Ten Spanish-English bilingual graduate students working as SLP-Assistants or Emergency Waiver SLPs in Arizona, California or Texas participated in a focus group discussion and written survey about the use of their bilingual skills at work, adequacy of their supervision and adequacy of their graduate preparation to provide bilingual services. Qualitative analyses of both verbal and written responses were used to identify themes and supporting descriptors. Recommendations are offered for improved supervision, monetary compensation and bilingual practice in “English-only” states.

**Method**

**Participants:** Ten bilingual Spanish-English graduate students licensed as Speech-Language Pathology assistants, or working under the equivalent emergency waiver status of their state, in Arizona, California and Texas. All participants are graduate students in the NAU Summers-only track.

**Focus Group and Written Questionnaire:** Respondents participated in a videotaped focus group that met to verbally answer questions about their experiences as bilingual therapists. In order to obtain responses from all participants on each question, participants also individually filled out a written survey which used a five-point Likert scale and provided space for comments after each question.

**Procedure:** Responses from all survey questions were used to identify main themes and the descriptors supporting them. Six main themes were established. The video of the focus group was reviewed to gather supporting comments of the established themes and identify any additional themes. No new themes were identified. For each of the six main themes, a primary question that elicited information about the theme was identified. Secondary questions were identified for four of the themes. The most common descriptors supporting each of the themes were identified.

**Results**

**Theme 1 – Supervision**

**Question:** Do you feel that you receive adequate supervision/support at your place of work?

- Need more supervision and consistent feedback
- Being new requires more supervision
- Supervisors should be knowledgeable and understanding

**Theme 2 – Meeting Clients’ Needs**

**Question:** Bilingual Therapy has a significant effect on my clients and their needs.

- Communication with clients and their families is key
- Provides an added level of comfort
- "My goal is success for my client"

**Theme 3 – Use of Bilingual Skills**

**Question:** Do you use your bilingual skills at your place of work?

- On a daily basis with clients and their families
- For assessments, evaluations, meetings, therapy, phone calls, etc.
- Used more with younger clients until they know English well enough
- Used for purposes not even related to their position

**Theme 4 – Value of Bilingual Skills**

**Question:** Do you feel that your bilingual skills are valued by your district employer?

- Feel taken for granted and taken advantage of
- Bigger workload

**Theme 5 – Training**

**Question:** Does your graduate school education provide training that is particularly useful in your bilingual work setting?

- More classes needed, but appreciate what is already provided
- More training in Spanish phonology, assessments, and therapy techniques
- Knowledge of how to work with bilingual clients can be applied to any language

**Theme 6 – Cultural Competence**

**Question:** Do you feel that being aware of cultural differences is more important than being bilingual?

- Enhances communication with clients and their families
- “Being bilingual does not guarantee effectiveness”
- Cultural awareness makes you more sensitive to clients’ needs
- Cultural awareness allows for effective therapy with every culture

**Discussion**

The following provides an interpretation of responses to questions for each theme.

**Supervision:** The majority of respondents feel that supervision/support at their workplace is not adequate and that a competent supervisor is more important than a bilingual supervisor. 60% of respondents indicate that their current supervisor is not bilingual.

**Meeting Clients’ Needs:** All respondents feel that being bilingual enables them to better meet their clients’ needs.

**Use of Bilingual Skills:** All respondents use bilingual skills daily in a number of ways, including for purposes outside of their job duties. The majority also feel that the use of their bilingual skills is limited to some degree by working in an “English-only” state.

**Value of Bilingual Skills:** None of the respondents receive monetary compensation for their bilingual skills, but the majority feel that their employer values their bilingual skills.

**Training:** 90% feel that their graduate program provides some useful preparation for working in a bilingual setting, yet many indicate that additional training would be useful.

**Cultural Competence:** 100% of respondents feel that being aware of cultural differences is more or equally as important as being bilingual.

**Conclusions & Recommendations**

1. Bilingual support personnel believe that they need better supervision.
   - SLPs should receive training on how to be effective supervisors. This might include graduate classes, or post graduate training supported by employers.

2. Bilingual support personnel feel that having a competent supervisor is more important than having a bilingual supervisor.
   - All graduates, whether or not they intend to work in a bilingual setting, should be prepared to supervise bilingual support personnel.

3. While teachers and some SLPs receive monetary compensation for their bilingual skills, but the majority feel that their employer values their bilingual skills.

4. Bilingual support personnel feel that working in an English-only state has some impact on service delivery.
   - SLPs and SLP support personnel should ensure that they are following federal laws and employ best practice when working with their bilingual clients.

**References**