

LITERACY FOUNDATIONS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO
EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTION

Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan

FOREWORD BY SHARON VAUGHN

Literacy Foundations for English Learners

A Comprehensive Guide to Evidence-Based Instruction

edited by

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Teaching Literacy Skills to English Learners

Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan

By completing this chapter, the reader will

- Learn about the profiles and demographics of English learners (ELs) in the United States
- Understand the issues regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native English speakers
- Reflect on the historical perspective of bilingual education in the United States
- Learn how federal initiatives and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) affect education for ELs
- Examine other considerations for meeting the educational needs of ELs, including multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in which students' response to intervention (RTI) and instruction are closely monitored

Victor has just arrived from Honduras with his family. He attended first and second grade in his hometown. His family reports that he made excellent grades in his former school. His family is living with his uncle and adjusting well to living in the United States. Victor tells his teacher that he wants to be a doctor and needs to learn English so that he can read books and one day go to medical school. His teacher is so happy to have a student who is very motivated to learn. She wants to teach him to understand, speak, read, and write in English while also teaching him to understand each of the content standards required of a third-grade student. Fortunately, she has the support of her leadership team. Her school district also provides professional development opportunities to learn the most effective English as a second language strategies to implement in the classroom for students like Victor.

INTRODUCTION

Students such as Victor attend school each day with a desire to learn English and meet their academic goals. Some students have recently arrived from other countries or perhaps their parents or grandparents have continued to speak a language other than English in the home. Although the reasons may vary based on the individual child, in essence, these students have likely experienced limited opportunities for learning English before entering school. Yet, the expected learning outcomes of students such as Victor remain the same as all the other students in the classroom. Students who do not speak English as their native language are known as *English learners (ELs)*; they represent a diverse population of students who speak various native languages and represent various cultures, socioeconomic levels, and educational backgrounds. These individuals may experience challenges in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English at a level that is commensurate with their native English-speaking peers. ELs also bring with them prior knowledge, experiences, and strengths related to language and learning that educators must find ways to identify and build upon. Teachers must be prepared to meet the educational needs of every student, including ELs. The goal of this book is to close the gap of knowledge and practice for serving the language, literacy, and academic needs of ELs.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND PROFILES

ELs are a fast-growing population in schools (McFarland et al., 2017) and represent a diverse population with varied backgrounds. It is necessary for educators and their school leadership teams to understand and be prepared to meet their educational needs. A first step is to learn about the patterns of growth for this population, the initiatives that support their school services, and the considerations for adjusting instruction in order to achieve positive academic outcomes.

The demographics of the United States are rapidly changing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (McFarland et al., 2017),

Table 1.1. Languages commonly spoken by English learners in United States

Language	Percentage
Spanish	77%
Arabic	2.3%
Chinese	2.2%
Vietnamese	1.8%
Hmong	0.8%
Somali	0.7%

Source: McFarland et al. (2017).

there has been an increase in the number of ELs living in the United States. As of 2017, there were 4.9 million ELs attending public schools, representing 9.5% of the student population of the United States.

ELs represent varied backgrounds. Spanish-speaking ELs represent close to 80% of the second language learner population. Arabic speakers are the second most common ELs, representing 2.3% of the EL population attending public schools (McFarland et al., 2017). Table 1.1 describes the languages commonly spoken by ELs in the United States. Although ELs are the fastest growing subpopulation of students in public schools, fewer than 3% of teachers have the specialized certification to work with this group of students (Rahman, Fox, Ikoma, & Gray, 2017).

Literacy and English Learners

ELs enter school with varying literacy skills. Some may be able to read and write in their native language, whereas others may only hold oral language skills in their native language. Likewise, some ELs enter school with basic reading and writing skills in English, whereas others present very limited English literacy skills.

As the population of ELs has risen, schools have struggled to implement new practices to meet the needs of these students. As a result, students who speak English as a second language face a 13% chance of not graduating from high school. ELs are almost twice as likely to drop out of high school in comparison to their non-Hispanic White peers (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2019). Furthermore, although Spanish-speaking ELs represent the most common second language learners, they demonstrate significant achievement gaps in literacy. According to the *Nation's Report Card* (NAEP, 2019), Hispanic students in fourth grade are 21 points behind those individuals classified as non-Hispanic Whites in reading achievement. Hispanic students that live in poverty are 28 points behind their English-speaking peers in reading achievement. In addition, only 23% of ELs in fourth grade read at a proficient level, whereas 35% of non-Hispanic White students in the fourth grade read at a proficient level.

In light of these harrowing facts, educators need new approaches, best practices, and evidence-based strategies to address the achievement gap

for ELs. This book seeks to provide effective literacy practices to teach this population of students and improve their educational outcomes. Readers will learn the essential components of literacy instruction for teaching ELs, the research base for determining the best practices for instruction, and the resources necessary for successful implementation.

Next, this chapter looks back at the federal legislation that relates to delivering instruction to ELs.

FEDERAL INITIATIVES

Federal initiatives and legislation provide a framework for instructional design among ELs. Teachers and school leaders must understand these guidelines in order to ensure successful implementation and thus positive student outcomes. This section briefly summarizes how the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (PL 90-247), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (PL 114-95) affect instruction for ELs.

Bilingual Education Act

The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968 (PL 90-247), is one of the most important federal initiatives for ELs. Proposed by Texas Senator Yarborough, it was designed to be the first federal legislation that would address teaching students with limited English proficiency (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). It stipulated that the federal government would provide school districts with financial assistance to establish and develop innovative educational programs for students with limited English-speaking ability. The Bilingual Education Act was the first attempt to recognize that students with limited English proficiency required specialized instruction and aimed to ensure equal opportunity, provide access to better education, and subsequently increase graduation rates. This was necessary as not to violate the civil rights of students who did not speak English. Notable limitations were that it provided limited funding via competitive grants and was only designed for children between the ages of 3 and 8 with limited English proficiency.

An amendment was established in 1974 as a result of a Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). *Lau v. Nichols* was a class action suit brought against the San Francisco Unified School District. It alleged that 1,800 Chinese students who did not understand English were not being provided an equal education because the curriculum and resources provided were only in English and no specialized English as a second language techniques were incorporated within the instruction. In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that providing students who do not understand English with the same facilities, teachers, curriculum, and resources does not constitute equality

of treatment. In other words, the students' individual rights were violated. Legally, it was determined that Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (PL 88-352), which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, was violated. The students needed additional language and literacy resources in order to learn the content required of all students, and this was not provided to them.

Soon after the *Lau v. Nichols* ruling, Congress enacted the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (PL 93-380). It defined what constitutes a denial of equal educational opportunity and required districts to provide special programs for limited English speakers. In addition, the Bilingual Education Act was not only amended in 1974 but also in 1978, 1984, and 1988. In 1994, the Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized, setting up preferences to programs that promoted bilingualism. Bilingual education programs were described as providing native language instruction and English instruction. In summary, the Bilingual Education Act, and its amendments, was the earliest initiative to address teaching ELs; it was expanded and revised by the No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

NCLB reauthorized and restructured the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendments of 1968 (PL 90-247). NCLB proposed that school successes should be based on performance measures from standardized tests. Its goal was to ensure that all children demonstrate grade-level proficiency in selected areas, including English literacy, math, and science. The legislation required all public schools receiving federal funding to administer annual statewide assessments to all students.

NCLB had a significant impact on bilingual education and the Bilingual Education Act in the United States, due to its emphasis on monitoring students' progress and testing. As a result of NCLB and its emphasis on testing, the Bilingual Education Act was renamed the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (Title III). It allowed states to select how they would address the second language needs of ELs. The individual states would now be required to establish English proficiency standards and quality academic instruction in reading, mathematics, and language arts that was based on scientific evidence for English acquisition. ELs would also be required to take tests that measured their progress compared with monolingual English speakers. These students, however, would be exempt from taking tests in math and reading during their first year in school. States and school districts were required to design plans for providing ELs with the appropriate instruction within their educational budgets. Furthermore, determining the best models of language instruction with the most evidence-based practices would need to be fur-

ther reviewed because the body of research for this population of students had not been determined.

In addition, the law required each school that received Title I funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (PL 89-10) to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is a measurement to determine how every school in the country is performing academically with each student and student group. In other words, each state could set the expected growth or achievement expected each year and the schools or school districts would be required to meet the expectations. The state objectives needed to be measurable and include various subgroups of students, including students considered to be economically disadvantaged, students with learning disabilities, and students who were identified as limited English proficient. Measures for schools to improve and specific timelines were also required for each school. This was very challenging for states because the meta-analysis for best practices had not been finalized and valid screening measures and assessments for ELs were not available. States began to work on developing the assessments related to their population of students.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ESSA was a later reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replaced NCLB. ESSA is in place at the time of this book's publication, and the law focuses on high academic standards. ESSA also focuses on ELs, students living in poverty, and students with learning disabilities, but it allows each state to determine how they can meet each of the requirements. It expands preschool programs and innovative local programs to meet individual students' needs. ESSA also requires every state to submit a plan and seek approval on how it will meet the legislation requirements, including those related to ELs.

ESSA requires every state to report entrance and exit criteria for ELs' language and learning status in order to secure resources for these students. ESSA also requires states to report the academic outcomes of long-term ELs who have been in the program for more than 5 years. These reporting systems are often referred to as *accountability for quality education*. In addition to the outcomes of long-term ELs, ESSA allows states to report on those students who have attained English proficiency for a maximum of 4 years. Therefore, these students who have successfully attained English proficiency can be identified as a subgroup in the state's reporting system for the purpose of measuring students' progress and educational outcomes. ESSA does allow states to exclude first year ELs in the reporting or accountability system. The test results, however, must still be reported.

ESSA also requires reporting on ELs with disabilities and includes an increase in funding for programs meeting the educational needs of this diverse population. ESSA does provide guidelines regarding the selection

of effective approaches for the development of English language proficiency. As such, states are required to design English language proficiency standards as well as academic content standards for each subject area taught in schools. The standards must be designed to meet the educational needs of all students.

CURRICULUM: THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

As previously discussed, states are required to design proficiency standards under NCLB and ESSA. As this mandate was put into practice, it became clear that allowing states to design their own standards could result in students being held to different standards across various states. To address this concern, the National Governor's Association gathered a group of educational experts to work on developing curriculum standards that could be used by the states. The result of this initiative resulted in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), published in 2010. The CCSS are designed to provide clear objectives of what students must learn at each of the grade levels. The standards reflect objectives that are relevant to the real world and are designed to help students in public schools prepare for college and careers. Standards were released for mathematics and English language arts on June 2, 2010, with a majority of states adopting the standards in the subsequent months. States were eager to implement the CCSS because the federal grant known as Race to the Top included standards and assessments for students to be college and career ready.

Yet, little research has been completed on the efficacy of the CCSS for ELs. On a related point, many ELs have challenges meeting the demands of CCSS because they must develop their English language skills and English literacy skills while mastering content knowledge. In this book, readers will learn evidence-based strategies for developing language and literacy skills, which can also assist in meeting the guidelines set forth by the CCSS.

PROGRAM MODELS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

As educators determine the curriculum standards that are required by their schools, it will be important to understand the educational program models that are currently available and the variables that can affect their language and literacy outcomes (i.e., ELs across the country are provided instruction through various program models). Schools may offer several language of instruction program models, each of which can best serve students at varying levels of their second language development. For example, some schools may be unable to provide native language instruction and therefore may focus on English as a second language, incorporating strategies to increase students' understanding. Other schools may provide English immersion in which all instruction is in English with very little support in the native lan-

guage. In some settings, students are in a transitional bilingual education program in which the native language is utilized in the first few years. As the student progresses in language and literacy, English becomes a major focus of instruction. Dual language programs provide instruction in the native language and English throughout the students' academic career. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) outlined four program models for ELs that are educationally sound. Each is described next and summarized in Table 1.2.

1. *English as a second language or English language development*: The goal of this model is to teach academic vocabulary to ELs to help them understand instruction in each of the subjects. This requires English language proficiency for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Instruction is provided primarily in English.
2. *Structured English immersion*: This model is designed to impart English language skills so the EL can make the transition to and succeed in an English-only general education classroom. Instruction is provided primarily in English with strategies to support students' understanding of information.

Table 1.2. English learner (EL) program models

Program option	Program goal	Language(s) used for instruction
English as a second language or English language development	This program consists of techniques, methodology, and special curricula designed to explicitly teach ELs about the English language, including the academic vocabulary needed to gain access to content instruction, and develop their English language proficiency in all four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, writing).	Usually provided in English with little use of the ELs' primary language(s)
Structured English immersion	This program is designed to impart English language skills so that the ELs can make the transition to and succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom once proficient.	Usually provided in English with little use of the ELs' primary language(s)
Transitional bilingual education (TBE) (early-exit bilingual education)	TBE is a program that maintains and develops skills in the primary language while introducing, maintaining, and developing skills in English. The primary purpose of a TBE program is to facilitate ELs' transition to an all-English instructional program while the students receive academic subject instruction in the primary language to the extent necessary.	Students' primary language and English
Dual language or two-way immersion	This is a bilingual program in which the goal is for students to develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language in a classroom that is usually comprised of half primary English speakers and half primary speakers of the other language.	English and another language

Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2016). *English learner tool kit* (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

3. *Transitional bilingual education (early-exit bilingual education)*: This model maintains and develops skills in students' native language while introducing and developing skills in their second language. The purpose of this model is to facilitate the ELs' transition to an all-English instructional program. The students do receive academic subject instruction in their native language, to the extent necessary.
4. *Dual language or two-way immersion*: The goal of this model is for students to develop language proficiency in the native and second language, such as English. Students receive instruction in both languages throughout their academic career. Within a two-way dual language classroom, approximately 50% of students are native English speakers and the other 50% speak another native language. In some schools, a one-way dual language classroom is established in which all students in the classroom are non-native English speakers. The goal for these students, however, continues to be language and literacy proficiency in their native language and English.

The program models to serve ELs are designed to meet a student's language and academic needs in addition to providing guidance to schools for aligning the model to the student. It is important for educators to identify the model that their school or program uses and plan instruction accordingly. When implemented with fidelity, positive student outcomes are expected.

When an EL does not achieve the typical language or literacy skills as his or her peers, then it is necessary to consider providing additional opportunities and support to the student. This can be achieved through multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT: MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

A framework for meeting the educational needs of ELs can include a response to intervention (RTI) process within MTSS. This process was first introduced in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PL 108-446). The goal was to identify students with potential learning disabilities during the early years of education using various sources of data in MTSS. In MTSS, students in the general education classroom often meet the educational standards and expectations and are considered to be in Tier 1. Some students will require extra time in a small-group instructional setting to meet the educational standards, which is a Tier 2 level of support. Tier 2 typically requires a minimum of an additional 30 minutes of targeted instruction. The students' progress is closely monitored, and if the RTI is not favorable, then a third tier of support is recommended. Students who require this more intensive intervention are referred to Tier 3 specialized programs. Tier 3 is implemented with more intensity (minimum of 45 min-

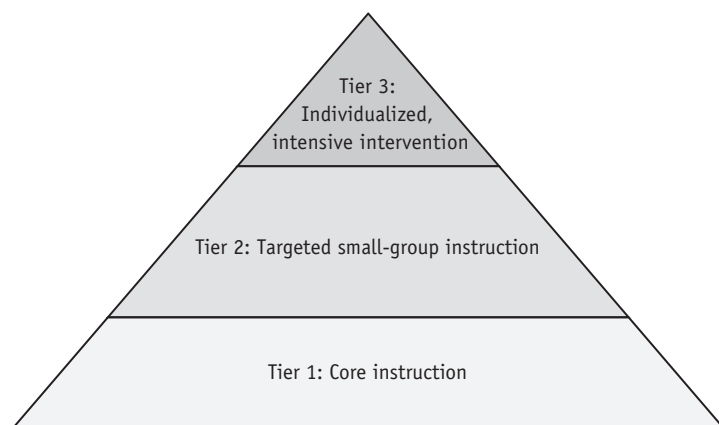


Figure 1.1. Tiered levels of support.

utes per day) to meet the educational standards prescribed by the school and state. See Figure 1.1 for a summary of the MTSS tiers.

Monitoring an EL's language, literacy, and content knowledge provides guidance on skills that require more instruction. For example, if the EL is not meeting the prescribed educational goals at a Tier 1 level of support, then more opportunity within a small-group setting (Tier 2) can be implemented to further enhance the likelihood that the student can master the concepts presented during the core instruction within the classroom. Once these students are identified, their progress monitoring becomes more frequent and their intervention more individualized to meet their needs.

More research must be in place to further understand and improve upon this service delivery among ELs. For example, educators need to know which assessment tools should be utilized to determine a student's language and literacy skills and thus follow his or her progress. These tools must be valid for ELs and must consider the student's oral language proficiency in the native language and English. This becomes a complex goal, as there are many languages and variables to consider when designing an effective assessment instrument.

This book provides techniques for improving language and literacy goals among ELs. Students who require more opportunities to achieve their language and literacy goals should be provided with small-group instruction on a regular basis. The implementation of best practices for language and literacy development among ELs is necessary so that each of these students can achieve his or her academic goals. The information provided in this book can benefit typically developing ELs and those who struggle with reading.

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the varying profiles of ELs, the program models in which they are instructed, and the need for them to achieve high levels

of language and literacy skills. Subsequent chapters in this book address each of the necessary components for the development of literacy skills among ELs.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the fastest growing population of students in U.S. public schools?
2. What is the most common second language of ELs in the United States?
3. What can be done to improve the number of teachers who are prepared to instruct ELs in public schools?
4. Describe one of the variables related to reading achievement among ELs.
5. What appears to be one of the most essential skills for reading comprehension among ELs?
6. What provisions did the Bilingual Education Act provide?
7. Describe the features of NCLB as related to educating ELs.
8. What are the newer features for ELs in ESSA?

EXTENDED READING AND APPLICATION ACTIVITIES

1. Read the CCSS for literacy standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>). With a colleague, discuss the references to ELs within the standards.
2. Read about the waivers for annual yearly progress among ELs in relation to the CCSS. Next, discuss the various challenges reported for achieving positive outcomes among this population of students.
3. Read the literacy briefs on RTI in an MTSS for ELs (<https://osepideasthatwork.org/osep-model-demonstration-program>). Discuss the recommendations for increasing ELs' academic achievement.

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