

Research Article

From coursework to classroom: Enacting sustaining literacy pedagogies in bilingual teacher preparation

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This qualitative study explores how preservice bilingual teachers engage with culturally and linguistically sustaining literacy instruction through coursework and field experiences in a bilingual teacher preparation program. Drawing on narrative reflections from three undergraduate students enrolled in a course titled *Teaching in the Bilingual Classroom*, the study examines how future educators make sense of literacy as a pedagogical tool for affirming students' identities, promoting biliteracy, and advancing equity. Findings highlight two central themes: (1) the role of intentional literacy practices—such as phonemic awareness routines, interactive read-alouds, and predictable classroom structures—in fostering language development and engagement in bilingual settings; and (2) the importance of translanguaging and transmodal pedagogies in facilitating disciplinary literacy, particularly in STEM contexts. Participants demonstrated an evolving ideological clarity as they observed how classroom teachers leveraged bilingualism and multimodality to support comprehension, community connection, and access to content. Their reflections illustrate a shift from seeing literacy as a neutral set of skills to understanding it as a culturally embedded, meaning-making process. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on bilingual teacher education by illustrating how preservice teachers begin to integrate theory and practice, develop critical noticing skills, and envision themselves as responsive, equity-oriented educators. Implications are offered for teacher preparation programs seeking to cultivate linguistically sustaining pedagogies that extend beyond language acquisition and into inclusive, discipline-responsive instruction.

Keywords: Bilingual education; Culturally sustaining pedagogy; Disciplinary literacy; Preservice teachers; Teacher preparation; Translanguaging

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1. Introduction

In the spring semester, I sat with three preservice bilingual educators—Jennifer, Carrie, and Manuel—as they wove together stories from their field placements with ideas drawn from our course, *Teaching in the Bilingual Classroom*. Their reflections unfolded like small windows into classrooms alive with the sounds of shifting languages, the rhythm of ritualized greetings, the pause of a teacher explaining a word in two languages, and the energy of students “chopping” words into syllables with their hands. These were not isolated moments of instruction, but intentional acts—rooted in the belief that literacy instruction for emergent bilinguals is a space where language, identity, power, and knowledge converge (Bartolomé, 2004). For these novice educators, the work of learning to teach was not only about acquiring strategies but about

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developing ideological clarity and learning to see bilingualism as a resource to be sustained (García & Kley, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Their insights echoed a growing body of international research showing how translanguaging and multimodal pedagogies can open pathways to equitable disciplinary learning. In bilingual classrooms across diverse contexts, teachers have been shown to integrate visual, gestural, and linguistic modes to help learners navigate complex content (Curiel, 2023; Curiel & Palmer 2023). Ethnographic studies in two-way dual-language programs illustrate how a teacher's translanguaging stance shapes students' access to disciplinary knowledge (Baca, 2024), while middle school case studies reveal how institutional monolingual norms can constrain these practices, even as they deepen comprehension (Kim & Kim, 2024). In listening to Jennifer, Carrie, and Manuel, I heard these theories refracted through the immediacy of classroom life—where a hands-on engineering project became an opportunity for bilingual vocabulary building, or a read-aloud turned into a lesson on social justice through two languages.

This study asks: (1) How do preservice bilingual teachers describe and interpret literacy practices observed in bilingual classrooms? (2) What pedagogical strategies do they identify as supportive of bilingual learners, and how do these align with culturally and linguistically sustaining frameworks? and (3) In what ways do preservice teachers begin to articulate ideological clarity about bilingual literacy instruction through their reflections and field-based learning? By examining these questions, I aim to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how teacher preparation can nurture critically conscious bilingual educators—educators who can design instruction that is linguistically inclusive, culturally responsive, and academically rigorous.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Literacy in the Bilingual Classroom Context

In this study, the term *literacy* is used intentionally but expansively. Although the instructional context is bilingual—and the long-term goal is *biliteracy*, the ability to read, write, and participate meaningfully in more than one language (Escamilla et al., 2014; Soltero, 2016)—foregrounding “literacy” to reflect participants' evolving understandings and classroom observations. Several noted how teachers navigated “the Spanish brain” versus “the English brain,” pointing to shifts in cognitive and linguistic processing across languages. This tension underscores the need to teach for both shared and distinct dimensions of literacy and biliteracy while affirming students' full repertoires (García & Lin, 2017; Hornberger, 2003). Naming this stance clarifies how I analyze preservice teachers' talk and writing about bilingual literacy instruction.

2.2. Bilingual Education as Identity-Affirming and Meaning-Making

Recent scholarship in bilingual education has emphasized the importance of translanguaging, transmodal instruction, and disciplinary literacy as means of promoting equitable access to academic content while affirming students' lived experiences (García et al., 2017; Martínez-Álvarez, 2022). However, translating these frameworks into responsive classroom practices is a complex process—particularly for preservice teachers who are still developing their teaching identities and pedagogical skillsets. The teacher preparation classroom, especially when paired with field-based experiences, offers a unique site of learning where theory and practice can begin to converge.

2.3. Intentional Pedagogy and Practice in Bilingual Classrooms

A foundational aspect of effective bilingual teaching lies in the intentional design of instructional routines that integrate language, content, and student engagement. Research has shown that responsive literacy strategies—such as phonemic awareness activities, structured routines, and interactive read-alouds—play a critical role in supporting emergent bilingual learners' comprehension and participation (Echevarría et al., 2017). These are not incidental moments; they are carefully constructed to build foundational skills while also affirming students' identities and

linguistic strengths. Jennifer, for example, observes a kinesthetic phonics routine in her placement classroom in which students “chop” multisyllabic words, a practice aligned with multisensory approaches to early literacy (Nemeth, 2009). This strategy links physical movement with oral language development, helping students internalize sound patterns and strengthen decoding skills. Carrie similarly highlights how daily greeting rituals and clearly articulated lesson objectives create predictability and linguistic rehearsal, which are especially important for bilingual learners transitioning between language contexts. Research supports these routines as essential for establishing linguistic safety and instructional clarity (Peregoy & Boyle, 2016). Manuel’s observation of interactive read-alouds underscores the value of dialogic literacy practices that blend storytelling with vocabulary expansion and cultural contextualization. These read-alouds function as multimodal entry points into literacy, helping students connect emotionally and cognitively with text while reinforcing oral language development (Martínez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999). Collectively, these pedagogical practices reveal how structure, intentionality, and responsiveness work together to foster academic success for bilingual learners.

2.4. Bilingual Education as Identity-Affirming and Meaning-Making

The reflections also reflect a shared understanding that bilingual classrooms are dynamic spaces of cultural and linguistic meaning-making, rather than sites of simple translation or dual-language exposure. Emerging research on translanguaging and culturally sustaining pedagogy argues that literacy should not be confined to the mechanics of decoding text, but should instead engage students in constructing meaning through the full range of their linguistic and cultural resources (García et al., 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Carrie’s description of students “turning their Spanish brains on” through structured language transitions reflects intentional classroom practices that acknowledge language boundaries while building fluidity across them. Manuel identifies the value of dual-language books and vocabulary instruction that allows students to make conceptual connections across languages—aligning with research showing that bilingual texts provide cognitive scaffolds while also fostering pride in heritage language (Cummins, 2000). Jennifer takes this further by emphasizing how bilingual literature can address complex sociopolitical issues, such as climate change and migration, in developmentally appropriate ways. This aligns with research on critical literacy in bilingual education, which promotes student engagement with themes of justice, identity, and voice through accessible, multilingual narratives (Moll et al., 1992; Souto-Manning, 2013). These reflections affirm that bilingual classrooms are not simply about achieving fluency in two languages—they are spaces where students negotiate meaning, build empathy, and develop academic and cultural agency.

2.5. Global Perspectives on Bilingual Teacher Preparation

Although this study is situated within a U.S. bilingual teacher preparation program, the questions it addresses—how teachers conceptualize literacy, biliteracy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy—resonate across international contexts. Research in the Basque Country, for example, demonstrates how plurilingual education policies encourage teachers to view language boundaries as flexible resources for meaning-making, fostering what Cenoz and Gorter (2021) call “integrated plurilingual practices.” Similarly, European Content and Language Integrated Learning [CLIL] initiatives highlight the importance of combining content instruction with intentional language scaffolding, a concern echoed in our participants’ reflections on STEM instruction for emergent bilinguals (Coyle et al., 2010).

In Latin America, intercultural bilingual education models in Bolivia and Peru have grappled with balancing Indigenous language revitalization, Spanish literacy development, and academic achievement. López (2021) documents the tensions teachers face in designing curricula that honor Indigenous knowledge systems while meeting national academic standards. Zavala (2021) extends this work by illustrating how critical literacy frameworks can challenge deficit-oriented ideologies in Peruvian classrooms, a move that parallels our participants’ development of ideological clarity.

In the Asia-Pacific region, Lin and He (2017) examine how translanguaging in Hong Kong and mainland China classrooms not only mediates content learning but also affirms students' linguistic identities, underscoring the global relevance of classroom discourse as a site of equity work. Similarly, Tupas (2014) highlights the sociopolitical dimensions of multilingual policy in Singapore and the Philippines, revealing how teacher agency plays a central role in navigating top-down language mandates.

2.6. Preparing Bilingual Teachers with Ideological Clarity

Underlying all of these observations is the preservice teachers' developing ideological clarity—a recognition that literacy instruction is inherently political, and that decisions about texts, routines, and language use must be grounded in commitments to equity and inclusion (Bartolomé, 2004; Paris, 2012). As preservice teachers engage with course readings and apply their learning in real classrooms, they are beginning to see themselves not merely as instructors of reading skills, but as designers of learning environments that affirm students' languages, cultures, and lived experiences. They are learning to choose texts intentionally, scaffold vocabulary in responsive ways, and create routines that validate bilingualism rather than marginalize it. Importantly, they are also developing critical noticing skills—the ability to observe how teachers use language, space, and time in ways that either include or exclude students from full participation (Mason, 2011). These reflective insights are essential in teacher preparation programs, where the goal is not only to equip candidates with strategies, but also to cultivate a pedagogical stance that is rooted in community, cultural relevance, and linguistic justice (García & Kleyn, 2016; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). The shift these preservice teachers describe—from learning how to teach reading to understanding why and for whom they teach—is central to preparing educators who will enter classrooms with the clarity and commitment needed to sustain bilingual learners' success.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that brings together culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), and the concept of ideological clarity in teacher preparation (Bartolomé, 2004; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Together, these frameworks support an understanding of bilingual literacy instruction not simply as a matter of method or strategy, but as a space of cultural negotiation, linguistic agency, and critical consciousness.

Culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy [CLSP] builds upon earlier asset-based approaches, such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), by explicitly affirming and extending the cultural and linguistic practices of communities of color. Paris and Alim (2017) define CLSP as an educational stance that seeks to sustain rather than erase the multilingual and multicultural identities of students. For bilingual learners, this includes preserving heritage languages, validating everyday linguistic practices, and promoting instructional practices that reflect the dynamic and plural nature of language. In the context of this study, CLSP provides a foundation for analyzing how preservice teachers begin to view literacy instruction as a means of affirming bilingual identities, building community, and connecting to students' lived experiences.

Complementing this, translanguaging theory offers a lens for understanding how bilingual students make meaning by drawing from the entirety of their linguistic repertoires. García and Wei (2014) conceptualize translanguaging as both a pedagogical strategy and a theoretical orientation that challenges rigid language boundaries and monolingual norms. Translanguaging pedagogy encourages educators to design instruction that leverages students' home languages, community discourses, and multimodal expressions as integral to the learning process. For preservice teachers learning to navigate bilingual classrooms, translanguaging theory provides a way to reimagine literacy not as isolated reading and writing tasks in English or Spanish, but as fluid, creative, and socially situated acts of communication.

Finally, the study is informed by the concept of ideological clarity, which emphasizes the importance of teacher candidates developing a critical understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of education (Bartolomé, 2004; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Ideological clarity involves recognizing how race, language, culture, and power shape both classroom practice and student opportunity. Within bilingual education, ideological clarity is particularly urgent, as teachers must grapple with historical and ongoing systems of linguistic marginalization while simultaneously advocating for the legitimacy and richness of bilingual students' knowledge. For preservice teachers in this study, developing ideological clarity means moving beyond technical approaches to literacy and toward pedagogical decisions that reflect a commitment to equity, linguistic justice, and community-rooted practice. Together, these three interrelated frameworks guide the analysis of how preservice bilingual teachers interpret their field experiences, make meaning of course readings, and begin to envision literacy instruction that is responsive, sustaining, and transformative.

4. Methods

4.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in narrative inquiry to explore the experiences and evolving pedagogical understandings of three preservice teachers enrolled in a bilingual teacher preparation program. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was chosen as the guiding methodology because of its focus on lived experience, reflection, and meaning-making over time. The aim was to better understand how preservice teachers construct knowledge about culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy, particularly in relation to disciplinary literacy and biliteracy development, through both coursework and field experiences.

4.2. Participants and Context

Participants were three undergraduate students—Jennifer, Carrie, and Manuel—enrolled in *Teaching in the Bilingual Classroom* during the Spring 2024 semester at a private liberal arts university in the southwestern United States. The course, a required component of the bilingual teacher certification pathway, is typically taken in the junior or senior year and is paired with a concurrent field placement in bilingual or dual language classrooms at partner elementary schools. Participants reflected varied bilingual backgrounds and experience levels with emergent bilingual learners. They were purposefully selected using criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2002) because they demonstrated consistent engagement in both course discussions and field-based reflections, and their backgrounds were representative of the broader program.

- **Jennifer**, a Latina bilingual preservice teacher, entered with early childhood teaching experience and often reflected on literacy, language development, and social justice.
- **Manuel**, a bilingual Latino preservice teacher with a strong interest in STEM, frequently linked coursework to equity and access issues in content-area instruction.
- **Carrie**, a heritage Spanish speaker with community-based youth programming experience, demonstrated a reflective stance toward culturally responsive pedagogy and was attuned to language variation and newcomer needs.

Collectively, their narratives offered insight into how preservice teachers negotiate theory and practice in bilingual settings and develop ideological clarity about biliteracy instruction during a formative stage of their professional preparation.

4.3. Data Collection

Data were drawn from multiple sources across a 15-week semester. The primary corpus comprised weekly written reflections in response to course readings, whole-class discussions, and field-placement observations. Prompts were structured yet open-ended to surface connections between theory and lived experience. Supplementary data included informal field notes from class discussion and small-group debriefs, plus relevant course artifacts (e.g., literacy lesson plans, children's literature presentations). Together, these sources allowed within- and across-case

triangulation of how participants interpreted course content, made sense of field experiences, and articulated emerging teaching philosophies. Reflection prompts were semi-structured, typically consisting of two to three open-ended questions that invited participants to connect course readings to their field observations, analyze specific classroom practices, and consider how these related to culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. For example, prompts might ask participants to describe a literacy strategy observed in their placement, explain how it supported bilingual learners, and reflect on how they might adapt the approach in their own future classrooms. These debriefs were loosely guided by discussion questions but allowed for emergent topics, enabling participants to clarify observations, make cross-case comparisons, and collaboratively interrogate instructional choices they had witnessed.

4.4. Data Analysis

I used an iterative, six-phase thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) informed by culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) and disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

4.4.1. Step-by-step coding process

Familiarization. All texts (reflections, notes, artifacts) were read multiple times; analytic memos captured early hunches about literacy/biliteracy, translanguaging, and ideological clarity.

Initial coding (inductive). Line-by-line, semantic and latent codes were generated from the data (e.g., *shifting language stance*, *separating Spanish/English “brains”*, *disciplinary text moves*). Codes were logged in a shared coding matrix (excerpt → initial code → memo → source).

Focused coding (iterative). Related inductive codes were clustered and, where relevant, **linked deductively** to concepts from the frameworks (e.g., *aligning language separation talk* with tensions in biliteracy development; *framing strategy talk* vs. *stance talk* in translanguaging). Redundant codes were merged; overly broad codes were split with operational definitions.

Candidate themes. Code clusters were elevated to theme candidates (e.g., *Clarifying literacy vs. biliteracy*, *Translanguaging as stance, not just strategy*, *Approximating disciplinary literacy in fieldwork*).

Review & refinement. Themes were checked against all data sources for coherence and representativeness; disconfirming/negative cases were actively sought and used to refine boundaries and rename themes for precision.

Define, name, illustrate. Final themes were defined with inclusion/exclusion criteria, analytic warrants, and representative excerpts; an audit trail documented all codebook revisions.

4.4.2. Data to theme progression examples

Examples in this context are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Data to theme progression examples

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Initial code (inductive)</i>	<i>Focused code (refined/linked)</i>	<i>Theme</i>
“My CT said we switch to English for writing because ‘that’s the testing language,’ but kids kept bringing Spanish into notes anyway.” (Jennifer)	Testing drives language choice	Assessment logics shaping language use	Translanguaging as stance, not just strategy
“I felt like I had two brains—Spanish during read-aloud and English during science. It made literacy feel different in each.” (Carrie)	“Two brains” talk	Tension between literacy and biliteracy goals	Clarifying literacy vs. biliteracy
“When we annotated captions and diagrams, students used Spanish to explain but wrote labels in English.” (Manuel)	Multilingual text moves	Cross-lingual disciplinary practices	Approximating disciplinary literacy in fieldwork

4.5. Positionality

As the first author, I occupied a dual role as both course instructor and primary researcher. This position afforded access to rich, situated narratives that emerged from participants' weekly reflections, classroom interactions, and field-based experiences. However, I acknowledge that this proximity carries the potential for confirmation bias in both data interpretation and participant responses. The inherent power dynamics of teacher–researcher relationships may have shaped the degree of openness in participants' contributions and influenced how I perceived and analyzed the data.

Recognizing these dynamics, I engaged in intentional strategies to mitigate bias and enhance trustworthiness. I cultivated a classroom environment that prioritized critical dialogue, vulnerability, and mutual respect, enabling participants to engage authentically with course content and research activities. Additionally, I implemented peer debriefing with a colleague who was not involved in the course, engaged in cross-checking interpretations to challenge my assumptions, and maintained a reflexive journal to document decision-making and note moments when my instructional role intersected with my analytic lens. These practices were integral to ensuring that the findings reflect participants' perspectives as faithfully as possible while maintaining ethical research standards.

4.6. Ethical Procedures

Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. The study followed institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, including secure storage of data, anonymization of identifying information, and transparency about the instructor–researcher role. Reflexive practices were employed throughout to ensure that findings accurately represented participants' perspectives and were not unduly influenced by the researcher's positionality.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of participants' reflections revealed two interrelated themes that illuminate how preservice bilingual teachers begin to connect theory and practice in ways that advance equity for emergent bilingual learners. First, *Intentional Literacy Practices as Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Pedagogy* captures how participants recognized and interpreted classroom strategies—such as predictable routines, multimodal vocabulary instruction, and the purposeful selection of multilingual texts—not merely as instructional techniques, but as deliberate acts of identity affirmation and community building. These practices reflected a pedagogical stance that positioned students' linguistic repertoires as assets, aligning with the core commitments of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. Second, *Translanguaging and Transmodal Pedagogies as Pathways to Equitable Disciplinary Literacy* highlights how participants observed and enacted strategies that enabled bilingual learners to access, navigate, and contribute to content-area discourse in subjects such as STEM and social studies. Here, translanguaging was not treated as a remedial scaffold, but as an intentional and equity-driven practice, while transmodal approaches—integrating visual, oral, written, and embodied modes—expanded opportunities for meaning-making across disciplinary contexts. Together, these themes demonstrate how targeted coursework and field experiences can foster ideological clarity and equip preservice bilingual teachers with the tools to design instruction that is linguistically inclusive, culturally responsive, and academically rigorous.

5.1. Intentional Literacy Practices as Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Pedagogy in Bilingual Teacher Preparation

A central theme that emerged from these preservice teacher reflections is the use of intentional literacy practices as culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. This theme encompasses the pedagogical moves, literacy strategies, and bilingual scaffolds that preservice teachers are

observing and analyzing across both their coursework—such as children’s literature studies—and their field placements. Their reflections reveal how thoughtfully selected books, dual-language texts, and interactive read-alouds are being used to engage students in meaningful language development while affirming their cultural identities. The preservice teachers noted how classroom routines, phonemic activities, and scaffolded vocabulary instruction serve as purposeful tools to support biliteracy, engagement, and comprehension. These practices reflect a broader understanding of literacy not only as a set of skills but as a vehicle for honoring students’ lived experiences, languages, and communities. Through this work, preservice teachers are beginning to develop ideological clarity about bilingual education, positioning themselves as future educators who can center language, identity, and belonging in their pedagogical decision-making.

5.1.1 Examples from the field illustrate how these intentional practices come to life in bilingual classrooms

Jennifer:

Looking at the different readings from books in the presentation, we see a wide variety of topics, language composition, and art styles. This variety allows students of all ages to enjoy a multilingual reading experience. The books expanded my worldview [...] while addressing topics such as global warming, judging physical appearance, and the pain of moving to a foreign land. In my field placement, the teacher used similar approaches, asking students for words with specific phonetic roots and having them physically “chop” words into syllables to stay engaged.

Carrie:

In Mrs. Ocampo’s classroom, Spanish language arts begins with students greeting one another in a circle to “turn their Spanish brains on.” She also starts each lesson by reviewing objectives so students know what they are expected to learn, and uses verbal repetition to practice pronunciation.

Manuel:

During story time, Ms. Postell is intentional in maximizing each book’s potential. Before reading, she discusses the title, author, and illustrator, and explains key vocabulary—such as wheelchair—in both Spanish and English. While reading, she engages students with questions and, afterward, connects the story to an activity. This, along with our author study, showed me the value of bilingual books and how to use them to enrich learning.

5.1.2. Intentional literacy practices function as culturally sustaining pedagogy

Across all three reflections, preservice teachers demonstrate a developing capacity to recognize how purposeful teaching strategies shape bilingual students’ linguistic, cognitive, and cultural growth. They are beginning to move beyond noticing *what* strategies teachers use to understanding *why* those strategies are deliberately chosen and how they function in a bilingual setting.

Jennifer’s account of students “chopping” words into syllables illustrates how multimodal, kinesthetic approaches can reinforce foundational literacy skills while functioning as cross-linguistic scaffolds (Escamilla et al., 2014; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Carrie’s reflection on predictable routines reframes them as intentional “language activation” moments that center Spanish in students’ academic identities (García & Wei, 2014). Manuel’s description of interactive read-alouds demonstrates how vocabulary instruction can become a site of critical literacy, where students not only learn words but also explore their sociocultural meanings (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2014).

At the same time, these examples reveal important tensions that deepen preservice teachers’ ideological clarity. Predictable routines may foster consistent language use, but could risk becoming formulaic over time. Similarly, multimodal strategies can strengthen biliteracy development, yet they must be carefully adapted to avoid privileging one language’s orthographic or phonological system over another (Hornberger, 2003). These insights signal a growing understanding that literacy practices are not neutral—they are pedagogical decisions that shape how bilingual students experience identity, belonging, and intellectual engagement.

The reflections ultimately frame bilingual classrooms as dynamic environments where language is intentionally activated, contextualized, and valued. Carrie's notion of "turning their Spanish brains on" aligns with translanguaging theory's emphasis on activating full linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014), even as it raises questions about reinforcing binary language separations (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Jennifer's observation of literature tackling themes such as migration and climate justice affirms culturally sustaining pedagogy's call for critical content (Paris & Alim, 2017) while inviting inquiry into how such topics are navigated across languages (Zavala, 2021). By maintaining the integrity of their observations while critically interpreting them, preservice teachers move toward "critical noticing" (Paris & Alim, 2017) — developing the ability to design instruction that affirms identities, promotes equity, and addresses the complex realities of bilingual education.

5.2. Translanguaging and Transmodal Pedagogies as Pathways to Equitable Disciplinary Literacy in Bilingual Classrooms

Another key finding to emerge from the preservice teachers' reflections is the critical role of translanguaging and transmodal pedagogies in supporting emergent bilingual learners' access to disciplinary literacy, particularly in STEM content areas. As these future educators engaged with course readings and field placements, they began to identify the limitations of generalized language instruction and the need for content-specific scaffolds that honor students' full linguistic and semiotic repertoires. Effective bilingual pedagogy, they observed, extends beyond vocabulary translation or simplified texts. It requires intentional, multimodal instructional strategies that integrate students' home languages, community knowledge, and cultural ways of knowing — strategies that situate disciplinary learning within culturally and linguistically sustaining frameworks (García & Kleyn, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2017). This evolving understanding reflects a broader shift toward ideological clarity about the intersections of language, content, and equity in bilingual education. As preservice teachers began to notice how language and learning are mediated across oral, written, visual, and gestural modes, they also began to envision themselves as educators capable of designing instruction that is linguistically sustaining and discipline-responsive.

5.2.1 Examples from their reflections illustrate how this theme emerges in practice

Jennifer:

This week's reading emphasized shifting from general literacy support for emergent bilingual learners to a more discipline-specific approach, noting the lack of STEM disciplinary literacy in early grades and the need for transmodal strategies that draw on linguistic and non-linguistic resources, including home languages. At the school, I worked with a small group whose varying fluency levels affected their engagement with the text; by clarifying difficult words and encouraging multiple modes of participation, I saw how flexible, multimodal strategies can support understanding.

Carrie:

One drawback of focusing on general language skills is that students may become "jack of all trades, but master of none" and struggle with discipline-specific vocabulary. In a spaghetti-tower building activity, we discussed introducing key terms while creating opportunities for bilingual students to share knowledge. Ms. Lopez modeled this when she asked a newcomer from Chile, "What happened at the beginning? ¿Qué pasó al principio del cuento?" — using translanguaging to clarify and support comprehension.

Manuel:

The reading highlighted how STEM poses challenges for bilingual learners due to specialized vocabulary and structure. I agree, noting how scientific language often incorporates international terms that do not translate easily. In my field placement, I saw this pedagogy in practice when the teacher guided students to summarize a story in three parts (beginning, middle, end) with a picture and a descriptive word for each—an approach that expanded vocabulary and strengthened students' ability to set a scene.

5.2.2. Critical insights about bilingual teacher learning

Across the three accounts, preservice teachers show an emerging awareness that *how* language is taught matters deeply for disciplinary access. Jennifer's example highlights the importance of multimodal scaffolds – gestures, visuals, and collaborative dialogue – to build comprehension, aligning with research on transmodal meaning-making (Rowse & Walsh, 2011). This also points to a broader pedagogical challenge: how to balance multimodal supports with the rigor of disciplinary discourse, ensuring that scaffolding does not oversimplify complex content.

Carrie's reflection underscores a related tension. Her observation that students risk becoming "jack of all trades, but master of none" without content-specific instruction calls attention to the limits of generalized language teaching. It affirms what Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) describe as the necessity of *discipline-specific literacy* – teaching the ways scientists, mathematicians, or engineers use language – rather than focusing solely on functional communication. Ms. Lopez's bilingual questioning further illustrates how translanguaging can make specialized language comprehensible while simultaneously validating students' home languages as tools for intellectual work. Yet this also raises questions about pacing and expectations: How can teachers balance immediate linguistic access with the long-term goal of disciplinary fluency?

Manuel's observation builds on this by showing how visual and linguistic supports – such as story summarization with images – can deepen conceptual understanding while expanding vocabulary. At the same time, his reflection raises an important consideration about gradual release: how do educators transition from highly scaffolded activities toward independent disciplinary thinking, ensuring students internalize the cognitive moves that such supports model?

5.2.3. Ideological shift: translanguaging is not a supplemental strategy but a pedagogical stance

The preservice teachers' reflections align with García and Wei's (2014) conception of translanguaging as an intentional act of equity, not merely a linguistic accommodation. Carrie's example of fluid language use during STEM instruction illustrates how translanguaging can create both linguistic access and relational trust – essential components of equitable pedagogy. Similarly, Manuel's recognition of the globalized nature of scientific vocabulary highlights why cross-linguistic unpacking is essential for conceptual understanding. Jennifer's emphasis on the marginalization of bilingual students in STEM connects this to a broader structural critique: when emergent bilinguals are excluded from rich disciplinary discourse in the early grades, they are systematically denied access to future opportunities in science and technology fields.

At the same time, these insights complicate existing scholarship by surfacing persistent tensions in bilingual education. While preservice teachers affirm bilingualism as a resource for identity and conceptual development, they also grapple with the balance between meeting students' immediate comprehension needs and cultivating the specialized language and habits of mind required for disciplinary expertise (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). These tensions reflect a growing ideological clarity – an understanding that equity in bilingual education is not just about access to language, but access to *powerful* disciplinary knowledge. These reflections suggest a shift from a narrow conception of language support toward a more expansive, interdisciplinary approach that weaves together disciplinary literacy, language development, and culturally responsive teaching. Preservice teachers are beginning to see that effective instruction for emergent bilinguals must mobilize multiple modes of meaning-making – linguistic, visual, gestural, and collaborative – while maintaining high expectations for disciplinary rigor. They are also developing an understanding of their pedagogical agency: the awareness that their decisions about language use, scaffolding, and multimodal design fundamentally shape students' opportunities to learn and belong.

In short, this second theme highlights not only the pedagogical strategies that support bilingual students' engagement with STEM content but also the ideological work required of teachers. As future educators learn to see translanguaging and transmodal practices as central – rather than peripheral – to disciplinary learning, they are preparing to design classrooms where emergent

bilingual students are not just participants but contributors to the production of academic knowledge.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how preservice bilingual teachers engaged with culturally and linguistically sustaining literacy instruction through coursework and field-based experiences. Through their reflections, participants revealed a growing awareness of the role that intentional literacy practices—such as read-alouds, scaffolded vocabulary instruction, and structured classroom routines—play in promoting biliteracy, affirming student identity, and fostering meaningful engagement. Their insights extended beyond early literacy to include the integration of translanguageing and transmodal pedagogies in content areas like STEM, underscoring the importance of responsive, multimodal strategies that recognize and build upon the full linguistic and semiotic repertoires of bilingual learners.

Collectively, these reflections highlight the transformative potential of bilingual teacher preparation programs that intentionally connect theory to practice. When preservice teachers are guided to observe classroom interactions with a critical lens and encouraged to reflect on the sociopolitical dimensions of language, literacy, and learning, they begin to develop the ideological clarity needed to make equity-centered pedagogical decisions. This clarity allows future educators to move beyond superficial understandings of literacy instruction and embrace practices that are culturally sustaining, community-rooted, and instructionally rigorous. This study extends existing frameworks of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy by illustrating how *critical noticing* develops in preservice bilingual teachers through the interplay of field-based observation, reflective practice, and explicit engagement with sociopolitical dimensions of literacy instruction. Additionally, this study offers a situated model of how preservice bilingual teachers develop ideological clarity by integrating disciplinary literacy with culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy.

At the same time, this study has limitations. First, it draws on a small sample of three participants within a single course at one university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study is also based on written reflections and observational data, rather than interviews or longitudinal tracking, which may have constrained the depth and range of insights into the participants' evolving pedagogical beliefs. Additionally, because the instructor served as the primary researcher, there is potential for researcher bias, particularly in the selection and interpretation of student reflections. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insight into how bilingual preservice teachers begin to make sense of sustaining pedagogies in literacy instruction. It underscores the need for teacher education programs to intentionally embed critical reflection, translanguageing theory, and disciplinary literacy into their curriculum, while also providing preservice teachers with real-world opportunities to enact these frameworks in supportive classroom contexts. Future research might expand this work by examining how these early insights evolve as preservice teachers transition into full-time classroom roles, or by exploring how collaborative inquiry and mentorship models can further strengthen bilingual teacher preparation. Ultimately, this study affirms that preparing teachers to serve bilingual learners well means preparing them to teach not only with strategies, but with vision, purpose, and conviction. By engaging with these global perspectives, this study situates preservice bilingual teachers' reflections within a broader transnational conversation about equitable and inclusive multilingual education. This positioning underscores that while our findings are context-specific, the processes of developing ideological clarity, integrating disciplinary literacy, and sustaining linguistic diversity are critical for bilingual teacher preparation worldwide.

7. Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer several important implications for the design and implementation of bilingual teacher preparation programs. First, the development of ideological clarity must be

positioned as a central goal of coursework and clinical practice. Preservice teachers need structured opportunities to grapple with the cultural, historical, and political dimensions of bilingual education and to reflect on how their own pedagogical decisions can either sustain or marginalize students' linguistic and cultural identities. Embedding readings, discussions, and assignments that explicitly center culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy—and encouraging preservice teachers to apply these frameworks in their field placements—can support this critical development.

Second, bilingual teacher educators should design learning experiences that bridge literacy methods with content area instruction, especially in disciplines like STEM where emergent bilingual students are often underserved. Coursework should model how to scaffold disciplinary language, promote multimodal meaning-making, and leverage students' home languages and cultural knowledge as legitimate resources for learning. Activities such as author studies, book evaluations, and content-integrated lesson planning can help preservice teachers build confidence in selecting and adapting texts that reflect the lived realities of their students.

Third, field experiences must be intentionally structured to foster critical noticing and pedagogical experimentation. Mentor teachers should be supported in modeling linguistically sustaining practices and encouraged to engage preservice teachers in discussions about why and how certain strategies work in bilingual classrooms. When possible, bilingual teacher preparation programs should partner with schools and educators who are already enacting the kinds of practices and ideologies aligned with sustaining pedagogy, ensuring that preservice teachers are not only exposed to effective strategies but also to equity-driven models of teaching.

Finally, teacher preparation programs should create space for preservice teachers to engage in collaborative reflection through writing, dialogue, and inquiry-based learning communities. The act of articulating what they notice, question, and hope to implement can help preservice teachers move from passive observers to active participants in shaping bilingual education. These practices not only strengthen their instructional skills but also reinforce their professional identities as culturally responsive, linguistically affirming educators.

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