

Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing: A Hybrid Learning Model to Strengthen
Motivation, Reading Comprehension, and Spanish Writing in Bilingual Elementary Classrooms.

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Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing: A Hybrid Learning Model to Strengthen Motivation, Reading Comprehension, and Spanish Writing in Bilingual Elementary Classrooms.

This action research study aims to evaluate the impact of a blended learning environment, *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing*, on the motivation, reading comprehension, and Spanish writing performance of second-grade bilingual students. The project arises from the need to transform traditional literacy practices in bilingual contexts, where children face the challenge of progressing in two languages simultaneously while often showing low motivation and limited engagement with reading and writing. As Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2017) explain, disruptive innovation in education occurs when technology is not used as an accessory but as a transformative medium for learning. In this sense, the proposed model integrates digital resources with meaningful face-to-face experiences, blending storytelling, play, and collaboration to foster intrinsic motivation and active student engagement. This action research study is designed to examine academic outcomes and to understand how hybrid learning transforms students' attitudes toward reading and writing in bilingual settings.

1. Fundamental Research Question

The central research question guiding this action research study is: How does the implementation of the blended learning model *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing* impact the motivation, reading comprehension, and Spanish writing performance of second-grade bilingual students? This question is significant because it addresses one of the most enduring challenges in bilingual education: students' lack of motivation and limited engagement

with reading and writing in their native language. Investigating this issue provides insight into how blended learning, which combines face-to-face and digital strategies, can enhance academic performance while fostering a more positive attitude toward literacy.

1. Working Hypotheses

Although action research focuses on improving practice rather than testing universal theories, this study establishes working hypotheses to guide observation, data collection, and reflection. These hypotheses express the expected outcomes of the 12-week implementation of the *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing* model.

- a) Reading comprehension: Students will demonstrate an improvement of at least 10–15 percent between pre- and post-assessments.
- b) Motivation: Motivation scores, measured on a five-point Likert scale, are expected to increase by an average of one point following the 12-week intervention.
- c) Spanish writing: Students' written compositions will improve by at least one level in the analytic rubric categories of coherence, vocabulary, and structure.

These hypotheses address one of the persistent challenges in bilingual education—students' limited engagement with reading and writing in their native language. Investigating these expectations provides insight into how blended learning, which combines face-to-face and digital strategies, can enhance both academic performance and students' attitudes toward literacy.

2. Participants and Setting

Participants included 18 second-grade bilingual students (ages 7–8) enrolled in a dual-language program at an elementary school in Texas. Literacy instruction was delivered primarily in Spanish, while digital activities provided English support through platforms such as i-Ready and Amplify Reading. The classroom was equipped with tablets, reliable Wi-Fi, and access to adaptive learning tools. To ensure ethical compliance and data protection, parents of all participants will provide written consent prior to data collection. Student identities will be protected by assigning unique codes to each data source, and all portfolios and digital files will be securely stored in password-protected folders. No personally identifiable information will be publicly disclosed.

3. Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature provides a strong conceptual framework for understanding how hybrid learning environments can transform reading and writing instruction in bilingual elementary classrooms. Recent studies agree that blended learning, when designed with clear pedagogical intent, not only increases academic performance but also strengthens students' motivation, autonomy, and engagement (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2017; Graham, 2019).

3.1. Blended Learning and Pedagogical Transformation

Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2017) define blended learning as a disruptive innovation that reshapes teaching by strategically combining digital and face-to-face instruction. From this perspective, technology is not an accessory but a medium for personalizing instruction and

encouraging active knowledge exploration. Graham (2019) adds that the effectiveness of blended learning depends on its alignment with educational goals and the inclusion of authentic practices that promote sustainable learning.

In the Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing model, adaptive platforms (i-Ready, Amplify Reading, Schoology) and creative tools (Genially, Kahoot!, Adobe Express) act as bridges connecting imagination, collaboration, and linguistic practice, enabling students to advance at their own pace within a structured and motivating environment.

3.2. Bilingual Literacy and Cross-Linguistic Transfer

Research on bilingual literacy emphasizes that a strong foundation in the first language supports the acquisition of a second language. Cummins' (2000) linguistic interdependence hypothesis posits that cognitive and metalinguistic skills developed in Spanish can transfer to English learning. August and Shanahan (2006, 2017) empirically confirm that students who build solid literacy skills in their first language achieve stronger performance in their second.

Similarly, García and Kleifgen (2018) highlight that valuing and maintaining literacy in Spanish prevents students from perceiving English as disconnected or inferior, fostering a positive bilingual identity. The proposed model builds on these findings by prioritizing Spanish language development as the foundation for biliteracy and by integrating activities that link reading, vocabulary, and writing strategies across both languages.

3.3.Motivation, Growth Mindset, and Learning Culture

Motivation is identified as a critical factor in literacy development. Dweck (2006) argues that learners with a growth mindset persist through challenges and view mistakes as opportunities to learn. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) demonstrate that reading engagement increases when instruction incorporates autonomy, relevance, and enjoyment.

Thomas and Brown (2011) further assert that curiosity and play are at the core of a new culture of learning, while Pekrun (2006) and Wenger (1998) emphasize the role of positive emotions and a sense of belonging in fostering active participation. In the *Explorers of the Forest* model, these principles come to life through engaging stations, symbolic rewards (“forest coins”), and creative projects that foster resilience, collaboration, and a love of learning.

3.4.Inclusive Instructional Design and Meaningful Learning

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018) guides the creation of flexible environments that provide multiple means of representation, action, and engagement, ensuring inclusion for all learners. Likewise, COVA+CSLE (Harapnuik, 2016) encourages learners to develop *Choice, Ownership, Voice, and Authentic Learning*, empowering students to take ownership of their learning process.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) reinforce this idea through their emphasis on “enduring understandings” that connect learning to real-life experiences. These perspectives converge in the forest model, where the teacher serves as a designer of learning experiences that strike a balance between structure, creativity, and reflection.

3.5.Authentic Assessment and Continuous Improvement

Assessment in hybrid environments must capture both learning outcomes and the processes that lead to them. Mertler (2019) emphasizes that action research requires data triangulation to strengthen validity and foster formative feedback. Brookhart (2013) argues that analytic rubrics make quality criteria visible, while Barrett (2007) and Andrade and Brookhart (2020) highlight the potential of digital portfolios to promote self-regulation and metacognitive reflection. The *Explorers of the Forest* model utilizes these tools to document student progress, enhance self-assessment, and inform pedagogical decision-making through ongoing reflection.

4. Study Information

This action research study employs a mixed-methods design to evaluate the impact of a blended learning environment, *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing*, on the motivation, reading comprehension, and Spanish writing performance of second-grade bilingual students. The action research approach was selected for its cyclical and reflective nature, which enables the teacher-researcher to plan, implement, observe, and refine instructional practices in real-time (Mertler, 2019). This design promotes continuous improvement by embedding systematic inquiry into the teaching and learning process, transforming the classroom into a space for innovation and evidence-based reflection.

The quantitative component of the study measures students' academic growth through diagnostic and post-assessment instruments in reading comprehension and Spanish writing. The qualitative component examines changes in motivation, engagement, and self-perception through surveys, observations, and student reflections. This integration of numerical and narrative data

aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) assertion that mixed-methods research yields richer, more comprehensive interpretations of educational phenomena. Internal validity will be supported through data triangulation, consistent reflection, and alignment with the core principles of action research.

5. Data Collection Procedures

Data will be collected over a 12-week period, organized into three sequential phases:

- Pre-Implementation (Weeks 1–2): administration of diagnostic reading and writing assessments, as well as a baseline motivation survey.
- Implementation (Weeks 3–10): ongoing data collection through adaptive platforms (*i-Ready* and *Amplify Reading*), structured classroom observations, anecdotal records, and student reflections.
- Post-Implementation (Weeks 11–12): administration of post-tests, compilation of writing portfolios, and a final motivation survey.

6. Data Sources and Instruments

7.1. Quantitative instruments include pre- and post-tests, Spanish writing rubrics (Brookhart, 2013), and adaptive platform reports that document accuracy, growth, and usage patterns.

7.2. Qualitative instruments: motivation surveys, structured observations, anecdotal records, reflective journals, and digital/physical student portfolios (Barrett, 2007).

8. Data Organization and Analysis

All data will be entered into an analysis matrix categorizing evidence by type (quantitative vs. qualitative), analytic focus (motivation, comprehension, writing), and source (teacher, student, or digital system). Quantitative results will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine percentage gains and mean differences between pre- and post-measures. Qualitative data will be analyzed through thematic coding, which will identify recurring patterns of engagement and self-regulation.

Triangulation across multiple data sources will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, reflective notes kept throughout the process will ensure transparency and traceability of the analytical decisions. The goal of this systematic process is to strengthen teaching practice and provide actionable insights into how blended learning environments support bilingual literacy development.

9. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods action research design to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing* model impacts motivation, reading comprehension, and Spanish writing performance among second-grade bilingual students. This design integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches, enabling the researcher to capture both measurable learning outcomes and the lived experiences and perceptions of participants.

The quantitative component focuses on academic growth through standardized instruments, including pre- and post-assessments of reading comprehension, analytic writing rubrics, and

adaptive learning reports generated by platforms such as *I-Ready* and *Amplify Reading*. These numerical data reveal progress patterns and enable comparison between baseline and post-intervention results.

The qualitative component explores students' motivation, engagement, and emotional connection to literacy learning. Data will be collected through structured classroom observations, anecdotal notes, open-ended surveys, and reflective journals completed during the implementation phase. This approach seeks to understand how affective and behavioral dimensions shape participation and self-regulation.

A mixed-methods approach is most suitable for this study because it enables data triangulation and the integration of both empirical and interpretive insights, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the intervention's effectiveness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consistent with the cyclical nature of action research, this design fosters continuous improvement: quantitative findings guide instructional adjustments, while qualitative evidence enriches reflective practice (Mertler, 2019). Thus, the study unites measurement and meaning, evidence and reflection, theory and classroom practice in a coherent methodological framework.

10. Data Collection and Analysis

Data will be collected over a 12-week period, divided into three phases: pre-implementation (weeks 1–2), implementation (weeks 3–10), and post-implementation (weeks 11–12). This extended timeline provides a comprehensive view of how the *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing* model impacts student motivation, reading comprehension, and Spanish writing performance in bilingual classrooms.

Timeline

Phase	Weeks	Main Activities	Instruments
Pre-Implementation	Weeks 1–2	Administration of diagnostic reading and writing assessments; baseline motivation survey.	Diagnostic tests, writing rubrics, motivation Likert scale.
Implementation	Weeks 3–10	Hybrid learning model implementation: station rotations, digital platforms (<i>i-Ready</i> , <i>Amplify Reading</i>), classroom observations, and student reflections.	Observation guide, platform reports, learning journals, reflection forms.
Post-Implementation	Weeks 11–12	Post-tests, portfolio review, final perception survey, and teacher reflection.	Post-assessments, analytic rubrics, Likert survey, portfolio analysis.

11. Data Sources and Instruments

Quantitative:

- Pre- and post-assessments in reading comprehension and writing.
- Analytic rubrics measuring coherence, spelling, structure, and vocabulary (Brookhart, 2013).

- Motivation survey using a 5-point Likert scale addressing enjoyment, autonomy, persistence, and perceived achievement.
- Digital analytics from *i-Ready* and *Amplify Reading* documenting accuracy, usage, and progress.

Qualitative:

- Structured classroom observations focusing on engagement, participation, and collaboration.
- Teacher anecdotal records capture instructional insights and student behaviors.
- Digital and physical portfolios with writing samples, self-assessments, and metacognitive reflections (Barrett, 2007).
- Open-ended surveys and learning journals provide emotional and perceptual insights from students.

12. Data Analysis

Data analysis will combine descriptive quantitative techniques with qualitative thematic analysis. Quantitative results will be examined through improvement percentages, mean comparisons, and pre- and post-growth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while qualitative evidence will be coded under key themes: motivation, comprehension, writing, and self-regulation. Triangulation of data across multiple sources will enhance validity and reliability.

The process will include ongoing teacher reflection and recording of pedagogical adjustments throughout the 12 weeks. This reflective practice will transform data into actionable knowledge that informs future instruction. All research instruments, including surveys, Likert

scales, rubrics, observation forms, and reflection templates, will be included as appendices in the final report.

13. Sharing and Communicating Results

The results of this action research study will be shared with two primary audiences: the school community and the teaching community. The goal is to ensure that the findings extend beyond the classroom and contribute to strengthening instructional practices and professional growth among educators.

First, results will be presented to the administrative team and bilingual elementary teachers through an informative video summarizing the key findings of the *Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing* project. The video will include visual documentation of the process, student testimonials, and examples of writing products, effectively communicating the model's impact on motivation, engagement, and performance.

Second, the project's results and materials will be published in the digital ePortfolio, providing an accessible record of the process, documenting the model's impact on teaching practice, and serving as a resource for educators who wish to adapt the proposal in similar bilingual contexts. This dissemination process aims to inspire innovative teaching practices, promote pedagogical reflection, and cultivate a culture of continuous improvement grounded in evidence. This dissemination plan will serve not only to report outcomes but to inspire pedagogical innovation and collaboration within the school community.

14. Final Reflection

At the conclusion of the action research process, reflection will focus on critically examining each phase of the study, including planning, implementation, data collection, and analysis, to identify insights, strengths, and areas for improvement. This process will provide a comprehensive understanding of the results of the Explorers of the Forest of Reading and Writing model from a pedagogical perspective, emphasizing the impact and relevance of the strategies applied in bilingual literacy instruction.

Reflection will be documented through a professional journal and a narrative report that incorporates the teacher-researcher's perspective, student feedback, and collected evidence. The reflective process will analyze which instructional decisions had the greatest impact, identify necessary adjustments for future implementations, and determine how the findings can inform the design of more inclusive and motivating bilingual learning experiences.

Following Mertler's (2019) framework, this final reflection will serve as an ongoing process of interpretation and action in which data are transformed into practical knowledge that drives continuous instructional improvement. The results will not be treated as final conclusions but as a starting point for new questions, refinements, and collaborative practices among educators. This reflective approach will foster a more critical, empathetic, and creative perspective on teaching, reaffirming action research as a path toward professional growth and educational innovation.

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