

# 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 serv.6( 7 were givTD-m)8.1(e rds for stu)ary and

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 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 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 in

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 Li

#### **4. Grand View Boulevard Elementary School**

Grand View Boulevard Elementary offers Pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore, in Kindergarten the students receive 90% Spanish instruction and 10% English instruction. In 1<sup>st</sup> grade, students receive 80% Spanish instruction and 20% English instruction. By 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, students are at 70% Spanish instruction and 30% English instruction. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students receive 60% Spanish instruction and 40% English instruction. As previously mentioned, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades students receive 50% Spanish and 50% English instruction. The school's website shares that the K-5<sup>th</sup>









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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