

# Emergent bilinguals lost vital instruction during remote learning, study shows

November 15 2022, by Brian Cox

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Using the dscout smartphone app, 50 teachers from 10 different states filed daily reports over the amount of language-rich instruction their students received over a two-week period of remote learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Brian Cox. All Rights Reserved.

Emergent bilingual learners—students developing proficiency in English and another language—in kindergarten through second grade saw significant loss of language-rich instruction during remote learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a study by Amy Crosson, associate professor of education in the Penn State College of Education.

The research by Crosson and Rebecca D. Silverman, associate professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education, was recently published in *Reading Research Quarterly*.

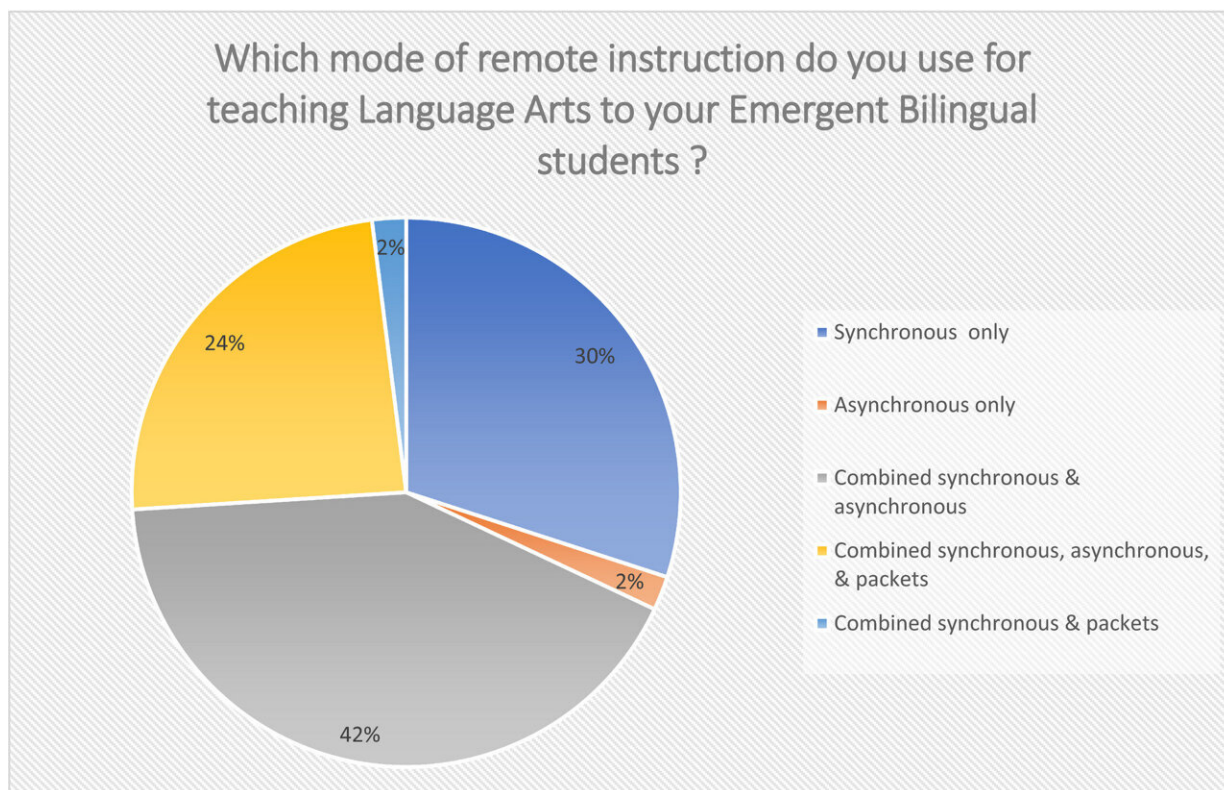
The "diary study" was conducted during school closures. Teachers submitted daily examples of literacy instruction with emergent bilingual children using photographs of literacy activities, video reflections on how the activities played out during remote instruction and observations about communications with multilingual families. Teachers also were asked to compare how they engaged emergent bilingual students in literacy activities in-person versus during remote instruction.

"I wanted a method that would allow me to understand how teachers were experiencing remote instruction, what decisions they were making on a day-to-day basis, and how literacy instruction was playing out with their children," Crosson said. "I didn't want to take just a broad look, I wanted to know what was happening day-to-day."

By using a daily diary method, Crosson said they got a more nuanced assessment of how much [language](#)-rich instruction—activities such as book discussions and narrative writing Crosson said are vital—emergent bilingual students were missing by learning remotely.

"One of the major findings is with respect to foundational, code-related skills like learning to decode words, teachers reported a small reduction in instruction," Crosson said. "In contrast, it was those language-rich

skills that were severely disrupted during remote instruction. Teachers reported providing much less instruction that would engage kids in book discussions and extended writing and building knowledge of word meanings. Foundation skills are critical, but also these language-rich interactions are essential to long-term literacy outcomes."



Instructional Modes Used for Literacy Instruction with Emergent Bilinguals During COVID-19 Remote Instruction. Credit: *Reading Research Quarterly* (2021). DOI: 10.1002/rrq.456

Fifty teachers from 10 states used a smartphone app to report. In addition to the general daily reporting, participants also chose three "focal" children and described how language-rich activities affected

them.

Crosson said Penn State's outreach helped her connect to many teachers interested in taking part in a study using an uncommon method.

"The network the Penn State College of Education has with educators and administrators was important—even well beyond Pennsylvania," she said. "That network was part of the approach that helped me reach so many teachers in so many places. I didn't realize just how incredible that advantage would be.

"Methodologically, this research expands the way we can we try to understand teachers' relationships with families and how [teachers](#) are making sense of the challenges to instruction and the innovations and what's successful on a day-to-day basis."

The challenge is how to apply what has been learned now that students are back to in-person learning.

"The key takeaway is thinking 'What do we do now?'" she said. "Where do we need to focus our energies? Where do we need to funnel resources? We ought to be thinking about that population of emergent bilinguals in the early elementary grades and especially thinking about how to funnel resources toward language-focused [literacy](#) instruction that was disrupted during that time and putting a lot of effort there."

**More information:** Amy C. Crosson et al, Impact of COVID-19 on Early Literacy Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals, *Reading Research Quarterly* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/rrq.456](https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.456)

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