masters Grade level standard. Our results are cause for concern regarding the postsecondary readiness, or lack thereof, of these students.

Keywords: Emergent Bilingual, English I End-of-Course, Texas, boys

1 Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015, reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act that affirms the commitment of the United States to provide equal educational opportunities to all students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a). Public schools are responsible for ensuring an equitable education for their ever-changing and diverse population. Concerning student diversity, an influx of English Learners is increasingly enrolling in public schools in the United States. The number of English Learners enrolled in public schools has increased from 4.5 million students in 2010 to 5.1 million in 2019. Texas, the state of relevance in this study, accounts for the highest enrollment percentage of English Learners in the United States at 19.6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Based on Texas Education Agency data for the spring of 2020, over one million English Learners were enrolled from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. As such, they make up 20% of the total student enrollment in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

The terms English Learners, Limited English Proficient, and, recently, Emergent Bilingual have been used interchangeably in Texas. In this article, the term Emergent Bilingual will be used to refer to students under Texas Education Code (TEC) 29.052 whose first language is other than English and who are in the process of acquiring English language proficiency. As more Emergent Bilingual students enroll in Texas public schools, the challenge to ensure their academic success has been daunting to schools as many Emergent Bilingual students fail state-mandated assessments required to graduate from high school (Wermund, 2013).

Intersectionality has been documented between race/ethnicity and the academic achievement of Emergent Bilingual students (Resilla, 2017). Researchers (e.g., Maxwell, 2012; Sheng et al., 2011) have determined that Emergent Bilingual students are more likely to come from poverty and are more likely to be enrolled in schools that have high percentages of students in poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2004; De Cohen et al., 2005; Noguera, 2011; Yeakey, 2012) than are their non-Emergent Bilingual peers. Emergent Bilingual students are at risk of dropping out of school

because of their limited English proficiency and low academic performance (Abedi, 2004; Course Crafters Inc., 2012; Genesse et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2012). Moreover, Emergent Bilingual students perform lower than their English-speaking counterparts in reading and mathematics tests (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Fry, 2008; Intercultural Development Research, 2015; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005). Polat et al. (2016) and Ozuna et al. (2016) established that Emergent Bilingual students perform more poorly in reading and literacy than their English-speaking peers.

In a recent investigation on the academic performance of Emergent Bilingual students and non-Emergent Bilingual students, Martin (2022) established that in Grade 4, Emergent Bilingual students performed lower than non-Emergent Bilingual students on the Texas state-mandated writing assessment. Rodriguez and Slate (2015) documented the presence of consistent achievement gaps between Emergent Bilingual students and their peers, wherein Emergent Bilingual students consistently performed lower on the Texas state-mandated reading and mathematics assessments than their peers. Sugarman and Geary (2018) have established that Emergent Bilingual students in Texas continue to perform below their non-Emergent Bilingual speaking peers on state-mandated assessments.

In another Texas statewide, multiyear analysis, Resilla (2017) investigated the reading and mathematics college-readiness skills of Emergent Bilingual students for seven school years (i.e., 2004-2005 through 2010-2011). She documented that Emergent Bilingual girls had better reading college-readiness skills than Emergent Bilingual boys in all seven school years. Emergent Bilingual boys, however, had higher mathematics college-readiness rates than Emergent Bilingual girls in all seven school years. In a recent Texas study, Villalobos (2021) investigated the performance of Emergent Bilingual boys and girls on the Algebra I, English I, English II, and History End-of-Course exams. He established that Emergent Bilingual girls outperformed Emergent Bilingual boys on the Algebra I, English I, and English II End-of-Course exams. Emergent Bilingual boys and girls performed at the same rate on the U.S. History End-of-Course.

English skills are essential for postsecondary success. The state-mandated English I exam provides valuable information about the reading college-readiness of students. To date, however, no published articles are available regarding the reading college-readiness of Emergent Bilingual boys as assessed by the Texas state-mandated English I exam. Accordingly, this research investigation into the reading college-readiness of Emergent Bilingual boys is warranted

2 Purpose of the Study

In this investigation, the focus was on the degree to which differences were present between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys in their performance on the Texas state-mandated English I End-of-Course exam. Specifically addressed was whether Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys differed in their performance on three grade level standards: Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level. These three reading college readiness measures were examined for two school years: 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, prior to the pandemic.

3 Significance of the Study

Findings from this multiyear statewide analysis will enhance the extant research literature available on the performance of Emergent Bilingual boys compared to the performance of non-Emergent Bilingual boys on the English I End-of-Course exam. Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys have different academic success levels. After an extensive search of the existing literature, no published articles could be located in which the performance of Emergent Bilingual boys was compared to the performance of non-Emergent Bilingual boys on this state-mandated assessment.

4 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is the difference between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys in their performance on the English I End-of-Course exam Approaches Grade Level standard?; (b) What is the difference between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys in their performance on the English I End-of-Course exam Meets Grade Level Standard?; (c) What is the difference between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys in their performance on the English I End-of-Course exam Masters Grade Level Standard?; and (d) What consistencies exist in the performance of Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent

Bilingual boys on the three Grade Level standards across two school years of data analyzed? The first three research questions were answered separately for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, whereas both school years of data were analyzed for the fourth research question.

5 Method

Research Design

Present in this multiyear investigation was an ex post facto or causal-comparative research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Pre-existing data, obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS Data Standards, 2018), were analyzed in this investigation. The independent variable was student language status: Emergent Bilingual or non-Emergent Bilingual. As defined in the Texas Education Code (TEC) 29.052, Emergent Bilingual are "students who are in the process of acquiring English and have a primary language other than English" (Texas Education Agency, 2022). The three dependent variables that were present were student performance on the English I End-of-Course exam (a) Approaches Grade Level standard, (b) Meets Grade Level standard, and (c) Masters Grade Level standard for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. Because all data analyzed in this article were archival in nature, we were not able to control nor manipulate any of the variables. As such, the degree to which cause and effect relationships can be determined is limited (Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

Participants and Instrumentation

Participants in this study were Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys in Texas who took the English I End-of-Course exam in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. The number of Emergent Bilingual boys in each two school years was about 50,000, and the number of non-Emergent Bilingual boys in each school year was about 175,000. The data analyzed in this article were obtained previously from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System database for the English I End-of-Course exam administered in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. A Public Information Request was previously submitted to and was fulfilled by the Texas Education Agency to obtain the data. Datasets requested and obtained were for: (a) language status, (b) English I End-of-Course grade level standards, and (c) gender.

Measured by the English I End-of-Course exam are three categories for performance. Successful performance on the Approaches Grade Level Category indicates that students are likely to succeed in the next grade or course (Texas Education Agency, 2018). In the Meets Grade Level Category, success is interpreted to mean that students have a high probability of academic success in the next grade or course (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Students may still need some type of short-term and targeted academic intervention. Success in the Masters Grade Level Category indicates that students are expected to succeed in the next grade or course. Students who perform within this category need very little to no academic intervention (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

6 Results

We conducted Pearson chi-square inferential statistical procedures to determine the degree to which differences existed in the STAAR English I End-of-Course exam performance (i.e., Met, Did Not Meet) at the Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level standards by student language status for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. This inferential statistical procedure was appropriate because dichotomous data were present for each STAAR English I End-of-Course grade level standard (i.e., Met, Not Met) and for student language status (Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2011). Given the statewide sample that was present, the sample size requirement for chi-square procedures was met.

6.1 Approaches Grade Level Standard Results

For the first research question about the STAAR English I End-of-Course Approaches Grade Level standard for the 2017-2018 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 19502.19, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .28 (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 1, a statistically significantly lower percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, 3 times lower, met this Approaches Grade Level standard in the 2017-2018 school year than non-Emergent Bilingual boys. More than half of the non-Emergent Bilingual boys met this standard, compared to less than a fifth of Emergent Bilingual boys.

Table 1

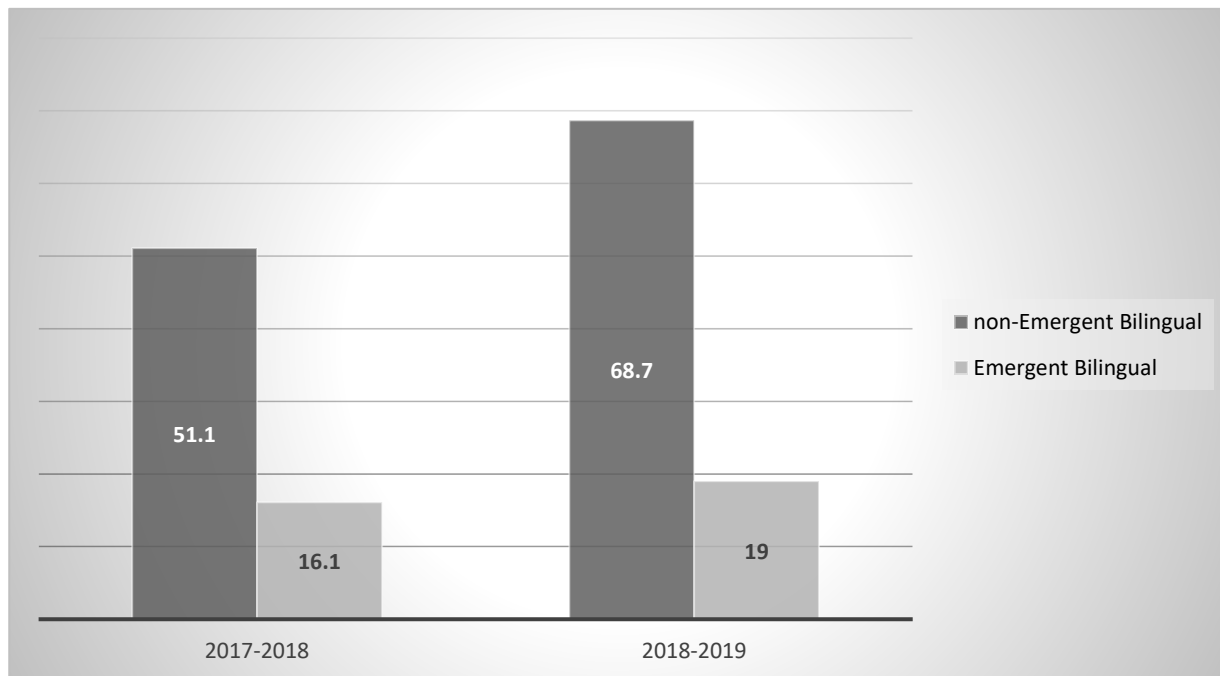
Frequencies and Percentages of the STAAR English I End-of-Course Approaches Grade Level Standard by Student Language Status for Both School Years

School Year and Language Status	Did Not Meet	Met
	<i>n</i> and %age of Total	<i>n</i> and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 40,686) 83.9%	(<i>n</i> = 7,779) 16.1%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 99,805) 48.9%	(<i>n</i> = 104,335) 51.1%
2018-2019		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 41,949) 81.0%	(<i>n</i> = 9,836) 19.0%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 85,962) 47.0%	(<i>n</i> = 96,837) 53.0%

With respect to the 2018-2019 school year for the STAAR English I End-of-Course Approaches Grade Level standard, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 18792.19, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .28 (Cohen, 1988). A statistically significantly lower percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, two and a half times lower, met this Approaches Grade Level standard in the 2018-2019 school year than non-Emergent Bilingual boys. More than half of the non-Emergent Bilingual boys met this standard, compared to less than a fifth of Emergent Bilingual boys. Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics for this school year. The percentages of Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Average percent who met the Approaches Grade Level standard by language status in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.



6.2 Meets Grade Level Standard Results

Concerning the second research question about the STAAR English I End-of-Course Meets Grade Level standard for the 2017-2018 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 17618.62, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .26 (Cohen, 1988). As delineated in Table 2, a statistically significantly lower percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, 7 times lower, met this Meets Grade Level standard in the 2017-2018 school year than non-Emergent Bilingual boys. More than a third of the non-Emergent Bilingual boys met this standard, compared to less than a twentieth of Emergent Bilingual boys.

Table 2

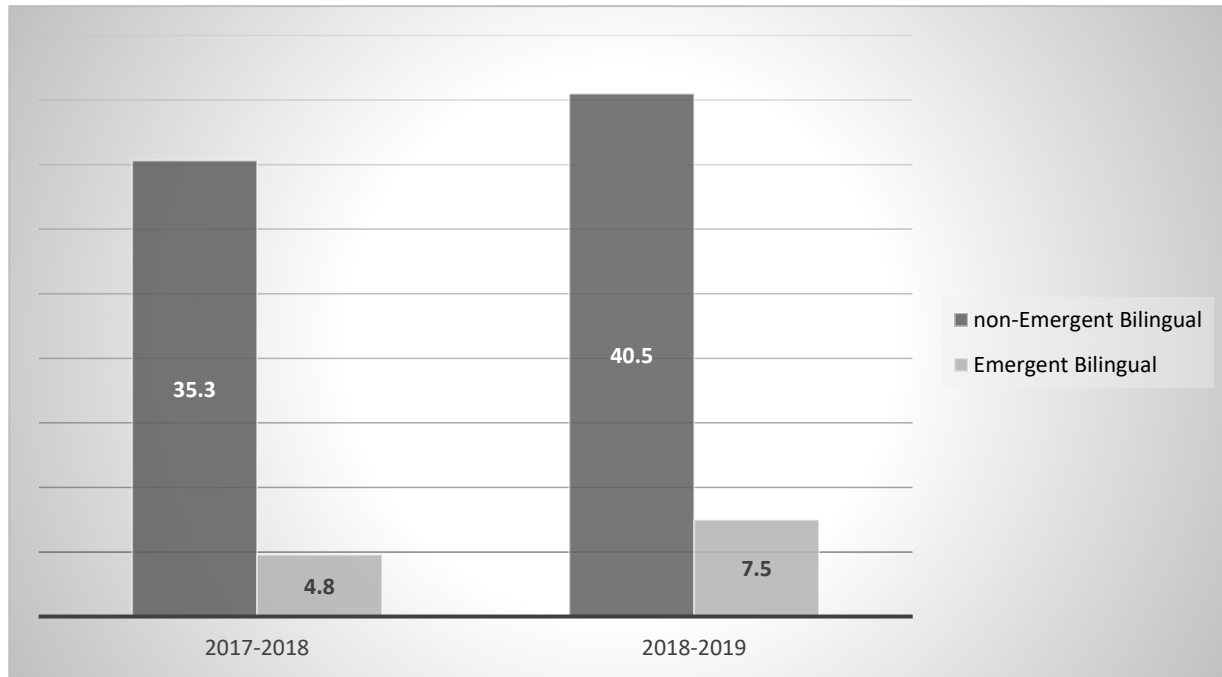
Frequencies and Percentages of the STAAR English I End-of-Course Meets Grade Level Standard by Student Language Status for Both School Years

School Year and Language Status	Did Not Meet	Met
	<i>n</i> and %age of Total	<i>n</i> and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 46,160) 95.2%	(<i>n</i> = 2,305) 4.8%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 132,012) 64.7%	(<i>n</i> = 72,128) 35.3%
2018-2019		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 47,901) 92.5%	(<i>n</i> = 3,884) 7.5%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 108,764) 59.5%	(<i>n</i> = 74,035) 40.5%

With respect to the 2018-2019 school year for STAAR English I End-of-Course Meets Grade Level standard, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $\chi^2(1) = 19810.83, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was near-moderate, .29 (Cohen, 1988). A statistically significantly lower percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, 5 times lower, met this Meets Grade Level standard in the 2018-2019 school year than non-Emergent Bilingual boys. More than 40% of the non-Emergent Bilingual boys met this standard, compared to less than 8% of Emergent Bilingual boys. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for this school year. The percentages of Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Average percent who met the Meets Grade Level standard by language status in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.



6.3. Masters Grade Level Standard Results

Regarding the third research question about the STAAR English I End-of-Course Masters Grade Level standard for the 2017-2018 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2567.33, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .10 (Cohen, 1988). As delineated in Table 3, a statistically significantly low percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, 0.1%, met this Masters Grade Level standard in the 2017-2018 school year compared to 5.2% of non-Emergent Bilingual boys. Readers should note the extremely low percentages of boys in both groups who met this standard.

Table 3

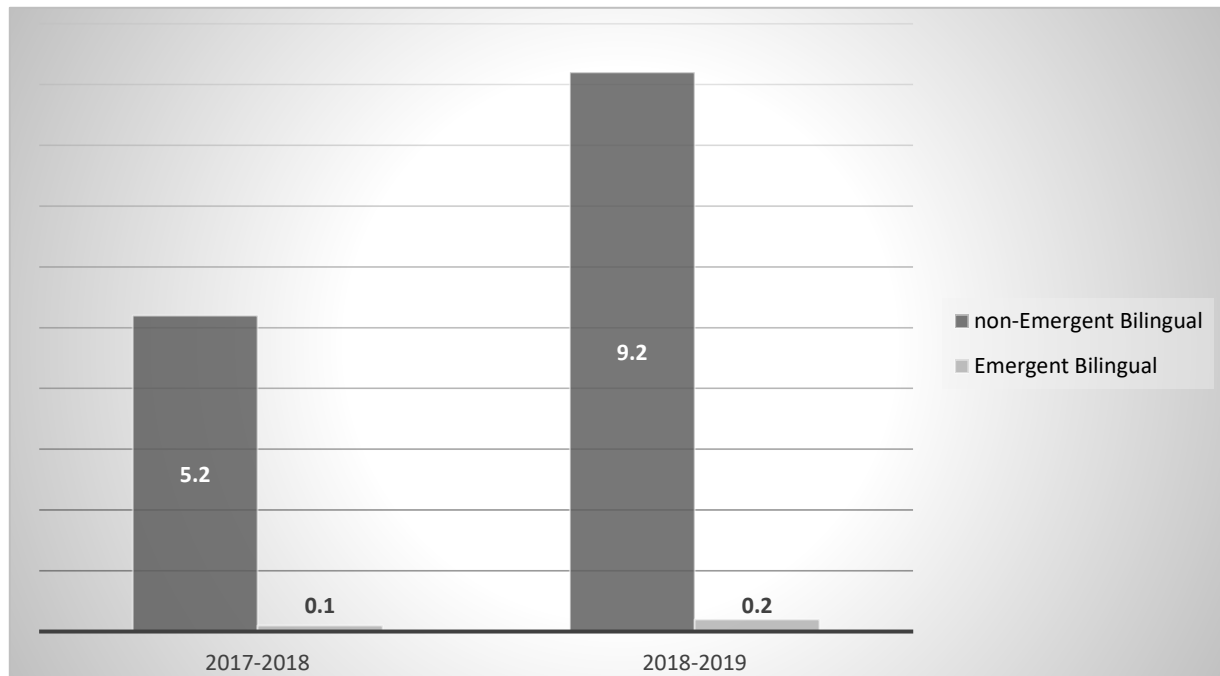
Frequencies and Percentages of the STAAR English I End-of-Course Masters Grade Level Standard by Student Language Status for Both School Years

School Year and Language Status	Did Not Meet	Met
	<i>n</i> and %age of Total	<i>n</i> and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 48,431) 99.9%	(<i>n</i> = 34) 0.1%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 193,467) 94.8%	(<i>n</i> = 10,673) 5.2%
2018-2019		
Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 51,683) 99.8%	(<i>n</i> = 102) 0.2%
Non-Emergent Bilingual	(<i>n</i> = 165,994) 90.8%	(<i>n</i> = 16,805) 9.2%

With respect to the 2018-2019 school year for STAAR English I End-of-Course Masters Grade Level standard, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 4883.31, p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .14 (Cohen, 1988). A statistically significantly low percentage of Emergent Bilingual boys, 0.2%, met this Masters Grade Level standard in the 2018-2019 school year compared to 9.2% of non-Emergent Bilingual boys. Readers should note the extremely low percentages of boys in both groups who met this standard. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis. Depicted in Figure 3 are the percentages of Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard.

Figure 3

Average percent who met the Masters Grade Level standard by language status in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.



7. Discussion

The extent to which differences were present on the Texas state-mandated English, I End-of-Course exam on three grade level performance measures (i.e., Approaches Grade Level standard, Meets Grade Level standard, and Masters Grade Level standard) between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys were addressed in this investigation. Two consecutive years (i.e., 2017-2018 and 2018-2019) of data prior to the pandemic were obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System. Results will now be summarized for each of the three grade level performance measures.

Concerning the English I End-of-Course Approaches Grade Level standard, Emergent Bilingual boys consistently performed lower than non-Emergent Bilingual boys in both school years. Only one-fifth of Emergent Bilingual boys met this grade level standard in the 2017-2018 school year and in the 2018-2019 school year, compared to two-thirds of non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard. Notably, less than 8% of Emergent Bilingual boys met the standard compared to 40% of non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this standard.

Regarding the English I End-of-Course Meets Grade Level standard, Emergent Bilingual boys performed seven times lower and five times lower than non-Emergent Bilingual boys, respectively, in both school years. Less than a twentieth of Emergent Bilingual boys met this grade

level standard, compared to more than a third of non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard in the 2017-2018 school year.

With respect to the Masters Grade Level standard, Emergent Bilingual boys performed lower than non-Emergent Bilingual boys in both school years. In the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, less than 2% of Emergent Bilingual boys met this grade level standard compared to less than 10% of non-Emergent Bilingual boys who met this grade level standard in both years. It is important to note that in both groups, very low percentages of boys met this standard.

7.1 Connections with the Existing Literature

Congruent with the existing literature (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Fry & Pew, 2008; Intercultural Development Research, 2015; Koyama & Menken, 2013; Martin, 2022; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005; Rodriguez & Slate, 2015), Emergent Bilingual boys continue to demonstrate poorer English skills than their non-Emergent Bilingual peers. Our results are quite congruent with previous researchers (Abedi, 2004; Course Crafters Inc., 2012; Genesse et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2012) who established the presence of relationships between English language proficiency and academic performance. Clearly, the educational needs of Emergent Bilingual boys are not being met (e.g., Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Menken, 2008; Valenzuela, 2005; Valencia, 2011; Zacher Pandya, 2011). Furthermore, reaffirmed in the results of this study is Back's (2020) claim that public schools continue to fail Emergent Bilingual students.

7.2 Implications for Policy and for Practice

The Texas Education Code §39.025 mandates that schools require high school students to meet at least the Approaches Grade Level standard in all five End-of-Course exams to meet graduation requirements. Results from this study are not supportive of the Every Student Success Act's promise of equal education for all students. In response, the State of Texas created a special provision for English I End-of-Course requirement for Emergent Bilingual students under 19 TAC §101.1007, which requires: An English learner (EL) who meets the eligibility criteria below shall not be required to retake the assessment each time it is administered if the student passes the course but fails to meet the passing standard. This provision applies to an EL enrolled in an English I course or an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) I course if the EL — has been enrolled in U.S. schools for three school years or less or qualifies as an unschooled asylee or refugee enrolled in U.S. schools for five school years or less, and has not yet attained a TELPAS advanced high reading rating. (TEA, 2020, para 1-2).

The question is whether the 19 TAC §101.1007 special provision provides an equal playing field for Emergent Bilingual students and their non-Emergent Bilingual peers. Solorzano (2008) argued the adverse effects of high-stakes testing on Emergent Bilingual students and emphasized that the basis for high-stakes tests are English instructional programs. Emergent Bilingual students are then placed in remedial classes that address the English language proficiency curriculum and have little opportunity to learn content knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in high stake tests. Emergent Bilingual students continue to be curtailed from having the same educational opportunities and class choices due to their English language proficiency. Frustration from this situation may lead to disengagement and, ultimately increased dropout rate.

Another implication of this study is whether the EOC English I Emergent Bilingual assessment provision bridges the gap of all Emergent Bilingual students. The provision covers newcomer Emergent Bilinguals but not long-term Emergent Bilingual students. A third implication of this study concerns the graduation rate of Emergent Bilingual students. The English I End-of-Course exemption is only one of the five STAAR End-of-Course assessments administered in English. These assessments are administered in English; therefore, the question may be asked whether these tests truly measure Emergent Bilingual students' content knowledge or their English language.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research can be generated based on the results of this multiyear statewide analysis. First, researchers are encouraged to replicate this study on Emergent Bilingual girls. The degree to which our findings on Emergent Bilingual boys would generalize to Emergent Bilingual girls is unknown. Second, an analysis of the effects of poverty within the Emergent Bilingual category is recommended.

A third recommendation is to replicate this study with data from the other four state-mandated End-of-Course exams. The findings discussed in this article may not generalize to other content areas. Lastly, it is recommended to replicate this study for the school years following the global pandemic. It is important to know whether substantial decreases in student performance have occurred and whether the achievement gaps present in this investigation continue to be present.

8 Conclusion

In this research investigation, we examined the degree to which differences were present between Emergent Bilingual boys and non-Emergent Bilingual boys on the English I End-of-Course exam on three grade level performance measures for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. In all six statistical analyses, Emergent Bilingual boys performed statistically significantly lower than non-Emergent Bilingual boys. Congruent with the extant literature (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Fry & Pew, 2008; Intercultural Development Research, 2015; Koyama & Menken, 2013; Martin, 2022; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005; Rodriguez & Slate, 2015), the reading skills of Emergent Bilingual students continue to be substantially lower than the reading skills of non-Emergent Bilingual students. Cause for concern exists, especially concerning the postsecondary preparedness of Emergent Bilingual students.

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