

## Challenges and Experiences in Teaching Multilingual Learners in Social Studies Classrooms

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the challenges and experiences faced by educators and school leaders in supporting Multilingual Learners (MLs) in North Carolina's social studies classrooms. Utilizing a narrative inquiry approach, the research explores the perspectives of 21 ESL teachers and public school administrators through interviews and open-ended questions. Key findings reveal that cultural and language barriers are the most significant obstacles to providing effective instruction for MLs. These challenges are often exacerbated by cultural biases and stereotypes, affecting both educators and students. The study emphasizes the need for targeted professional development programs to equip educators with research-based instructional strategies that address the unique needs of MLs in social studies education.*

**Keywords:** *Multilingual Learners, North Carolina, Social Studies, ESL.*

### **1. Introduction**

The number of Multilingual Learners (MLs) is growing across the country and in North Carolina. Nearly eight percent of North Carolina's 1.5 million public school students are MLs, and these students often face unique challenges—linguistic and academic—that students who are fluent in English don't typically encounter when they start school. Interestingly, seventy-two percent of school-aged children in the state who are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) were actually born in the U.S. This is quite similar to the national average, where seventy-one percent of native-born LEP children face similar hurdles (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). These students encounter additional linguistic and academic obstacles compared to those of their peers.

Only fifty-two percent of MLs graduate from high school in North Carolina compared with the overall state rate of eighty-four percent of MLs who must learn academic English to meet the state's rigorous academic standards. The Common Core State Standards for grade levels K-12 public schools were implemented; Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) addresses educational needs for MLs by emphasizing adopting new standards and assessments to measure students' academic growth and success. Therefore, content teachers and ML teachers need more support in implementing effective instructional best practices and resources to meet this student's needs.

MLs represent increasing numbers of North Carolina's school children and these students have linguistic and academic difficulties. MLs perform lower on content-based assessments in math, science, and social science when compared to non-MLs, indicating that language factors affect instruction and assessment (Abedi, 2006).

Furthermore, teachers in North Carolina often lack quality teaching expertise for these MLs. To facilitate the needs of MLs in the social studies classroom, this article investigates

challenges and experiences that impact educators who facilitate learning for Multilingual Learners (MLs) in social studies content.

### Learners are changing in North Carolina

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), North Carolina had approximately seven percent of the total student population, 105,801, are identified as having limited English proficiency in English and require systemic support from their teachers to meet the state-mandated standard (see Table 1). Table 1 shows the comparison data released in 2019 of the number of MLs enrolled in public schools K-12 in NC and the US from 2000-2017.

Table 1. Multilingual Learners (MLs) Enrolled in Public Schools K-12 in NC and the US from 2000 to 2017

	2000	2005	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of MLs (a percent of total enrollment in K- 12)							
North Carolina	44,165 (3.4%)	73,634 (5.5%)	103,249 (7.5%)	94,093 (6.2%)	102,090 (6.7%)	92,388 (6.0 %)	105,801 (6.9%)
United States	3,793,764 (8.1%)	4,471,300 (9.2%)	4,455,860 (9.2%)	4,670,356 (9.5%)	4,794,994 (9.8%)	4,858,377 (9.9%)	4,952,708 (10.1%)

This is the number of MLs enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in North Carolina from the selected years of 2000-2017 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics published in 2017, North Carolina has had a steady and significant growth of MLs from the years 2000-2017. In the year 2000, it started at 44,165 students at a rate of 3.4% and by 2017 it reached over 105,801 students at a rate of 6.9%. In over 17 years, the rate and number of MLs in North Carolina have outpaced the national average. From this data, we can deduce that the increase in the enrollment of MLs indicates North Carolina educators and administrators should be equipped to better serve these students.

### Accountability for Multilingual Learners' Academic Achievement in North Carolina

In North Carolina and nationwide, in elementary and middle school, MLs have significant achievement gaps in math and reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). Only 30 percent of MLs performed at or above basic levels in reading in 2007, compared to 69 percent of their non-ML peers. MLs are performing much lower academically than their Black, Hispanic, and White peers (Whittenberg, 2011). North Carolina's public school Multilingual Learners (MLs) face significant challenges in both language acquisition and academic achievement. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education mandated that all states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, submit plans detailing how they would comply with new accountability regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These regulations established requirements for states to standardize the identification process for MLs, including their entry and exit from ML status. Additionally, the regulations extended the number of years that schools can include former MLs' scores when reporting on the

academic outcomes of the ML subgroup and allowed states to develop their own English language proficiency indicators.

Moreover, the state of North Carolina sets the expectation that MLs take a maximum of six years to achieve English language proficiency. Students are considered on track if they meet their personalized growth targets from one year to the following. These specific English language targets are set based on the idea that students will make slightly more annual progress at lower proficiency levels and slightly less at higher proficiency levels (Montgomery & Drier, 2022).

No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation, Race to the Top (United States Department of Education, 2009), and even the Common Core State Standards movement do not single out social studies in the same manner as other content areas such as math, reading, English language arts, and science. For example, in North Carolina, national social studies organizations have made efforts to elevate the discipline's standing, state, and local priorities appear to be driven by formalized policies and funding directives. Amidst an entrenched testing culture and the prevalence of associated remediation demands, trends suggest that non-tested subjects compete for importance, scramble for instructional time, and are forced to grapple with secondary status (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Lazarin, 2014). Thus, non-tested subjects, like social studies, are often relegated to the sidelines (An, 2009; VanFossen, 2005; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Every Student Succeeds Act requires the state of North Carolina, as well as the other states and US territories, to develop a plan for the inclusion of recently arrived MLs in the State Accountability Model (ESSA, 2015). Effective in the 2017–18 school year and beyond, State Board of Education policy ACCT-021 requires that all students identified as MLs must participate in state assessments beginning with their first year in a United States school (North Carolina State Board of Education; NCDPI, 2019). For the first year, the requirement is for participation and reporting, not the accountability model. For year two, MLs' test scores will be included in the growth analysis for the accountability model. For year three and beyond, MLs' test scores will be included in the growth and achievement indicator of the accountability model.

North Carolina is classified as a World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) state, joining in 2008. WIDA is a recognized consortium of states dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable educational opportunities for Multilingual learners which offers states programming for identifying and annually assessing the English language development of its English learners (WIDA, 2012). In North Carolina and other states, MLs take longer to learn the academic language than learn the social language—approximately 7 years according to Young & Hadaway (2006).

### **Literacy Challenges in Teaching Multilingual Learners**

According to Ha (2021) based on an empirical study that investigates receptive vocabulary knowledge and language skills among MLs. This study shows that vocabulary instruction is essential as a fundamental aspect of language connected to reading comprehension, listening skills, quality of writing, and fluency. To gain adequate comprehension in reading and listening, MLs must be familiar with at least 95 percent and preferably 98 percent of the words in the text. This study showed a correlation between MLs proficiency levels, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension across diverse content areas. Therefore, as a major teaching and learning practice emphasis must be placed on academic language use including vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills to ultimately help aid in

catering instruction to the needs of the learner to reach English proficiency to achieve in diverse content areas such as social studies (O'Brien & Leighton, 2015).

Overall, Multilingual Learners (MLs) in North Carolina are not thriving in public schools, and addressing this issue is crucial for the state's future. High-quality teachers and effective pedagogical strategies are essential for developing multifaceted approaches to meet the diverse needs of MLs, particularly in North Carolina's social studies classrooms. Nationally, MLs make up over 10.8 million students, representing the fastest-growing segment of the school-age population. Recent data reveals a significant achievement gap: only 4 percent of eighth-grade MLs scored at or above the proficient level on national reading assessments, compared to 31 percent of native English speakers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This disparity highlights the urgent need for targeted educational support and resources for MLs.

Within middle and secondary levels, MLs encounter even more challenges because of struggles with academic text, lack of content knowledge, underdeveloped oral language, and limited vocabulary language levels (Islam, 2017). Educational researchers (Vaughn, Martinez, Linan- Thompson, Reutebach, Carlson, & Francis, 2019) conducted two experimental studies focused on discovering best practices to improve vocabulary knowledge and comprehension for MLs in 7th-grade social studies classes. In this study, students received multi-component social studies instruction including explicit vocabulary instruction, structured pairing, audiovisual instruction, and incorporation of graphic organizers in planning lessons.

MLs need specific instructional practices that must be implemented in diverse content areas, including social studies. These instructional practices are providing explicit vocabulary and concept instruction, use of audiovisual content, incorporating graphic organizers in writing instruction, peer-pairing, and cooperative learning strategies. From this study, these instructional practices once implemented are associated with improved outcomes in middle-school social studies instruction to enhance vocabulary knowledge and comprehension for MLs. Findings from these two experimental studies indicated that students' overall academic language and literacy improved significantly with the content areas of social studies (Vaughn, Martinez, Linan- Thompson, Reutebach, Carlson, & Francis, 2019). This is what is needed to ensure MLs' needs are met and addressed in North Carolina.

## **2. Methods**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges and experiences in facilitating learning for MLs in North Carolina's social studies classrooms. The methodology utilized was a narrative inquiry approach to gather participant's experiences and impressions. Through narrative research inquiry, this study explored individuals' experiences to understand how they shed light on the identities of their perspectives of their roles as ESL experts and public school administrators. This method allowed stories to be gathered through structured interviews. Participants shared personal experiences in their profession as ESL experts or public school leaders found in single or multiple episodes and private situations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Since this study explored experiences in public school settings, the researcher took excerpts from the transcripts derived from interviews and determined common themes among the participants. These themes are aligned with both social and cultural capital frameworks providing a foundation for how cultural processes and social interactions affect college completion. The primary strength of the qualitative approach to cultural assessment is the ability to probe underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions (Choy, 2014).

## Participants

This study was conducted with a sample size of twenty-four participants consisting of seven school administrators -principals, assistant principals in the Cumberland County schools and seventeen ESL experts -ESL teachers, Instructional coaches, and ESL Program Coordinators/Directors in four selected counties in the Sandhills region in North Carolina (See Table 1). These school administrators and ESL experts represented diverse backgrounds and levels of experience within the NC public school system. In addition, these ESL teachers and school administrators work collaboratively with MLs. All of them were employed as full-time educators in NC public schools in Cumberland, Lee, Harnett, and Hoke County.

All of these four counties currently have many MLs enrolled in their counties and provide support for MLs. Headcounts of MLs for each county are represented in Table 2 and the total number of participants in each county and their position titles are listed in Table 3. The study participants reflect the demographics of educators in North Carolina regarding gender, ethnicity, and years of experience with the public school system in North Carolina. Out of twenty-four, seventeen educators received specialized training for working with MLs, and seven administrators represent elementary, middle, and high schools in their respective counties.

Table 2. County Representation, Educator Position Titles, and Headcount of MLs (2019-2020)

Counties and Total Number of Participants (24)	Participants in Each County and Their Titles	Headcounts of MLs
Cumberland County	School Administrators: 7	1471
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 High School principal</li> <li>• 1 Middle School Principal</li> <li>• 2 Middle School Assistant Principals</li> <li>• 1 Elementary Principal</li> </ul>	
1 Instructional Coach/ESL Teacher K-12		
3 ESL Teachers K-12		
Lee County	7 ESL Experts: 7	1461
4 ESL Teachers		
1 District Secondary ESL Instructional Facilitator 6-12		
1 District Elementary ESL Instructional Facilitator K-6		
1 ESL Program Director		
Harnett County	3 ESL Experts: 3	1481
2 ESL Lead Teachers		
1 ESL Director		
Hoke County	3 ESL Experts: 3	622
2 ESL Teachers K-12		
1 ESL Coordinator		

Twenty-four participants, ESL teachers, and public school leaders in four selected school districts in North Carolina. These educators and leaders represented diverse communities,



backgrounds, genders, cultures, ethnicities, positions, and experience levels in the public school system. In addition, these ESL teachers and school leaders worked collaboratively together with multilingual learners. The participants were selected to gather diverse perspectives of individuals working in the field with English language learners in K-8 social studies. They are categorized as school leaders, which consists of principals and assistant principals. Also categorized in the chart are ESL experts, which consist of five or more years of experience, ESL instructional coaches and facilitators, ESL curriculum specialists, and ESL program directors.

The number of reported MLs enrolled in these school districts is shown in the table. 5,075 students are identified as MLs in four counties: Cumberland, Lee, Harnett, and Hoke County. They are in the southeastern region of North Carolina and participated in the study. The participants shared their unified perspectives on working with MLs in social studies. ESL teachers and school leaders who participated in this study were asked to discuss the services and strategies they felt were effective in supporting MLs in social studies content. The participants shared their thoughts and ideas through confidential face-to-face interviews.

### **Data Collection**

The data collected for this research project comes from the original interview transcription conducted by Wynne (2021). The participants responded to the following question: Share unique challenges and experiences in teaching MLs. An open-ended question was posed to learn what ESL teachers and public-school administrators found to be the most challenging aspects of working with MLs. All written field notes and transcription were reviewed thoroughly and used for this study.

The researchers engaged in a focused reading and examination of all transcribed data collected and categorized findings. This research involves context analysis and qualitative analysis of verbal data. Because of language complexity, the framework of analytic tasks will be included: segmentation and full context of data by code.

Segmentations of the language for coding will be practiced making a measurable comparison. To achieve reliability, two coders check the intercoder agreement and use the results to revise our coding scheme until an adequate level of agreement has been reached. From this response the researchers found relevant topics and interpretations from these responses s, the researchers identified relevant topics and interpretations that guided the following results and discussion. This study used transcribed interview data. Qualitative data was collected from the transcribed data sources: ESL teachers and their school administrators' interviews. For all their challenges, we compiled the data according to factors such as their positions and roles (principals and ESL experts) and the counties they serve to discover their unique challenges and support their distinctive need for helping MLs in North Carolina.

### **3. Results**

ESL experts and public school administrators in North Carolina face numerous challenges in and out of the classroom. Overall ESL experts' and their administrators' interviews and comments revealed a sense of compassion toward MLs. They were interested in helping their MLs and recognized language and cultural barriers that hinder MLs' learning in content classrooms. The range of challenges was a wide reflection of ESL experts and their public school administrators' responsibilities, preparation, years of experience, and grade level. There were 24 participants, consisting of 17 ESL experts and 7 administrators employed in K-12 to public schools, with a range of experiences from 1-25 years in education.

Overwhelmingly, 21 out of 24 participants in this study communicated that cultural and language barriers are the greatest challenges in providing instruction for MLs. ESL teachers and school leaders stated that often these challenges are reciprocal for educators, administrators, students, and families of these learners. Most of the ESL experts noted that these challenges correlate with their achievement and often cultural stereotypes and biases that have been projected on MLs. Despite these difficulties, most participants identified seven key areas where challenges are most prominent.

Finding 1: Teachers need extra time to give additional support and further explanation because most MLs are not proficient in the academic English language, so they have difficulty in understanding the subject matter in the classroom.

The conversation with most ESL teachers presented the language barrier as the biggest challenge. English is used as a medium of instruction and many MLs are struggling in school. This creates anxiety and stalls effective classroom participation. As one ESL teacher said:

*...first of all, because of their accent, or because they don't know the words, they get withdrawn. They don't want to speak out; they are afraid to even raise their hand, or to be even picked out within the rest of everybody. Because they feel ashamed. You know, not having the right words, or mispronouncing a word. That's one of the biggest challenges they face. ESL Teacher, K-12*

Another ESL teacher added that this situation results in limited practice of the target language. Classroom teachers are left with the sole burden of helping MLs develop competence in English within a 45-min lesson because the language outside the classroom and at home is majorly their native language. In secondary schools, MLs' opportunity to use English is limited to the daily 40-50 minutes lesson. MLs in secondary school especially are not given many opportunities to practice the English language in the classroom.

These challenges are especially evident when multilingual learners (MLs) struggle with academic English, making it hard for them to fully understand the content being taught. Additionally, the overwhelming curriculum puts even more pressure on teachers, creating a barrier to effective teaching. Teachers often feel the need to move quickly to stay on track with the tight schedule, which can leave MLs behind and make it harder for them to succeed in the classroom.

Finding 2: Teachers need to understand Multilingual Learners' cultures because cultural overgeneralization and misunderstanding create hindrances to Multilingual Learner's learning.

Most of our MLs are Hispanic in North Carolina classrooms. The challenges most often cited by middle and high school administrators concentrated on teachers' overgeneralization of Hispanic culture. One middle school assistant principal said,

*...all Hispanics are not the same, you've got Mexicans, you've got Puerto Ricans, you've got Cubans, you've got people from Spain, and Brazil, you've got lots of distinct cultures of Spanish-speaking people, and their cultures are very different. so, it's very offensive you know to Puerto Ricans to say that to them about Mexican culture because it's very different. Middle school assistant principal.*

One of the ESL coaches also pointed out that a teacher in her school calls a Spanish-speaking student "Mexican." Sometimes, the teachers do not understand some of those little nuances in culture, and their cultural overgeneralization and stereotype frequently make MLs upset. In addition, one of the elementary principals indicated that MLs feel strange in American

classrooms. Some of our mannerisms and interaction could be challenging to them as well. Likewise, some ESL experts pointed out body language is often misinterpreted.

In some Asian or Hispanic cultures, MLs often avoid eye contact when their teachers are talking to them. Especially here in the South, teachers may want them to look the teacher in the eye. If they don't do that, teachers take that as a perception of being disrespectful. ESL coach, K-12.

Students from like an Asian country, their body language is a lot different so sometimes the teacher thinks they're being rude or disrespectful. So sometimes the classroom teacher doesn't understand that, and just thinks they're behaving disrespectfully. ESL teacher, K-12.

This often leads to multilingual learners (MLs) feeling isolated and disconnected from their classrooms. MLs are not afforded the chance to learn from their own familiar home culture with a curriculum and pedagogy that recognizes their cultural setting. This makes it harder for teachers to build meaningful relationships and create a supportive learning environment. In many cases, educators struggle to offer the academic help these students need because they lack the cultural understanding to connect with them in a way that truly supports their learning.

Finding 3: Teachers need to practice a sociolinguistic and pragmatic approach to encourage MLs to participate in American classrooms because MLs decrease their self-esteem and confidence level making them feel negative about themselves because they feel embarrassed and frustrated in a new cultural situation.

Other major challenges were cultural conflicts and self-esteem issues that can affect MLs learning in mainstream classrooms. Most ESL specialists and secondary educators responded that having helpers or a buddy system in class should help MLs in Social Studies classrooms. A high school ESL Teacher wrote,

*So, they want to hide that culture. They don't feel proud of their culture mostly. So, they want to be, because I think it happens to any teenager, they want to be mixed up, or assimilate, the dominant culture or whatever. So, they want to be, because I think it happens to any teenager, they want to be mixed up, or assimilate, the dominant culture or whatever. ESL Teacher, K-12.*

What is expressed here aligns with research conducted by Whittenberg (2011), which reveals that content classes have minimal learner participation because learners do not have the necessary linguistic and cultural competence. MLs are culturally monitory and gain negative attitudes towards their home language and culture. This negative attitude emanated from the fact that learners have limited competence in their first culture. This minimal learner participation can be linked to the learners' negative attitude toward the subject which eventually leads to significant levels of underperformance in content learning. Therefore, a sociolinguistic and pragmatic approach is needed to address this.

One great way to support multilingual learners (MLs) is by exposing them to the language used by speakers from the target community. Activities like role-playing, skits, reenactments, and other hands-on, interactive strategies can make this learning more engaging. Teachers can also tap into the students' own cultural and linguistic knowledge, helping them connect their backgrounds to the language being used. (Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2014).

Finding 5: Teachers were challenged by the lack of quality professional development support and resources.



Over half of the ESL experts and school administrators expressed a need for high-quality training and professional development offered within the school district. They also felt that cultural and language barriers impact their achievement in the mainstream classroom, especially social studies content. This was a major challenge expressed by educators, which has hindered their ability to effectively work with MLs. Many of these educators, including school administrators, expressed that they often do not receive much guidance from their district offices on ways to engage these students. They claim that this is due to a lack of personnel in their district who have received training and certification in ESL.

Research has found that more than 50 percent of social studies teachers have MLs in their classes (Jimenez-Silva, Hinde, & Hernandez, 2013); however, it also reveals that educators who facilitate social studies instruction report feeling unprepared to teach MLs (Cho & Reich, 2008; O'Brien & Leighton, 2015). Social studies within the national education policy context remain absent (Yoder, Kipler, & van Hover, 2016).

In addition, Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy (2008) most teacher education programs that prepare mainstream content area teachers do not include instruction on teaching MLs, much less on how to advocate for MLs' equitable education. Without this training or knowledge in this area, it impacts the teachers' interactions with these students, and their ability to support their students' success through collaboration with colleagues, school leaders, and the community (Ritter, 2009).

Consequently, their professional training and pedagogical skills are necessary but not enough to facilitate MLs in mainstream classes. Teachers who have more MLs receive more training and resources but the counties with low MLs do not receive the same resources. Some school leaders in Hoke County expressed that even within higher education they receive little to no guidance on how to support the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of MLs. Therefore, teachers in small and rural districts face more challenges because they often do not provide professional development and access to universities that provide resources.

Findings 6: Teachers and administrators advocate for their ML students.

ESL teachers and school leaders said their key role was to serve as advocates for their MLs to ensure they felt welcome in the classroom and meet their needs. They also believed teacher advocacy coincided with their self-efficacy. This was important to ensure they felt empowered to facilitate quality instruction for these students to meet their language and content-area objectives. Respondents strongly saw themselves as being advocates for MLs. They expressed that MLs are often overlooked, and many educators and school leaders are not equipped to support them in multiple classroom settings. According to Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez (2002), a need for education and administrators to voice concerns and support for the needs of MLs within the evolving culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms of America. This is critical to ensure the academic success of MLs across the curriculum.

Findings 6: Teachers need to create a stronger parent- relationship because MLs' parents' involvement is limited.

Education is a collaboration between the school, students, parents, and the community at large. Building strong relationships between parents and teachers is crucial for the success of multilingual learners (MLs) in the classroom. Parents offer valuable insights that help educators understand and meet their children's cultural and language needs. On ESL teacher shared,

*...I don't think, sometimes, that our teachers understand the culture of our students. Um, a lot of times with our Latino students, in their home countries the parents don't question the teachers, that's not appropriate. Um, it's a respect piece, your teacher is trained, and they know what you need and I'm not going to question them Teachers in America see that as a lack of participation- ESL Teacher, K-12.*

Many participants in the study pointed out that when parent-teacher relationships are strong, it creates a more positive learning environment especially in subjects like social studies. Teachers must recognize and understand the cultural perspectives of these students and their families, so they can better hone and align their instruction based on their needs in the classroom. Creating a positive learning environment means more than just managing the classroom—it is about setting up a welcoming space, building trust with families, and working together with the community (Banks, 2008). This approach helps students feel welcomed and supported, ultimately enhancing MLs' academic success.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

Multilinguals with limited English proficiency have difficulties understanding the subject matter. Social studies, in particular, asks students to contextualize, synthesize, and critically evaluate primary and secondary sources (Kim & Wynne, 2021). In other words, social studies content requires students to have a well-developed understanding and conceptual knowledge of academic vocabulary. MLs experience challenges meeting the content objectives and goals set in the social studies classroom due to their limited linguistic proficiency.

North Carolina educators have shared the challenges they face in supporting MLs: language barriers, cultural conflicts, and a lack of access to effective professional development. Teachers care deeply about their students' success, yet many feel unprepared to meet the unique needs of MLs. Clearly, educators need better tools, training, and time to provide meaningful learning opportunities for these students. These findings represent a starting point for tackling these challenges through the support of targeted ML instruction and professional growth opportunities. This study makes the following recommendations:

*Educators and school leaders must have more time to teach MLs language through social studies content.*

*ESL experts must develop better Academic English development materials and inclusive resources.*

*School leaders must provide professional development opportunities to equip educators with integrative literacy teaching strategies.*

*School leaders must provide professional development opportunities to equip educators with integrative literacy teaching strategies.*

*ESL educators and school leaders must provide culturally relevant pedagogy and multicultural training to social studies and content teachers.*

*ESL experts and administrators must offer an open conversation about the challenges and evaluate their perspectives with MLs about classroom cultural components that may aid them in providing more instrumental and equitable learning environments for these students.*

*Social studies content teachers, ESL teachers, and school administrators must collaborate to ensure that MLs are successful in meeting the state standards in the social studies content.*

Educators in the state of North Carolina's educational system are rarely asked about the challenges they experience in teaching MLs in content classrooms across the curriculum. These challenges must be clearly and explicitly addressed throughout individual school districts and throughout the state. The findings from this study can offer meaningful data to educational practitioners for professional development, resources, and direction for future

school policies that promote positive outcomes in MLs' overall achievement in social studies and other mainstream content areas in North Carolina.

To better support Multilingual Learners (MLs) in North Carolina's social studies classrooms, several recommendations are proposed: First, educators and school leaders need more time to teach language skills through social studies content, allowing MLs to better grasp key academic vocabulary and concepts. Second, ESL experts should create more accessible and engaging resources that help students build their academic English skills in context. Third, school leaders must prioritize professional development that focuses on integrating literacy strategies into social studies instruction, giving teachers the tools they need to support MLs effectively. Additionally, it is essential to provide training and professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure that all students' diverse backgrounds are valued and reflected in teaching practices. Open conversations between ESL teachers, school leaders, and MLs themselves will help create a more inclusive and supportive environment, where cultural differences are acknowledged and addressed. Finally, fostering collaboration between social studies teachers, ESL educators, and administrators will ensure that MLs receive the guidance and support they need to meet state standards. These recommendations are to address the challenges educators face, offering clear paths for improvement that can lead to better outcomes for MLs across North Carolina.

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