Data on English Language Learners
A Status Report
Data on English Language Learners

In 1990, one in 20 public school students in grades K-12 was an English language learner (ELL)... Today the figure is 1 in 9. Demographers estimate that in 2028 it might be one in 4. The ELL population has grown from 2 million to 5 million since 1990, a period when the overall school population increased only 20 percent.

States not typically associated with non-English speakers—Indiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Colorado, Utah, etc. —each saw an increase in the ELL population of at least 300 percent between 1994-95 and 2004-05.
Data on English Language Learners

ELL students in the U.S. come from over 400 different language backgrounds. What may come as a surprise is that most ELLs were born in the United States. Among elementary-age ELLs, 76 percent were born in the U.S. Among middle- and high school students, 56 percent were born in this country. However, about 80 percent of ELLs’ parents were born outside of the U.S.
By far, the majority of ELLs—80 percent—are Spanish speakers. This is an important fact to bear in mind, since Spanish speakers in the U.S. tend to come from lower economic and educational backgrounds than either the general population or other immigrants and language minority populations. For example, speakers of Asian languages are about eight percent of the ELL population. The poverty rate of Asian immigrants is the second lowest (at 11.1 percent)...Consequently, most ELLs are at risk for poor school outcomes not only because of language, but also because of socioeconomic factors.
Data on English Language Learners

On the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Report Cards in reading and math), fourth-grade ELLs scored 37 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math. The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger—45 points in reading and 38 points in math. Things have not improved much over the past decade.
Overview of the Findings of the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth
National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth

Identification of Research Questions
- Development of Literacy in language-minority children and youth
- Cross-linguistic and cross-modal relationships
- Socio-cultural contexts and literacy development
- Instruction and professional development
- Student Assessment
1800 titles initially identified for inclusion in the review

Reduced to a total of 970 studies based on the panel’s judgment of relevance to the research questions and technical adequacy.

Criteria for inclusion

- Empirical data had to be reported – no thought or advocacy pieces
- Allowed book chapters and dissertations when no or little juried research journal research reports were available
- 50% or more of the research sample had to be language-minority students
- When experiments, quasi experiments, single subject designs or multiple base-line studies were reported they must have control groups, groups sizes of at least 4 students in each cell, and be conducted for a minimum of 6 months
Criteria for inclusion continued
- When correlation studies were examined they must have at least 20 subjects or more.
- Published after 1979
- Published in English
- Subjects must be children 3-18
- Data must be disaggregated for various groups

Criteria for exclusion
- Serious confounds exist in the design
- Not relevant to research questions
Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students
Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

Findings

- Meta-analyses of 10 studies indicate that first and second-language speakers are equivalent in word reading accuracy.
- Meta-analyses of 9 studies indicate that first and second-language speakers are equivalent in spelling performance.
- Too few studies in writing to draw conclusions
Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

Predictors of Word-Level Performance

“Second-language predictors of second-language word-level literacy skills among language-minority students in the primary grades are similar to those identified in decades of research on early reading development conducted with native speakers” (p. 62-63).

Predictors of Text-Level Performance

“The same variables have been shown in other work to relate to monolingual’s reading comprehension… As those shown to predict second-language learners reading comprehension (pg. 63).
Language-minority Students Identified as Having Literacy Difficulties

Word level: “There are similar proportions of language-minority students and monolingual speakers classified as poor readers...with the exception of oral language skills, the overall profiles of poor readers in the two groups are very similar. Both groups have problems with “phonological awareness and working memory.”” (p. 63).
Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Relationship between English Oral Proficiency and English Literacy
  - Measures of oral language proficiency in English ...were not strong predictors of word and pseudo-word reading for language-minority children. (p. 63).
  - Not much can be said about spelling from the current body of research. [Research shows highly variable effects of L1 on L2 spelling (Figueroedo, 2006).]
  - The crucial role of oral vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension suggest that limited vocabulary knowledge is associated with low levels of reading comprehension in English and English-language learners with a large repertoire of high-frequency and academically relevant words are better able process written texts than English-language learners without such a repertoire” (p.65).
Relationship of Oral Language Proficiency to Second-Language Literacy

Questions concerning the role of language proficiency in the domains of reading fluency and comprehension are particularly pertinent in second-language contexts, but there is almost no research in this area” (p.68).

“The development of reading comprehension [among L2s], like that of word level skills, is highly dependent on effective instruction” (p. 100).

“…Oral language proficiency in English is associated with well-developed reading comprehension skills in English – including oral vocabulary knowledge (ability to give definitions), awareness of cognates, listening comprehension, oral storytelling skills, and syntactic skills” (p. 135).
“All studies showed language-minority students performing less well than their native-speaking peers on measures of reading comprehension.” (p. 102).

Not enough research in writing to state any conclusions.

Little is known about how or if PA and oral language proficiency (vocabulary and grammar knowledge) predict L2 students’ spelling development. (p. 129).
“There is not a strong relationship between grammatical sensitivity and English and the English spelling skills of elementary–level English-language learners, but that vocabulary skills in English may be related to spelling skills in English” (p. 131).

“Spelling accuracy among ELLs is predicted by phonological processing skills and pseudo-word decoding” (p. 131).
“Advanced ELLs were able to read more fluently than might have been expected given their oral language skills in English” (p. 132).

“English oral language proficiency and English reading comprehension are also mediated by contextual factors, such as home language use, literacy practices, and SES, as well as by differences in instructional and other educational experiences” (p. 135).
“Well developed oral language skills in English are associated with better writing skills in English” (p. 136).

“In general, research on the role of English language proficiency in the development of English writing skills in ELLs is limited” (p. 138).

“The available research suggest that English oral language proficiency is consistently implicated when larger chunks of text are involved, whether in reading comprehension or writing” (p. 139).
First – and Second-Language Literacy
“In summary, findings from four of the five studies reviewed previously yielded results that support the interdependence hypothesis suggesting that across a wide range of ages, word reading skills acquired in one language transfer to the other”  (p. 202).

“Six of the seven studies reviewed here investigated the transfer from the first to the second language; the single study that looked at reverse transfer found it to occur from English to Spanish spelling”  (p. 209).
“Without exception, these studies provide evidence for cross-language transfer of cognate vocabulary” (p. 214).

In the aggregate, the results of studies on the transfer of vocabulary knowledge suggest that aspects of word knowledge transfer across languages” (p. 217).
“In summary, all these studies provide evidence for the cross-language transfer of reading comprehension ability in bilinguals...With respect to the influence of level of second-language proficiency, these studies present conflicting findings” (p. 222).

“In summary, with the exception of Hernandez (1991), all the studies reviewed previously provide evidence supporting the notion that bilingual children who read strategically [using reading strategies] in one language also do so in their other language” (p. 227).
“In summary, the studies reviewed here suggest a number of possibilities about 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} language writing relationships…

- Beginning writers use what is known about writing in the 1\textsuperscript{st} language for forming hypotheses about writing in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} language.
- Young children receiving instruction in a 2\textsuperscript{nd} language exclusively, writing skills may develop first in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} language and subsequently in the 1\textsuperscript{st}.
- For older children with varying proficiencies in 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} languages, aspects of writing ability may correlate only for students proficient in the 1\textsuperscript{st} but not in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} language, suggesting that early in 2\textsuperscript{nd} language acquisition these children draw on resources available to them in their 1\textsuperscript{st} language.
Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development
“Clearly, immigration and refugee experiences can create traumatic situations for children and families: however, there is no evidence that these experiences impede literacy achievement. Literacy outcomes are more likely to relate to home (and school) language and literacy learning opportunities, irrespective of immigration circumstances” (p. 255).
“The most we can say given the available research is that bridging home-school differences in interaction can enhance students’ engagement and level of participation in classroom instruction. This outcome is certainly not trivial, but it is not the same as enhancing student achievement or other types of learning outcomes – effects the existing data cannot confirm” (p. 256).
“One fairly consistent finding across a number of studies is that language-minority students’ reading comprehension performance improves when they read culturally familiar materials… However, the language of the text appears to be a stronger influence on reading performance: Students perform better when they read or use material in the language they know better. The influence of cultural content is not as robust…Students’ cultural affiliations are frequently confounded with SES – for which,…there is strong evidence of an impact on literacy outcomes – rendering interpretation even more problematic” (p. 256).
The influence of Parents and Families

Language-minority parents express willingness and often have the ability to help their children succeed academically.

More home literacy experience/opportunities are generally associated with superior literacy outcomes, but findings in this regard are not consistent, and precise conclusions are difficult to find.

The relationship between home language use and language-minority children’s literacy outcomes is unclear.
The influence of Policies
- The research base does not permit firm conclusions (p. 257).

Language Prestige or Status
- Possible costs for 1st language maintenance
- Lower prestige of Spanish may affect teachers’ assessment of student competence and thus result in low-level instructional practices (p. 258).
Instruction and Professional Development
“The findings of studies that have compared bilingual and English-only approaches must continue to be interpreted with great caution. The Institute of Education Sciences is currently funding three evaluation studies employing experimental or quasi-experimental methods and will compare outcomes for students instructed in English-only with those instructed with some use of the native language” (p. 398).
“The findings of all five studies [PA and Phonics] are consistent with the extensive findings of 1st language research. The NRP examined 52 studies of PA instruction and another 38 studies of phonics instruction. Both conferred clear benefits on children’s reading development, as determined by a wide range of measures…” (p. 427).
“Fluency instruction benefits native and appears to similarly benefit ELLs. There is a clear need for more research into the most effective way to teach oral reading fluency to children who are learning English as a 2nd language” (p. 429).
“The three studies of vocabulary instruction for ELLs reviewed here yielded findings consistent with those of vocabulary studies of native speakers. However, there is a great need for more investigation into what constitutes sound and effective vocabulary instruction for ELLs” (p. 431).
“…. These few studies [on ELL reading comprehension] did not show a consistent advantage for comprehension strategy instruction. Given the small number of studies reviewed here, it is impossible to determine the best way to facilitate reading comprehension for ELLs” (p. 433).
“Common instructional routines may need to be adjusted to make instruction in the literacy components maximally effective with ELLs. Unfortunately, authors often have been silent in describing such adjustments” (p. 437).

“We can enhance literacy development of ELLs with better instruction” (p. 447). “Most interventions had a greater impact on decoding and fluency than on reading comprehension” (p. 448).

“It may be that what is needed is sound reading instruction combined with simultaneous efforts to increase the scope and sophistication of these (ELLs) students’ oral language proficiency” (p. 448).
“In the aggregate, however, it appears that what works with native-speaker populations generally works with ELLs. In fact, instruction that emphasizes literacy components confers a learning advantage to ELLs. The effect sizes for such teaching tend to be in the moderate range, meaning that its benefits are large enough be important.”

“Effect sizes for ELL are lower and more variable than those for native ES students, suggesting that such teaching is likely to be necessary, but insufficient for improving literacy achievement among ELLs.
School Change Factors

“Importance of mobilizing [all] staff to focus on the needs of ELLs, even when students are few in number. Doing so shows very positive results.

Efforts must be sustained and comprehensive.

Schools worked with staff at local universities who assisted with staff development and school change efforts and documented the process of the changes that occurred, for both the students and the school, over time” (p. 522).
Instruction and Professional Development

Special Education

“One important issue raised by these studies is the manner in which students are identified as learning disabled and the assessments used to track their progress... Studies should be designed to differentiate between a language delay and a reading disability” (p. 539).

“The studies reviewed in this section investigated a variety of techniques designed to improve the language and literacy development of language-minority students with special needs. Of interest is that approaches grounded in different theoretical models were to be promising” (behavioral, cognitive, interactive, and holistic (p. 537).
Effective Literacy and ESL Instruction for ELs in the Elementary Grades

- **Recommendation 1:** Screen for reading problems and monitor progress.

- Conduct formative assessments with English learners using English language measures of phonological processing, letter knowledge, and word and text reading. Use these data to identify English learners who require additional instructional support and to monitor their reading progress over time.

- Level of evidence: **Strong**
Recommendation 2: Provide intensive small-group reading interventions

Provide focused, intensive small-group interventions for English learners determined to be at risk for reading problems. Although the amount of time in small-group instruction and the intensity of this instruction should reflect the degree of risk, determined by reading assessment data and other indicators, the interventions should include the five core reading elements (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Explicit, direct instruction should be the primary means of instructional delivery.

Level of evidence: Strong
Recommendation 3: Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction.

Provide high-quality vocabulary instruction throughout the day. Teach essential content words in depth. In addition, use instructional time to address the meanings of common words, phrases, and expressions not yet learned.

Level of evidence: Strong
Recommendation 4: Develop academic English

Ensure that the development of formal or academic English is a key instructional goal for English learners, beginning in the primary grades. Provide curricula and supplemental curricula to accompany core reading and mathematics series to support this goal. Accompany with relevant training and professional development.

Level of evidence: Low (primarily expert opinion)
Recommendation 5: Schedule regular peer-assisted learning opportunities.

Ensure that teachers of English learners devote approximately 90 minutes a week to instructional activities in which pairs of students at different ability levels or different English language proficiencies work together on academic tasks in a structured fashion. These activities should practice and extend material already taught.

Level of evidence: Strong
Effective Instruction for English Learners
Transitional Bilingual Education vs. Structured English Immersion

Reading and Language Outcomes of a Five-Year Randomized Evaluation Of Transitional Bilingual Education

Robert E. Slavin
Nancy Madden
Margarita Calderón
Johns Hopkins University

Anne Chamberlain
Megan Hennessy
Success for All Foundation

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This study reports the fifth-year results of a study comparing the English and Spanish language and reading performance of Spanish-dominant children randomly assigned beginning in kindergarten to Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) or Structured English Immersion (SEI). This is the first randomized study to compare TBE and SEI reading approaches over a period as long as five years.
As expected, on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and its Spanish equivalent (TVIP) and on English and Spanish versions of three Woodcock Reading Scales, kindergartners and first graders in TBE performed significantly better in Spanish and worse in English than their SEI counterparts, controlling for PPVT and TVIP.

After transitioning to English, TBE children in grades 2-4 scored significantly lower than those in SEI on the measure of receptive vocabulary, the PPVT, but there were no significant differences on most English reading measures.
On the Spanish language (TVIP) and reading measures, TBE students scored significantly higher than SEI in grades K-3, but not grade 4. Both groups gained substantially in English receptive language skills over the years. These findings suggest that Spanish-dominant students learn to read in English (as well as Spanish) equally well in TBE and SEI.
Overview of the Findings of Teaching English Language Learners, American Educator, Summer 2008

Conclusion or Recommendation 1: Teaching students to read in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English.
Conclusion or Recommendation 2: What we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs.
Conclusion or Recommendation 3: When instructing English learners in English, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students’ language limitations.
Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not - Say

- **Instructional Modifications:**
  - Make Text in English More Comprehensible by Using Texts with Content that Is Familiar to Students
  - Build Vocabulary in English
  - Use the Primary Language for Support
Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not Say

✦ Instructional Modifications:

✦ Predictable and consistent classroom management routines, aided by diagrams, lists, and easy-to-read schedules on the board or on charts, to which the teacher refers frequently.
Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not - Say

- **Instructional Modifications:**
  - Graphic organizers that make content and the relationships among concepts and different lesson elements visually explicit.
  - Additional time and opportunities for practice, either during the school day, after school, or for homework.
Instructional Modifications:

- Redundant key information, e.g., visual cues, pictures, comic books, and physical gestures about lesson content and classroom procedures.

- Providing opportunities for extended interactions with teacher and peers. Assigning students to translate L2 text into L1 has been shown to be helpful.
Instructional Modifications:

Identifying, highlighting, and clarifying difficult words and passages within texts to facilitate comprehension, and more generally greatly emphasizing vocabulary development.
Instructional Modifications:

- Helping students consolidate text knowledge by having the teacher, other students, and ELLs themselves summarize and paraphrase.

- Giving students extra practice in reading words, sentences, and stories in order to build automaticity and fluency.
Instructional Modifications:

- Adjusting instruction (teacher vocabulary, rate of speech, sentence complexity, and expectations for student language production) according to students’ oral English proficiency.

- Targeting both content and English language objectives in every lesson.
Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not - Say

- **Conclusion or Recommendation 4:** Assess Knowledge and Language Separately.
Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not - Say

- Conclusion or Recommendation 5:
  Effects of “Culturally Accommodated Instruction” Are Uncertain.
 Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not - Say

◊ Conclusion or Recommendation 6: Add Time.
Conclusion or Recommendation 7: ELLs also need academic content instruction, just as all students do; although ELD is crucial, it must be in addition to—not instead of—instruction designed to promote content knowledge.
Overview of the Findings of Effective Instruction for English Learners, Center for Research and Reform in Education, Johns Hopkins University, 2011

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Effective Instruction for English Learners

Margarita Calderón, Robert Slavin, and Marta Sánchez

Summary

The fastest-growing student population in U.S. schools today is children of immigrants, half of whom do not speak English fluently and are thus labeled English learners. Although the federal government requires school districts to provide services to English learners, it offers states no policies to follow in identifying, assessing, placing, or instructing them. Margarita Calderón, Robert Slavin, and Marta Sánchez identify the elements of effective instruction and review a variety of successful program models.

During 2007–08, more than 5.3 million English learners made up 10.8 percent of the nation’s K–12 public school enrollment. Wide and persistent achievement disparities between these English learners and English-proficient students show clearly, say the authors, that schools must address the language, literacy, and academic needs of English learners more effectively.

Researchers have fiercely debated the merits of bilingual and English-only reading instruction. In elementary schools, English learners commonly receive thirty minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction but attend general education classes for the rest of the day, usually with teachers who are unprepared to teach them. Though English learners have strikingly diverse levels of skills, in high school they are typically banded together, with one teacher to address their widely varying needs. These in-school factors contribute to the achievement disparities.

Based on the studies presented here, Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez assert that the quality of instruction is what matters most in educating English learners. They highlight comprehensive reform models, as well as individual components of these models: school structures and leadership, language and literacy instruction, integration of language, literacy, and content instruction in secondary schools; cooperative learning; professional development; parent and family support teams; tutoring; and monitoring implementation and outcomes.

As larger numbers of English learners reach America’s schools, K–12 general education teachers are discovering the need to learn how to teach these students. Schools must improve the skills of all educators through comprehensive professional development—an ambitious but necessary undertaking that requires appropriate funding.

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Effective Instruction for English Learners

- Constant collection and use of ongoing formative data on learning, teaching, attendance, behavior, and other important intermediate outcomes.

- A strong focus on professional development for all staff members, including administrators.

- Standards of behavior and effective strategies for classroom and school management.

- Leadership focused on building a “high-reliability organization” that shares information widely, monitors the quality of teaching and learning carefully, and holds all staff responsible for progress toward shared goals.
For English learners, vocabulary instruction must not only be long term and comprehensive, but also be taught explicitly in all subject areas before, during, and after reading. Students benefit the most when teachers provide rich and varied language experiences.

In programs where English is the primary language of instruction for literacy development, it is critical for teachers to show respect for the student’s primary language and home culture.

Reading instruction that covers the key components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension).
To help English learners catch up when they fall short in core knowledge, all disciplines must practice vocabulary knowledge, reading, and writing instruction.

Content-area reading should involve explicit instruction in discourse structures, word use, and grammar needed for math, science, social studies, and language arts.

Conduct literacy assessments to assign struggling students to appropriate interventions and to monitor progress. Assessments would cover the primary language as well as English to identify appropriate instruction.
Effective Instruction for English Learners

- Teachers who work with English learners found professional development most helpful when it provided opportunities for hands-on practice with teaching techniques readily applicable in their classrooms, in-class demonstrations with their own or a colleague’s students, and personalized coaching.

- Parent support for children’s success in school is always important, but it is especially so for the children of immigrants. English learners are likely to have to balance cultural, linguistic, and social differences between home and school, so open communication and positive relationships across the home-school divide are crucial.
Children need to be in school on time every day. Effective programs for attendance collect information early in the day and act on it immediately, so that lateness and missing days of school never come to be seen as normal.

When children are struggling in reading, the most effective intervention is one-to-one tutoring by well-trained, certified teachers.

Collaborative reading interventions, in which peers engage in oral interaction and cooperatively negotiate meaning and a shared understanding of texts, produced larger effects than systematic phonics instruction and multimedia-assisted reading interventions (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010).
If you would like a copy of this PowerPoint presentation:

D. Ray Reutzel, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education
University of Wyoming

http://www.uwyo.edu/wsup/events/esl_conference_documents.html