



## The Marco DALE Baseline Study Final Report

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## WIDA Research

WIDA research expands knowledge on effectively teaching multilingual learners and assessing what they know and can do in a fair and valid way. We work in partnership with districts, states, and national experts to conduct research focused on understanding and supporting the highest quality educational practices and outcomes for multilingual learners to inform educators, policymakers, families/caregivers, and the research community.

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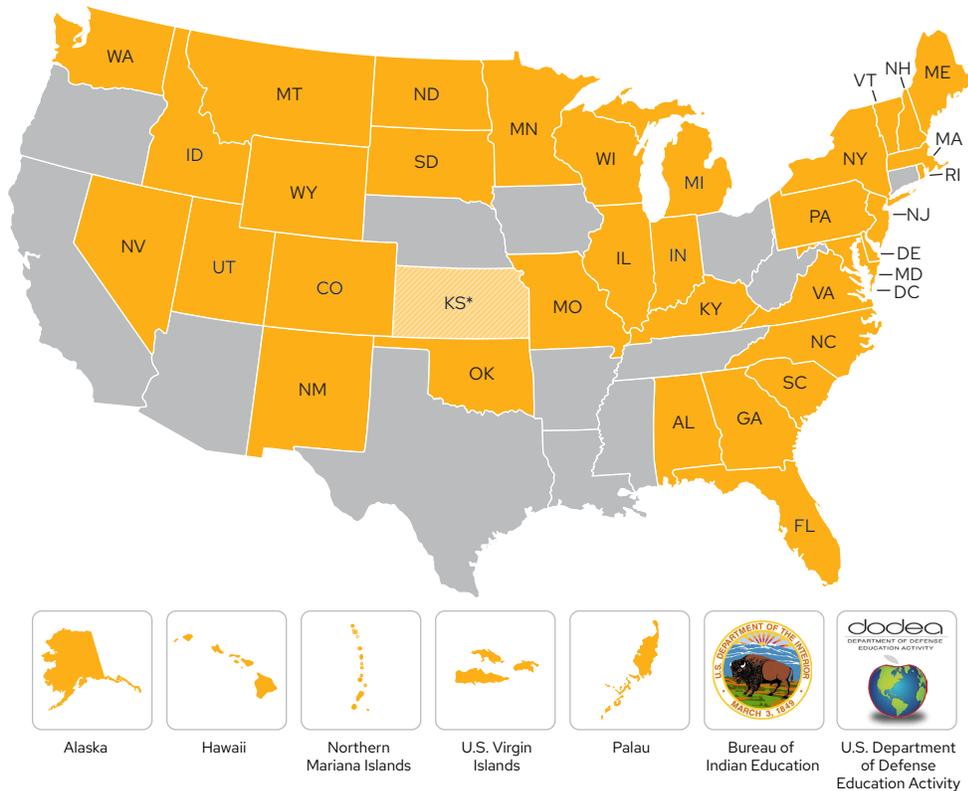
# Abstract

In 2023, WIDA published the Marco de los estándares del desarrollo auténtico del lenguaje español (Marco DALE). This study examines baseline data from Marco DALE, revealing the status of the framework in the field, its most used components, as well as the challenges and barriers for its implementation. The report provides an overview of the framework’s value from the perspective of different educational interest holders and recommendations on how to increase implementation in school classrooms. Findings suggest that the Marco DALE features a high-quality, evidence-based design, and that implementation could increase by developing additional support resources for educators.

## Introduction and Purpose

The Marco DALE provides a high-quality framework to support the language development needs of multilingual learners. At present, the implementation and use of the framework within the WIDA Consortium (Figure 1) is still in the initial stages after its launch in the fall of 2023. This baseline study analyzes the patterns of implementation of the Marco DALE and the challenges for its utilization. Data was collected through a survey, individual and group interviews, and observations in multilingual learning environments within the consortium. Through the analysis of this data, the study sought to surface systemic and instructional insights that promote reflection and inform the design of supplemental resources or actions that support the needs of educators of multilingual learners. This baseline report serves as the foundation for further exploration in the upcoming years.

**Figure 1**  
WIDA Consortium Map



*\*WIDA Alternate ACCESS user.*

## Research Questions

With the overarching goal of this inquiry being to produce actionable insights, this baseline report presents findings that were guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the status of Marco DALE’s adoption and utilization among educators?
2. How do educators perceive the effectiveness and relevance of each of the major components of Marco DALE?
3. Which components of the Marco DALE are most frequently implemented by educators, and what are the factors that contribute to this prevalence?
4. What are the primary supports and barriers that influence educators’ engagement with Marco DALE?

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study builds upon multiple complementary perspectives on the complex processes involved in multilingual literacy development and their connection to the Marco DALE implementation. Lev S. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory underscores the elements of social interaction and cultural tools in shaping language learning, while translanguaging theory highlights the dynamic mobilization of multilingual learners’ full linguistic repertoires. The ecological systems theory provides a lens through which to examine how the education community (schools, families, communities) interact to influence engagement, barriers, and learning outcomes. In addition, bilingual education and dual language models provide a foundation to understand the interactions between language and literacy skills development. Finally, Bloom’s revised taxonomy on the development of thinking skills, where distinct types and levels of knowledge—factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive—converge, correlates to key components in the Marco DALE.

### Suggested Readings Related to the Theoretical Framework:

Gauvain, M. (2008). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. In M. M. Haith & J. B. Benson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of infant and early childhood development* (pp. 404–413). Elsevier. [https://files.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/4016/files/2022/08/Vygotskys\\_Sociocultural\\_Theory.pdf](https://files.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/4016/files/2022/08/Vygotskys_Sociocultural_Theory.pdf)

Vogel, S., & Garcia, O. (2017). Translanguaging. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.181>.

EBSCO. (2024). *Ecological systems theory*. Retrieved 8 Jan. 2026 from <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/psychology/ecological-systems-theory>.

Ponte, M. (2025). *Dual language implementation: Program models and best practices for a successful program*. Participate Learning. <https://www.participatelearning.com/blog/dual-language-implementation-models/>

Owen Wilson, L. (2016). *Anderson and Krathwohl Bloom’s Taxonomy Revised*. Quincy College. [https://www.quincycollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-and-Krathwohl\\_Revised-Blooms-Taxonomy.pdf](https://www.quincycollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-and-Krathwohl_Revised-Blooms-Taxonomy.pdf)

# Research Design

## Methods of Inquiry

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the implementation of the Marco DALE with a focus on standards integration, instructional alignment, and practitioner experience. Data sources included a large-scale survey (n=354 complete responses), eleven semi-structured interviews and focus groups with educators of multilingual learners and instructional leaders, and two classroom observations using a validated observation tool. A total of 464 responses were initiated as part of the 2025 Marco DALE Baseline Study but only 354 were completed. Partial responses were excluded because they did not provide sufficient information across the full set of questions to allow for systematic coding and statistical analysis. To ensure consistency and comparability across items, only fully completed surveys were included in the analysis; therefore, the sample size is n=354. In addition to the survey, 16 interviews were originally secured, of which 11 were completed; four classroom observations were planned, and two were successfully conducted.

The survey instrument was designed to assess familiarity with the Marco DALE components, frequency of use, perceived value, and alignment with academic standards. It included both closed-ended items and open-ended prompts to elicit practitioners' voices. Responses were coded using a thematic framework aligned to the observation tool dimensions: implementation, alignment, component integration, translanguaging, and support systems. Frequency counts were generated for each component<sup>1</sup> (e.g., *usos clave del lenguaje* [Key Language Uses or KLUs], *expectativas del lenguaje* [Language Expectations], *ideas principales* [Big Ideas]), and open-ended responses were synthesized to surface patterns in usage, barriers, and instructional impact.

Interview and focus group participants were selected to represent a range of roles (e.g., classroom teachers, curriculum designers, language specialists, higher education faculty), and geographic contexts. Interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured protocol with questions that probed familiarity with the Marco DALE framework, insights into professional learning, use of specific components, standards alignment, implementation challenges, and recommendations. Transcripts were coded deductively using the same analytic framework as the survey and inductively to capture emergent themes such as translanguaging, biliteracy, and system-level disconnects. Direct quotes were extracted to illustrate practitioner perspectives.

School selection for classroom observations was done based on recommendations from survey respondents or interview/focus groups participants and took into consideration the following two factors: use of the Marco DALE and familiarity with the framework. From 10 schools contacted, only four expressed interest in participating. Four classroom observations were planned, but only two were completed. The two classroom observations that were not completed occurred due to barriers with delayed approvals from state research review boards and scheduling conflicts. Classroom observations were conducted in four different classrooms over 3 days, with two different teachers. Classrooms included newcomers, bilingual, and dual language programs. The observation tool used included 30+ dimensions across implementation, alignment, component use, and support systems. The observer

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the original Spanish names of the Marco DALE components followed by their English equivalent as they appear in the WIDA English Language Development Standards, 2020 Edition.

rated each dimension on a 5-point scale and recorded qualitative notes. Observation data was used to validate survey and interview findings, particularly around the use of mentor texts, graphic organizers, and expressive writing tasks. Observations also provided insights into how components from the Marco DALE were enacted in real-time instruction, including integrating translanguaging and contrastive analysis.

The triangulated approach allowed for both breadth and depth, capturing quantitative patterns of use and qualitative insights into pedagogical practice, system-level barriers, and professional learning needs. Together, these methods offer a comprehensive and practitioner-grounded view of the Marco DALE and its implementation. The combined evidence from surveys, interviews, and observations represents a comprehensive snapshot of how educators, administrators, and higher education voices are engaging with the Marco DALE at multiple levels of practice. The study prioritized educators' voices, instructional context, and systems-level insight, ensuring that findings are not only descriptive but also actionable through the recommendations.

The study achieved the objective of providing a robust foundation to inform WIDA's work around standards and professional learning, as well as potential future research pathways. It also sets the stage for future inquiries to determine the progress, dissemination, and expansion of the Marco DALE across the consortium.

## **Limitations**

Despite the rigor of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged.

### ***Survey Response Completeness***

A total of 464 surveys<sup>2</sup> were initiated, but only 354 were fully completed and, therefore, included in the analysis. Partial responses were excluded for the following reasons: a) respondents did not answer questions beyond the demographics section, and b) only complete responses ensure consistency and comparability across items. While this approach strengthens the reliability of findings, it also means that some perspectives might not have been captured in the final survey dataset and that respondents who did not finish the survey could differ in meaningful ways from those who completed it.

### ***Interview Sample Size and Representation***

The 11 interviews conducted, out of the 16 planned, provided rich qualitative insights, but the sample size is limited relative to the diversity of bilingual education contexts nationwide. Most participants were drawn from districts with active adoption of the Marco DALE, which may not reflect experiences in states or districts where the framework is less established.

### ***Observation Scope***

Ten schools were originally planned for classroom observations. Out of these, only four schools confirmed interest. In the end, the sample size was two schools where classroom observations were completed, out of four planned. While these observations were productive and validated by the survey and interview findings, they cannot be generalized across all grade levels or subject areas. The limited scope reduces the ability to fully capture variability in instructional practice.

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<sup>2</sup> n=354 survey responses (out of 464 initiated); 11 complete interviews (out of 16 secured); two completed classroom observations (out of four planned)

## ***System Level Constraints***

Several findings highlight systemic barriers (e.g., lack of state endorsement, higher education disconnect, cost of materials). These insights are based on educator perceptions rather than direct policy analysis. As such, conclusions about system-level gaps should be interpreted as practitioner-informed rather than definitive.

## ***Timeframe of Framework Implementation***

The Marco DALE is new in many contexts due to its recent launch in the fall of 2023. Its adoption has happened only in the past 2 years. Hence, the reason this baseline study is timely and foundational as it provides preliminary outcomes and potential to adjust and execute the needed pivots. It is recommended that mid-launch additional studies be conducted in 3–5 years to assess its sustained impact on biliteracy development and standards mastery.

## **Data Sources**

### ***Survey Data***

- **Instrument:** 354 completed Qualtrics surveys.
- **Scope:** Educators across multiple districts, grade levels, and roles.
- **Content:** Familiarity with the Marco DALE, component use, alignment to standards, perceived value, barriers, and professional learning needs.
- **Analysis:** Frequency counts, coding matrices, thematic synthesis of open-ended responses.

### ***Interview and Focus Groups Data***

- **Participants:** Eleven semi-structured interviews (out of 16 planned) with educators of multilingual students, curriculum designers, language specialists, higher education faculty, and one student-teacher.
- **Protocol:** Interview questionnaire (aligned to survey)
- **Content:** Familiarity, training, component use, alignment, challenges, recommendations, translanguaging practices, system-level context.
- **Analysis:** Deductive coding aligned to study instrument dimensions, inductive coding for emergent themes (e.g., translanguaging, biliteracy, system disconnects); direct quotes extracted.

### ***Observation Data***

- **Tool:** Observation tool with 30+ dimensions across implementation, alignment, component use, and support systems.
- **Scope:** Two classroom observations (out of four planned).
- **Content:** Ratings on a 5-point scale, qualitative notes on instructional practice, component integration, translanguaging, and scaffolding.
- **Analysis:** Validation of survey and interview findings, identification of instructional exemplars, and challenges.

## Document Review

- **Unit plans:** Final bilingual unit plan with all supporting documents and resources, WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition, Marco DALE, ACTFL® framework (also known as the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages by the National Standards Collaborative Board).
- **Content:** Standards integration, language objectives, cross-language connections, scaffoldings strategies, standards components, and alignment.
- **Analysis:** Crosswalked against observation to assess alignment, use of components, and instructional coherence.

## Data Snapshot

### Survey Data

Educators completed a Qualtrics survey to provide feedback on the Marco DALE. This section provides a quick snapshot of the findings of the study. For more detailed information, please refer to the Results and Findings section.

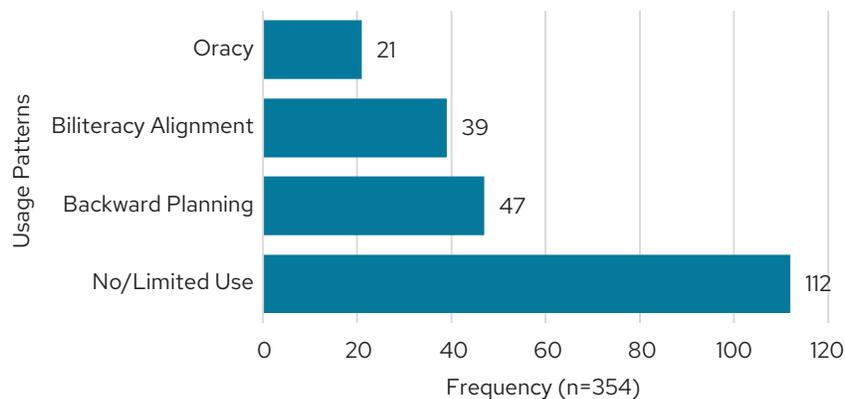
Scope: Survey n=354 out of 464

### Usage Patterns

Usage patterns among educators are shown in Figure 2. Among the 354 survey respondents, a sizable portion (112) reports no or limited use, in contrast to notable groups who are experimenting with backward planning (47) and biliteracy alignment (39). This suggests that early adoption is concentrated on specific practices rather than widespread implementation.

**Figure 2**

Usage Patterns in the Marco DALE

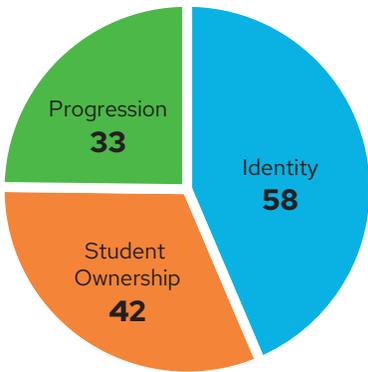


## Perceived Value

Educators perceive the value of the Marco DALE as a tool for strengthening identity (58), and student ownership (42), as shown in Figure 3. These values highlight the framework’s potential to empower learners. Progression (33), though, is less frequently cited, pointing to a need for clearer scaffolding across grade levels.

**Figure 3**

What Is the Perceived Value of the Marco DALE?

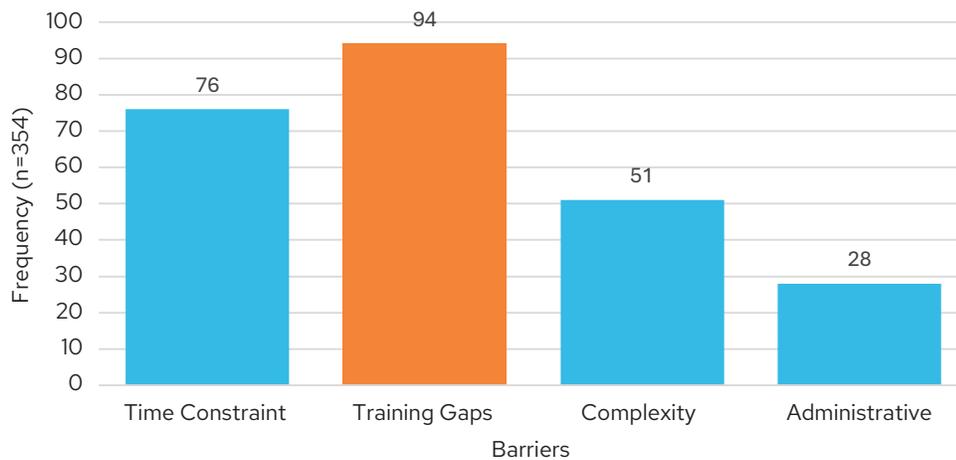


## Barriers to Implementation

The most pressing challenges facing the implementation of the Marco DALE are training gaps (94) and time constraints (76), as shown in Figure 4. Challenges such as complexity (51) and administrative hurdles (28) further limit uptake. These findings underscore that professional learning and system-level support are prerequisites for scaling.

**Figure 4**

Barriers to the Marco DALE Implementation

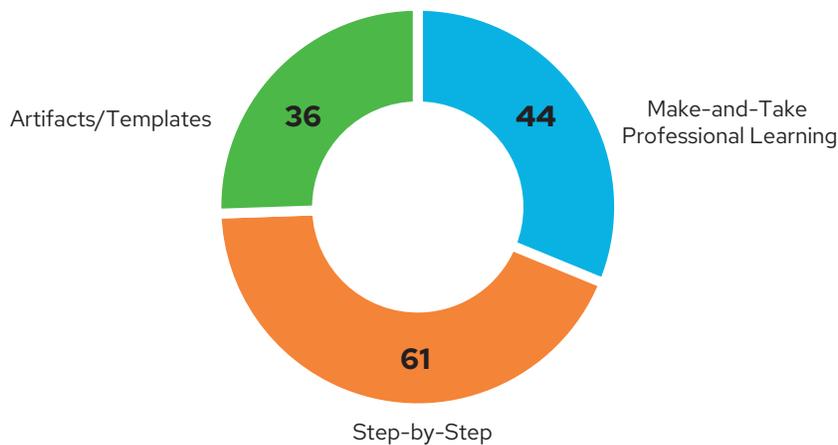


## Professional Support

Educators call for highly practical support, as shown in Figure 5. This support includes step-by-step guidance (61) (i.e., coaching and follow-up), make-and-take professional learning (44), and ready-to-use artifacts/templates (36). This reflects a desire for hands-on, immediately applicable resources rather than abstract theory.

**Figure 5**

The Marco DALE Professional Learning Needs

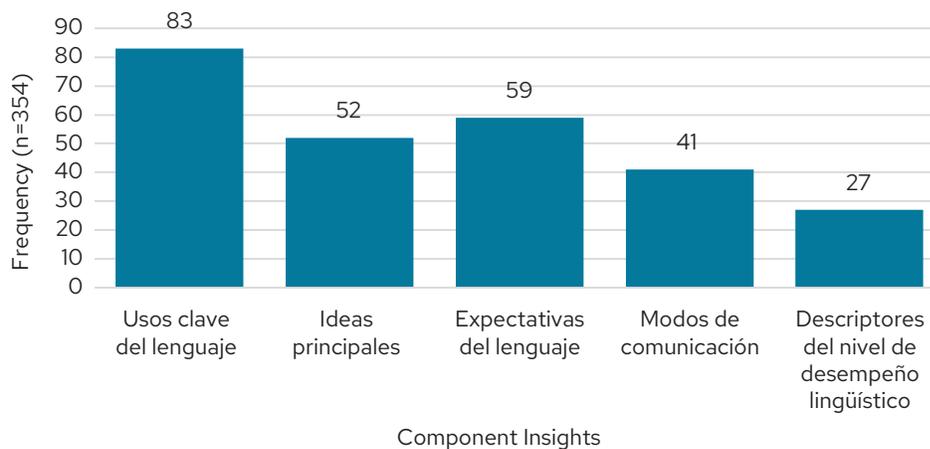


## Component-Specific Insights

The usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs) and the expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations) are the two components of the Marco DALE that resonate the most among survey respondents, with values of 83 and 59, respectively, as shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

Insights by the Marco DALE Components

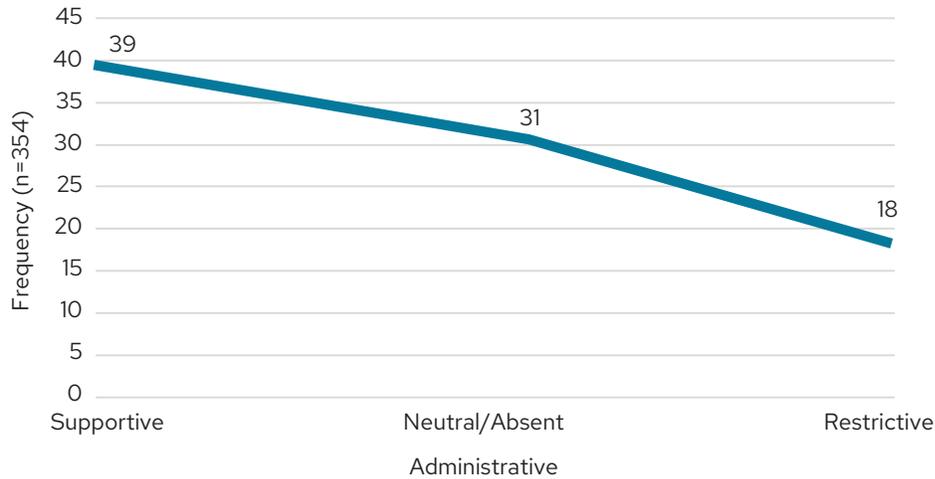


## Administrative and Systemic Factors

Support for the adoption and implementation of the Marco DALE is mixed, as shown in Figure 7. While the majority of respondents report supportive contexts (39), others describe the support as neutral/absent (31) or restrictive (18). This variability indicates that system-level alignment is uneven and may influence adoption rates.

**Figure 7**

Administrative and Systems Support

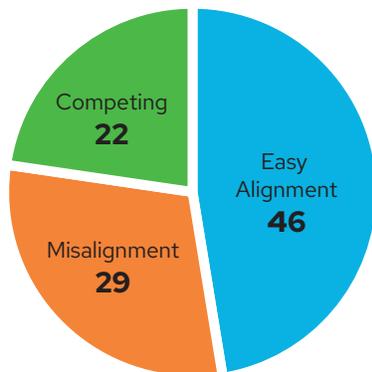


## Cross-Framework Alignment

Educators find easy alignment (46) in some areas, but misalignment (29) and competing frameworks (22) remain obstacles, as shown in Figure 8. This highlights the importance of positioning the Marco DALE within the broader ecosystem of standards and curricula.

**Figure 8**

Cross-Framework Alignment



## Interview Data

Interviews were conducted with educators to gather their feedback on, among other topics, the familiarity, components, and alignment of the Marco DALE. This section provides key findings from their responses to the interview questions, along with selected supporting quotes.

Scope: Interviews n=11 out of 16

### ***Familiarity With the Marco DALE***

Some educators report the use and implementation of the framework since its endorsement and have made connections to the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition. They state high familiarity, especially among bilingual educators and curriculum designers, and lower familiarity in higher education contexts.

#### **Quotes:**

“Much more helpful than [the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition]”

“Intentional nuances of Spanish”

“not always intuitive digital resources (digital explorer)”

### ***Training Experiences***

Training is limited and most of the time it happens at conferences or through some workshops. Professional learning is reported as inconsistent and often surface-level. Educators want sustained, practice-based training with coaching support. There is no systematic professional learning pipeline, and no connection to higher education teacher preparation programs. This leads to frustration as there is no clear guidance.

#### **Quotes:**

“more videos of classroom practice.”

“a workshop where you can sit and do half day and everyone brings a unit”

“no training...”

### ***Component Specific Insights***

The usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs) and the expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations) are cited as the most used. The ideas principales (Big Ideas) and modos de comunicación (Modes of Communication) are referenced but harder to digest. Translanguaging awareness is repeatedly highlighted as a key element within instruction. Translanguaging is seen as transformative and clear as a definition, but not actionable or unclear on how to implement them in the classroom. Educators struggle with unpacking descriptors (i.e., descriptores Podemos [Can Do Descriptors] or descriptores del nivel de desempeño lingüístico [Proficiency Level Descriptors or PLDs]) and want clearer models per subject.

## ***Cross-Framework Alignment and Teaching Practice***

Educators report that the Marco DALE aligns well with state standards and curriculum. This is clear and evident in practice, especially in the context of writing, oracy, and through biliteracy programs. The lack of formal state level endorsement in some cases is what is delaying uptake of the framework as well as delays for the integration in teacher preparation programs. Higher education reports no use of the framework in their contexts.

## ***Assessment***

Educators wish for more assessment of integration. Assessment of diagnostics is weak. The descriptors Podemos (Can Do Descriptors) provide some support but this is not usual in Spanish. There is a need for formative assessment models tied directly to the Marco DALE.

### **Quotes:**

“Wishes they [WIDA] did more of assessment”

“What is the gold standard?”

## ***Ease of Integration***

Teachers find the usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs) and the expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations) easy to connect with, but the complexity lies in unpacking the whole framework. The lack of ready-to-use lesson samples and scope/sequence hinders the implementation of the framework.

### **Quote:**

“time to go through and unpack.”

## ***Barriers***

There are cost barriers in some contexts because the implementation and use of the Marco DALE is not a mandate. The number of resources and materials is limited, which results in limited implementation. Advocacy is needed to support official adoption/endorsement as well as investment in all the resources needed.

## Observation Data

This section provides the key findings of the classroom observations. The findings shed light on the classroom practices educators use to implement the Marco DALE to support Spanish language development as well as the challenges and barriers they face to fully embrace the framework.

Scope: Observations n=2 out of 4.

**Table 1**

Implementation and Teacher Practice

Aspect	Observation 1	Observation 2
<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incipient level</li> <li>• Implicit guidance through some of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-level intentional insights and knowledge of not only framework implementation but also framework integration</li> <li>• The teacher guided students through scaffolded activities built from background knowledge to oracy to expressive writing.</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General best practices</li> <li>• Limited bilingual focus</li> <li>• Basic scaffolds and visuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilingual best practices</li> <li>• Mentor texts, multimodal scaffolds</li> <li>• Contrastive analysis, visible classroom strategies</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Moves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not focused</li> <li>• Disconnect with some of the learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge through modeling</li> <li>• Talk moves in both languages, and structured discussions throughout</li> <li>• Good progression in modes of communication and implementation of the ideas principales (Big Ideas)</li> </ul>
<b>Content Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with content and language standards</li> <li>• Subject connections visible in displays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same alignment evident</li> <li>• Reinforced through text-based and writing displays</li> </ul>

Aspect	Observation 1	Observation 2
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formative checks, teacher observations</li> <li>Use of graphic organizers and learner writing</li> <li>Some unintentional elements to monitor student progress through self-designed spreadsheets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance tasks</li> <li>Varied communication modes, graphic organizers, vocabulary and mentor text, language choice boards</li> </ul>
<b>Component Insights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal evidence of the Marco DALE components</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear use of the ideas principales (Big Ideas), usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs), modos de comunicación (Communication Modes), and expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations)</li> <li>Progressions from Interpretive to Expressive</li> </ul>
<b>Translanguaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not observed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich translanguaging, cultural connection, intentional integration of prior knowledge and lived/cultural experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Support Systems and System Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaffolds present but less differentiated</li> <li>Evident administrative support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiated scaffolds by proficiency</li> <li>Intentional resource choices</li> <li>Principal and educator support evident</li> </ul>

There were clear differences between both observations, presenting clear and detailed examples of what a beginner implementation and a more comprehensive approach look like. The second observation showed how the implementation of the Marco DALE plus its integration with the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition and state standards can look like. The high-quality work allowed for the visualization of well-balanced academic rigor, scaffolded access, and translanguaging models. The strength lies not only in the implementation and practice but in careful planning, component alignment, and choice of differentiated supports that lead to a high-level instructional coherence.

# Results and Findings

## Key Trends

Educators value the Marco DALE for its clarity and classroom usefulness, but adoption is constrained by training gaps, time to implement, and administrative support.

The baseline study highlights several key trends in the implementation of the Marco DALE. There is a prevalence in the use, access, and implementation of specific components that directly connect to classroom practice as reported by educators. In addition, specific challenges and barriers were stated based on the level of access to professional learning, as well as the complexity of unpacking certain elements of the framework.

Some of the components most widely used include the usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUUs), the expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations), and in some cases the ideas principales (Big Ideas). All these components emerge in the study as the most widely adopted because of their “clarity and practical use” for the classroom context. In addition, educators recognize the value of the alignment of this Spanish language development framework with current district and classroom resources, because it supports “advancing learning-centered approaches for multilingual learners.”

At the same time, there are persistent barriers identified by participants, which include limited access to training, time constraints, and not enough administrative support.

## Usage Patterns

Implementation is in its initial stages, with selective use of components and stronger uptake among language specialists and in dual language contexts.

In terms of usage patterns, most respondents state to be in the initial stages of adoption. Many of the respondents who are most often responsible for implementing the Marco DALE are in the roles of literacy coaches, language program coordinators, and/or language specialists, which in some way limits direct implementation in the classroom context, as they focus solely on professional learning for educators. Hence, responses of not familiar, have not used, or no training can be correlated to them not currently teaching Spanish, being new to their district, or working solely in administrative support roles.

### Quote:

“I have not used any aspects...”

However, the following usage patterns stand out:

- **Light to moderate integration tied to planning:** Educators use the framework to backward plan and set language objectives especially in dual language contexts.

### Quote:

“We use them to backwards plan and make our units of instruction more rigorous”

- **Selective component use:** The usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs), ideas principales (Big Ideas), expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations), and modos de comunicación (Modes of Communication) are the most frequently referenced components throughout the survey and interviews, as well as prevalent during observations.
  - The usos clave del lenguaje (Key Language Uses or KLUs) are the most practical for lesson planning, oracy, and function-focused objectives. Educators observe clearer task-language alignment and natural progression across the usos clave del lenguaje.
  - The ideas principales (Big Ideas) are valued for honoring multilingual identity and connecting purpose to interaction. Educators perceive them as the “most useful” without extensive training.
  - The expectativas del lenguaje (Language Expectations) are reported as frequently used to articulate language features in pre-/post-assessments and anchor objectives.
  - The modos de comunicación (Modes of Communication) are highlighted for multimodal production and biliteracy alignment in Spanish. They are cited as practical for classroom discourse and multimodal projects.
  - Results from the survey and interviews show multiple requests for more detailed, grade-clustered descriptores del nivel de desempeño lingüístico (Proficiency Level Descriptors or PLDs) that are comparable to the PLDs in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition.

**Quotes:**

“I have used KLUs to plan for lessons. Especially when I must think about oracy.”

“[Los] Modos de Comunicación me ha[n] ayudado mucho para facilitar el desarrollo de la comunicación.”

- **Bridge in the classroom:** Translanguaging is consistently mentioned both in the survey and interviews, as well as observed at the two schools visited, as a celebration of learners’ identity and a vehicle to enhance learning.

**Quote:**

“I appreciate that the Big Ideas and [translanguaging to] honor multilingual identity and why one uses language for global interaction with other people and communities. I have used this to highlight these practices and ideas with educators I work with.”

## Perceived Value of the Marco DALE

The Marco DALE is widely seen as making academic language visible, teachable, and providing a bridge between language and content.

Educators consistently mention the above takeaway. Even those who report minimal use see the value in it and consider that this perception will only increase with the right amount of time dedicated to its implementation and the right levels of professional training.

The perceived value of the Marco DALE among educators shows areas of strength and tension, as follows:

- **Educator mindset and identity as language professionals**
  - **Identity expansion:** Respondents who identify as educators describe the Marco DALE as a resource that supports them in thinking like language educators and going beyond the content.
  - **Ownership and clarity for students:** Several respondents state an increased student ownership of language features and a clear definition of language goals.
- **Cross-framework tensions and misalignments**
  - **Descriptores del nivel de desempeño lingüístico (Proficiency Learning Descriptors or PLDs):** Respondents compare the descriptores del nivel de desempeño lingüístico in the Marco DALE with the PLDs in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition. Educators describe them as “less developed” and consider that clearer progression artifacts could support their improvement.
  - **Document complexity:** Educators feel overwhelmed with the length of the Marco DALE document. The fact that all grades are in one document makes it difficult to use and implement. Bilingual education specialists recommend that educators “...consider only their grade cluster.”
  - **ACTFL®/State standards primacy:** Some districts lean first on ACTFL® or state standards, making the Marco DALE “another layer” they need to consider and reconcile.
  - **Clear alignment wins:** Many of the respondents note “easy alignment with [the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition]” and better coherence when backward planning across content and language.
  - **Bridging English and Spanish literacy:** Respondents value the Marco DALE as a solid foundation for biliteracy, pointing out how Spanish language development supports English language proficiency and content mastery.
  - **Where does misalignment appear:** Respondents report different levels of complexity, especially when it comes to the grade-level clusters, gaps in professional learning, and the fact that the Marco DALE is “another [set of] standard[s] to add,” which makes educators feel overwhelmed and hinders the usability of the framework, especially in districts where the priority is implementing the state standards.

## Challenges and Barriers

Limited time, insufficient training, administrative neutrality, and contextual disparities constrain consistent adoption of the framework.

Educators identify a consistent set of barriers to the implementation and use of the Marco DALE, including the following:

- **Time and capacity:** How long it takes to get to know the framework, the amount of information required, and the degree of step-by-step training needed to support implementation are overwhelming.
- **Administrative neutrality or low visibility:** States typically fall into one of these three categories: Some states are neutral in adopting/endorsing the Marco DALE, some states are

unaware of its existence, and some states encourage its use without a clear understanding of what it means or what its implementation entails. This is exacerbated by context constraints, especially in scenarios where monolingual English is prevalent, Spanish classroom settings are not available, or there is reliance on other frameworks. This reduces the possibilities of the Marco DALE uptake.

- **Community and access barriers:** A minor subset of respondents noted inequalities in the local context, lack of collaboration and/or support, and the need for mindset shifts that value Spanish literacy.
- **Gaps in preservice preparation and higher education alignment:** Educators, both seasoned and novice, flag a need for the Marco DALE to be integrated into teacher education preparation programs at the higher education level (preservice training). They see this as a comprehensive approach to promote mindful planning habits in the areas of functional language for educators. Rookie educators and administrators repeatedly request foundational, step-by-step training aligned to their local curricula. Educators see this as the stage or instance where this integration of frameworks and resources could happen.

**Quote:**

“Teaching bilingual teacher candidates how to write bilingual units...” as this is their reality.

## Correlation of Data Collection Tools

Triangulation of the survey, interview, and observation data demonstrates consistent trends in how educators are engaging with the Marco DALE. Demographically, participants represent a broad range of roles—literacy coaches, language program coordinators, bilingual education specialists, administrators, and teachers—across multiple states, districts, higher education settings, and charter contexts. This diversity strengthens the validity of the findings, as the perspectives converge despite the varied contexts. Usage patterns reveal high interest but low familiarity among those outside dual language programs, with dual language schools reporting more active use. Findings across data collection tools show that educators consistently highlight the framework’s value in providing clarity for planning and setting language objectives, with early evidence of improved student outcomes in writing, oracy, and standards mastery. These results confirm that the three collection methods reinforce one another.

The data also converges around barriers and supports. Time constraints, limited training, administrative neutrality, and document complexity are the most frequently cited obstacles, compounded by contextual policies such as contexts where monolingual English prevails and competing frameworks. All three data collection tools confirm strong alignment within WIDA resources, but there is a need for clearer crosswalks with other frameworks and state standards. This correlation across data sources validates the trends and underscores the reliability of the triangulated findings.

# Recommendations and Implications: From Framework to Action

## Classroom Practice

The study demonstrates that the Marco DALE framework provides teachers with concrete tools and components that directly improve the development of language domains and competencies. The implication for classroom practice is that educators need access to practical, ready-to-use resources (e.g., lesson samples, videos, scaffolds) to translate the framework into daily instruction. Without this support, the framework runs the risk of remaining on a theoretical level. By focusing on teachers' voices and classroom realities, this study underscores the importance of designing resources that are adaptable, accessible, and aligned to standards.

## Informal Networks Driving Implementation

To overcome implementation challenges, educators recognize the need for real-world experiential supports such as the following:

- **Coaching, peer planning, and conferences:** Coaching and peer collaboration surface as the most helpful supports even more than formal training.
- **Professional learning communities beat “one-off” professional learning:** Educators state that small work groups, make-and-take sessions, and group exploration of examples tied to grade-level cluster materials are professional learning activities they would be interested in. These would be more helpful as ongoing go-to spaces for support in implementation.

## District and School Systems

Findings reveal uneven district-level push and limited systemic support. The implication is that states and districts must move beyond passive endorsement to active integration of the Marco DALE into curriculum, professional learning communities, and assessment systems. Leadership support is a critical lever—schools where principals encourage use of the Marco DALE saw a stronger uptake and more consistent outcomes. Districts should, therefore, invest in structured professional learning pipelines, resource access, and administrator training to ensure implementation is not left to the initiative of individual teachers. This study highlights the need for system-level scaffolding to sustain and scale impact.

## Higher Education and Teacher Preparation

Interviews with higher education faculty reveal a disconnect: The Marco DALE is rarely included in teacher preparation programs, leaving educators unprepared to implement it. The implication is that integration of the Marco DALE into bilingual and English as a Second Language teacher preparation curricula is essential for long-term sustainability. Partnerships between WIDA, universities, and districts could ensure that teacher candidates graduate with both conceptual knowledge and practical strategies for standards-based bilingual instruction. This study points to higher education as a critical but underutilized site for systemic change.

## Changes in Policy and Advocacy

The lack of state-level endorsement and guidance emerged as a significant barrier. The implication is that policy advocacy is necessary to legitimize and scale the Marco DALE. Without official recognition, districts and schools struggle to prioritize resources and training. This study provides evidence that educators see the Marco DALE as more effective than other frameworks, making a compelling case for state adoption, funding support, and integration of accountability systems. Policy alignment would ensure consistency across districts and elevate bilingualism and multilingualism as statewide priorities.

## Assessment and Accountability

Educators consistently requested clearer assessment tools tied to the Marco DALE. The implication is that assessment integration is a missing link between standards and student outcomes for Spanish language development. Developing rubrics, exemplars, and formative assessment tools aligned to the framework would allow teachers to monitor biliteracy growth systematically. This study highlights the need for assessment practices that capture progress in Spanish language development, ensuring that multilingual learners are evaluated meaningfully and comprehensively.

Overall, the evidence is clear: The Marco DALE has the potential to transform multilingual education by making academic language visible, teachable, and culturally and linguistically responsive. To engage in this transformation pathway, educators, districts, higher education institutions, and policymakers must act together investing in sustained professional learning, accessible resources, and systemic alignment. This is not simply about adopting another framework; it is about making multilingualism a cornerstone of educational practice. The time to move from promise to practice is now to ensure that every multilingual learner has the tools, support, and resources they need to thrive.

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