

Dual Language Program Models and English Language Learners: An Analysis of the Literacy Results from a 50/50 and a 90/10 Model in Two California Schools

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Abstract

This paper examines the literacy results of English language learners (ELLs) in two California schools following either the 50/50 or the 90/10 dual language (DL) program model. The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature review of dual language programs with an analysis of two schools' websites and literacy assessment data in order to determine the effectiveness of each program model in establishing strong foundational literacy skills and fostering the prolonged academic success of ELLs. California provides various options for the bilingual education of its increasing immigrant population. Under the umbrella of

bilingual education, dual language programs aim to provide students with instruction in two languages which will allow them to become fully bilingual and develop biliteracy skills. The intended purpose of biliteracy is for students to demonstrate reading and writing proficiency in both instructional languages. Although California implements a variety of dual language program models, this paper provides an overview and comparison of the 50/50 and 90/10 models as they are implemented in two California schools with similar demographics. This paper provides an analysis of the English Language Arts/literacy results of ELLs under both program models as depicted on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress to determine which model is most effective in its literacy instruction of language minority students. The findings indicate that ELLs demonstrate higher levels of literacy proficiency under the 90/10 program model. These findings have implications for native language proficiency and the preservation of the mother tongue.

Keywords: English language learners, dual language, program models, literacy, bilingual education, California, biliteracy

1. Introduction

Between 2006 and 2016 the United States immigrant population increased by four million people (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). As of 2017, the United States is home to one-fifth of the world's total migrants (Batalova, Hallock, & Zong, 2018). The rise in immigration has contributed to the growing presence of English language learners (ELLs) in classrooms throughout the country. In Fall 2015, 9.5% of public-school students were identified as ELLs nationally, an increase from the 8.1% reported in Fall 2000 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018). ELLs embody diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics that create specific academic needs. Educators of ELLs in mainstream classrooms are faced with the challenge of meeting pre-set academic standards for students with fluctuating levels of English proficiency.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 sought to provide funding for the K-12 public education of students in need (Menken, 2010). Through ESEA, all students were promised an equal opportunity to a quality education. In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) required that ELLs be provided with the necessary services to support them through their English language acquisition process (Menken, 2010). Under BEA, language minority students were given access to programs and services that addressed the growing presence of language diversity in schools throughout the country (Crawford, 1997). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001 with an emphasis on improving educational outcomes through accountability measures for teachers and schools (Menken, 2010). Under NCLB, ELLs are held to the same academic standards as their native English-speaking counterparts on achievement tests that are administered in the English language (Crawford, 2004). The accountability expectation of NCLB becomes flawed when ELLs are being tested in English academic content while simultaneously learning the language.

Bilingual education provides ELLs with an additional layer of support towards attaining English-proficiency and improved academic achievement. Dual language (DL) programs fall

under the umbrella of bilingual education where students are receiving academic instruction in two languages. Following the implementation of many English-only policies, DL programs allow schools to serve the needs of their linguistically diverse students by promoting values of bilingualism and biliteracy (Place & Hoff, 2011). The rise in immigration is making bilingualism an increasingly discussed topic within the realms of public education. DL programs vary in approach depending on the percentage of instruction that is provided in each language. This paper focuses on the 50/50 and 90/10 DL program models in an effort to explain and provide the benefits and drawbacks of each in regard to the literacy proficiency of ELLs.

In Fall 2015, California had the highest percentage of public-school students who were identified as ELLs at 21% (NCES, 2018). Similarly, California is also the second highest state to show growth in its immigrant population from 2000-2016 behind Texas (Batalova, Hallock, & Zong, 2018). The increased presence of ELLs in California provides a demand for bilingual and DL programs that aim to address their needs. Two California schools with similar demographics implementing DL program models are analyzed for the purpose of this paper. Normandie Avenue Elementary follows the 50/50 DL program model where students receive 50% of their instruction in Spanish and 50% of their instruction in English. Grand View Boulevard Elementary employs the 90/10 DL program model allowing students to begin with 90% of their instruction in Spanish, 10% in English and gradually increasing until getting to 50% in both languages by 4th and 5th grade. An overview of the demographics at both schools and a literature review to describe the characteristics of each program model are provided. An analysis of the English Language Arts/literacy results of ELLs under both program models as depicted on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress are presented to determine the effectiveness of each model in its literacy instruction of language minority students. In considering the percentage of native language instruction provided to ELLs at each school under each program model, this paper addresses the following research question:

How do foundational literacy skills in the native language influence the academic achievement of ELLs as depicted through two DL program models?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dual Language Programs and English Language Learners

The rise in immigration has contributed towards the growing presence of students who speak a language other than English in classrooms throughout the United States (Gibson, 2016). The high-stakes testing requirements of NCLB mandating grade level proficiency of all students on content knowledge depicts an achievement gap of ELLs whose language proficiency impacts their performance (Menken, 2010). The support offered to ELLs is most commonly seen through English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction that focuses on increasing English-language proficiency. Critics of ESL instruction argue that there is a gap between the level of rigor in the curriculum offered to native English-speaking students in contrast to the one offered to ELLs (Murphy & Torff, 2019). Despite their limited language abilities, ELLs are held to the same academic standards as their native English-speaking

counterparts. The achievement gap becomes increasingly visible as ELLs do not receive the content level of instruction they are being tested on because of their limited proficiency in the English language (Murphy & Torff, 2019). In a study exploring teachers' support of less rigorous curriculum for ELLs (Murphy & Toff, 2019), it was depicted that teachers are more supportive of rigorous curriculum for general education students than they are for ELLs. The literature on the study conducted by Murphy and Toff (2019) contributes to the understanding of ELLs underperforming on high-stakes tests.

Following the wave of bilingual education, DL programs emerged thus providing an option that allows immigrant students to maintain their mother tongue throughout their schooling (Varghese & Park, 2010). The different DL program models that are offered in schools throughout the country allow emergent bilinguals to develop their bilingualism throughout their education. The benefits of bilingual programs have effectively debunked initial concerns regarding lower academic achievement in the dominant language in DL and bilingual programs (Cummins, 2005). In a study conducted in a Houston, Texas school (Thomas & Collier, 2003), ELLs who were enrolled in DL programs for five years scored in the 51st percentile on a nationally normed test administered in English. Through DL programs, linguistically diverse students can view their language abilities as an asset instead of a limitation. Under the umbrella of DL programs, one-way DL programs group students who have a background in one language in order to learn the second language. Two-way DL programs, on the other hand, establish a balanced mix of students with a background in both target languages in one classroom setting. For example, under a one-way DL program structure, Spanish-speaking students would be grouped together and taught Spanish and English. Under a two-way DL program structure, Spanish and English speaking students would be grouped together and learn both languages simultaneously. Both one-way and two-way DL program structures make use of 50/50 and 90/10 program models in order to provide instruction.

2.2 50/50 Program Models

The diversity of DL program models is made evident through the varying characteristics employed to deliver language and content instruction. The 50/50 DL program model functions under the even split of language instruction by content area. As previously mentioned, under this program students receive 50% of instruction in English and 50% of instruction in Spanish, or the second language. The 50/50 DL program model typically allows for ELLs and native English speakers to be grouped together and serve as models for each other throughout the language learning process (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). It is important to note that the 50/50 DL program model can be implemented through a divide of language instructional time “based on content area, class period, instructor, day, week, unit, or semester” (Santillana USA, n.d., para. 9). This model promotes the integration of both native English speakers and speakers of the target language as a tool that benefits students in becoming bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural (Santillana USA, n.d.). The language divide of the 50/50 DL program model fosters the simultaneous development of literacy skills in students' primary language and in the second language (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005; Brisk & Proctor, 2012). Brisk and Proctor (2012) recognize assessment, teacher training, and

curriculum and materials development as challenges to this program model.

2.3 90/10 Program Models

The 90/10 DL program model begins with 90% of instruction in Spanish, or the second language, in content-area subjects and 10% of instruction in English in the arts to all learners (Santillana USA, n.d.). The student populations enrolled in a 90/10 program model are grouped together based on the fact that they all speak one language as they progress towards learning the second language and becoming fully biliterate. Therefore, ELLs begin by receiving literacy instruction in their native language and native English speakers are fully immersed in the second language while developing oral language proficiency (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). As the program progresses throughout the years, English language instruction increases until both languages are equally distributed in later grades. Through the 90/10 DL program model, native language proficiency for ELLs is targeted in the early grades while gradually introducing the second language (Santillana USA, n.d.). Research on language proficiency has shown that students depict higher characteristics of Spanish proficiency and full bilingualism in the 90/10 model than in the 50/50 model (Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008, as cited by Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Similarly, research on students in 90/10 DL program models depict equal or higher levels of English proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking as those enrolled in 50/50 DL program models or English mainstream programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Brisk and Proctor (2012) describe the importance of teachers who are qualified to teach in both languages in order to ensure the effectiveness of this program model.

3. Normandie Avenue Elementary School

Normandie Avenue Elementary is a Pre-K to 5th grade Title I school in the Los Angeles Unified school district. The school enrollment during the 2015 school year was 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 19.4% Black or African American, 77.9% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 1.1% Two or more races, and 1.4% White (Office of Civil Rights, 2018). During the 2015-2016 school year, 43.6% of students were identified as ELLs (Office of Civil Rights, 2018). Normandie's vision is to provide standards-based instruction for all students (Normandie Ave Elementary School, 2018). The 50/50 DL program at Normandie is offered from Kindergarten to 5th grade. Under this model, the students receive 50% of their instruction in English and 50% of their instruction in Spanish at all grade levels. The school promotes the development of academic language and literacy in both languages using this model (Normandie Ave Elementary School, 2018). The instruction provided in all subject areas is in both English and Spanish following the Common Core State Standards (Normandie Ave Elementary School, 2018). The school's website shares that the school has a shared goal of college preparedness through literacy initiatives (Normandie Ave Elementary School, 2018). Normandie's principal shares the school's commitment to nurture critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and college/career readiness among all students (Normandie Ave Elementary School, 2018).

4. Grand View Boulevard Elementary School

Grand View Boulevard Elementary offers Pre-K to 5th grade within the Los Angeles Unified school district. The school is identified as a Title I school with student enrollment breakdown of 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.5% Asian, 10.4% Black or African American, 73.9% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 1.0% Two or more races, and 12.6% White in 2015 (Office of Civil Rights, 2018). During the 2015-2016 school year, 39.7% of the students were identified as ELLs (Office of Civil Rights, 2018). Grand View aims to promote student achievement with an emphasis on culturally relevant and responsive education that embodies continuous improvement (Grand View Blvd Elementary School, 2014). The 90/10 DL program at Grand View begins in Kindergarten with 90% academic instruction in Spanish. Each year the students receive a 10% increase of English instruction until reaching 50% in both languages by 4th and 5th grade. Therefore, in Kindergarten the students receive 90% Spanish instruction and 10% English instruction. In 1st grade, students receive 80% Spanish instruction and 20% English instruction. By 2nd grade, students are at 70% Spanish instruction and 30% English instruction. In the 3rd grade, students receive 60% Spanish instruction and 40% English instruction. As previously mentioned, in the 4th and 5th grades students receive 50% Spanish and 50% English instruction. The school's website shares that the K-5th grade teachers in the program are native speakers, three are either National Board Certified or have earned their Master's, and collectively have an average of 10+ years of experience (Grand View Blvd Elementary School, 2014). Grand View prides itself n being the first and only school in the Los Angeles Unified school district to offer the 90/10 DL program since 1990 (Grand View Blvd Elementary School, 2014).

5. Method

English Language Arts/literacy results of ELLs on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress were retrieved from the Education Data Partnership (2019) website for both schools. The data is broken down by the percentage of ELLs who exceeded, met, nearly met or did not meet grade level standards for the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years at each school. This paper also investigates the percentage of students who were redesignated as fluent English proficient during each school year at each school. As mentioned previously in this paper, both schools offer either the 50/50 or 90/10 DL program model. This paper looks into the English Language Arts/literacy results of ELLs on California's state exam guided by the literature review on the topic in order to determine the effectiveness of the DL program models at establishing English literacy proficiency of language minority students.

6. Analysis

Table 1. English Language Arts/Literacy Results of ELLs on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress at Normandie Avenue Elementary School

Characteristics	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
English Learners	44.4%	42.2%	42.6%
Exceeded	2%	0%	0%
Met	6%	10%	3%
Nearly Met	15%	20%	15.2%
Not Met	77%	70%	81.8%
Redesignated Fluent English Proficient	6.9%	7.8%	14.1%

Note. Normandie Avenue Elementary School. Retrieved from the Education Data Partnership website <http://www.ed-data.org>

Normandie elementary follows the 50/50 DL program model to provide language instruction. The percentage of ELLs at Normandie was the highest during the 2015-2016 school year (44.4) with a slight decrease during the 2016-2017 (42.2) and 2017-2018 (42.6) school years. As depicted on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress during the 2015-2016 school year, the highest percentage of ELLs performed at the levels of not met (77) and nearly met (15). During the 2016-2017 school year, the highest percentage of ELLs performed again at the levels of not met (70) and nearly met (20). Similarly, the 2017-2018 school year performance levels of ELLs were at the highest percentages in the levels of not met (81.8) and nearly met (15.2). The highest percentage of ELLs to perform within the exceeded level was shown during the 2015-2016 (2) school year. During the 2016-2017 school year, the highest percentage of ELLs met grade level proficiency at Normandie (10) of the three years provided. As a whole, ELLs at Normandie were more likely to perform at the not met and nearly met levels during all three school years. The data in this paper depicts that ELLs at Normandie are underperforming as depicted by the state's high-stakes tests. The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress also measured the percentage of ELLs who were redesignated to fluent English proficient during the 2015-2016 (6.9), 2016-2017 (7.8), and 2017-2018 (14.1) school years. The percentage of ELLs that have been redesignated as fluent English proficient at Normandie has increased gradually during the three school years analyzed in this paper. Other measures of student success include their ability to meet or exceed grade level requirements on standardized tests.

Table 2. English Language Arts/Literacy Results of ELLs on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress at Grand View Boulevard Elementary

Characteristics	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
English Learners	39.8%	33.4%	31.1%
Exceeded	1%	1.8%	4.4%
Met	15%	8.8%	6.7%
Nearly Met	31%	40.4%	31.1%
Not Met	53%	49.1%	57.8%
Redesignated Fluent English Proficient	8.3%	15.4%	23%

Note. Grand View Boulevard Elementary School. Retrieved from the Education Data Partnership website <http://www.ed-data.org>

Grand View elementary uses the 90/10 DL program model as its main form of language instruction. During the 2015-2016 school year, the percentage of ELLs enrolled at Grand View was the highest (39.8). The percentage of ELLs at Grand View saw a gradual decrease during the 2016-2017 (33.4) and 2017-2018 (31.1) school years. The data depicted on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress during the 2015-2016 school year shows that the highest percentage of ELLs performed at the levels of not met (53) and nearly met (31). During the 2016-2017 school year, the highest percentage of ELLs performed at the levels of not met (49.1) and nearly met (40.4). The data followed a similar trend during the 2017-2018 school year with the highest percentage of ELLs performing at the levels of not met (57.8) and nearly met (31.1). The highest percentage of ELLs to exceed grade level proficiency was shown during the 2017-2018 (4.4) school year. The highest percentage of ELLs to meet grade level proficiency was shown during the 2015-2016 (15) school year. As shown by the data, ELLs at Grand View were most likely to perform at the levels of not met and nearly met. ELLs at Grand View fall within the category of underperforming as depicted by California's achievement exam. The percentage of ELLs to be redesignated to fluent English proficiency increased from the 2015-2016 (8.3) to the 2016-2017 (15.4) to the 2017-2018 (23) school year. The percentage of ELLs redesignated as fluent English at Grand View increased during the three school years analyzed in this paper. Other variables that can explain the difference in redesignation numbers at Grand View include the quality of teacher instruction, supplemental instructional programs used, and the extent of students' prior educational experiences.

7. Discussion

7.1 Strong Foundational Literacy Skills

The purpose of this paper was to compare the English language arts/literacy results of ELLs in two California schools employing two different DL program models. The demographics

and performance levels of ELLs at both schools were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of each program model in providing foundational literacy skills that promote increased academic achievement. The ELL population at Grand View academically outperformed the ELL population at Normandie. ELLs at Grand View demonstrated higher instances of meeting or exceeding literacy proficiency and percentages of students redesignated as fluent English proficient. The results lend legitimacy to claims of the 90/10 model being more effective than the 50/50 model (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). This claim relates to the former program's emphasis on developing strong foundational literacy skills in the native language. Under the 90/10 DL program model, ELLs are provided with literacy instruction in their native tongue before gradually introducing English instruction (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Therefore, in the primary grades, instruction emphasizes the establishment of strong foundational literacy skills in one language as a support for second language acquisition. The results of the data analyzed on the schools presented in this study support the notion that language development is most effective when students already have foundational literacy skills in one language (Thomas & Collier, 2003). Brown (2014) explains the significance of students having skills and behaviors related to reading that "serve as the base for later competence and proficiency" (p. 35). ELLs enrolled in 90/10 DL programs can progress throughout their language acquisition process by beginning with the foundational literacy skills in their native language. The skills and abilities acquired throughout the program are then able to transferable when they begin acquiring the English language. As depicted by the data presented in this paper, ELLs perform better when they can establish strong foundational literacy skills focused on one language as opposed to simultaneously receiving instruction in both languages (Brown, 2014).

7.2 Native Language Proficiency

Language minority students who are given the opportunity to develop native language proficiency that can later be transferred towards English content learning show increased academic achievement. The growing presence of ELLs throughout the country is bringing bilingual education to the forefront in public schools. In the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, researchers were able to analyze the ways in which language minority students are often viewed through a deficit lens in literacy development (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009). ELLs in 90/10 DL programs are taught to value the preservation of the mother tongue in order to improve their academic achievement as depicted through high-stakes tests administered in English. The shift in emphasis from monolingualism to bilingualism throughout the country makes it possible for ELLs to achieve higher levels of academic success through native language proficiency. In regard to literacy instruction, the most effective approaches and resources to meet the needs of ELLs begin with the recognition of the native language abilities (Grant, 2003; Brisk & Proctor, 2012). This recognition is influential in promoting higher academic achievement in ELLs.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper compared the English Language Arts/Literacy results of ELLs at two California

schools practicing either the 50/50 or the 90/10 DL program model. The findings indicated that ELLs under the 90/10 DL program model demonstrated higher levels of literacy proficiency than the ELLs in the 50/50 DL program model. The ELLs of the 90/10 program were also redesignated as fluent English proficient at higher percentages than those on the 50/50 program model.

The premise of the 90/10 DL program model is for students to develop strong foundational literacy skills through native language proficiency. As stated throughout this paper, ELLs benefit greatly from the opportunity to build on the oral language skills they possess in their native language as they move through the second language acquisition process (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). The development of native language proficiency allows language minority students to have a starting point for learning the English language rather than being viewed from a deficit standpoint (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009).

Practices of the 90/10 DL program model are difficult to implement in schools serving high percentages of ELLs without the proper resources. Effective bilingual educators are at the forefront of ensuring the academic success of language minority students. Aside from having highly-qualified bilingual teachers, 90/10 program models require necessary curriculum materials in the target language that aid in providing literacy instruction. However, the benefits of 90/10 DL program models are worth studying and implementing in order to help close the achievement gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers. Some recommendations for implementing practices of 90/10 DL program models with ELLs include:

- Conduct ongoing assessments to determine students' native language proficiency. Maintain the goal of developing strong foundational literacy skills as a prerequisite for acquiring a second language. During the later grades, continue assessments in the native language as well as the English language in order to monitor students' progression towards complete bilingualism and biliteracy.
- Dedicate funding for professional development of bilingual educators to continue to learn the best practices of effective DL program models. Bilingual educators should be given the opportunities to learn instructional strategies that promote biliteracy.
- Utilize enriching and thematic curriculum that promote bilingualism and biliteracy by including language and literature across grade levels. Students should be immersed in practices that are reflective of cultural values within the curriculum.

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