

Research Evidence Against Dismantling the U.S. Education Department: How to Protect and Improve Programs for English Learners

Are There Evidence-Based Programs and Practices That Improve English Proficiency and Academic Learning Among English Learners?

Yes. While schools operate within systems that often lack the resources, policies, and capacity needed to provide both differentiated language supports and rigorous academic instruction, research consistently demonstrates that there are numerous evidence-based approaches that can strengthen English proficiency and academic learning when the necessary conditions are in place.

Issue #1: Should Programs Emphasize Swift Integration Through English-Only Instruction or Promote Both English and Native Language Proficiency Through Bilingual Approaches?

In the past decade, there has been mounting, rigorous evidence that recommends **bilingual approaches over English-only programs**.

Arguments in Favor of Bilingualism

- While studies show that it can take longer to achieve English proficiency, **more students achieve higher levels of English proficiency and score higher on academic assessments**, especially in English Language Arts.
- The **development of students' first language is critical** for second language acquisition and cognitive development.
- Bilingual education **validates students' cultural and linguistic identities**, helping them reconcile their heritage with their American identity.

Outstanding Challenges

- Across the United States, **less than 20% of multilingual English learner (EL) students are educated through bilingual and dual language approaches**.
- Regardless of approach, language instruction educational programs can be **difficult to implement** as designed. Even when bilingual or English-only programs are well-designed on paper, schools often struggle to carry them out faithfully.
- **Program design, staffing capacity, teacher preparation, and equitable access to resources** are key to ensuring language instruction educational programs are effective and do not perpetuate inequalities among EL populations.

Issue #2: Is There Evidence to Inform Instructional Practices Across Grade Spans and in Different Contexts?

There is a robust literature providing evidence-based best practices in instructional strategies to improve time-to-proficiency/reclassification and academic learning in early grades, with emerging evidence covering middle and high school grade levels as well.

Instructional Strategies for English Learners by Grade Level

Grade Level	Evidence-Based Supports/Strategies
Pre-K to Grade 5 (Elementary School)	Explicit literacy instruction (including phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension), academic language development, visual and verbal supports, peer-assisted learning, leveraging home language and cultural assets, screening and monitoring, small-group support.
Grades 6-8 (Middle School)	Access to grade-level content to develop academic language and critical thinking, comprehension and writing support, visual aids, home language and cultural knowledge, collaborative learning, addressing socioemotional needs.
Grades 9-12 (High School)	Academic English development focusing on oral and written language, structured reading and writing, cognitive strategies, extended discussions, motivation and engagement, peer-assisted learning, small-group instruction for struggling ELs.

Research Gaps and Directions for Future Research

There is ongoing and active scholarship generating high quality research evidence that can be used to support decision making and systems change. Yet, there remain numerous areas of inquiry in which ongoing research is necessary to generate consensus as to the most effective approaches that schools can use to support English learners. These include, for example: effective practices for long-term ELs; best practices for integrating academic language into content area instruction; optimizing small-group and peer-assisted learning strategies; integrating extended discussions and critical thinking opportunities into instruction; and incorporating EL’s cultural and linguistic assets into instruction to enhance engagement and achievement.

Read the full research brief [here](#). Visit our [website](#) for more resources on protecting and improving programs for English learners, including a webinar recording, summaries of research evidence, and an FAQ on Title III and other federal supports.