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# Supporting English Language Learners' Experiences in the Classroom

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## Overview

In the United States, 9.6% of students are English Language Learners (ELL). At the state level, there is a significant increase in ELLs at 19.5% of Texas students learning English. This number again increases as we go into the Fort Worth Independent School District with 32.8% of the students being ELLs.

My Clinical (Student) Teacher experience at McLean 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Center opened my eyes to the language barriers that exist in Texas schools today. During the 2018-2019 school year, 30% of the student body at McLean 6<sup>th</sup> qualified for English Language support. I was able to see the way language supports were being put in place by the teachers. This is what led to my guided questions:

- 1) How were supports being used to enhance English Languages Learners in the classroom?
- 2) What supports were being used to enhance English Language Learners in the classroom?

## Method

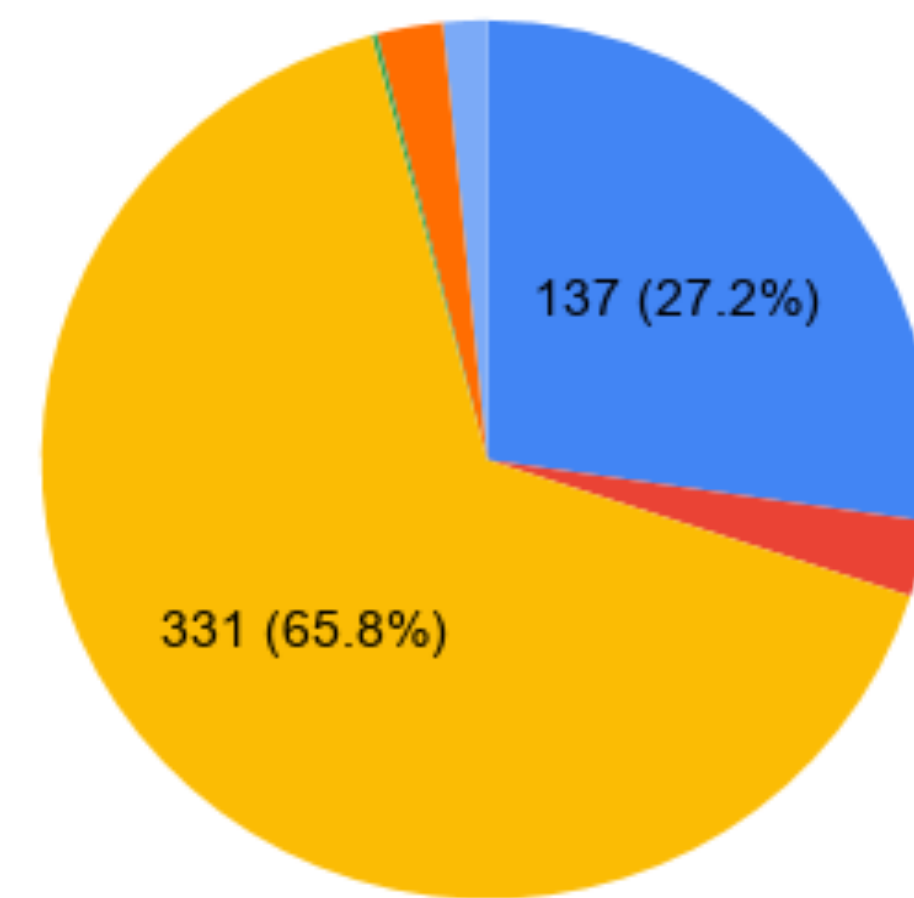
For my research, I created an anonymous survey using the TCU Qualtrics System. The survey was sent to 170 students at McLean 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Center. I received 51 responses to my survey.\* The survey was 6 questions long and focused on students' experiences with language supports. The 6 questions were both multiple choice and short answer.

- 1) What is your primary language spoken at home?
- 2) How helpful or unhelpful is your teacher when providing language supports?
- 3) How easy or difficult is it to obtain the resources that you need from your teacher?
- 4) How useful are the language support services provided?
- 5) What are some accommodations (resources) you receive from your teacher? For example: dictionaries, different text options, or before-after-school help?
- 6) How can your teachers provide better language supports?

## Demographics

Demographics of McLean 6th Grade Center 2018-2019

- White
- African American
- Hispanic
- American Indian
- Asian
- Two or More Races



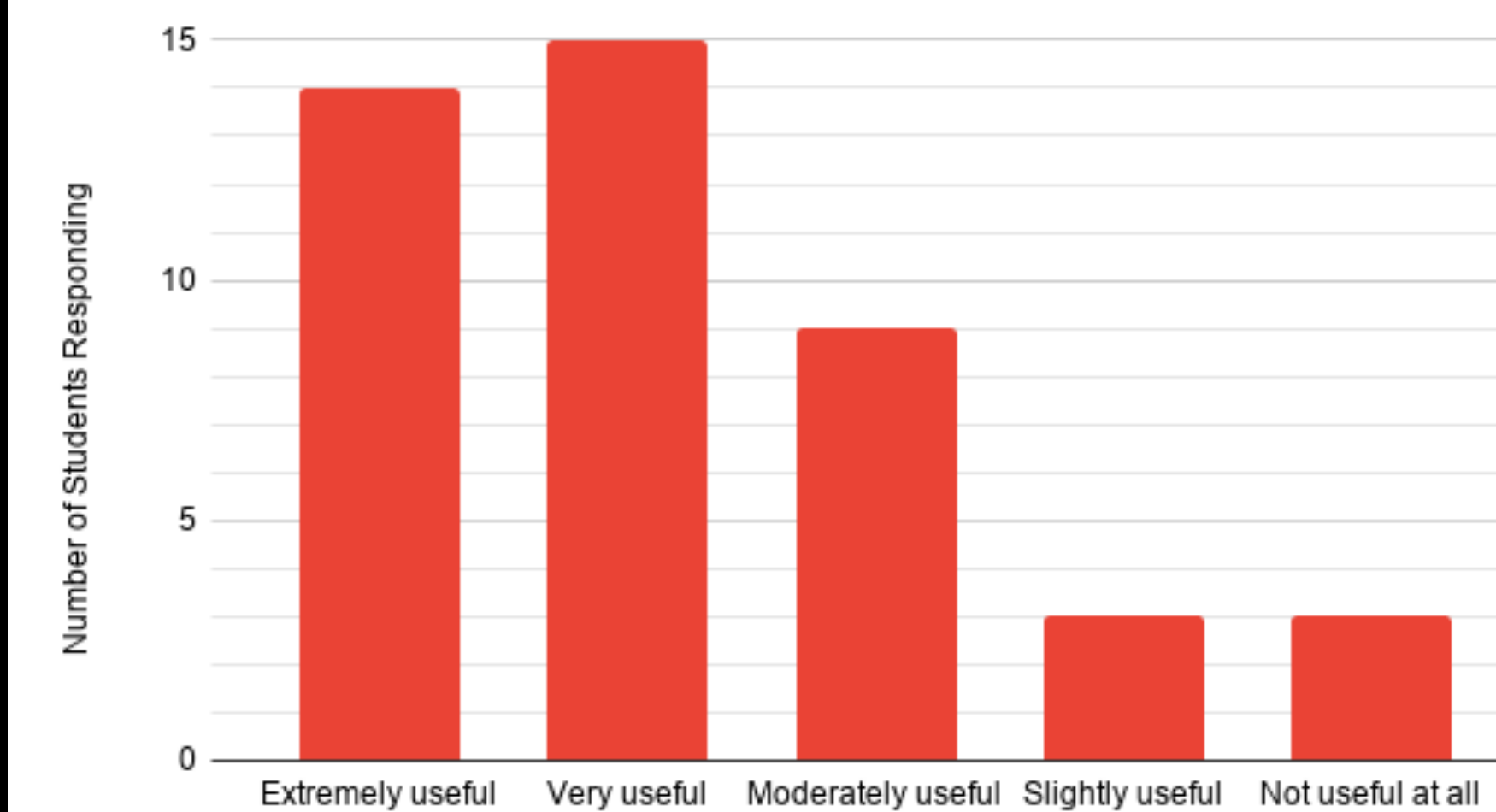
## Demographics Explained

The demographics for McLean 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Center were found using the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR). While the demographics are from the previous school year, the school has maintained very similar demographics for the past 5 school years. The student population thus maintains a similar need for specific supports.

The TAPR stated that 30.8% of the students were English Learners. Of those students who were English Learners, a majority spoke Spanish. Using the demographics from my survey, all of the students who said they required "language supports" spoke Spanish. This is true in the national level as well, where 76.6% of ELLs surveyed in 2018-2019 spoke Spanish.

## Supports

How useful are the language support services provided?



\*Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the survey had to be administered online. The lack of responses are due to the survey being optional, as well as some students not having access to the internet or a device. Had the survey been administered in class, I would have been able to get most of my students to participate, as it would have been an in class activity.

## Supports Explained

From the survey, I was able to obtain the students' opinions on how helpful the support services were.

- 87.81% of students felt that teachers provided slightly useful to extremely useful language supports.
- 43% of the students found it moderately easy to obtain those supports.
- When asked about what supports they received, 57.5% used dictionaries, 35% used before- after-school help, and 25% used audio options.
- When asked about what other services could provide better language support, 21.1% of students wanted instruction that focused on increasing language skills and 15.8% of students wanted a translator. The remaining 63.2% believed that the instruction did not need additional supports.

## Discussion

Based upon national, state, district, and the campus statistics, English Language Learners are a growing population in the American education system. My original questions focused on what supports students were receiving and how helpful/unhelpful the supports were in the classroom.

All students were provided language supports from their teachers. The supports range from dictionaries, audio options, differentiated texts, and before-school during lunch, and after-school help. Teachers evaluate the students every 6 weeks and then adjust accommodations. Students found these supports to be slightly to extremely useful. Most students said dictionaries and varied instructions were the best supports that teachers offered. With continued and persistent efforts, these students may eventually no longer rely on these language supports.

One student made an important distinction in the survey response; while his/her English is growing, his/her parents only speak Spanish. Information distributed by individual teachers is commonly only given in English. So, important information about the students learning is not being relayed to an essential student support system, the family or guardians of the student. 15.8% of the students commented on the school's need for a translator. In future studies, it would be beneficial to see how campuses offer support for the families of English Language Learners.

## References

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