

# **Bilingualism in America**

*Supporting Bilingual Learners in the American Education System*

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate American education and the way it impacts bilingual students in schools. The itemized focus points include: (a) experiences of immigrant POC in education as bilinguals, (b) bilingual education history, benefits, and criticisms, (c) a call for support — an evaluation on ways that we can support bilingual students in America in both monolingual and bilingual education, (d) a look at the over and underidentification of English learners with disabilities, and (e) advocacy to celebrate linguistic diversity.

Negative attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education practices reflect a socio-political climate, rather than legitimate linguistic evidence. In this thesis, I discuss the experiences of bilinguals in America, highlighting those of color. This will be done through recounting personal experiences as a first generation, low income bilingual of color and general experiences that bilinguals face in schools, as well as including a discussion on a study conducted for this thesis in order to gain more clarity of these mentioned experiences.

The success of education programs that improve the situation for multilingual students is highly dependent on the quality of their educational and social constructions. I argue for what I believe to be the most efficient methods of supporting bilingual students through the various layers of education (teacher education programming, classroom practices, and the proper identification of English learners). For example, in terms of teacher education programming, I argue that bilingual school administration should improve their selection process of teachers where they should require that they exhibit active teaching behaviors, have proper training in child growth and development, and have a solid awareness of the cultural, social, and political contexts of which they will be dealing with. If we want to begin to improve schooling for the students, we must begin with educators who are in charge of them. In terms of classroom

practices, I argue for maximal contextual reinforcement and support for William J Tikunoff's five Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF) that are meant for bilingual classrooms, but are also features applicable for monolingual circumstances. In terms of identifying English learners properly and avoiding the over and underidentification of English learners with disabilities, I argue for a closer examination of its English Learner Education (ELE) programming by implementing a systemic team approach of language and cognitive development specialists, special education teachers, ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, and parents.

*Key terms: bilingualism, multilingualism, heritage language (HL), first language (L1), second language (L2), bilingual education, monolingual education, pluralistic approach, assimilationist approach, linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD), limited English proficiency (LEP), English Language Learner (ELL), emergent bilingual, subtractive bilingualism, additive bilingualism*

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## Introduction

In this thesis, I will investigate American education in the scopes of monolingual and bilingual schooling, as well as establish methods to support and advocate for bilingual students, particularly students of color. This thesis was motivated by my personal experiences as a bilingual first generation low income (FGLI) Chinese American who attended a monolingual public K-12 school in New Jersey. It was also motivated by a class I took at Bryn Mawr College taught by Dr. Katherine Riestenberg in the spring of 2020: *Multilingualism: Second Language Acquisition*.

The overarching problem at hand is important to deal with— bilinguals are not properly supported by American education all around. However, there are tangible steps we can take that can begin to change this standard.

My contribution to this field lies in identifying these steps through various subfields of education: curriculum-based support, teacher training program improvements, and acknowledging the problems and solutions of the over and under identification of English learners with disabilities. I will do so by first raising awareness to the issues that bilingual people of color encounter to further establish the premise for writing this thesis. This will be done through recounting their common experiences as well as that of my own, and a discussion of a study I conducted for this purpose. The study surveys bilingual learners who are over the age of 18 and have had experiences in American education. Then, I will lead into a review of bilingual education and its benefits, criticisms, and challenges. Following, I will identify some regional policies in the effort to make useful comparisons. Once all of this has been covered and my findings have been analyzed, I will go into detail about the ways to support bilinguals in various methods of education through cited sources and my own recommendations. This information

will be about what I believe to be the best methods of improving teacher programming and classroom practices. I will finally then identify the issues of over and under identifying emergent bilinguals with disabilities, and establish what I believe is to be the best existing recommendations.

### **1. Experiences of Immigrant POC in Education as Bilinguals**

The attitudes towards bilingualism vary amongst different contexts, though some of these attitudes are often negative in the United States. There tends to be a desire for English-only environments due to this. Early bilingualism is often stigmatized for “threatening” children’s language development and intellectual skills. In fact, it was only just about 17 years ago that bilingual education in most public schools was banned in three states (Arizona, California, and Massachusetts) which collectively educated 40% of the nation’s English-language learners. It was only in the past 5 years that voters and lawmakers in California and Massachusetts repealed anti-bilingual education laws (Mitchell 2019). Arizona’s process of repealing anti-bilingual education laws is still in progress.

Some North American English-speaking educators argue that English should be used in immigrant homes as much as possible, to the exclusion of their heritage languages, in order to prepare the children for a monolingual English education (Genesee, Nicoladia 1995; 18). This ideology leads to a multitude of problematic thoughts, such as shame and detachment from home culture and language, and the stigma that comes with living in an English-dominant society, both of which will be discussed later in this thesis. One problematic belief is that code-switching can cause language confusion, despite the fact that “separation of the two languages has been reported to occur by about age 3” (Leopold, 1949). It isn’t just some arbitrary mixing of multiple

languages — it is rule-governed and systematic. Code-switching is the act of switching from one language to another in a single phrase. It achieves a variety of goals, such as “conveying emphasis, role playing, or establishing sociocultural identity” (Genesee, Nicoladia 1995; 19). Contrary to the belief that code switching is a sign of incompetency, it exemplifies the linguistic competency of multilinguals. The following data will demonstrate an example of what code-switching looks like with Welsh and English, and Spanish and English respectively:

(1) Welsh and English

pan dach chi ‘n defnyddio *wide-angle lenses*  
 when be.2PL.PRES PRON.2PLLL PRT use.NONFIN wide-angle lenses

‘When you use wide-angle lenses . . .’

dach chi ‘n *emphasize-iodefnyddio* ‘r *foreground*  
 be.2PL.PRES PRON.2PLL PRTT emphasize-NONFINNNNNN DET foreground  
 PRO.2PL  
 PRO.2PL

‘. . . you emphasize the foreground’

[Fusser17-BEN]

(2) Spanish and English

el siempre me da cumplidos así  
 PRON.3S always PRON.1S give.3S.PRES compliment.PL thus

‘He’s always paying me compliments like that . . .’

*so I said to him*  
*defnyddio*



So PRON.1S said to PRON.3S

PRO.2PL

PRO.2PL

‘ . . . so I said to him . . . ’

*talk to me in two more years*

talk to PRON.1S in two more year.PL

‘ . . . Talk to me in two more years’

[Sastre9-VAL]

In example (2), we can see that when code-switching occurs in between clauses, Spanish grammar applies to the first clause (“el siempre me da cumplidos así”) while English grammar applies to the next sentence (“...so I said to him... talk to me in two more years”) (Deuchar 2019; 5). In this case, the code-switching is overtly rule-governed where the grammaticality of each language applies to their respective spoken phrases. However, in instances where there is intraclausal code-switching, like in example (1) with Welsh and English, there may be confusion as to whether we should evaluate the grammaticality through either language or neither. Despite the fact that Labov (1971; 457) described the intraclausal code-switching of a New York Puerto Rican Spanish/English bilingual as “the irregular mixture of two distinct systems,” and stated that no one had yet been able to identify any systematic rules or constraints, constraints were indeed being postulated by the end of the 1970s (Deuchar 2019; 5). Pfaff (1979) conducted one of the first such studies where she argued that the mixture of Spanish and English, whether in isolated loan words or code-switching of clauses and sentences, is subject to clear linguistic constraints. She also states that “it is unnecessary to posit the existence of a third grammar to account for the utterances in which the languages are mixed” and that the grammars of Spanish

and English are meshed together according to constraints that favor “surface structures common to both languages” (Deuchar 2019; 5).

Code-switching of children is often a learned pattern from their parents, who may do so themselves (Genesee, Nicoladia 1995; 20). For instance, Lanza (1992) and Goods (1994) suggest that code-switching in bilingual families helps to facilitate communication between the parent and child at a time when a child’s linguistic resources are limited, and code-switching by bilingual children does not cause a breakdown in communication (Genesee, Nicoladia 1995; 21).

Particularly with bilinguals of color in America, there is a double standard that exists between them and white bilinguals. When a bilingual is a person of color, they are often regarded as inferior and unprofessional, but when a bilingual is white, it is acknowledged to be prestigious, especially when they learn a new language later in their life. The latter is called “additive bilingualism,” where the native language is maintained and the second language is used for social, economic, and/or political gain (Stanford News 1991). For example, English-speakers in Quebec often learn French to build their business skills. Whether this additive bilingualism is in French, Latin, classical Greek, Italian, or other languages, it is seen as an “academic boon” for non-minority people (Stanford News 1991).

On the other hand, subtractive bilingualism, where the new language “replaces” the native language, is society’s goal for minority people. This is because their native languages are often seen as a “barrier to academic and economic success — Hispanics, Vietnamese, Filipinos and others” according to Hakuta (Stanford News 1991). When it comes to educating young children in bilingual instruction, Asian and Hispanic immigrant children are often viewed as incompetent learners unless they graduate out of it quickly, as bilingual instruction also comes with another level of stigma where some may only see it as a stopgap measure. In this

perspective, people may believe that being in a bilingual program for too long is a reflection of a student's lack of proper development.

As a FGLI bilingual person of color who was raised in New Jersey, I can attest to much of the aforementioned negativity that comes with being bilingual in America. When I was a young child growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood in Beachwood, NJ, I tried my best to hide my Cantonese skills as much as possible. I felt embarrassed every time someone tried to ask me to speak in my native language because it made me feel ostracized, different, and like I was going to be made fun of. I went to a monolingual public school and tried to fit into the mold of what being an American child in an American school looks like as much as possible, but I could never get quite close enough — I was still visibly Chinese. I grew up with shame of my home culture and language, and had only wished that embracing linguistic diversity was normalized into the curriculum.

## **2. Bilingualism in America: A Study**

In order to demonstrate the real life implications of anti-bilingualism, I have conducted an anonymous survey utilizing Google Forms in order to collect data to represent multilingual students' educational experiences in America. No identifiable information was included and the data was stored on a password protected computer.

### **2.1 Method**

#### **2.1.1 Participant Demographics**

The survey was sent out to the public on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. It was also sent out on the Tri-College's Linguistics email list. The intended audience is any bilingual person over the age of 18 who had educational experiences

different from monolingual students in America at any point in their lives before entering college.

49 responses were acquired over the course of 2 week in November 2021. 63.3% of participants use 2 languages, 22.4% use 3+ languages, and 14.3% use 1 language on a regular basis. Participants were recorded to be users of Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Creole, English, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hawaiian Pidgin, Hebrew, Hindi, Korean, Lao, Mandarin, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Telugu, Tibetan, Urdu, and Vietnamese. 69.3% of participants use a different language at home vs. school, 16.2% don't use a different language at home vs. school, and 14% use multiple languages at home.

95.9% of these speakers spent at least some time in American grade school education. About 6% of participants went to charter school, 10.1% went to private school, and 75.4% went to public school. The other 8.5% included participants from co-op home schooling, as well as from combinations of private school, public school, and charter schools throughout their lives.

### **2.1.2 Procedures**

Then, the following guiding research questions were asked to provide insight on each individual's experiences with language and schooling:

- (1) Did you ever face stigma as a bilingual student growing up in grade school?*
- (2) If you answered yes to the previous question, please elaborate on your experiences if you can!*
- (3) Do you feel like being bilingual gives you an advantage or disadvantage (socially, academically, culturally, etc.), and how?*

*(4) If you can think of it, what are some ways you might have benefited from more academic support as a bilingual while you were growing up?*

### **2.1.3 Results**

*(1-2) Did you ever face stigma as a bilingual student growing up in grade school?*

The common theme amongst students who had faced stigmas growing up was many reported being unwelcome in their school environments because of their language and cultural background. Someone had stated that they were “told many times when speaking in Korean during school time that speaking Korean is not allowed and [they] would get in trouble for it. The teachers would say ‘others would feel left out’ and that other students wouldn’t know if [they were] talking ‘bad’ about them in Korean. Throughout preschool [they were] told that if [they] spoke Korean at school, [they] would struggle to learn English (because [they] immigrated to the US at a young age) so the teachers would suggest for [them] to detach [themselves] from [their] language and culture.” Another Korean speaking student had encountered racist bullying as a child, and tried to distance themselves from Korean and avoided speaking it around other kids. It kept them from “owning the language and wanting to develop [their] Korean any further.” A Spanish speaking participant stated that being an ESL student was hard, especially in a predominantly white elementary school, and faced many racial slurs and ostracization by their white classmates.

Some students that reported to have not experienced stigmas as a bilingual student had gone to a dual-immersion bilingual grade school or an international school with a strong language immersion program where everyone else was bilingual. 42.9% of the other participants had simply answered “no” to this question.

*(3) Do you feel like being bilingual gives you an advantage or disadvantage (socially, academically, culturally, etc.), and how?*

When asked this question, many participants had reported experiencing both advantages and disadvantages simultaneously. However, a general theme among the advantages seems to be that having knowledge in multiple languages is a value in and of itself and helps to connect you to different types of people and cultures. Someone noted that being bilingual gave them a better knowledge of language acquisition and “pronunciations of words in Spanish class came more easily.”

A general theme among the disadvantages is having to face racial stigmas and being a “cultural outsider” when in a predominantly white school. One participant stated that they were “able to learn other languages with ease,” but their “English ability was always undermined in school since it wasn’t [their] first language.”

Many participants thought that being bilingual was more of a disadvantage while growing up, but now see it as an advantage and an important skill in a multicultural world. One person stated that “in middle school, knowing a second language became more socially admired in [their] grade and [they] felt prouder of [their] ability to speak fluently in Chinese.”

*(4) If you can think of it, what are some ways you might have benefited from more academic support as a bilingual while you were growing up?*

One participant noted that they didn’t need academic support as much as social support such as: “being more confident, understanding that it’s okay to eat different foods, [and] like you don’t have to be like everyone else.” Another participant feared forgetting their language because they weren’t practicing their home language growing up and had wished they were able to learn

their home language earlier in life while in school. Someone else said that they “definitely would have liked to have had some support when re-doing assignments because [they were] unable to understand what [they were] supposed to do.” They would have wanted someone “patient and understanding to explain the task at hand as many times as needed” in order to “learn ways to manage [their] anxiety of interacting with social superiors and figures of authority.” Some other participants shared a similar sentiment where they had hoped that teachers were more understanding towards students who were multilingual. Someone stated that they would have benefited academically if their “elementary teachers had a better understanding of language acquisition and second language learning.” This same participant had the idea that all teachers, regardless of the grade level or subject they teach, should take mandatory classes in multilingualism and language acquisition as a part of their training.

#### **2.1.4 Discussion**

These results provide real insight into the experiences of children in American schooling. When the language and cultural patterns of school are significantly different from what children experience at home, they’re required to learn their heritage language and culture while simultaneously trying to master an alien language and culture (Saracho, Spodek 1995; 171). Many of these linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) children feel that they have to reject their home culture and language in order to assimilate to what they are learning in school. In these cases, LCD children may become disoriented in school and reject their personal cultural identities while striving to assimilate to the dominant society (Saracho, Spodek 1995; 171). Ideally, children’s home language and culture should be able to inform the way they present themselves in school. They shouldn’t feel like they absolutely must separate their home lives and

school lives, because inevitably the two cultures are interconnected. This also goes hand in hand with the point made about code-switching and how it is a valuable skill rather than a strain on linguistic development. To reiterate, many patterns of code-switching seen in children are often patterns that were learned at home from their parents. “Identity suggests one’s sense of belonging to a group, within a larger culture, united by shared customs, values, behavioral roles, language, and rules of social interaction tied to a common ancestry” (Salomone 2010; 70). It is important for them to feel a sense of belonging in a wider context in order to gain confidence in their speaking abilities whether it’s their second or native language. When children’s school experiences don’t provide them with a sense of self worth or validation, their cognitive development and linguistic proficiency may become hampered (Hindle 1995; 63). Therefore, it is important that we ensure that a child’s strong sense of identity is prioritized when thinking about curriculums and classroom set ups.

In efforts to alleviate the conflict of identity for multilingual students, having access to their home language communities will increase their confidence of speaking abilities, and will thus only benefit their language development. In the study I conducted, someone found that having a “small support circle in elementary school” for Vietnamese private lessons was helpful, even though it was very short lived. Had it been longer, this participant notes, it would have helped them retain the language more. To support student language backgrounds, we can first understand the demographics and needs of their students, and then find ways to connect them to their home language speaking communities in order for them to have more access to spaces where they can practice and maintain their language. This can be something implemented within the school, or a connection made externally.



Schools must make it a point to expose students to different cultures and languages, and be ready to provide the appropriate support when needed. This can be done by emphasizing language acquisition, second language learning, and cultural, political, and social dynamics during teacher training. These are all items that will be mentioned later on in this thesis.

### **3. Defining Bilingual Education Programs**

In this section, we will define what bilingual education programs are for the purposes of clarification and addressing common misconceptions. Bilingual education as it stands uses two languages as a method of instruction in part or all of a school's curriculum. There are two different types of approaches in bilingual education: the assimilationist approach and the pluralistic approach. In the assimilationist approach, bilingual education is more used as a stopgap measure until the second language is learned, and in the pluralistic approach, bilingual education is used for the value of itself.

The assimilationist approach is often the more "conservative, elitist" approach, but is unfortunately the more prevalent one (Kjolseth 1975). Well over 80% of bilingual education programs in the United States seem to follow the assimilation model, and only the remaining few are "moderately pluralistic." The pluralistic approach takes into account "language dominance, linguistic features, and attitudes existing in the community where the program is to be implemented" with teachers active in the ethnic community, whereas in the assimilationist approach, "the community is involved, but not in control." The desired outcome of the latter approach is to use the "ethnic language as a bridge to the non-ethnic language," causing stigma against the heritage language and loss of culture (Kjolseth 1975).

When it comes to dual-language programming, which is a specific type of bilingual education with a pluralistic approach, it may be one-way or two way (Cohen 1975; 18). In one-way dual-language instruction, students are native in one of the languages, and are learning in a new language. In two-way dual-language instruction, students who have language competencies in both languages are learning through both said languages.

The following table briefly summarizes the other different types of education available for bilinguals. It differentiates between the “weak forms” (often with an assimilationist aim) and the “strong forms” (often with a pluralistic aim) of education:

<b>WEAK FORMS OF EDUCATION FOR BILINGUALISM</b>				
<b>Type of Program</b>	<b>Typical Type of Child</b>	<b>Language of the Classroom</b>	<b>Societal and Educational Aim</b>	<b>Aim in Language Outcome</b>
SUBMERSION (Structured Immersion)	Language Minority	Majority Language	Assimilation	Monolingualism
SUBMERSION with Withdrawal Classes	Language Minority	Majority Language with 'Pull out' L2 Lessons	Assimilation	Monolingualism
SEGREGATIONIST	Language Minority	Minority language (forced, no choice)	Apartheid	Monolingualism
TRANSITIONAL	Language Minority	Moves from Minority to Majority Language	Assimilation	Relative Monolingualism
MAINSTREAM with Foreign Language Teaching	Language Minority	Majority Language with L2/FL Lessons	Limited Enrichment	Limited Bilingualism

SEPARATIST	Language Minority	Minority Language (out of choice)	Detachment/ Autonomy	Limited Bilingualism
<b>STRONG FORMS OF EDUCATION FOR BILINGUALISM AND BILITERACY</b>				
<b>Type of Program</b>	<b>Typical Type of Child</b>	<b>Language of the Classroom</b>	<b>Societal and Educational Aim</b>	<b>Aim in Language Outcome</b>
IMMERSION	Language Majority	Bilingual with Initial Emphasis on L2	Pluralism and Enrichment	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
MAINTENANCE/ HERITAGE LANGUAGE	Language Minority	Bilingual with Emphasis on L1	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
TWO-WAY/DUAL LANGUAGE	Mixed Language Minority & Majority	Minority and Majority	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN MAJORITY LANGUAGES	Language Majority	Two Majority Languages	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
Notes: (1) L2 = Second Language, L1 = First Language, FL = Foreign Language (2) Formulation of this table owes much to discussions with Professor Ofelia Garcia				

Fig. 1<sup>1</sup> Descriptive chart of the models of bilingual education

It is important to make distinctions for the terminology that is being used, as different pieces of literature may vary in usage. The term “immersion” is sometimes used interchangeably

<sup>1</sup> Source: Baker, Colin. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Vol. 2nd ed, Multilingual Matters, 1996, 175.

with “bilingual education.” However, an immersion program is a *type* of bilingual education that is made for the sole purpose of getting bilingual learners to a native English proficiency level. It is not equivalent to other strong forms of bilingual education programs that support the home language and majority language simultaneously. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, we will regard immersion programs as a separate entity.

Genesee (2004; 548) defines bilingual education as instruction that aims to promote bilingual competence by using all languages as media for instruction for significant portions of the curriculum. On the other hand, Rossell and Baker (1996; 7) define bilingual education as teaching minority language-speaking students to read and write in their native tongue with the goal of transitioning them to English over a long period of time. These definitions describe different situations with different goals. The distinction being made is bilingual education (Genesee 2004) and education for bilingual children (Rossell and Baker 1996). For the purposes of this paper, we will be using Genesee’s definition of bilingual education.

#### **4. History of Bilingual Education**

Now, we will establish how bilingual education programs were founded within its historical context. US bilingual schooling falls into two distinct periods: pre World War I and post 1963.

World War I brought about a trend towards English-only schooling and policies as part of the Americanization process away from foreign language schooling. But when 1963 approached, it saw a renewed trend towards foreign language schooling (Cohen 1975; 40). Both of these trends will be elaborated in depth later in this section. In 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act that recognized the growing number of LCD<sup>2</sup> children that were not receiving an

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<sup>2</sup> LCD: Linguistically and culturally diverse

education equal to their monolingual English-speaking peers (US Department of Education 1995).

The status of bilingual education has transitioned through four different periods: permissive, restrictive, opportunist, and dismissive (Baker 1996; 166). However, it is important to note that these time periods overlap, and that variations exist between different states due to each of their independent policies and practices. In the permissive period (1700s-1880s), European immigrants (Italian, German, Dutch, French, Polish, Czech, Irish, Welsh, etc.) arrived in the United States where a number of indigenous peoples and languages were located. Up until World War 1, linguistic diversity was encouraged. For example, German-English schools were set up by German communities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin; bilingual and monolingual German education was deemed acceptable. This was motivated by a couple of factors: competition for students between public and private schools, the indifference from school administrators, isolation of schools in rural areas, and ethnic homogeneity within a given region that gave way to bilingual education.

The restrictive period that took place during the first two decades of the twentieth century launched a change in attitude towards bilingualism and bilingual education in the United States. This was due to a dramatic increase of immigrants around the turn of the century which gave rise to the fear of foreigners, along with the call for their integration and assimilation. Because they lacked English literacy, which was seen as a source of social, political, and economic concern, the process of Americanization began and The Nationality Act (1906) was passed to require immigrants to speak English in order to become naturalized American citizens. By 1919, the Americanization Department of the United States Bureau of Education recommended that all school instruction, private and public, should be conducted in English.

Then in 1957, the Russians launched their Sputnik into space which led the US to compete in an “increasingly international world.” This time period was known as the period of opportunity, and the need for foreign language instruction increased. In 1958, the National Defense and Education Act was passed to promote foreign language instruction through elementary schools, high schools, and universities. People became slightly more tolerant of languages besides English that were spoken in the United States.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of color, race, or, national origin, and also led to the increased tolerance of other languages; however, during the 1980s, the dismissive period, hostility against bilingual education resurfaced. In 1981, President Reagan stated, “it is absolutely wrong and against the American concept to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly, dedicated to preserving their native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go out into the job market” (Baker 1996; 170). His assumption was that the preservation of the native language neglects English language acquisition, which was unfortunately a widely held sentiment in the United States at the time.

## **5. Benefits of Bilingual Education Programs**

Now that the historical background has been established, we can move on to discuss the benefits of bilingual education programs. Research shows that when bilingual programs are set up properly, they are successful and work well. In a survey of successful programs in California (Krashen and Biber 1988), they found that students participating in well-designed bilingual programs consistently outperformed the comparison students, doing very well compared to local and national norms and reaching national norms between grades 3-6. A “well designed” program was noted by Krashen as meeting the following criteria:

- (1) comprehensible input in English, and sheltered subject matter teaching<sup>3</sup>
  - (2) subject matter teaching in the first language, without translation
  - (3) literary development in the first language (which will transfer to a second language)
- (Krashen 1991; 5).

In a study conducted by Barnett et al. (2007), preschool children (3-4 years old) of low socioeconomic status in bilingual and English-only programs were compared with each other (Bialystok 2016). Children were assigned to these programs by lottery, which controlled to some extent any pre-existing differences among the children and their families. Experimental tasks that assessed phonological awareness and language knowledge (vocabulary) were given. In both programs, children made comparable progress in English skill development, but the children in the bilingual program also developed similar skills in Spanish. Therefore, this study indicates that bilingual instruction does not impede development of English as a second language and that it produces long term benefits for children's language and literacy proficiencies.

Additionally, three other studies reaped similar results coming from bilingual programs of Italian and English (Montanari 2013), Mandarin and English (Padilla et al. 2013), and Hebrew and Russian (Schwartz 2013) (Bialystok 2016; 5). In terms of the Italian-English program study, the 60 children attending this program in California were evaluated from first to third grade for language and literacy abilities in both languages. Results showed that children developed strong literacy skills in both languages by the first grade, even though instruction was exclusively taught in Italian (the minority language of the program). In terms of the Mandarin-English program that also happened to be implemented in California, instruction was provided in

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<sup>3</sup> sheltered subject matter teaching: "provides comprehensible input directly, while teaching in the first language makes an indirect but powerful contribution by providing background knowledge and literacy" (Krashen 1991; 7)

Mandarin beginning in kindergarten for children who spoke Mandarin at home or were exposed to it, or were only at an English-speaking level. Though it was also a small-scale study like with the Italian-English program, results showed that children gained proficiency in both languages and sometimes even outperformed state levels of standardized tests given in English, despite instruction in the minority language. In terms of the Russian-Hebrew program, 4 year olds attending school in Israel where Hebrew is the majority language were studied. Results showed again that children in these bilingual programs developed language proficiency and narrative skills in Hebrew, while maintaining higher levels of Russian.

Therefore, across all three of these studies involving young children, the majority language of these communities was attained proficiently despite instruction in the minority language, and the students were able to gain higher proficiencies in their minority language as well. These studies show that bilingual instruction can encourage the retention of language proficiency and culture without it being at the expense of second language acquisition. However, due to the nature of small-scale studies, we should consider these results to be more suggestive than definitive, but the general pattern among these programs is still important to discuss.

Another small-scale study was conducted by Esposito and Baker-Ward (2013), where they administered two executive function tasks to children in kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade who were in either bilingual education or an English only program (Bialystok 2018). Executive function level is associated with school success. It examined children from low socioeconomic communities. The first task was called the “sun/moon” task where children were given a page with 10 rows of five randomized items and were asked to name them either “sun” or “moon” based on a day or night item theme. Then, they were tasked to name the items the opposite of what it actually was (ex: if stars were shown, the correct response would be to say



“sun”). There was no difference in results between the two groups of children on this task. The second task was called the trail-making task (TMT). The TMT is an executive function task that has been previously shown to be performed better by bilingual rather than monolingual 8 year olds (Bialystok 2010). The kindergarteners all found the tasks to be too hard, so there weren't any noticeable differences between the two groups. However, the remainder of the results of this study, for the children in second and fourth grade enrolled in a bilingual program, showed that they outperformed those in the English only program during the TMT, which requires inhibition and rule-switching. The outcomes of this study point to the possibility that even limited exposure to bilingual education can improve children's executive functions.

All of these studies point towards the idea that when bilingual education programs are set up properly, they will be successful in encouraging the retention of native language proficiency and culture, and improving a child's executive functions.

## **6. Challenges of Bilingual Education**

Even as these programs have the potential to work well when they are successful and set up correctly, they are often met with many challenges socially and politically. Through a western lense, monolingualism is seen as the norm and bilingualism is only seen as “double monolingualism” where the two language systems are completely independent from one another. Thus, even when bilingual programs are developed, school administration may still insist on denying the existence of the complex nature of multilingualism when those running the bilingual programs are operating under a larger institution that prioritizes misinformed monolingual ideologies (Tove et al. 2009; 141).

According to data from the US Department of Education (2017), there are 35 states in America that have schools that offer bilingual programs. Looking at all of these programs, 18 languages are offered in total. However, the home languages are not often the focus in American dual-language programs. “The percentage of Arabic-speaking English-learners, the second-largest group in U.S. schools, has increased 75 percent over the past eight years [since 2019] to 122,000” (Mitchell 2019). However, only two states reported offering dual-language programs in Arabic. The number of states offering dual-language programs in the languages the students speak is not increasing proportionally to the growing number of Arabic-speaking English-learners, and so they are not representing and supporting this demographic efficiently.

In specific situations that prioritize assimilation over accommodation (pluralism), there are “often actually two schools housed in one building — one with a bilingual strand of classrooms and the other with ‘regular’ [monolingual] classrooms.” Here, we have a bilingual program within a monolingual school. The problem with this setup is that it has the tendency to alienate bilingual teachers from non-bilingual staff, with reports of bilingual teachers feeling like “second class citizens” within their own buildings, and monolingual teachers mistrusting the methods of bilingual teachers (Ovando and Collier 1985). Additionally, bilingual students in this situation are often deprived of the resources that are often made available to other students, which simultaneously deprives native English speakers from reaping the potential benefits of a bilingual education. Reformation in the bilingual education system is difficult to foster because bilingual teachers and administrators are often met with “indifference, or in some cases, hostility” when attempting to implement new programs or expand older ones. If a program cannot be adequately integrated into the system, it has very little chance of succeeding; thus it is

important that renewed attention must be given to elaborate planning and implementation of these programs for them to flourish (Toni Griego-Jones 1995; 2).

## 7. Oppositions to Bilingual Education

Since bilingual education is met with so much criticism and debate, I will highlight some of the arguments against it and identify their counterpoints. In *Bilingual Education: A focus on current research*, Krashen mentions RP Porter, author of *Forked Tongue*, who is strongly against bilingual education. Porter insists that bilingual education doesn't work (Porter, 1990a, p. 223). In some cases, she is simply anti-bad bilingual education, bringing up points that many can agree with — for example, noting that “delayed exposure to written language until students reach grade level” (Porter, 1990a, p. 22) or that “programs in which teachers are encouraged to code-switch in class (Porter, 1990a, p. 31)” are ineffective pedagogies. Language separation is a good thing sometimes, as even a bilingual will need to have protected monolingual spaces (Tove et al. 2009; 146). However, other attacks against bilingual education are not supported by the data she presents. For example, she claims that in Boston, “several hundred” bilingual education students had not learned enough English to be graduated into monolingual schooling by grade seven (Porter, 1990a, p. 60). However, Porter does not tell us whether this is a small or large percentage of the total number of students surveyed (if it is a small percentage, the data indicates that the program was actually successful if being graduated into a monolingual school was the intended goal) (Krashen 1991; 6).

There is a popular argument that immersion programs are superior to bilingual education that utilizes both languages evenly. Imoff (1990) who supports this view claims that “the language teaching method that is generally the fastest, most efficient, and most effective is the

Berlitz or immersion method” but does not present evidence supporting his view (Krashen 1991; 6). It is possible that he was citing Rossell and Ross (1986), according to Krashen, who claims that “immersion students outperform students in bilingual education in English language proficiency in six out of seven studies.” However, there are four different types of language immersion programs to analyze:

- (1) submersion or “sink or swim” (there is little to no support to this approach)
- (2) Canadian-style immersion (CSI) where middle-class children receive much of their subject matter instruction through a second language and a strong effort is made to ensure that instruction is comprehensible; additionally, CSI students are able to develop literacy and subject matter knowledge in their first language (CSI principles are identical to that of bilingual education and have been successful — the goal is bilingualism and not the replacement of a language with another)
- (3) sheltered subject matter teaching with a sheltered class as a transition; this is better than a program that forces a student to jump into the mainstream language (this approach was inspired by the success of CSI, and research at the university level has shown that “students in sheltered subject matter classes acquire impressive amounts of the second language and learn subject matter as well” (Edwards, Wesche, Krashen, Clement and Kruidinier, 1983; Lafayette and Buscaglia, 1983; Hauptman, Wesche and Ready, 198; Sternfeld, 1989).
- (4) structured immersion (SI, also inspired by the success of CSI) that fulfills the 4 characteristics: comprehensible subject matter instruction to second language acquirers, use of the first language when necessary for explanation, direct instruction of grammar, and pre-teaching vocabulary. There is little proper evidence that supports the efficacy of

direct grammar instruction and pre-teaching vocabulary. For example, Gersten and Woodward (1985) reported that SI children did extremely well in a follow up study with high levels of performance (65th percentile) two years following the initial study with a Californian school, but only two groups of 9 children were studied and no comparisons were made to bilingual education (Krashen 1991; 6-8).

Returning to the argument made by Rossell and Ross (1986), who said that immersion programs were more effective than bilingual education in six out of the seven studies performed, it is important to note that many of those studies pose several serious problems such as: not having a sufficiently large sample size (Gersten 1985), mislabelling an actually bilingual education program as immersion (Willig 1985, 1987), and including studies about Canadian French immersion even though Canadian early total immersion is not the same as an all-English immersion. Also, many American limited English proficiency (LEP) children do not come with the same advantages that well prepared children from financially-stable households have, such as the ones in the Canadian-French immersion programs (Krashen 1991; 9-10). Due to all of these problems that have been noted with the immersion argument, it has thus been shown that the idea that immersion is superior to bilingual education has not been properly demonstrated.

## **8. Regional Research on Policies**

The status of bilingual education varies throughout the country. As noted earlier in this thesis, it was only about 17 years ago that bilingual education was banned in three states (Arizona, California, and Massachusetts) when it came to public schools. These stigmas and attitudes about bilingual education and bilinguals are permeating. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge how these ideologies tangibly manifest in the United States.

When the law No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed in 2001, New York City had experienced dramatic changes to schooling that especially affected emergent bilinguals (interchangeably, English language learners). Schools in New York City had chosen to eliminate bilingual education programs and replaced them with English-only programs due to this policy that resulted in a “highly invasive federal education policy within the US context” (Menken, Solorza 2012; 97). Due to the decentralization of NYC schools, a process that gives power to local governments, communities, and schools, principals of individual schools have to decide which language programs would be provided to support their bilingual students (Menken, Solorza 2012; 98). These decisions were built on the basis that bilingual education programs were the cause for poor performance of emergent bilingual students on high-stakes tests and other academic measures. The decision to remove these programs was thought to improve their test performance, regardless of any actual data or evidence that may prove or disprove this point (Menken, Solorza 2012; 108). As we have discussed in this thesis, we know that usage of the home language supports the acquisition of a second language. When these principals talked about bilingual teachers, they claimed that they used their home language too much at the expense of building English proficiency. Many principals have even admitted to shutting down bilingual programs as a way of “keeping out” these emergent bilinguals — “I think there is a movement to not take, to say we don’t have a bilingual program so we don’t get the students who want a bilingual education” (Garcia 2016).

The number of emergent bilinguals in NYC bilingual education programs began to decrease while the number in ESL programs increased (Menken, Solorza 2012; 98). In the 2002-2003 school year, 39.7% of all emergent bilinguals were enrolled in some bilingual education program, while 53.4% were enrolled in ESL programs. In the 2010-2011 school year,

only 22.3% of emergent bilinguals were enrolled in bilingual education programs and 70.2% were enrolled in ESL programs (New York City Department of Education, 2011). As a result of the lack of bilingual education programming and participation, the New York State Department of Education placed the NYC DOE under a corrective action plan to address education issues that include the reduction of bilingual programs; they pledged to create 125 additional bilingual programs by 2013 (Garcia 2016). Between the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, the city only opened 60 new programs. The plan was replaced in 2014 by a Memorandum of Understanding which was a bilateral agreement between NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña and NY State Education Commissioner John King. It put pressure on the city to improve the conditions for English learner (EL) students. Some of its goals were to ensure that bilingual education programs would be accessible to all eligible students by the 2018-2019 school year, and that a process would be put in place to prevent schools from declining to enroll EL students.

In an article that recorded the current educational experiences of the South, English as a Second Language (ESL) specialist Anne Pace stated that “there just aren’t enough teachers to accommodate the amount of children that are coming in right now,” which is the case across much of the nation and of the South (Carsen 2015). Finding qualified teachers to aid bilingual learners has been an especially difficult process for them. Every Southern state besides Texas has an officially English-only government which may affect educational policies, having tendencies to favor English immersion over teaching language-minority students their heritage languages, like in dual-language bilingual education. According to Dely Velez-Roberts, a bilingual who administers EL programs for the State Education Department, Alabama doesn’t have bilingual education; they only have English Learner programs. She is unfamiliar with research that supports bilingual education due to the fact that she and only three other trainers travel the state

to coach teachers that have little experience, and the state has more than 20,000 classified English learners. Thus, we can see how being under-resourced in education can dramatically affect the type of education students receive.

### **9. Support for Students in Bilingual Education: Within Teacher Education Programming**

Teachers who work with LCD children must be properly trained and possess knowledge of more than one language, or are in the process of mastering a second language. This serves the purpose of being able to understand children's language development better, so that their work with children is not based on false assumptions (Genesee, Nicoladia 1995; 18). They should also have a solid foundational knowledge on:

- “(1) the history and traditions of both the education of LCD children and of LCD children
- (2) principles of child growth and development
- (3) learning theory
- (4) the cultural, social, and political contexts in which they will be working” (Saracho & Spokdek, 1983).

These teachers need to be aware of the effects that socioeconomic and cultural factors may have on a child's cognitive and language development, which is essential to developing a program's set of goals (Edwards, Fear, Gallego 1995; 162). Thus, one of the ways bilingual programs can be improved is to make teacher preparation programs more inclusive and informed about second language learning, and the role and importance of a child's native language.

The increase in the number of LCD children calls for more qualified bilingual teachers in order to properly support all LCD students. These qualified bilingual teachers should have the characteristics of a good early childhood teacher, including:



- “(1) believing that cultural diversity is a worthy goal
- (2) respecting the culture children bring to school
- (3) believing that the children’s culture is worth preserving and enriching
- (4) appreciating cultural and linguistic differences as undeniable individual differences
- (5) being willing to learn more about the education of LCD children
- (6) having a positive self-concept
- (7) enhancing the children’s self-image
- (8) having confidence in the ability of LCD children to learn
- (9) having a positive attitude toward all children of any ethnic group, regardless of socioeconomic status (Blanco, 1975; Casso & Gonzalez, 1974)” (Edwards, Fear, Gallego 1995; 154).

Additionally, some educators suggest that these teachers of LCD children should be of the same ethnic background of the children in order to provide more support and encourage them to perform better. However, it has also been noted that if the teachers are of the same ethnic group but come from a different socioeconomic background, they may be less sensitive towards students of greater need and perceive them as lacking ability or motivation (Edwards, Fear, Gallego 1995; 155).

Improvement of the selection process of LCD teachers should result in positive change, and improvements in the bilingual education system (Edwards Fear Gallego 1995; 156). Effective, successful teachers of bilingual students generally exhibit “active teaching” behaviors such as:

- “(1) communicating clearly when giving directions, accurately describing tasks and specifying how students will know when the tasks are completed correctly, and

presenting new information by using appropriate strategies like explaining, outlining, and demonstrating

(2) obtaining and maintaining students' engagement in instructional tasks by maintaining task focus by pacing instruction appropriately, by promoting student involvement, and by communicating their expectations for students' success in completing instructional tasks

(3) monitoring students' progress and providing immediate feedback whenever required with respect to whether students are achieving success in tasks or, if not, how they can achieve success" (Tikunoff 1985; 3).

### **10. Support for Students in Bilingual Education: In Practice**

Beyond improving LCD teacher education programs, there are ways to support LCD students in practice. William J. Tikunoff (1985) identified the five Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF), a descriptive study that sought to identify and verify instructional features that appear to be successful in producing positive classroom experiences for limited English proficiency (LEP) students (Tikunoff 1985; v). These features are as follows (Tikunoff 1985; 3):

“(1) effective teachers exhibit the ‘active teaching’ behaviors found to be related to increased student performance on tests of academic achievement in reading and mathematics

(2) effective teachers mediate effective instruction for limited English proficiency (LEP) students by using both L1 (native language) and L2 (second language, in this instance, English) effectively for instruction, alternating between the two languages whenever necessary to ensure clarity of instruction for LEP students

(3) effective teachers mediate effective instruction for LEP students by integrating English language development with academic skills development, thus enabling LEP students to acquire English terms for concepts and lesson content even when L1 is used for a portion of instruction

(4) effective teachers mediate active teaching by responding and using information from LEP students' home cultures(s). They (a) use cultural referents during instruction, (b) organize instruction to build upon participant structures from the LEP students' home culture(s), and (c) observe the values and norms of the LEP students' home culture(s), even as the norms of the majority culture are being taught

(5) the instructional intent of successful teachers of LEP students is congruent with how they organize and deliver instruction, and with the resultant consequences for students. In addition, they communicate (a) high expectations for LEP students in terms of learning and (b) a sense of efficacy in terms of their own ability to teach all students.”

Additionally, research has indicated that reading, and especially free voluntary reading, has been a major source of language and literacy development, as well as knowledge (Krashen 1991; 11). Reading in the primary language provides much of the underlying proficiency that aids English language development. Additionally, a reading habit in the first language will likely transfer to the second language with advanced first language development. Thus, it is important to advocate for students to read in their primary language which in turn strengthens their bilingual proficiency.

## **11. Support for Bilingual Students in Monolingual Education: Within Teacher Education Programming**

Finding ways to support bilingual students in monolingual education begins with the teachers and the program training that comes with it. In order to better serve the needs of POC bilingual students, it requires much reform of American childhood education and additional training for teachers. As noted in the previous section “*Support for Students in Bilingual Education: Within Teacher Programming*,” linguistic diversity needs to be acknowledged by educators of LCD children to both meet the needs of their students, and for them to gain awareness of their different language and cultural backgrounds to understand what the curriculum should look like. Proper linguistic training is often expected out of multilingual teachers, but it should also be a part of monolingual teachers’ training. Being a monolingual teacher shouldn’t absolve them from having to learn about linguistic differences with the students they are responsible for. Teacher training programs must reflect the “shifting political, demographic, and programmatic realities” (Milk et al. 1992; 10). During the training phase, prospective teachers must be provided with the opportunities to interact with language minority students and their parents in order to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to work in multicultural environments (Milk et al. 1992; 11). These programs should examine the curriculum for teacher training courses to ensure that all educators are provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to properly address the needs of language minority students. It should also include a foreign language requirement in order for them to gain a stronger sense of awareness for their students’ needs and experiences.

## 12. Support for Bilingual Students in Monolingual Education: In Practice

Now that recommendations for improving teacher education programs in monolingual schooling have been established, we can look at recommendations that apply to schooling in practice. According to Saracho and Spodek, LCD children learn best with maximal contextual reinforcement, and concentrating exclusively on the technical aspects (reading, grammar, and spelling) can have a detrimental influence on the learning environment (Saracho, Spodek 1995; 172). It's especially important for bilingual students to not be subjected to too many inevitable prescriptivist<sup>4</sup> values of American education. Bilinguals are not confused. There is an internal structure to their language abilities that they have an understanding of, and trying to emphasize too much on what is grammatically correct is not a productive use of educational time.

Although William J. Tikunoff's aforementioned five Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF) were meant for bilingual teachers working with bilingual students, these features are also applicable to monolingual school environments. Even the feature that uses "L1 for a portion of instruction for purposes of assuring clarity and understanding" can be accommodated in different ways. For example, there was one study site where Vietnamese LEP students were working with Vietnamese teacher assistants that had some English proficiency. They provided translations and interpretations of the teacher's instructions whenever it was needed, and as a result, the students were able to understand the requirements of the tasks at hand. They were also able to seek assistance and feedback from these teacher assistants (Tikunoff 1985; 53). In this way, students were able to gain a better grasp of the lesson content while developing "student functional proficiency," and English skills that relate both to content development and learning appropriate responses to class task demands (Tikunoff 1985; 54).

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<sup>4</sup> Prescriptivism: includes a strict set of beliefs that there are correct and incorrect ways to use language

If teachers wanted to implement an integrated language and content program for limited English proficiency (LEP) students in a monolingual school, is it of utmost importance to identify content/mainstream teachers who are interested in modifying their instruction for LEP students, and ESL teachers, when available, who are interested in integrating subject matter into their language classes (Crandall et al. 1987; 7). Content-based instruction uses academic content as its base (ex: characteristics of animals) and emphasizes the kinds of academic language skills (ex: classification and comparison-contrast) which are important for students to function successfully in a mainstream academic classroom (Crandall et al. 1987; 3). Content or mainstream teachers and ESL teachers must collaborate in order for the program to be successful as early as possible in the school year in order to have a sufficient amount of time to develop the curriculum, discuss methods, and identify material to use for the program. Staff development in terms of focusing on methods and materials will also be necessary (Crandall et al. 1987; 7). They could begin with a few pilot classes to demonstrate the approach, which should hopefully in turn build support for it within the school. For example, they could implement this approach in classes for art or music. These are ideal starting points because they “combine high interest with relatively low language requirements,” and they can then expand the program to include math, social studies, and science (Crandall et al. 1987; 7-8). However, facilitating cooperation between language and content-area teachers may pose some difficulty as schools are becoming increasingly compartmentalized, and opportunities for communication or collaboration may be limited (Crandall et al. 1987; 8). It is important to gain support from the administration at all stages of development, but it is also important to note that not all teachers need to participate in this program development immediately — a core group of interested teachers who are willing to

develop their own integrated program that meets the school's curriculum objectives can then later invite other teachers to join if the program is successful (Crandall et al. 1987; 7-8).

### **13. The Issue: Overidentifying/Underidentifying English Learners with Disabilities**

In efforts of finding ways to support bilinguals in America, we must also address the problem of over and under identifying English Learners (ELs) with disabilities (Zacarian 130; 2011). This is a pressing issue as it's important that we find ways to properly meet the needs of all ELs and avoid placing students in programs incorrectly. In this section, I will identify the components of this issue and identify ways of remedying it as noted by Zacarian.

First, we must define the terms "overidentifying" and "underidentifying."

Overidentifying ELs with disabilities refers to having a high and disproportionate number of English learners being referred for a special education evaluation and being diagnosed with a learning disability. Educators must understand the needs of ELs and properly deliver instruction that is tailored for them in order to stop overidentifying students as having disabilities when they do not. When it comes to underidentifying students, some educators might be afraid of referring ELs too quickly, and believe that more time is needed for a student to learn English before a special education referral is made. In this case, they could be waiting until the student fails which may prevent interventions that are needed from occurring. By the time they have waited too long, it's possible that it may become too late to provide the types of interventions that would have helped the student the most. This poses the question: how can we find an intermediate between these two extremes and properly identify ELs with disabilities in schools?

### **13 .1 Addressing the Disproportionality in Identifying English Learners with Disabilities**

In an attempt to resolve this disproportionality, Zacarian discusses the multistep scale of response commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI) as being useful to help educators and specialists address the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education. In this process, school systems would systematically provide interventions to prevent students from failing as this would be occurring without waiting for a special education evaluation. There are four components to an RTI model according to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2010):

- “(1) a school-wide, multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure
- (2) screening
- (3) progress monitoring
- (4) data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification in accordance with state law.” (137)

However, we must acknowledge that the RTI model isn't one-size-fits-all for ELs. This is because some schools and states might not offer instruction or support in a student's home language or have eliminated bilingual education programs, making English the only language that ELs can access in schools. Even if they do, the programming and resources available may be limited. As a result, ELs don't receive the necessary programming for the success of their language and cognitive development, and may consequently end up performing poorly. Additionally, even if interventions are applied, they are sometimes not enough or don't address the specific needs that English learners have.



In order to determine whether a student is having difficulties in school due to second language learning or having a disability, a school must examine the effectiveness of its English Learner Education (ELE) programming. Educators and specialists must also gather data about the ELs in question to determine if their struggles are either due to developmental processes with learning English or if there is an underlying learning disability. When difficulties are only present in an English-only school environment, it is less likely that there is an underlying disability at hand. When difficulties are present in both the English-only school environment and at home where they use their home language(s), then it is more likely that a referral for a special education evaluation is appropriate.

A systemic team approach is needed that includes specialists that are trained to deal with the intersection of disabilities and language acquisition. The team should also include special education teachers, ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, and parents. If the team discovers that over/underidentification is happening due to under-resourced ELE programming they may:

“(1) increase professional development so that more teachers and specialists are trained and have a better understanding of the school’s EL population from a cultural and linguistic perspective

(2) implement daily ESL instruction so that students receive a greater continuum of English language development

(3) offer instruction or support in the student’s home language so that students have increased access to the curriculum

(4) hire more specialists who are bilingual and bicultural in students’ home languages and cultures

(5) include a district wide approach to curriculum planning and delivery that includes an understanding of English language development and the importance of ELs' culture, language, and world experiences

(6) use a systemic team approach for evaluating the learning environment for ELs.” (141)

Then, they can apply immediate interventions if needed, which includes:

(1) providing help to individual students when they first appear to struggle to learn

(2) identifying the students who have disabilities

(3) supporting individual students with interventions that are proven to work

(4) evaluating the success of the supports and interventions so that additional or more intensive interventions may be applied if needed

(5) providing special education referral and service delivery.” (141)

### **Conclusion: Advocating to Celebrate Linguistic Diversity in American Schools**

The American education system must collectively celebrate linguistic diversity in their curriculums and teacher training programs in order to fully support all cognitively and linguistically developing students. Of course this is easier said than done, as we've noted that there are many societal and political obstacles surrounding this issue — from the stigma that hovers over multilingualism in school settings to the lack of access to resources that support emergent bilinguals. All of the suggestions made in this thesis are necessary for the improvements of education for students in America. However, it is important to acknowledge that even if teachers may come to a classroom well equipped with all the right knowledge, resources, and tools, change must happen on an institutional level in order for these recommendations to even be considered. Teachers often operate in a larger context in which they

must still abide by the standards and policies of the institution. Nevertheless, it is important to empower and support students of different cultural backgrounds so they can confidently speak and participate in American classrooms, and feel pride in their home language and culture, and we can do so with these changes. My hope for the American education system is that, in time, these recommendations outlined may become standardized in schools.

To summarize these guidelines, we must solidify the foundation of teacher education programming that allows for necessary training on LCD student education, culture, and language which in turn provides a stronger understanding of the social contexts teachers work with. We must also push for active teaching techniques and effective instruction for LEP students that engage their native tongue in ways that aid academic and language skill development, and build new programs that effectively focus on content based instruction. Lastly, we must solidify ways to avoid over and under identifying English learners with disabilities.

### **Further Research: Overidentification and Underidentification of Bilingual Students as English Language Learners (ELL) in the United States**

In establishing places for further research, I would like to investigate the over and under identification of bilingual students as English Language Learners. This would be done in relation to the research I have already completed about the over and under identification of English learners with disabilities, and ensuring that students are placed in the correct classrooms.

In terms of federal law, according to the Education Commission of the States in 2020, an English learner is defined as someone:

“(1) who is aged 3 through 21

(2) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school

(3) (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English (ii) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant and

(4) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.”

At least 21 states in America require the administration of a home language survey, and at least 27 states require the use of an English language proficiency screening assessment for students whose home language is not English (Rafa et al. 2020). Depending on the process each state takes with the surveys or screening assessments, over or underidentification may occur. For example, in 2009, Arizona’s survey asked only one question: “What is the primary language of the student?” This resulted in a 30,000 student decline of those enrolled in an ELL program because the survey wasn’t flagging enough students for ELL screening. On the other hand, according to a study conducted by Lisa García Bedolla and Rosaisela Rodriguez in 2011, they found that California school districts had been misidentifying kindergarten students as English learners. Their home language survey results pointed to the likelihood that districts had not been allocating their resources effectively. Too many children had been flagged for testing and not

enough passed the screening test around 2011. This resulted in the misplacement of students in classrooms where they don't belong.

Both of these states have since then improved their processes of administering English learner assessments. However, I am interested in researching more about the current state of English learner assessments to pinpoint ways to minimize the over and under identification of English learners, and ensure that students are properly placed in classrooms that best support their development.

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