

LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNERS: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT
CHARACTERISTICS THAT IMPACT TIME TO ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to emergent bilingual students, their families, and the educators who have made it their mission to improve the education of students learning a new language, and in a new language.

I would not have had the opportunity to achieve this great accomplishment without the support and encouragement of my parents, Antonio and Marina Sánchez. Their love, wisdom, and generosity have been the wind beneath my wings and sustained me in the most challenging times of this journey. *Gracias, mami y papi, por enseñarme a volar, por confiar y creer en mí y por apoyarme para poder lograr mis sueños.*

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my daughters, Tiffany and Brittany; my parents, Antonio and Marina; and my sisters, Rossana (in heaven), Nancy, Clari, and Liza, for their support and unconditional love throughout this incredible journey.

Abstract

Background: The number of students identified as English learners (ELs) has grown to over 1 million in Texas and to more than 5 million nationwide. A growing subgroup within the EL population is categorized as long-term English learners (LTELs)—ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 5 or more years and have not been reclassified as English proficient. Of particular concern are LTELs who do not advance past a beginning or intermediate level of proficiency, according to the Texas Education Agency's Results Driven Accountability report.

Purpose: This study sought to analyze student and program characteristics that could potentially impact English learners' time to English language proficiency and the probability of becoming long-term ELs. To examine these variables, this study focused on the following research questions: (1) How long does it take English learners to become proficient in English as measured by TELPAS? (2) To what degree are student and program characteristics predictive of time to proficiency? (3) What is the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner? Does the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increase the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner? **Methods:** A quantitative study was conducted using 8 years of cross-sectional and longitudinal data to examine time to proficiency and the probability of becoming an LTEL. Basic descriptive statistics were used to compute the central tendency of time to English language proficiency. A multiple regression model with robust standard errors was used to analyze the probability that student and program characteristics could be determined to be predictors of time to proficiency. A logistic regression approach was used to examine the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner and whether the

presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increases the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner. **Results:** The results generated by this analysis demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between student and program characteristics and time to proficiency. The analysis revealed that participation in bilingual or ESL programs, nonparticipation, economically disadvantaged status, and participation in special education were statistically significant predictors of time to proficiency and the probability of becoming a long-term EL ($p = < .001$) and that the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increased the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner. **Conclusion:** Making systemic changes to positively impact and improve the education of English learners requires the collaborative effort of district and campus instructional leaders. Therefore, it is vital to provide to critical stakeholders timely support and relevant professional learning opportunities to build upon their existing knowledge and help them gain the necessary competencies to improve current practices.

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Chapter I

Introduction

English learners (ELs), a classification given to a subpopulation of students who are identified as not proficient in English and account for more than five million elementary and secondary school-aged children nation-wide, are the fastest growing group of scholars in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). In K–12 public schools, this population significantly increased in over half of the states from 2010 to 2015, and by 2017 the percentage of English learners made up 10.1% of the total student population in the United States. Although a small portion of ELs enrolled in U.S. schools are immigrant newcomers from many countries around the world, the majority of ELs are native Spanish speakers born in the United States.

Whether immigrant or U.S. born, at initial school enrollment, students who are identified as ELs are either non-English speakers or have limited proficiency in English. In 2014–2015, 14% of ELs were also students with disabilities, 50% of ELs identified with a disability had a specific learning disability, and 21% were identified as having a speech or language impairment (Hussar et al., 2020). Regardless of their initial proficiency level or disability upon initial enrollment, however, ELs are expected to make one level of growth in English proficiency each year. ELs who are not able to make gains in English proficiency and make expected academic progress within five years are referred to as long-term ELs (LTELs).

While the education of ELs has improved throughout the years, effectively supporting ELs in acquiring academic English continues to be a challenge for schools across the nation. Academic language proficiency provides the foundation for and access to academic achievement. ELs who have academic language proficiency understand the English that makes the learning of academic concepts and skills fully accessible. Despite the many studies that have concluded that

it takes 4 to 12 years for ELs to attain academic English proficiency (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta et al., 2000), ELs are expected to meet the grade-specific passing standards on state assessments as their native English-speaking peers within 3 years of their initial enrollment in U.S schools.

Based on research findings regarding time to proficiency, it is an unrealistic expectation, regardless of the experience or credentials of the teachers who support them, for most ELs to develop the deep levels of academic English needed to meet state standards by their third year in U.S. schools.

National Context

Supreme Court Cases

Evidence shows that in the past four decades the academic achievement gap between these culturally and linguistically diverse students and their native English-speaking peers has continued to widen (Hakuta et al., 2000) despite federal mandates that require that the former group receive equal educational opportunities to succeed academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Supreme Court cases have highly influenced federal policy regarding the education of ELs. In the case of *Keyes v. Denver* in 1973 (Wright, 2010), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that student groups such as Latinos and Blacks could not be segregated from their peers which meant that English learners could not be segregated from their English proficient peers. The following year, in *Lau v. Nichols* 1974, Justice William Douglass wrote that “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Wright, 2010, para. 19). Making it a federal requirement to provide English learners with an instructional program in which they can be given equal access to an education, which includes receiving instruction in their native language, initiated the

establishment and implementation of Bilingual and ESL programs across the nation. In *Castaneda v. Pickard* 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a bilingual education program had to be based on reliable educational research, implemented with adequate commitment and resources, evaluated and proven to be effective, and replaced with alternative evidence-based programming if found ineffective. While the courts have never mandated a specific special language program model or approach, federal policy makes it clear that schools are required to address the linguistic and academic needs of ELs (Wright, 2010).

Federal Policy

Federal law requires states to include subgroups, such as ELs, in their accountability system and builds on that requirement by elevating English proficiency outcomes to be a key element of statewide accountability systems (Goldschmidt & Hakuta, 2017). English proficiency is now an indicator for school level ratings. This requirement has big implications on how much attention is given to the progress that ELs make in English language development. Districts must be able to monitor the progress of all student groups and intervene in response to poor outcomes as early as possible.

Progress in achieving English language proficiency is one of five indicators that federal law requires all states to include in their statewide accountability system. Federal policies that support English learners are mainly found in Titles I and III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Title I of ESSA included accountability requirements regarding EL academic achievement and growth in English language proficiency (ELP) as measured by the states' English language proficiency assessment (ESEA section

1111(c)(4)(A)(ii); 34 C.F.R. § 200.13(c)). ESEA also requires each state to include an indicator for progress in attaining ELP (ESEA section 1111(c)(4)(B)(iv); 34 C.F.R. 200.14(b)(4)).

Title III, Part A of the ESSA focuses primarily on supplemental services and funding for English learners. To be in compliance with Title III, states must have a process in place for identifying ELs in K–12th grade. The process begins with a home language survey that schools must provide to parents enrolling their children in the state for the first time. This process is followed to identify students who use a language other than English at home. If a language other than English is noted as a language used by the student or at home, an English language proficiency test is administered. Students who score below proficient are classified by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) as ELs and are eligible to participate in a special language program. English language proficiency is assessed annually. Once ELs meet the state's proficiency criteria, which varies across all states, they are reclassified as fluent English proficient, and with parent approval, are exited from special language programs. After exiting, the academic progress of these students is monitored by the LPAC for two years.

State Context

State Policy

The Texas Education Code (TEC) consists of the laws and rules passed by the state legislature. In Texas, these laws are communicated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), as administrative law, known as the Texas Administrative Code (Tex. Admin. Code). Educational institutions that are supported by state tax funds must abide by these rules. Texas Administrative Code Chapter 89, Subchapter BB, which is based on TEC 29, Subchapter B, includes state policy regarding bilingual education and special language programs. This code is aligned to federal regulations regarding bilingual and special language programs requirements and the process for

identifying ELs. The TEA adheres to federal law regarding bilingual education policy in that it requires local education agencies (LEA) that have twenty or more identified English learners, in the same grade level in the elementary grades, who speak the same language to provide bilingual education services, which require bilingual teacher certification and the use of the native language and English to impart instruction. LEAs with less than twenty ELs must offer an English immersion program which requires, at minimum, for the language arts and reading teacher to be ESL certified, and instruction is imparted only in English through second language acquisition methodology (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1205).

English Learner Programs

The TEA gives local education agencies (LEA), which include public school districts and charter schools, the option to implement one or more of four Bilingual Education program models that include Transitional Bilingual Program–Early Exit, Transitional Bilingual Program–Late Exit, One-way Dual Language Immersion, and Two-way Dual Language Immersion (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210 (c)). The ESL program models that LEAs can implement include ESL pull-out and ESL Content-based (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210 (d)).

Time to reclassification expectations for ELs participating in a bilingual program are specific to each program model. The program model that supports students in meeting reclassification criteria in the shortest amount of time possible is the Transitional bilingual early-exit model. ELs who participate in this model are expected to meet reclassification criteria in a minimum of two years and a maximum of five (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210 (c)). This program model is described as subtractive because the native language is lost. Program models that support students in developing proficiency in both the native language and English are considered additive in nature because the trajectory that students follow results in the addition of

a second language. In these program models ELs are expected to meet reclassification criteria in six and no later than seven years (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210(c)).

Local Context

School districts in the state of Texas implement a variety of Bilingual Education Program models. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) with an EL population that exceeds 65,000 students (Public Education Information Management System [PEIMS], 2019), implements all four Bilingual Education Program models and both ESL program models. The 180 elementary campuses implement Transitional Bilingual Program models, 45 campuses implement Dual Language Immersion Program models, and 270 elementary, middle, and high school campuses implement ESL Program models. To better address the linguistic and academic needs of students participating in the Transitional Bilingual Program model, HISD developed an instructional framework that bases the decision to impart language arts and reading and math instruction in English on the attainment of English proficiency as measured by TELPAS and academic progress and not on the number of years of program participation or grade level.

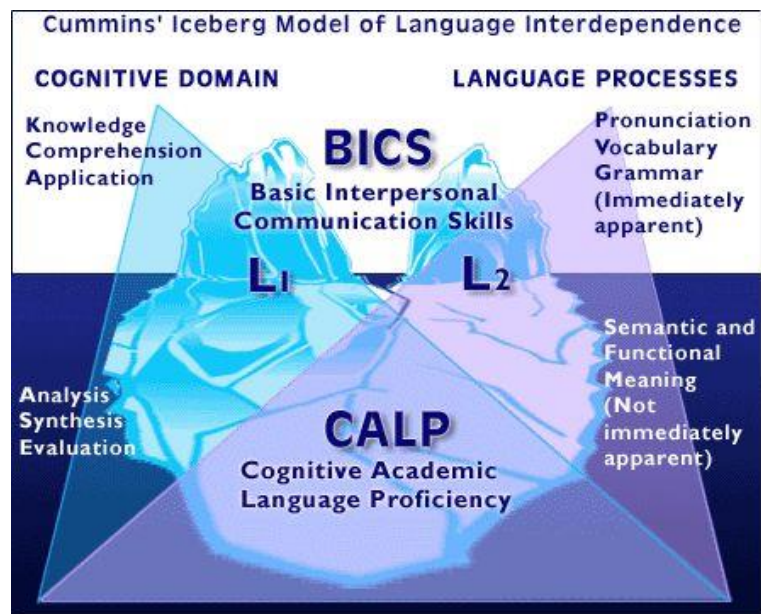
Theoretical Frameworks

There are two competing conceptual frameworks that frame special language programs. Bilingual education programs are based on the perspective that teaching a child in the native language is essential for effectively acquiring the second language and being academically successful. Bilingual Education theory is based on two hypotheses developed by Jim Cummins (Cummins, 1979). Cummins's Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis explains that there is a relationship between a student's first and second language and suggests that every language consists of features that look different on the surface but share a common underlying proficiency (CUP) that involves literacy, content learning, problem-solving, and metacognition. Therefore,

the content and skills that are learned in the first language transfer to the second language and do not have to be relearned. This hypothesis is represented as a “dual-iceberg” as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Cummins' s Iceberg Model of Language Interdependence



Note. Reprinted from "Interdependence of First- and Second-Language Proficiency in Bilingual Children," by J. Cummins, 1979, in E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language Processing in Bilingual Children*, Cambridge University Press.

The Threshold Hypothesis theorizes that there is a relationship between bilingualism and cognition and posits that students who have high levels of proficiency in two languages have linguistic as well as cognitive advantages and that students who have low levels of proficiency in the first and second language experience linguistic and cognitive deficiencies. Goldenberg (2010) concurs that students must have a certain degree of proficiency in English to ensure that the input, which constitutes the teaching of content concepts and skills, is comprehensible, and

adds that, to be effective readers and writers, students must have a strong knowledge base in their native language.

English language immersion programs, on the other hand, are based on the premise that more time spent on acquiring a second language results in faster acquisition of the language and ultimately academic achievement, and that delaying English language development delays the learning of academic concepts and skills. Steven Krashen, the most influential second language theorist, describes five main hypotheses in his second language acquisition and language learning theories (Krashen & Terrell, 1998). The Acquisition Learning Hypothesis focuses on communicating meaning and not on the correctness of syntactical structures whereas the Monitor Hypothesis explains how second language learners apply their understanding of grammar rules to monitor receptive and expressive language skills. The Natural Order Hypothesis explains that a second language learner begins to acquire the target language by producing single words before developing fluency. The Input Hypothesis adds that learners continue to develop proficiency along the natural order when they are incentivized to go beyond what they already know. The Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that there are outside factors that can inhibit the learner from acquiring the second language such as high levels of anxiety and low self-confidence.

Much of the research that has examined language programs and their relationship to English language development and academic outcomes has had limitations, therefore, the debate over which special language programs are the most effective in helping ELs attain English proficiency and close achievement gaps, continues. However, researchers and practitioners agree that a quality program implemented with fidelity by highly qualified teachers whether the goal is English proficiency or proficiency in both languages, will render more favorable student achievement outcomes. And as the achievement gap among ELs and their native English-

speaking peers continues to widen, practitioners and policy makers alike continue to search for the panacea that will provide the best outcomes for ELs.

Significance and Relevance of the Study

While states have implemented special language programs to meet federal regulations in affording ELs the opportunity to make linguistic and academic gains, it is critical to analyze EL data to find potential contributing factors associated with time to proficiency. Detailed data analysis by school districts to identify the special needs of ELs experiencing challenges in developing English proficiency is not widespread practice. Instead, a one-size-fits-all approach takes place at the district and campus level when making instructional and assessment decisions for this growing population of students. To effect positive change for low performing ELs, data must be disaggregated from a different lens to make more accurate and informed instructional, assessment, intervention, and programming decisions. According to the 2017 TELPAS state report (TEA, 2017), there were 305,881 sixth- to twelfth-grade ELs in Texas schools. Of these, 215,500 (70%) had attended U.S. schools for 5 or more years. Over 9,000 of these students were enrolled in a large urban school district (K. Briand, personal communication, November 27, 2017). In 2017, this school district accounted for almost 5,000 LTELs who participated in various language support programs and remained at a beginning or intermediate TELPAS composite level (Performance Based Monitoring, n.d).

Analyzing the profiles of LTELs who have not succeeded in progressing past a beginning or intermediate TELPAS composite rating can reveal pertinent information for preventing the continuous escalation of LTELs as well as relevant data to address the linguistic and academic needs of current LTELs. Academic achievement is dependent on the attainment of academic English proficiency (Umansky & Reardon, 2014); therefore, it is imperative that EL data be

evaluated to serve as a basis for developing effective district and campus-wide targeted improvement plans.

The results of this study will serve to help decision-making campus personnel better understand the criticality of collaborative efforts among the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), the Annual Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee, the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT), and 504 committees to monitor processes related to initial identification of students as English learners, accurate and timely identification of ELs with specific learning disabilities, program placement recommendations of dual identified students, language of instruction decisions, and assessment and disability-specific accommodations decisions.

Purpose of the Study

Data derived from the Education Commission of the States (Rafa et al., 2020) reveals that the longer non-native English speakers take to develop English proficiency the more likely they will fall behind academically. As the population of English learners continues to grow in Texas schools, so does the concern that many are not attaining advanced English proficiency levels. Of particular concern is the surge of ELs who remain at a beginning or intermediate level of proficiency after five or more years in school (Performance-Based Monitoring, n.d).

The ultimate purpose of this study is to predict time to proficiency based on specific student characteristics as measured by the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS). To examine these variables, this study focuses on the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How long does it take English learners to become proficient in English as measured by TELPAS?
2. To what degree are student and program characteristics predictive of time to proficiency?
3. What is the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner? Does the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increase the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner?

Definition of Terms

Time to English language proficiency versus time to reclassification: It is important to clarify the difference between time to English language proficiency and time to reclassification. In this study, time to English language proficiency relates to the number of years it takes for ELs to attain English proficiency as measured by TELPAS. Time to reclassification is the time it takes ELs to meet the state criteria to exit EL status and be identified as English proficient (EP). In Texas, reclassification criteria include language proficiency, academic proficiency, and a subjective teacher evaluation.

Reclassification versus exit: These two terms cannot be used interchangeably. A student's EL status is classified as English proficient (EP) when the student meets grade-specific reclassification criteria established by the state. Reclassification can only be made by the LPAC and is not dependent on parent approval. Exiting or transferring an EP student from a special language program to the general education program can only be done with a signed parent approval after the LPAC has reclassified the student as English proficient.

Transitional Bilingual–Early Exit: The goal of this program model is for students to become proficient in English and be academically successful. Instruction is imparted in both English and another language and students are expected to meet reclassification criteria not earlier than two or later than five years after the student enrolls in school. Bilingual certified teachers impart instruction in literacy and academic content in the students' primary language and target second language development through academic content.

Transitional Bilingual–Late Exit: The goal of this program model is for English learners to become proficient in English and be academically successful. Instruction is imparted in both English and another language and students are expected to meet reclassification criteria not earlier than six or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school. Bilingual certified teachers impart instruction in literacy and academic content in the students' primary language and target second language development through academic content.

Dual Language Immersion One-way: The goal of this program model is for English learners to become bilingual and biliterate and be academically successful. This model provides ongoing instruction in literacy and academic content in English and another language with at least half of the instruction delivered in the students' primary language for the duration of the program. Students are expected to meet reclassification criteria not earlier than six or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school.

Dual Language Immersion Two-way: The goal of this program model is for English learners and native English speakers to become bilingual and biliterate and be academically successful. This model provides ongoing instruction in literacy and academic content in English and another language with at least half of the instruction delivered in the English learner's

primary language for the duration of the program. Students are expected to meet reclassification criteria not earlier than six or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school.

ESL–Content-based: In this program model, ELs acquire English through English language arts and reading, mathematics, science, and social studies by appropriately certified ESL teachers. The goal of this program is for English learners to attain full proficiency in English.

ESL–Pull-out: In this program model, ELs acquire English through English language arts and reading by an appropriately certified ESL teacher. The goal of this program is for English learners to attain full proficiency in English.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

English learners are challenged by the daunting task of developing English proficiency while mastering content knowledge and skills. Research shows that English learners who have not attained English and academic proficiency by fifth grade may be at risk for failing to graduate from high school or dropping out of school before graduation (Johnson, 2019). As the population of English learners continues to grow in Texas schools, so does the concern that thousands of students, after more than 5 years of enrollment in U.S. schools, remain at a beginning and intermediate level of English proficiency (TEA, 2019a). To address the linguistic needs of students who do not make the expected yearly gains in English language development, it is critical to take into consideration student and program characteristics that may be associated with time to proficiency, such as participation in bilingual and ESL programs, special education, and the free or reduced-price lunch program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The following literature review consists of three sections. The first section reviews state policy regarding the implementation of special language program requirements, the identification of students with limited English proficiency, and the reclassification and exit of English learners. The second section explains how a second language is developed and the theories that support English language development, the standards that frame the teaching of English for academic purposes, and the summative English language proficiency assessment used to measure the progress made by English learners in Texas. The third section focuses on research that has examined the association of specific student, school, and program characteristics and time to proficiency.

The Education of English Learners

Required Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Programs

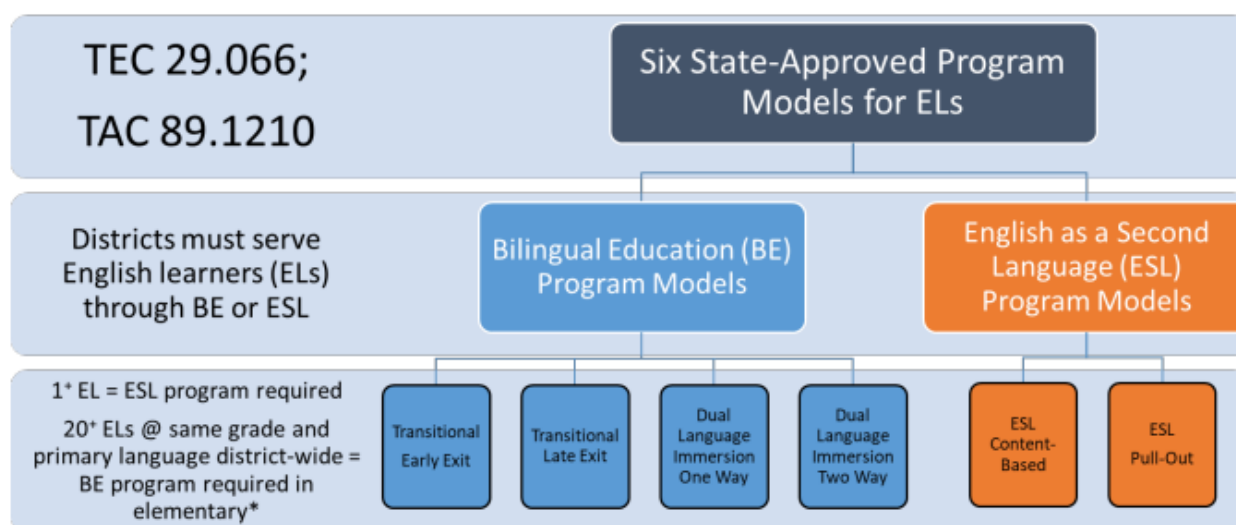
The Texas Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating English Learners states the following (Commissioner's Rules, 1996/2020):

- (a) Each school district that has an enrollment of 20 or more English learners in any language classification in the same grade level district-wide shall offer a bilingual education program...in prekindergarten through the elementary grades with that language classification.
- (b) A school district required to provide a bilingual education program . . . shall offer dual-language instruction (English and primary language) in prekindergarten through the elementary grades, using one of the four bilingual program models described in §89.1210.
- (c) All English learners for whom a school district is not required to offer a bilingual education program shall be provided an English as a second language (ESL) program . . . regardless of the students' grade levels and primary language, and regardless of the number of such students.”
- (d) A school district required to provide an ESL program . . . shall provide an ESL program using one of the two models described in §89.1210.

Figure 2 demonstrates the six state-approved program models: four Bilingual Education program models and two English as a Second Language program models that school districts can implement to meet language program requirements stipulated in Texas Education Code 29.066 and Texas Administrative Code § 89.1210.

Figure 2

Texas approved program models for ELs



Note. Reprinted from *Getting started: Program implementation rubrics and tools*, by

English Learner Support Division, n.d., Texas Education Agency, p. 3

(<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Getting%20Started%20Guide.pdf>).

Identification of English Learners

As required by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states must distribute a home language survey (HLS) to all parents when they first enroll their children in the state's public schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In Texas, schools are required to assess the English language proficiency of students enrolling for the first time in a Texas public school or open enrollment charter school whose parents or guardians indicate on the HLS that a language other than English is used at home or by the student. Texas schools follow a standardized, state-wide identification process, outlined in the Texas Administrative Code §89.1226(a), that includes the administration of a single state-approved English proficiency test to determine whether a student should be

classified as an English learner (Commissioner's Rules, 1996/2020). The single state-approved English proficiency test used in Texas to assess English proficiency is the LAS Battery of Assessments. This battery of assessments includes two English language proficiency tests. The preLAS test measures the listening and speaking proficiency of students in PreK–3, PreK–4, and kindergarten. The LAS Links test measures the listening and speaking proficiency of first-grade students, and the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of second through twelfth-grade students. These respective assessments measure how well a student understands, speaks, reads, and writes in English. Students who do not achieve a fluent English proficient score on the preLAS or LAS Links tests are classified as English learners by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC). The LPAC is required to give written notice to the student's parent that the student was classified as an English learner, make a program recommendation, and obtain parental approval to place the student in the state required bilingual education or ESL program, as described in Texas Administrative Code §89.1220(h) (Commissioner's Rules, 1996/2020). Parents have the right to accept the recommended program, deny it and request that the student be placed in another special language program, or deny any special language programs and request that the student be placed in the general education program.

Reclassification of English Learners

Whether an English learner receives language support through a language program or not, the goal is that the student achieves both English and academic proficiency to meet reclassification criteria within three but in not more than seven years. The LPAC is required to review every student identified as an English learner at the end of every school year and determine which students meet reclassification criteria (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1220(g)(5)). The criteria for reclassifying a student as English proficient at end of year is much more rigorous than

the criteria used to classify a student as English proficient when tested initially. Based on the state-established English learner reclassification criteria that were in place in the 2018–2019 school year, an English learner had to demonstrate proficiency in listening and speaking on the state’s English language proficiency test as well as show satisfactory performance on the state reading and writing assessment. A subjective teacher evaluation confirming that the student was “able to participate equally in a regular all-English instruction program” (TEA, 2018, p. 1) was also part of the criteria.

English Language Development

Second Language Acquisition

There are many theories concerning how a second language is developed. Stephen Krashen (1998) found that we do not learn a second language by studying it; we acquire language when we are able to understand messages that are comprehensible. Making content comprehensible involves building on prior knowledge, using pictures, graphs, maps, charts, examples, and illustrations, demonstrating, dramatizing, personalizing, supporting the content with facial expressions and body language during face-to-face interactions, and scaffolding language commensurate to the student’s proficiency in English. Krashen’s Natural Approach theory (Krashen, 1998) identifies five stages of language acquisition that a child experiences while acquiring a second language. The first stage is the preproduction stage. Students in this stage are not yet producing language. Oftentimes they understand more than they can produce. This phase can last anywhere from a few weeks to a year depending on a variety of factors such as individual motivation, self-efficacy, interaction with English speakers, the need to use the second language, and access to linguistic supports, to name a few. The second stage is the early speech production stage. During this stage of second language acquisition, students can respond

with one to two-word answers or frequently used short phrases. It is during the third stage, known as the speech emergence stage, that students begin to speak in simple sentences that include verb tenses such as present and present progressive verb tenses. When students reach the fourth stage—intermediate fluency, they begin to use more complex sentences and grammatical structures. Although second language support is still needed, at this stage students are better able to negotiate meaning in listening and reading and use more grade appropriate vocabulary when speaking and writing. The fifth and last stage of second language acquisition is the advanced stage. At this stage, students can engage in learning experiences that include uncontextualized cognitively demanding content with minimal second language support from their teacher or from resources created specifically to provide second language support to English learners.

Similar to Krashen's second language acquisition conceptual framework is Cummins theory (1999) that English learners first develop basic interpersonal communicative skills, or BICS, before developing cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP. Cummins coined these acronyms in the early 90s to distinguish between conversational language used in social settings that, according to his research, can take anywhere from one to two years to develop, and the content specific academic language that consists of the English needed to think critically and communicate in academic settings. Cummins devised a framework that identifies a continuum of tasks as cognitively undemanding and cognitively demanding. In accordance with Bloom's taxonomy, tasks that Cummins refers to as undemanding are the lower order thinking skills on Bloom's continuum and the cognitively demanding skills are the higher order thinking skills. Cummins notes that ELs at any level of the continuum or stage of second language acquisition are able to successfully engage in academic learning experiences when input is comprehensible, and tasks are context embedded.

English Language Proficiency Standards

In 2007, the Texas State Board of Education approved and introduced the English language proficiency standards (ELPS) (English Language Proficiency Standards, 2007). These standards represent the English language Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills that all school districts must use to develop second language acquisition curriculum. The ELPS are divided into four components. The introduction provides an overall description of the ELPS, establishes that they are to be published along with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for each subject in the required curriculum, and provides background information on second language acquisition. The second component establishes the responsibilities that all local education agencies have in integrating the ELPS across the curriculum in every core and enrichment subject area and in every grade level from kindergarten to 12th grade. The third component includes the cross-curricular student expectations: learning strategies, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The fourth component consists of the proficiency level descriptors known as the PLDs, which include language features that describe what an English learner at each proficiency level and in each domain can understand, say, comprehend, and write (English Language Proficiency Standards, 2007).

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System

Before 2001, the state had no standardized system for measuring EL progress or attainment of English proficiency. School districts had the option to choose which test to administer from a list of state-approved English proficiency tests to evaluate the progress that ELs had made in English. In 2001, the Texas State Board of Education introduced the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System, referred to as the "TELPAS," a standardized English language proficiency test that serves as a summative assessment to measure progress and

attainment of English proficiency among English learners (TEA, 2009). This assessment includes four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each language domain has four levels of language proficiency: beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high. Each domain is weighted equally when calculating the composite score. This composite score reflects the overall proficiency level a student achieves by spring of each school year. In the 2018–2019 school year, the administration of TELPAS tests went from a paper pencil format to an online multiple-choice test that assesses three of the four language domains: listening, speaking, and reading. The only domain still rated holistically by trained raters is writing.

English Language Support Programs

Bilingual Program Models

TEA gives local education agencies (LEA), required to offer a bilingual education program the option to implement various bilingual program models (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210(c)(1–4)). School districts can choose to implement an Early-exit Transitional Bilingual Program, a Late-exit Transitional Bilingual Program, a Two-way Immersion Dual Language Program, and/or a One-way Immersion Dual Language Program.

A common goal of all four bilingual education program models is for ELs to become fully English proficient and succeed academically. What sets these program models apart, however, is that the former two are considered subtractive programs because English proficiency is developed at the expense of losing the native language, thus subtracting their first language. The latter program models are categorized as additive models because English is added to the students' linguistic repertoire allowing students to maintain and develop their native language while they develop proficiency in English. Program implementation, language goals, and teacher

certification is what characterizes the differences among these four programs (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210(c)(1–4)).

Implementation of the Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Program involves imparting instruction in both the EL's native language and English. A teacher, required to be certified in bilingual education, uses primarily the native language to teach the core content subjects in the early primary grades; however, by third grade most, if not all, subjects are taught in English. Instructional frameworks created for an early exit program model allow for accelerated English instruction to meet time to proficiency and reclassification expectations in three years and no later than in five years, as stipulated in Texas Administrative Code § 89.1210(c)(1).

Like the Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Program model, implementation of Late-exit Transitional Bilingual Program involves imparting instruction in both the EL's native language and English by a bilingual certified teacher. In this model, however, more time is dedicated to developing literacy, math, and critical thinking skills in the native language past third grade and English is developed through a content-based ESL approach when imparting instruction in Social Studies and Science. In accordance with Texas Administrative Code (§ 89.1210 (c)(2)), ELs participating in a Late-exit program model are expected to become proficient in English and meet reclassification criteria in six years and no later than seven years. This program model fosters the development of strong oral and literacy skills in the native language. Students are usually transitioned into all English instruction when they achieve an advanced English proficiency level in reading and writing as measured by TELPAS.

In a Two-Way Immersion Dual Language program model there is a combination of English learners and native English speakers in a classroom. The goal is for both student groups to become bilingual, bi-literate, bi-cultural, and be academically successful. Within this model,

schools follow various language of instruction allocations. In 90/10 and 80/20 models where students are developing bilingualism and biliteracy, the minority language is used to impart instruction for either 90% or 80% of the day, and English for 10% or 20% of the day. Each year from prekindergarten to second-grade instruction in the minority language decreases and English instruction increases. From third grade through fifth grade, however, students receive 50% of content instruction in the minority language and 50% in English. In this program model, English learners are expected to reach reclassification criteria in 6 years, but no later than in 7 years. To meet the goal of this program model, however, students are not exited from, or transferred out of, the Dual Language program even if they meet reclassification criteria before fifth grade. In elementary schools implementing a 50/50 model, instruction is imparted in English 50% of the day and in the minority language 50% of the day from prekindergarten through fifth grade (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.12.10(c)(4)). If departmentalized, teachers who instruct in the minority language are required to be certified in bilingual education. Teachers who instruct only in English can be either bilingual or ESL certified.

In a One-Way Immersion Dual Language program model, participation is exclusive to students who do not speak English. Like the Two-Way Immersion Dual Language program model, the goal is for minority language speakers to become bilingual, bi-literate, bi-cultural, and be academically successful. Schools follow a 90/10, 80/20, or 50/50 language of instruction allocation from prekindergarten to fifth grade. Students are expected to meet reclassification criteria in 6 years but no later than in 7 years and are not exited from this program even if they meet reclassification criteria before fifth grade. Certification requirements in this program model are the same as in the Two-way Dual Language program model (Tex. Admin. Code § 89.1210(c)(3)).

English as a Second Language Program Models

Texas Administrative Code § 89.1210(d) stipulates that for ELs for whom a local education agency is not required to provide bilingual education, the district must offer an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Of the two ESL program models that LEAs can opt to implement, the most widely used model is the ESL pull-out program model (Tex. Admin. Code 89.1210(d)(2)). In this model, a self-contained teacher who is ESL certified or an ESL certified support teacher can provide reading and language arts instruction. In instances where the grade level is departmentalized, the teacher who teaches English language arts and reading is required to be ESL certified. The other content teachers, however, are expected to be trained in sheltered instruction, but not expected to be ESL certified. The ESL content-based program model is an intensive English language program that supports English language development through academic content instruction in English language arts and reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. Implementation of a Content-based ESL program model requires that all core-content area teachers be ESL certified grade (Tex. Admin. Code 89.1210(d)(1)). Due to certification requirements, the ESL pull-out program model is more widely used in Texas than the ESL content-based model.

English Proficiency and the Reclassification of English Learners

An English-proficient student is a student who has the ability to understand and use grade-appropriate language in academic settings without the need for second-language supports. School districts use a variety of assessment instruments to evaluate the English proficiency of students whose primary or home language is a language other than English. English proficiency is measured annually to ensure that students identified as English learners are making expected progress and to determine if students have met the established criteria to be reclassified as

English proficient and exit EL status. State-established criteria to determine if a student is fully English proficient, for reclassification purposes, are more rigorous than the criteria used when a student is initially assessed. In Texas, criteria used for reclassification purposes include English proficiency ratings, academic proficiency scores, and a subjective teacher evaluation. As documented on the 2018–2019 EL reclassification rubric (TEA, 2018), to reclassify as English proficient, ELs had to score as fluent on a state-approved English proficiency test in listening and speaking, meet the passing standard on STAAR reading in grades 3–10 or score at or above the 40th percentile on a state-approved norm-referenced standardized achievement test in Grades 1–2 and 1–12, achieve satisfactory performance on a state-approved writing test in Grades 1–12, and be recommended for reclassification by the student’s English language arts and reading (ELAR) teacher as documented on the EL Reclassification Rubric that confirms that the student no longer needs second language support to be academically successful in the general education program (TEA, 2018).

Academic English proficiency goes hand in hand with academic achievement. ELs who do not achieve English and academic proficiency are not able to reclassify as English proficient. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017) categorizes students who continue with EL status for more than 5 years as LTELs. Despite the availability of a standardized method for measuring growth in English proficiency, state required integration of English language proficiency standards in all core content and enrichment subjects in Grades K–12, and a myriad of instructional resources and professional development created to support gains in English proficiency and academic achievement, data show that the percentage of English learners not making expected progress in English is rising, on-time high school

graduation rates, although climbing, are below 75%, and drop-out rates are above the established cut points (Table 1) (Performance-based Monitoring Analysis System, 2015–2018; TEA, 2019a).

Table 1

TELPAS Composite Rating Levels From 2015 to 2019

Measures	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
District rate (%)/ Texas rate (%)	14.3	14.6	13.7	26.1/20.5 ^a	31.0/25.5 ^a
Cut points	0–7.5	0–7.5	0–7.5	—	—
Drop-out rate for students identified as LEP, Grades 7–12					
District rate (%)	4.1	5.0	5.0	6.1	5.6
Cut points	0–1.8	0–1.8	0–1.8	0–1.8	0–1.8
Graduation rate for students identified as LEP					
District rate (%)	31.4	56.6	54.8	58.0	59.3
Cut points	75–100	80–100	80–100	80–100	80–100

Note. Data from *Results driven accountability data and reports*, by the Texas Education Agency

(<https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/monitoring-and-interventions/rda/results-driven-accountability-data-and-reports>). TELPAS, Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System; LEP, limited English proficient.

^aTexas rate.

^b Number of LEP students in Grades 5–12 in U.S. schools 5 or more years who received a TELPAS composite rating of beginning or intermediate.

Long-term English Learners

Attainment of academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years on average. Although more than half of English learners attain proficiency within this range of time, studies show that some students never attain this landmark (Slama, 2012). Students who do not attain English proficiency before entering middle school, or later, often do not develop the essential knowledge

and skills to be academically successful in courses required for high school graduation (Slama, 2012).

Recent studies have found specific factors that mitigate a student's ability to attain proficiency in English. Researchers in Texas who examined trends in LTELs found that the percentage of ELs who started first grade in 2000–2001 and became LTELs when compared to ELs who started first grade in 2014–2015 and became LTELs increased from 36% to 67%: “Almost seven in ten students who began first grade as an English learner in Texas public schools in 2014–2015 did not reclassify within five years” (Cashiola & Potter, 2021, p. 2). Austin and San Antonio also experienced a significant increase in the percentage of ELs becoming LTELs. In Dallas, 80% of the cohort of students identified as EL in elementary school in 2014–2015 did not reclassify within five years. Compared with the 2000–2001 cohort of ELs who did not reclassify in five years, the 2014–2015 cohort showed an increase of 150%. El Paso also experienced low reclassification rates among the 2014–2015 cohort of students (Cashiola & Potter, 2021).

In a study that examined attainment of English proficiency by English learners in California public schools, researchers Umansky and Reardon (2014) found that roughly half of a cohort of students who were initially identified as ELs and who enrolled in school no later than kindergarten had attained proficiency in English by fifth grade and were reclassified as English proficient before going on to sixth grade. The other 50% became LTELs in middle school, and 25% of the cohort transferred into high school as ELs.

Research shows that there are strong indicators associated with the time it takes ELs to become English proficient. On behalf of Regional Educational Laboratory West's English Learner Alliance, whose membership includes departments of education from the states of

Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, researchers Haas et al. (2015) conducted like studies in all three states that included three cohorts of ELs who started school during the 2006–2007 school year in kindergarten, Grade 3 and Grade 6. The six-year study examined the characteristics of long-term English learners, whom they defined as “students who, during the six school years of the study, never scored at or above the levels required on [the respective states’] English language proficiency (ELP) test.” They found that in all three states' students identified as LTELs had the same characteristics. They had higher percentages of eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch and eligibility for individualized education program (IEP) services, as well as higher percentages of male students and students with lower ELP levels during the first year of the study when compared to students who were able to successfully reclassify as English proficient.

A later study conducted over the course of six years in Nevada by Haas et al. (2016a) examined three cohorts of students that included English learners in kindergarten, Grade 3, and Grade 6. English learners in the state of Nevada, like many states, are expected to gain at least one proficiency level each year. Based on this expectation, the study found that less than 50% of ELs met that expectation. During the study, the researchers found that the progress that ELs made in English proficiency differed by cohort and the level of proficiency students had achieved when they were first identified as English learners. Moreover, English learners eligible for the free and reduced lunch program scored lower on Nevada’s English Language Proficiency assessment than their peers who were not eligible for the lunch program, and male students scored lower than female students. English learners making progress at the expected rate ranged from 12%, which included students in the Grade 6 cohort with low initial English proficiency to a high of 46%, which included students in the Grade 6 cohort with high initial English proficiency.

Haas et al. (2016b) conducted a similar study in Utah and found that English learner students eligible for the school lunch program scored lower on the Utah Academic Language Proficiency Assessment than their peers who were not eligible for the school lunch program, male students scored lower than female students, and less than 60% of students in any cohort made the expected progress on the English proficiency assessment as established by Utah's annual measurable achievement objective 1. Other characteristics that influenced how well English learners met the expectation of making slightly less than one level of proficiency per year differed according to their cohort and their English proficiency level at the start of the study.

The trajectory that English learners experience from the time they are identified as non-English or limited-English proficient to the time they are reclassified as both English and academically proficient can span a 4- to 12-year period (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Hakuta et al., 2000). A study team from Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest (Slama et al., 2017) explored how much time it took a cohort of Grade 1 Hispanic ELs in Texas public schools to attain English proficiency and demonstrate satisfactory performance in reading and math on state assessments taken in both English and Spanish. It also investigated the degree to which initial English proficiency, students' education experiences, demographic characteristics, and district characteristics related to these outcomes. Student demographic characteristics included gender, age at school entry, eligibility for the federal school lunch program, immigrant status, native language proficiency, students' initial English proficiency, enrollment in prekindergarten, type of English learner program, and opting out of English learner programs. District demographic characteristics included percentage of students who are eligible for the federal school lunch program, percentage of students who are of a racial/ethnic minority group, and percentage of students who are English learners. The study found that approximately half the students attained

English language proficiency within 2.6 years, or middle of fourth grade. Students who were at a beginner level of English proficiency in first grade, ELs who also participated in a special education program, ELs who started first grade at age 7 or older, and students who were eligible for the federal school lunch program took the longest of any English learner subgroup to attain proficiency in English.

Student Characteristics That Impact Time to Proficiency

Oral language skills that are necessary in literacy development in the native language (L1) are also likely to benefit literacy development in the second language (L2). L1 literacy supports L2 literacy development (Cummins, 1979). Umansky and Reardon (2014) found that students who received instruction through their L1 closed the achievement gap with native English speakers and exceeded the performance of their EL peers in the district or in comparison groups. By the late elementary grades and particularly in middle and high school grades, ELs who received some specialized instruction, particularly first-language instruction, caught up to and sometimes surpassed their comparison peers. They scored at grade level and were less likely to drop out of high school. ELs who had not been in any specialized program but participated in mainstream English classes scored the lowest in comparison to students in any other programs and ended their schooling with low levels of achievement. The researchers also found that Hispanic ELs enrolled in bilingual programs were reclassified at a slower pace in elementary school but had a higher overall reclassification, English proficiency, and academic threshold passage by the end of high school.

Studies show that ELs in Transitional Bilingual programs have test scores well above those of ELs in English immersion in both ELA and math, and those in developmental bilingual have math test scores that are significantly higher than their peers in English immersion

(Valentino & Reardon, 2015). For Hispanic ELs, both the development of English proficiency and reclassification patterns are slower in early elementary school for those in bilingual programs than for those in English immersion programs. The test score growth rates of ELs in Dual Language Immersion programs far outpace those of ELs in Transitional Bilingual and ESL programs. Collier (1989) notes that when students are schooled in two languages, with solid cognitive academic instruction provided in both the first and second languages, both language minority and language majority students generally take from 4 to 7 years to reach national norms on standardized tests. Immigrants arriving at ages 8 to 12, with at least 2 years of L1 schooling in their home country, take 5 to 7 years to reach the level of average performance by native speakers on L2 standardized tests. Students enrolling in primary grades with no schooling in their first language in either their home country or the host country can take possibly as long as 7 to 10 years. English learners enrolling in U.S. schools in their early teens who have had no L2 exposure, without special assistance, may never reach the 50th NCE or may drop out before completing high school. Consistent, uninterrupted cognitive academic development in all subjects throughout students' schooling is more important than the number of hours of L2 instruction for successful academic achievement in a second language.

Longitudinal studies conducted by Collier and Thomas (2017) that included students from various ethnic groups, of low-income backgrounds, and with special needs who participated in dual language programs compared these groups with peers of the same category not in dual language classes and found that students who participated in Dual Language programs outperformed their peers not in Dual Language programs.

Among possible factors that can influence time to proficiency, one that is of critical concern is English learners also identified with learning disabilities (LD). Of all identified

disabilities, a learning disability (LD) is the most prevalent disability amongst ELs (Rodríguez & Rodríguez 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2006). English learners who are developing a second language and native English-speaking students who have a learning disability or language disorder tend to mirror similar learning characteristics (Barrera, 2006). To appropriately address the academic and linguistic needs of ELs it is vital that teachers and campus specialists be able to identify challenges that an EL may be experiencing. Wilkinson and colleagues (2006) note that academic difficulties can be caused by ineffective teaching-learning environments or instructional approaches that do not meet students' academic or linguistic needs. When an English learner is not making the expected linguistic or academic progress in a bilingual or ESL learning environment, where the instructional approach takes into account the deficits in the second language, the academic and linguistic needs of the EL may be better met through special education services (Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2006). General education and ESL teachers with little to no knowledge of learning disabilities would need to be able to differentiate among the learning characteristics of ELs and students with learning disabilities to know when to refer students for special education testing (Burr et al., 2015). Because many teachers cannot differentiate between a learning disability and a language difference, ELs are not referred for special education testing in the primary grades. Until there is evidence that an EL is not making expected progress in developing English proficiency, teachers generally do not begin the prereferral process. Unfortunately, this process is often initiated after the student has been enrolled in school for five or more years. Consequently, research shows that there tends to be an under identification of ELs in special education at the elementary grades and an overidentification of ELs in special education in secondary schools (Zacarian, 2011).

Although Cummins (1989) argued that acquiring basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) in a second language can take from 1 to 2 years and cognitive academic language proficiency can take as many as 5 to 7 years to develop, Echeverria and colleagues (2008) found that these acquisition phases could take longer for ELs with limited native language skills as well as for ELs with learning disabilities because of their limited vocabulary, deficits in receptive and expressive language skills, and difficulty understanding nonverbal language.

Burke et al. (2016) found that ELs are heterogeneous and time to achieve English proficiency can vary. Limited data were available to document the ELP progress of ELs with disabilities. One of the key findings from his research that focused on ELs with disabilities was that they were more likely to not reach proficiency in English and become long-term ELs compared to ELs without disabilities. Olsen (2014) found that the longer students remain ELs, the less likely they are to develop the advanced proficiency in English needed to be academically successful, to actively participate in classrooms, and to have access to grade-level content. To support ELs in developing academic language, actively engaging in classes, and accessing grade-level content, it is critical that their progress in acquiring, and learning English be monitored. Although the state of Texas measures student progress and attainment of English language proficiency, it is critical that immediate measures be taken in disaggregating data for ELs with disabilities, as now required by ESSA (Liu et al., 2018). This study seeks to better understand the factors that impact the time it takes for English learners to attain English proficiency. Of particular interest are English learners with identified learning disabilities who could potentially make up a large percent of long-term ELs.

Chapter III

Methodology

Attaining English language and academic proficiency is the ultimate goal for students identified as English learners in U.S. schools. As the population of English learners continues to grow in Texas schools, so does the concern that many are not making expected progress in attaining proficiency in English. Of particular concern is the high number of ELs who do not attain English language proficiency after five or more years in school. In 2019–2020 the number of ELs enrolled in Texas public schools climbed to 1,113,536 (TEA, 2020). The Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) spring 2019 state-wide summary report indicates that of the 303,466 K2-grade ELs who received a TELPAS composite rating, 62% had a proficiency level of beginning or intermediate (TEA, 2019b). And although 62% of the 657,095 Grade 3–12 ELs who were tested had an advanced or advanced high level of proficiency in English, it is of great concern that close to 250,000 ELs, or 38%, had not attained English proficiency (TEA, 2019b). The purpose of this study was to examine time to proficiency based on specific student and program characteristics and to determine the degree to which these variables predict a student’s eventual classification as a long-term English learner.

This study examined student and program characteristics associated with time to proficiency for students enrolled as English learners no later than Grade 1 and analyzed a large-scale longitudinal dataset of 15,050 ELs to determine which of these characteristics, if any, potentially signal problems making progress in attaining proficiency in English. This descriptive analysis enabled a systematic way to characterize students at-risk to become long-term English learners who do not attain English proficiency within five years of continuous school enrollment. It was expected that findings from this study supported the creation of an early warning system

to identify students within the first three years of schooling and provide intervention to reduce students' risk of becoming long-term English learners.

The ultimate purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of disabilities among ELs enrolled in U.S. schools for five or more years who had not made progress in English proficiency compared to the prevalence of disabilities among ELs enrolled in U.S. schools for five or more years who had made gains in English proficiency, as measured by TELPAS. It was hypothesized that the disabilities pose a significant risk factor for students that influences TELPAS scores in the four rated language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology and procedures used to determine time to proficiency, if student and program characteristics could potentially serve as predictors of time to proficiency, and the contribution of the presence of a learning disability over and above other individual difference variables on time to proficiency and the risk of being designated as a long-term English learner.

Research Questions

1. How long does it take English learners to become proficient in English as measured by TELPAS?
2. To what degree are student and program characteristics predictive of time to proficiency?
3. What is the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner? Does the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increase the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner?

Research Design

This quantitative study included eight years of cross-sectional and longitudinal data to examine time to proficiency as well as the probability of becoming proficient within five years for students assessed with TELPAS based on the year they entered first grade for the first time in U.S. schools. Student groups included two cohorts of English learners. Cohort A included ELs who entered Grade 1 for the first time in the 2010–2011 school year. Cohort B included ELs who entered Grade 1 for the first time in the 2011–2012 school year. Eight years of TELPAS data were analyzed for each cohort. Data for Cohort A included TELPAS composite ratings from 2010–2018 and data for Cohort B included TELPAS composite ratings from 2011–2019. For the sake of analysis, the two cohorts were analyzed together as a single sample.

Sampling

In the 2018–2019 school year, the total student population in a large urban school district located in southeast Texas included a little over 210,000 students. Of the total student population 71,246, or 34% (PEIMS, 2019), were classified as English learners. The sample for this study included two cohorts of English learners who were enrolled in the district for the first time in first grade in the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 school year, participated in either a Bilingual or ESL program, or opted out of participating in either program and had a TELPAS composite score.

Procedures and Process

To protect student's personal identity, the district provided deidentified data sets. In preparation for analysis, data was analyzed to identify students who had attained English proficiency as measured by TELPAS, were enrolled in the district for five or more years and were identified as ELs. Existing raw data was provided by the school district's Research and

Accountability Department personnel. Archival data sets of TELPAS student performance were requested for every year from 2010 to 2019.

Analysis

The dataset provided by the school district was used to construct the independent variables, chosen as possible predictors of time to English proficiency, and the outcome variable, years to English proficiency. The constructed predictor variables included participation in Bilingual and ESL programs and nonparticipation in a language program, and participation in Special Education and Free and Reduced Lunch programs. TELPAS composite score data was used to create the outcome variable that represented the number of years an EL took to attain English proficiency.

Basic descriptive statistics were used to address research question 1: How long does it take English learners to become proficient in English as measured by TELPAS? Data collected was used to identify mode, median, mean, and variance to analyze the full distribution of student performance.

A multiple regression model with robust standard errors, to address nonindependence, was used to answer research question 2: To what degree are student and program characteristics predictive of time to proficiency? Independent variables used to build this multiple regression model with robust standard errors¹ included participation in bilingual programs, participation in ESL programs, nonparticipation in bilingual and ESL programs, participation in the free and reduced lunch program, and participation in special education. This approach was used to analyze the difference between EL participation among the four programs on time to English language proficiency.

¹ Robust standard errors were used to take into account the lack of independence across participants due to their clustering within schools.

To account for both categorical and continuous predictors, a logistic regression approach was used to address the two-part research question 3: What is the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner? Does the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increase the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner? This model allowed the researcher to examine the log odds of ELs not reaching proficiency within five years and becoming long-term ELs, based on student characteristics and program participation, as well as the contribution of the presence of a learning disability, over and above these other independent variables, on the designation of students as long-term ELs.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of student and program characteristics on time to English language proficiency to determine whether these characteristics could be used to identify students with the potential of becoming long-term English learners. This study also sought to determine if there was a prevalence of disabilities among ELs enrolled in U.S. schools for five or more years who had not made progress in English proficiency compared to the prevalence of disabilities among ELs enrolled in U.S. schools for five or more years who had made gains in English proficiency, as measured by TELPAS.

This chapter provides an analysis of the results that were used to answer the following research questions.

1. How long does it take English learners to become proficient in English as measured by TELPAS?
2. To what degree are student and program characteristics predictive of time to proficiency?
3. What is the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner? Does the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increase the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner?

This study examined the time it took the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 cohorts of first time in Grade 1 English learners to attain English language proficiency using data from a large urban school district in southeast Texas. This longitudinal study also examined whether the time it took English learners to attain English language proficiency differed by participation in English learner programs such as Bilingual and English as a Second Language, and student background

characteristics such as economically disadvantaged, based on eligibility for the federal school lunch program, and participation in a special education program (Table 2). This study made use of archival data to expand knowledge of how much time English learners need to develop academic language in English. The results of this study can be used to inform English progress and attainment expectations.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Student Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Sample	15,050	100.0
Cohorts		
2010–2011	7,493	49.8
2011–2012	7,557	50.2
Participation in an English learner instructional program		
Bilingual or dual language	12,476	88.4
English as a second language	2,175	18.6
No participation	1,071	7.4
Participation in a special education program		
No	13,868	92.1
Yes	1,182	7.9
Participation in the free and reduced-price lunch program		
No	899	6.0
Yes	14,151	94.0

Research Question 1

Research question one examined the time it takes ELs to attain English language proficiency as measured by TELPAS. For the purposes of this project, students were considered proficient the first year in which they received a score of 4 on the composite rating of the TELPAS. For the years covered by this project, the composite rating of the TELPAS took into

consideration student performance on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Although other definitions of proficiency are possible, the use of the first year in which students demonstrated a rating of four on the composite rating requires students to demonstrate competence in all the language modalities while avoiding complications that could be linked to formal procedures for reclassifying ELs as fluent English proficient. This definition also allowed time to proficiency to be characterized based on the least amount of information, i.e., based on the fewest number of years of data. Based on the sample of students who achieved English language proficiency ($N = 9,048$), the mean of the data regarding time to English proficiency was 3.57 years. However, the median and mode were 3 years (see Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Years to English Language Proficiency

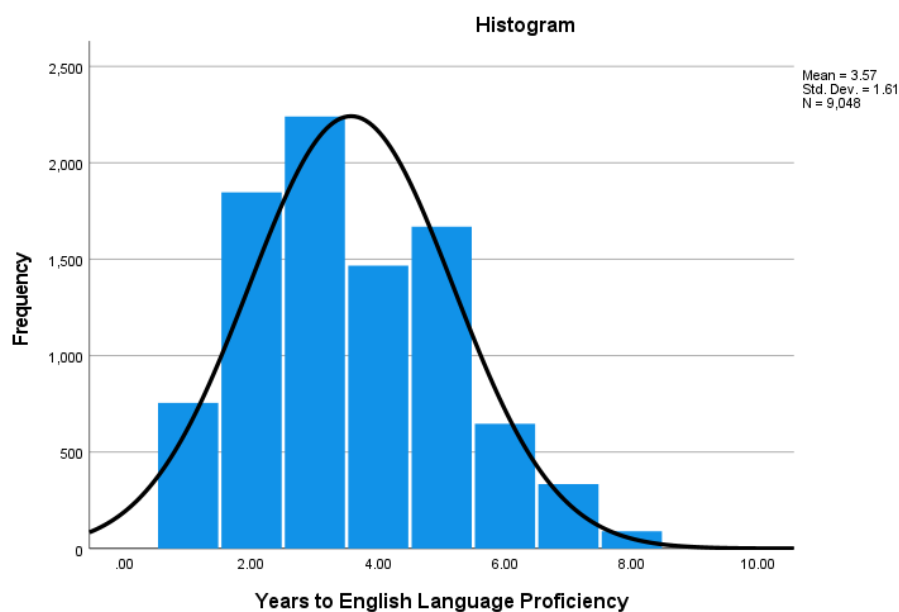
Descriptive statistics	Values
<i>Mean</i>	3.57
<i>Median</i>	3.00
<i>Mode</i>	3.00
<i>SD</i>	1.61

Note. $N = 15,050$; N (valid) = 9,048; missing = 6,002.

The histogram in Figure 3 depicts a distribution that is relatively symmetric with some positive skewness. The cumulative percentages of years to English language proficiency show that of the students who attained English language proficiency, approximately 50% did so by Year 3, and 88% attained English language proficiency by Year 5 (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

Figure 3

Histogram with Normal Curve of Years to English Language Proficiency

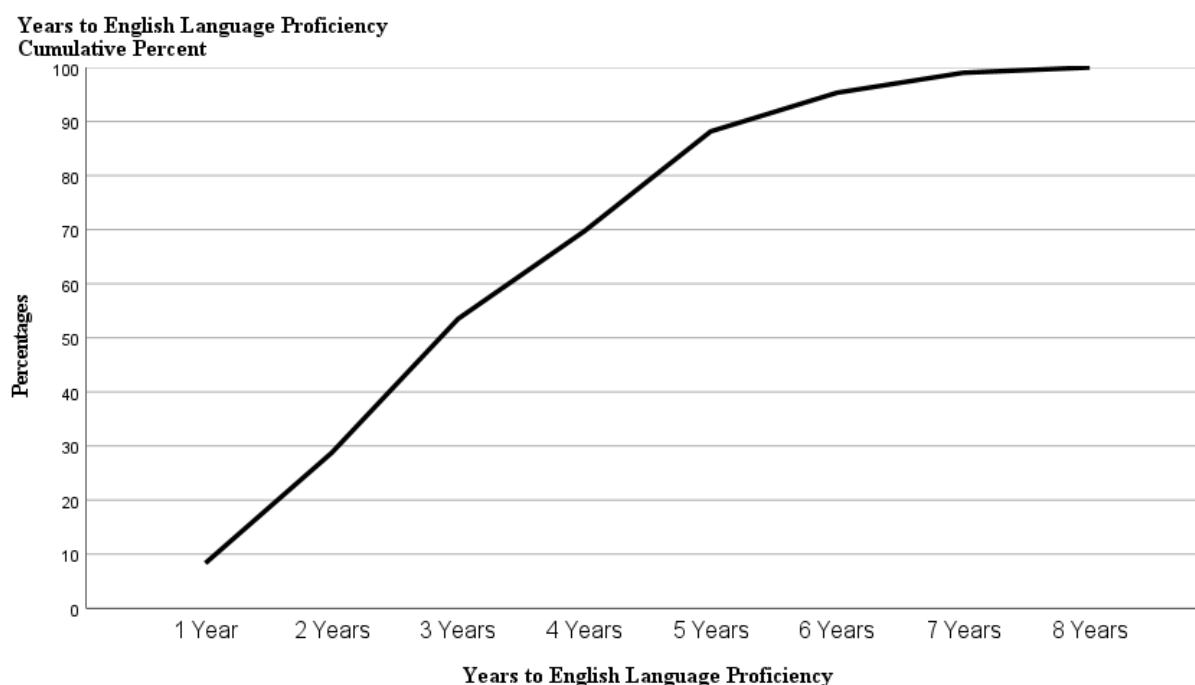
**Table 4**

Years to English Proficiency: Annual and Cumulative Percentages Over 8 Years

Year	Frequency	%	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	755	5.0	8.3	8.3
2	1847	12.3	20.4	28.8
3	2240	14.9	24.8	53.5
4	1467	9.7	16.2	69.7
5	1669	11.1	18.4	88.2
6	647	4.3	7.2	95.3
7	334	2.2	3.7	99.0
8	89	0.6	1.0	100.0
Total	9,078	60.1	100.00	
Missing	6,002	39.9		
Total	15,050	100.00		

Figure 4

Cumulative Percentages for Years to English Language Proficiency



Over one third of the sample did not remain enrolled in the district, such that the time they required to reach proficiency in English is unknown. For students who did not reach proficiency within the 8-year follow-up window of the study and who had follow-up data in Year 8, time to proficiency was left missing; for those who did not reach proficiency during the time that they were enrolled in the district and had fewer than 8 years of data, time to proficiency was set to missing. As a result, the time to proficiency measure is right censored. No attempt was made to account for the censoring in examining questions about time to proficiency. Students who were not proficient in the 8 years of this study had their years to proficiency score set to missing. These students (approximately 40%) either did not attain English proficiency by Year 8 or did not have available data for all 8 years and did not reach proficiency within their available data.

Research Question 2

The second research question examined the degree to which student and program characteristics are predictive of time to English proficiency. Independent variables used to build a multiple regression model with robust standard errors included participation in bilingual programs, participation in ESL programs, nonparticipation in bilingual and ESL programs, participation in the free and reduced lunch program, and participation in special education. The analysis used to account for robust standard errors revealed that participation in bilingual or ESL programs, economically disadvantaged status, and participation in special education were statistically significant predictors of time to proficiency ($p = <.001$). Table 5 shows the number of ELs in the sample who participated in special education and received bilingual or ESL program services and were eligible for the free or reduced lunch program.

Table 5

EL Participation in Special Education and Bilingual, ESL, or Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
EL participation in special education (Bilingual)	14,117	93.8	933	6.2	15,050	100.0
EL participation in special education (ESL)	11,718	77.9	3,332	22.1	15,050	100.0
EL Participation in Special Education (Economically disadvantaged)	15,050	100.0	0	0.0	15,050	100.0

Note. EL, English learner; ESL, English as a second language.

Table 6*EL Participation in Special Education—Crosstabulation*

Bilingual/ESL/Economically Disadvantaged Groups in Special Education	Yes/No				Total
		<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	Subtotal	
Bilingual					
EL participation in special education	No	1,382	11,629	13,011	
	Yes	259	847	1,106	
Total		1,641	12,476		14,117
English as a Second Language					
EL participation in special education	No	8715	1988	10703	
	Yes	828	187	1015	
Total		9543	2175		11,718
Economically Disadvantaged					
EL participation in special education	No	853	13,015	13,868	
	Yes	46	1,136	1,182	
Total		899	14,151		15,050

Table 7 shows parameter estimates with robust standard errors. This analysis identifies the difference between EL participation in bilingual, ESL, and special education programs and economically disadvantaged status on time to English language proficiency. The average time to English proficiency of students who participated in a bilingual program was 1.17 years more than students who did not participate in a bilingual program. The average time to English proficiency of students who participated in a special education program was 1.08 years more than students who did not participate in a special education program. English learners who were economically disadvantaged took a little more than half a year than the average time to attain English proficiency compared to students who were not economically disadvantaged. And the students who participated in an ESL program took slightly more than an extra quarter of a year to reach proficiency on average than students who did not participate in an ESL program. Based on these results, it can be concluded that student and program characteristics can be used as

predictors of time to proficiency with the most significant predictors being participation in special education and participation in bilingual education.

Table 7

Parameter Estimate with Robust Standard Errors: Years to EL Proficiency

Parameter	B	Robust Std.Error ^a	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Intercept	2.093	.074	23.391	<.001	1.948	2.237
BIL_PART	1.173	.053	22.156	<.001	1.069	1.276
ESL_PART	0.284	.055	5.131	<.001	0.175	0.392
ECODIS_PART	0.577	.074	7.843	<.001	.433	.721
SPED_PART	1.080	.111	9.755	<.001	.863	1.297

a. HC3Methods R Squared = .096 (Adjusted R Squared = .095)

Research Question 3

The first part of the third research question analyzed the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner, and the second part examined whether the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increased the risk that a student will be designated a long-term English learner. Long-term ELs are defined as students who do not meet reclassification criteria within 5 or 6 years of enrollment in U.S. schools, depending on the state. For the purposes of this study, students with the potential of becoming long-term ELs were students who had not reached proficiency in English as measured on the composite rating of the TELPAS within the first five years. This distinction is important for two reasons. First, this definition focuses only on the TELPAS component of the reclassification process, and in that sense the current project undercounts long term ELs in so far as reclassification imposes criteria other than TELPAS measured proficiency. Second, this definition allowed some students to be

classified as long term ELs whose score on the time to proficiency measure used in Research Questions 1 and 2 was missing. Specifically, if a student had a composite TELPAS score in year 5, 6, 7, or 8 that was less than four, then the student was determined to have the potential to become a long term EL even if their time to English proficiency score was missing because they never demonstrated proficiency in their TELPAS composite scores on file. Thus, the number of students with missing data for Research Question 3 is less than the number of students with missing data for the first two questions. For the analyses reported in this section, a binary outcome was created that took on the value of 1 if a student required more than 5 years to reach proficiency on the TELPAS and a value of 0 if the student required fewer than five years to reach proficiency. Thus, the logistic regression analyses reported are modeling the log odds of not reaching proficiency within five years.

The study found that the probability of not attaining English language proficiency in 5 years varied with student background and program characteristics. The logistic regression results shown in Table 8 demonstrate that the odds that an English learner who also participated in a special education program would attain English proficiency by Grade 5 were 9.64 times less than a student who did not participate in special education. Students who participated in a bilingual program had a lower probability of attaining English language proficiency in 5 years than students who did not participate in bilingual education. ELs who were also economically disadvantaged were 1.5 times less likely to attain English proficiency than ELs who were not economically disadvantaged. The odds of not attaining English language proficiency within five years for ELs who participated in ESL were 1.5 times higher than for students who did not participate in ESL.

Table 8*Logistic Regression Probability Results*

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1a	EL Part in SPED	2.266	.092	600248	1	<.001	9.637
	BIL_PART	1.013	.076	176.163	1	<.001	2.753
	ESL_PART	0.429	.061	49.460	1	<.001	1.535
	ESCODIS_PART	0.832	.130	40.790	1	<.001	2.298
	Constant	-2.510	.138	330.137	1	<.001	.081

a. Variable(s) entered in Step 1: EL Part in SPED, BIL_PART, ESL_PART, ECODIS_PART

Based on the results of a logistic regression analysis shown in Table 8, the probability is .074 that a student failed to reach proficiency within 5 years if that student was not in special education, was not economically disadvantaged, and did not participate in either bilingual or ESL programming. The contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner was highest for ELs who participated in special education (probability = .44), the second was participation in bilingual education (probability = .18), followed by students who qualified for the federal free and reduced lunch program (probability = .16), and lastly by ELs who participated in the ESL program (probability = .11). The results also show that the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increased the risk that a student will be designated a long-term English learner.

Chapter V

Discussion

This study examined the impact of specific student and program characteristics on time to English proficiency to determine their potential to serve as predictors of English learners being designated as long-term ELs (LTEs). To examine the contribution of these variables to the prediction of ELs time to proficiency and their failure to reach proficiency within five years three research questions were posed. The first research question analyzed the length of time it took English learners to become proficient in English. The second question investigated the degree to which student and school characteristics are predictive of time to proficiency. The third research question examined the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner and explored whether the presence of a learning disability over and above the other individual difference variables increased the risk that a student will be designated as a long-term English learner.

Research Question 1

Research question one examined the time it takes ELs to attain English language proficiency as measured by TELPAS. Based on data that characterized an EL as being proficient in five years, this study found that 65.3% of ELs, as a group, attained English proficiency in five years and 34.7% did not. However, to ensure that cumulative attainment results do not mask specific group outcomes, it is important to see the outcomes of each group. ELs who participated in ESL, bilingual, and in the free and reduced lunch program had similar outcomes. 64.7% of ELs in ESL programs, 64.1 % of ELs in the free and reduced lunch program, and 62.7% of ELs in bilingual programs attained English proficiency in 5 years, while only 20.9% of ELs who participated in special education attained English language proficiency by their fifth year. On

average approximately 36% of ELs who were characterized as bilingual, ESL, or economically disadvantaged did not attain proficiency by year five in their respective programs and 79.1% of ELs who participated in special education did not attain proficiency in five years.

This study examined ELs' time to attain English proficiency and some student and program characteristics that relate to time to proficiency in two different ways, first by examining the number of years to English proficiency and second by examining whether students took longer than five years to reach English proficiency. The question of time to English proficiency was examined in two ways because both yield incomplete pictures due to limitations of the data and the two approaches are complementary to one another. If all students had complete data and were enrolled in the school system until they reached proficiency, the two analyses would yield answers that are more directly comparable. But such is not the case. As it is, the two sets of analyses yielded similar conclusions about the importance of student and program characteristics.

Research Question 2

Research question two examined the degree to which student and program characteristics are predictive of time to English proficiency. The independent variables that were studied to determine the degree of influence on time to proficiency included bilingual program participation, ESL program participation, special education program participation, and economically disadvantaged status, which was based on student participation in the free and reduced lunch program. The results of the multiple regression with robust standard errors analysis conducted to address research question two revealed how much longer ELs with these characteristics took to attain English language proficiency than ELs who did or did not participate in these programs. The results, which were statistically significant for all variables,

revealed that students who participated in bilingual programs took 2.75 years longer to attain English proficiency than the average time it took ELs who did not participate in bilingual programs and students who participated in ESL programs took 1.53 years longer to attain English proficiency than the average time it took ELs who did not participate in these programs. ELs who participated in the free and reduced lunch program and ELs who participated in special education took 2.3 years and 9.6 years, respectively, longer to attain English proficiency than the average time it took ELs who did not participate in these programs to attain proficiency.

The results of this analysis might lead one to a conclusion that students who do not participate in language programs attain English proficiency faster than students who do receive second language support and consequently may have better achievement outcomes. This is an accurate conclusion for ELs who are not also in special education and ELs who are not economically disadvantaged. However, participation and nonparticipation in bilingual and ESL programs and the association of these variables to time to proficiency must be explained beyond the analysis results. It is important to note that although attainment of English language proficiency is paramount for academic achievement, when the focus is only on English language development, students can fall behind academically when grade-level content concepts and skills are not being taught in a way that is comprehensible to the English learner. Umansky and Reardon (2014) found that students who received instruction through their L1 closed the achievement gap with native English speakers and exceeded the performance of their EL peers in the district or in comparison groups. ELs who opted out of participating in a language program and instead participated in a mainstream program scored the lowest in comparison to students in any other programs and ended their schooling with low levels of achievement. The researchers also found that ELs enrolled in bilingual programs were reclassified at a slower pace in

elementary school but had a higher overall reclassification, English proficiency, and academic threshold passage by the end of high school. Valentino and Reardon (2015) found that even though development of English proficiency is slower for students in bilingual programs than for those in English immersion programs, Transitional bilingual program students in elementary grades had achieved test scores well above those of ELs in English immersion in both reading and math.

A study team from Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest (Slama, 2017) that investigated the degree to which initial English proficiency related to time to English proficiency found that students who were at a beginner level of English proficiency in first grade took longer to attain proficiency in English. This factor could potentially explain why a student who does not participate in a language program could attain English proficiency sooner than one who does. To test the validity of this assumption, it would be necessary to compare time to proficiency of ELs who participated and did not participate in a language program but were at the same English proficiency level at initial identification.

Like the findings of the REL team (2017), this analysis also concluded that students who were economically disadvantaged and participated in special education took the longest to attain English proficiency. Students who are economically disadvantaged tend to also have limited vocabulary in their native language and students with disabilities tend to have a much smaller vocabulary bank than students who are not. Echeverria's study (2008) concluded that due to both groups' deficits in receptive and expressive language skills, attainment of English proficiency took longer.

Research Question 3

The first part of research question three analyzed the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term English learner. The Long-term EL designation is based on the premise that an EL has not met reclassification criteria after 5 or more years in U.S. schools. Reclassification criteria includes both English language proficiency and academic proficiency. However, if a student has not attained English proficiency by year 5, he cannot be reclassified. This study focused only on attainment of English proficiency to determine which student characteristics, if any, had the highest influence on time to proficiency. Taking academic achievement out of the equation was purposeful to be able to clearly see the degree to which attainment of English proficiency might be impacting reclassification by Grade 5. The results of the first analysis revealed that the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term EL was highest for ELs who participated in special education, ELs who participated in bilingual education, and ELs who participated in the free and reduced lunch program. Students who had a lower probability of becoming LTELs, based on attainment of English proficiency, were students who participated in ESL programs and students who opted out of participating in any language program. Moreover, the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increased the risk of a student becoming a long-term English learner. These results support the findings of Haas et al. (2015) who found that there were higher percentages of ELs with learning disabilities and who were economically disadvantaged among students identified as LTELs. These findings support the creation of an early warning system to identify students with the potential to become LTELs within the first three years of schooling to ensure that systems are in place for reducing a student's risk of

becoming an LTEL and providing appropriate interventions respective of individual student needs.

Implications of Study Findings

The study findings have implications for identifying the approximation of years to English language proficiency based on student and program characteristics. The following recommendations suggest possible considerations for addressing the linguistic and academic needs of ELs with the goal of supporting their progress in attaining English and academic proficiency.

Recommendation 1

Findings from this study lend themselves to the development of an early warning system to identify students at higher risk for becoming LTELs. Through the utilization of such a system for identifying students who have the potential for not making expected progress or attaining proficiency in English, school leaders and staff could develop effective individualized learning plans designed to counteract the influence of risk factors. The warning system would not be designed to lower expectations for any student but rather, to build upon strengths to accelerate English proficiency and academic achievement. Such a warning system could help inform program placement, instructional practices and resources, the use of linguistic accommodations and supports, interventions, and a pathway for accelerating English language development.

Recommendation 2

The creation of a language development plan that includes frequent progress monitoring at the elementary level to ensure that ELs participating in bilingual and ESL programs in elementary schools are meeting expected yearly progress is crucial in preventing the escalation

of LTELs. Just as important is the development of a targeted plan at the middle school and high school levels to address the academic challenges that current LTELs are experiencing.

Recommendation 3

In this study, ELs who also participated in special education were found to be most at-risk for becoming LTEL. This finding suggests that increased attention should be paid to students who are classified as dual-identified, or ELs with disabilities. LPAC and ARD committees could benefit from collaborative training in decision-making regarding such students. Timing of such decisions is important – the earlier the better. Teachers must be supported through professional development on indicators to consider for initiating the pre-referral process, how to differentiate between a language disability and a language difference, how to choose the appropriate language supports to ensure that students are receiving comprehensible input, and in understanding the proficiency level descriptors of the English language proficiency standards to inform instructional decisions and practices.

Recommendation 4

Findings from this study could lead to erroneous conclusions regarding programming for EL's in relation to attainment of English proficiency. Decision makers and parents have options available to them regarding services for ELs and it is important that they be well aware of the benefits and challenges of the available language program models as well as student achievement outcomes. Achieving English proficiency in the shortest amount of time is not necessarily the goal to strive for. Acquiring a second language in the context of schooling takes time and study findings show that longer skill acquisition pathways coupled with literacy instruction in the native language often translate into better student achievement outcomes (Valentino and Reardon, 2015). Collier and Thomas (2020) found that ELs who received some type of native

language instruction or participated in an English immersion program as opposed to not receiving any language program services came closer to closing the achievement gap and recommended that it was important to inform parents who opted out of program services that “while the curricular mainstream may appear to speed their children’s acquisition of basic English, it does not lead to long-term academic success in English.”

Recommendation 5

An important factor to consider is the role of the parents in the education of their children. It is of utmost importance that parents be made aware of the purpose of the home language survey, how a student is identified as an EL, their students’ rights to a bilingual or ESL education and the advantages of program participation, the goals of each program model in relation to language, the student’s eligibility to receive linguistic supports during instruction and on assessments, and the progress that a student is expected to make each year in developing English proficiency.

Recommendation 6

English learners themselves must be made aware of their current English proficiency levels and what these levels, or stages of English language development, entail, be supported in establishing English language goals for progress and attainment and be given the tools for achieving them, be included in the progress they are making throughout the year and receive ongoing recognition when achieving short and long-term language and achievement goals. Providing this guidance to ELs will support them in developing the English language skills that will enable them to achieve their linguistic and academic goals to succeed in school and in life.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study provided a wealth of information regarding time to proficiency, the student and program characteristics that influence time to proficiency, and the contributions of these characteristics to the probability that students will be designated a long-term English learner. Although the results revealed that a large percentage of ELs did attain proficiency by year five, there still exists a large percentage of ELs who did not attain English proficiency. To address the needs of these students and prevent the continuous rise of the LTEL subgroup, further research regarding probable causes for lack of attainment is highly recommended.

Limitations of the Study

This longitudinal study provided the opportunity to analyze time to English language proficiency among English learners in a large urban school district with a population of ELs that currently exceeds 69,000 students or 33% of the total district population. Based on the statistical methods employed to analyze outcomes, the relationships among student and program characteristics and time to English proficiency reflect correlation association, and not causation. Whether these associations might represent potential causal levers requires further research and could lead to recommendations for interventions to improve outcomes for students who are at-risk for protracted time to proficiency, or failure to reach proficiency. The available data provided by the district was limited to basic program labels; therefore, information regarding fidelity of program implementation and the quality of instructional practices, which are important factors to consider, were not available.

This study did not attempt to examine student achievement in conjunction with English language proficiency. Lack of academic achievement data limited the study's ability to

determine whether ELs who did attain English proficiency before or by Grade 5 had reclassified or exited EL status.

CHAPTER VI

Action Plan

The academic difficulties experienced by ELs who have attained a higher level of proficiency in English differ from that of ELs who remain at lower proficiency levels. Instructional approaches and interventions must be differentiated to appropriately address the linguistic and academic needs of these two very distinct groups. Making systemic changes to positively impact and improve the education of all groups of English learners requires the collaborative efforts of district and campus compliance and instructional decision-making teams. Therefore, it is vital to provide critical stakeholders timely support and relevant professional learning opportunities to build upon their existing knowledge and gain the necessary competencies to improve current practice.

Designing an innovative solution to the ever-growing population of LTELs requires that problems of practice be clearly articulated. The following plan includes three targeted foci. The first addresses varied perspectives on the type of data that are available to schools and how data can be used in a more targeted and effective manner to inform instruction and identify students' linguistic and academic goals. The second centers on addressing the needs of ELs with disabilities, and the third, places a special focus on parent involvement. Solutions that address these foci involve new and continuous learning for central office and campus instructional leaders, teachers, and parents.

Solutions to Positively Affect English Learner Outcomes

Use of Student Data

School administrators have access to an overwhelming amount of data. Using multiple data sources to guide instruction is key to making informed decisions in addressing the linguistic

and academic needs of ELs. Data consumers in education, and especially central office and campus leaders, tend to focus mainly on district and state assessment data to identify the greatest areas of need. District and campus leaders use this data to develop comprehensive needs assessments which are then used to generate campus and district improvement plans; however, there are other types of data that need to be considered, analyzed, interpreted, and used to improve progress and attainment of academic English. For ELs in particular, data that should also be taken into account includes the number of years the student has been enrolled in U.S. schools, the student's home or primary language, the student's proficiency in the native language, the number of years classified as an EL, the level of English language proficiency when initially identified as an EL, the student's current English proficiency, the number of years the student has not made progress in developing academic English, eligibility for the free or reduced lunch program or other indicators that constitute an economic disadvantage, identified disabilities, age in Grade 1, whether the student was identified as unschooled or with limited or interrupted formal education upon initial enrollment in U.S. schools, rate of mobility, disciplinary referrals, grade retention, and attendance.

Use of Program Data

Other data associated with time to proficiency and program participation include: student participation in the language program recommended by the LPAC, years of participation in the recommended program, participation in an alternative language program due to insufficient certified bilingual and ESL teachers, program effectiveness based on annual evaluations, fidelity of program implementation based on appraiser observations, teacher certification, teacher efficacy, teacher use of linguistic accommodations, provision of small group instruction with tutors and/or interventionists, grade-appropriate curriculum and resources in the student's native

language and English, student participation in other programs and services such as: Advanced Academics/Gifted and Talented, Special Education, 504, Response to Intervention, STEM, Career and Technical Education, and Magnet programs.

Use of Assessment Data

Although the state education agency currently does not support districts with tools and resources to monitor EL progress, districts are required to do so. As per ESSA (2015) requirements, “LEAs should establish rigorous monitoring systems that include benchmarks for expected growth and take appropriate steps to assist students who are not adequately progressing towards those goals.” Based on the state’s expectation that ELs make one level of progress in English each year, students who are determined to be at a beginning level of English proficiency when they are first identified as English learners should attain English proficiency in four years. It is expected that a student who enrolls in school at a beginning proficiency level should reach an intermediate level of proficiency by the end of his second year in U.S. schools. By the end of the third year, the student is expected to reach an advanced level of language proficiency, and by the end of the fourth year, a student who is making expected progress should be able to attain an advanced high level of proficiency in English in all four language domains, as measured by TELPAS. However, current research reveals that this is not the case for more than 50% of ELs (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Formative and summative assessment data are important variables that must be examined to make educational decisions. The summative assessment results that TELPAS renders at end of year, however, cannot be used in a timely way to inform instruction or to monitor progress. Formative assessments that provide information *for* learning must be conducted throughout the year to monitor the progress that ELs are making. Consistent monitoring of EL progress in

English development throughout the year allows teachers to make timely and informed decisions that positively affect student outcomes. Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 74.4(b)(4) (English Language Proficiency Standards, 2007) requires districts to “provide intensive and ongoing foundational second language acquisition instruction to ELLs in Grade 3 or higher who are at the beginning or intermediate level of English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing as determined by the state’s English language proficiency assessment system.” To monitor EL progress, administrators and teachers must consider not only the results of common formative assessments but must also consider student work, anecdotal records, running records, and authentic student portfolios. While it can be time consuming to collect and understand how to use multiple data sources, developing these skills will prove to be critical in establishing a standardized system for implementing effective data analysis practices that support making focused and targeted instructional decisions for ELs.

Without a clear understanding of how to use data, administrators can make incorrect assumptions or arrive at erroneous conclusions about what the data mean. Moreover, understanding and interpreting the data is important, but to improve student performance, knowing how to use the data is what really counts. To ensure that campus administrators, and the district supervisors that support them, have a clear understanding of how to analyze and use EL data, specialized training on how to disaggregate data is vital. Campus administrators must have a clear understanding of the specific characteristics that differentiate EL subgroups to choose the most effective instructional approaches to improve educational outcomes. Once campuses begin to address EL’s linguistic and academic needs in a targeted and focused manner, instead of using a one size fits all approach, the linguistic progress and, ultimately, the academic achievement of ELs will be positively impacted.

ELs with Disabilities

Teachers are challenged with determining whether a student is experiencing academic difficulties due to limited English, a learning disability, or other possible impairments, largely because there is limited guidance for teachers to follow in addressing these challenges.

According to a recent publication (Burr et al., 2015), inconsistent identification of English learners with learning disabilities stems from a “lack of multitiered early intervention strategies, poorly designed and implemented referral processes, lack of options, beyond referral to special education services, for providing assistance to struggling students... and as a result, ELs are both under and over-identified for special education services.” Nation-wide, only 15 states provide published manuals with detailed guidance to support teachers in accurately identifying and addressing the needs of English learners with learning disabilities. California is the front runner with the most extensive manual followed by Oregon; however, the state of Texas, second to California in total EL population, is not included among the fifteen states.

ELs who go through their early formative years with unidentified disabilities do not receive services that could support their language development and ultimately their academic progress. Even when a prereferral process has been established, the shortage of bilingual diagnosticians and speech pathologists delays the identification process. A lack of assessment instruments in students’ native language is also cause for under identification of ELs. These students often times do not get identified as having disabilities until they develop a certain level of language proficiency to be tested in English. And because their disability can impact language development, these ELs can take seven or more years to develop a higher level of proficiency putting them at higher risk of not making academic progress, dropping out, and or not graduating from high school.

In the state of Texas, if a parent indicates on the home language survey that a language other than English is used by the student or in the home, most of the time, and the campus is unable to test the student with the state-wide English language proficiency (ELP) test, due to a significant cognitive disability, the LPAC is required to classify the student as an English learner even without the ELP test results needed to reach that determination. For many dual-identified students making the expected level of progress in English each year and attaining proficiency is a highly unachievable feat. The state must take this into consideration when establishing time to proficiency expectations for ELs with disabilities whose language disorders highly impact the plausibility of becoming proficient in English as measured by TELPAS.

Parent Involvement

Parents play a critical role in the academic success of their children. Parents of English learners who are also limited in English tend to be less involved in the education of their children than English speaking parents. To be able to advocate for their children, parents need to understand the process of second language acquisition, bilingual and ESL program models, the advantages of bilingual and ESL programs, time, and content allocation regarding language of instruction in bilingual and ESL programs, expected time to proficiency, and the impact of academic language proficiency on academic progress. From the time a student is identified as an EL to the time he or she becomes English proficient, each student journeys through different trajectories. Campus administrators and teachers are responsible for empowering parents by communicating with them what these trajectories will look like. Parents must be notified about the progress their child is making as well as when they are not making expected progress. Parents who deny program services must be informed about the advantages of receiving program services. Parents must also be informed about the stages of second language acquisition and how

the school monitors the progress the student is making as well as how the campus will support their child in attaining English proficiency to be academically successful.

Targeted Improvement Plan

Professional Development

Moving the needle in reaching the ultimate goal, which is to decrease the number of long-term ELs, calls for a targeted improvement plan. To address the problems of practice associated with long-term ELs, the following system of improvement considers the primary and secondary drivers that have the greatest potential for producing the most impactful positive changes (Perry, et al., 2020). The primary driver of the plan delineates a professional development plan to be carried out by various central office leaders based on their area of expertise, which might include Curriculum, Office of Special Education, Multilingual Programs, Student Assessment, Response to Intervention. This professional development plan would be carried out using the most appropriate platforms depending on subject matter and would include targeted audiences such as: Central Office Leaders, Campus administrators, Sheltered Instruction Coaches, Bilingual and Dual Language Teachers, ESL Teachers, General Education Teachers, and Special Education Teachers (see Figure 5). The secondary driver includes teaching and learning through collaborative processes to improve the educational system as it relates to English learners.

Using multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive needs assessment with an EL focus	√	√	√				
Using needs assessment data to generate a school improvement plan with an EL focus	√	√	√				
	ELS WITH DISABILITIES TRAINING						
Identification of ELs with disabilities	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Differentiating between a cognitive disability and a language difference	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Providing bilingual and ESL program services for ELs with disabilities	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Assessing ELs with disabilities	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Reclassification of ELs with disabilities	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

EL Program Training

Central and campus administrative teams must be knowledgeable about the identification and placement process and related state rules, to ensure that all eligible students are provided the opportunity to receive equitable learning opportunities and are offered the required language programs. To ensure effective program implementation, campus leaders and sheltered instruction coaches must know about teacher certification requirements to ensure that appropriate staff have been assigned to teach in Bilingual and ESL classrooms, and to support teachers who are assigned to teach ELs and are not appropriately certified. They must also be knowledgeable of time and content allocation in each grade level to ensure that teachers are implementing the

recommended instructional framework with fidelity. They must be able to evaluate a teacher's knowledge and skills in making grade-level content comprehensible to English learners at all proficiency levels while supporting ELs in developing academic English. Teachers must be knowledgeable about each child's English proficiency to identify the appropriate linguistic accommodations needed to make learning experiences meaningful through comprehensible input and to provide the respective second language supports students' need when measuring content mastery. For new learning to stick and for teachers to implement effective teaching strategies, it is essential that they be coached by experts in sheltered instruction strategies, now referred to in the state of Texas as content-based language instruction.

EL Data Training

Administrators must have a clear understanding of how to use multiple data sources to inform progress, instruction, and intervention. Based on student and program data, predictions can be made regarding time to English proficiency and whether students are on track to attain English proficiency in the projected number of years. These data can also be used to evaluate program implementation and create a comprehensive needs assessment and campus improvement plan. The intended outcome of this training is for instructional leaders and teachers to learn to use data in a way that informs practitioners on how to differentiate instructional approaches based on ELs' linguistic and academic needs.

ELs with Disabilities Training

This training will serve to bring awareness to both administrators and teachers about state regulations concerning the identification of ELs with disabilities. It will provide respective stakeholders guidance on how to determine appropriate accommodations to use on academic achievement tests as well as on the state-wide English language proficiency test. This training

will also emphasize the importance of providing both language and special education program services for dual-identified ELs. Participants will also learn how to establish modified reclassification criteria with respect to the English language proficiency test. The goal of this training is to ensure that all dual-identified students are given the opportunity to develop and attain English proficiency as well as reclassify as English proficient students.

Figure 6

English Learner Parent Training

English Learner Parent Training
Identification and Reclassification Process
Transitional Bilingual Programs: Early and Late Exit
Dual Language Programs: One-Way and Two-Way Immersion
ESL Programs: Content-based and Pull-out Programs
Phases of Second Language Acquisition
English Language Proficiency Standards and Proficiency Level Descriptors
Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System
Making the English Language Proficiency Standards/Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System Connection

EL Parent Training

The goal of EL Parent trainings is to empower parents with the information they need to be active advocates for their children. To make informed decisions about their children's education, parents must be knowledgeable about the identification process regarding how the LPAC determines if a student is an English learner, the language programs that districts are required to offer and the advantages of each respective program that the district offers, the goal of each program and how much time will be allocated to learning English as a second language in each grade level. These trainings will also provide parents with a better understanding of the stages of second language acquisition, information about the English language proficiency standards (ELPS), the English language proficiency assessment that all students identified as ELs must take each year until they attain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English as measure by TELPAS as well as the connection between the ELPS and TELPAS (See Figure 6).

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that although the majority of ELs, for whom TELPAS data was available, did attain English proficiency by Grade 5, about one third of students went on to middle school not being proficient in English. The results also revealed that ELs who did not participate in Bilingual, or ESL programs attained English proficiency faster than students who did receive these program services. Moreover, ELs who were not in special education or participated in the free and reduced lunch program were more likely to attain proficiency faster than students who did participate in these programs. The findings also suggested that the contribution of student and program characteristics to the probability that a student will be designated a long-term EL was highest for ELs who participated in special

education, ELs who participated in bilingual education, and ELs who participated in the free and reduced lunch program. Students who had a lower probability of becoming LTELs, based on attainment of English proficiency, were students who participated in ESL programs and students who opted out of participating in any language program and that the presence of a learning disability over and above these other individual difference variables increased the risk of a student becoming a long-term English learner.

It is important to note that while EL participation in general education may appear to accelerate time to English proficiency, relevant studies reveal that it does not lead to long-term academic success. It takes the collaborative effort of many stakeholders to make the necessary shift in current systems to improve the education of English learners who are at greater risk of failing academically. The education of ELs can be much improved through a well thought-out plan of action that takes into account student performance data, the importance of cross-functional collaborative efforts, identification of early warning signs based on student characteristics that have been proven to impact time to English proficiency and academic achievement to reduce students' risk of becoming long-term ELs, building capacity among district and campus instructional leaders and educators through professional development learning opportunities, and engaging and empowering parents of ELs.

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