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## **Bilingual Education Programs in United States Classrooms: Summary of Trends**

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## Introduction

The number of students from diverse language backgrounds is growing in elementary and secondary classrooms in the United States. The families of these students come from a variety of backgrounds, with Spanish being the dominant language for most of them. Many of the children and youth come to school lacking English language skills and are not able to access the mainstream curriculum.

Students who are identified as limited English proficient (LEP) or English language learners (ELLs) in school districts in the nation have a right to appropriate educational services. Bilingual education is an educational approach that can support students who are not proficient in English. Research has documented the effectiveness of this educational approach. Programs that use Spanish as a language of instruction have become popular in many states because of the large numbers of Spanish speaking students.

The use of bilingual education in classrooms in the United States has fluctuated since the early days of the United States. Data shows that there has been a decline in the number of students participating in bilingual education programs in recent years. The following discussion will summarize trends in bilingual education programs in the United States.

## Language Instruction Education Programs

According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), "where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students" (retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html> on June 11, 2010). OCR does not necessarily mandate any specific language program, but rather looks at that whether:

- (1) the program the recipient chooses is recognized as sound by some experts in the field or is considered a legitimate experimental strategy;
- (2) the programs and practices used by the school system are reasonably calculated to implement effectively the educational theory adopted by the school; and
- (3) the program succeeds, after a legitimate trial, in producing results indicating that students' language barriers are actually being overcome.

There are a variety of language instructional education programs (LIEPs) that are supported by research. They often are divided into programs that develop students' literacy in two languages and programs that focus on developing students' literacy only in English. The following terms are used in the Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs) required for programs funded under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Listing of programs serving ELL students

**Programs that focus on developing students' literacy in two languages –**

- Two-way immersion program or Two-way bilingual program
- Developmental bilingual program, late exit transitional program, or Maintenance bilingual education program
- Transitional program, Early exit bilingual program, or Early exit transitional program
- Heritage language program or indigenous language program
- Foreign language program, foreign language immersion (full or partial)

**Programs that focus on developing students' literacy solely in English –**

- Sheltered English instruction or Content-based English as a second language (ESL)
- Structured English immersion (SEI)
- Pull-out English as a Second language (ESL) or English language development (ELD)
- Push-in ESL program

(NCELA, Retrieved from [http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/files/uploads/5/Language\\_Instruction\\_Educational\\_Programs.pdf](http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/files/uploads/5/Language_Instruction_Educational_Programs.pdf) on June 11, 2010).

## Trends and Data

Data on educational programs for ELLs in school districts are available from a number of sources. The United States Department of Education (USDE) funded studies two studies in 1991–1992 and 200–2002 on services for ELL students in the nation. The later report, the *Descriptive Study of Services to Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students and LEP students with Disabilities* compares data on services compared the recent data with the data from the report in the 1990s. Current data on LIEPs used in educational programs funded through Title III of the ESEA is available from the CSPR data. A number of research studies over the years have discussed the effectiveness of different educational approaches and strategies, including those that support native language, but do not necessarily report on trends.

The 2001- 2002 *Descriptive Study* reported that “There has been a substantial shift in the past ten years in the instructional services received by LEP students. This shift has been toward LEP instructional services provided in English” (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick and Sapru, 2003, p. 9). Table 1 provides comparison data from the two studies.

TABLE 1  
 Service Types Received by LEP Students in 1991-1992\* and 2001-2002  
 (School LEP Services Questionnaire)

Service Type:	Percentage of LEP Students	
	1991-1992*	2001-2002
1—No LEP services/mainstream instruction only	2.1%	6.7%
2—No LEP services/instructional support	1.4%	5.0%
3—Some LEP services/all English	9.1%	24.7%
4—Some LEP services/some native language	7.0%	8.3%
5—Some LEP services/significant native language	3.1%	3.4%
6—Extensive LEP services/all English	14.6%	23.2%
7—Extensive LEP services/some native language	15.8%	11.8%
8—Extensive LEP services/significant native language	37.0%	17.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The number of respondents who provided data on the item from the current study was 1,987. The item response represented 95.1 % of the weighted cases on this form. The responses were weighted at the item level to be nationally representative.

\*Data from Fleischman and Hopstock (1993). The percentages were recalculated to exclude an "unknown" category  
 Table reproduced from Zehler, et al., 2003, p. 9

Data from the CSPRs reflect a similar trend to that of the *Descriptive Studies*. Instructional programs that use a language other than English continue to be used for ELLs, but the greater emphasis is on English-only programs, due in part to the political necessities of states that whose populations have voted to mandate the use of English-only programs. The CSPR data do not include numbers of students in specific programs so it cannot be compared directly with the data from the descriptive study. States report on the types of programs offered by their school districts. The majority of states offer some form of instruction that focuses on English. A smaller number of states provide instructional programs that support the students' home languages. Figure 2 shows the LIEPs used by states as reported in the two *Biennial Reports to Congress on the Implementation of Title III State Formula Grant Programs, 2002-2004* and *2004-2006*, as well as the two more recent CSPRs, 2006-07 and 2007-08.

Figure 2: Number of states offering LIEPs by type of program, 2002 - 2008

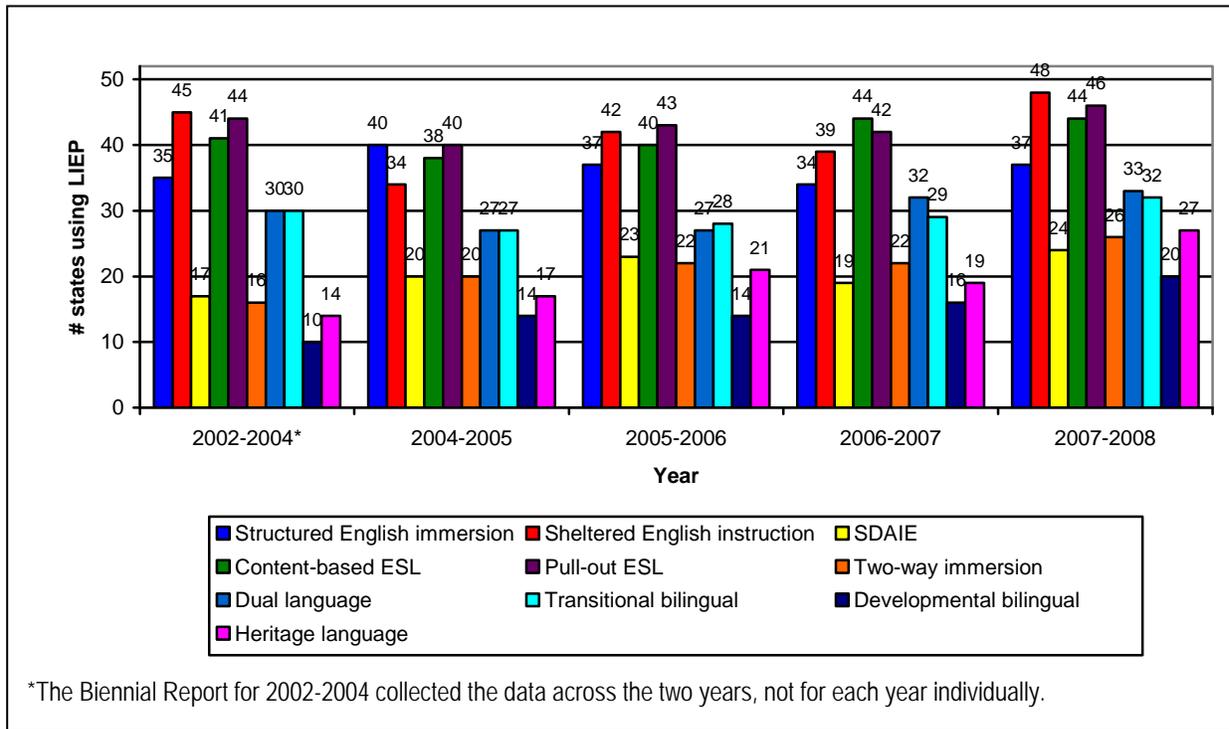
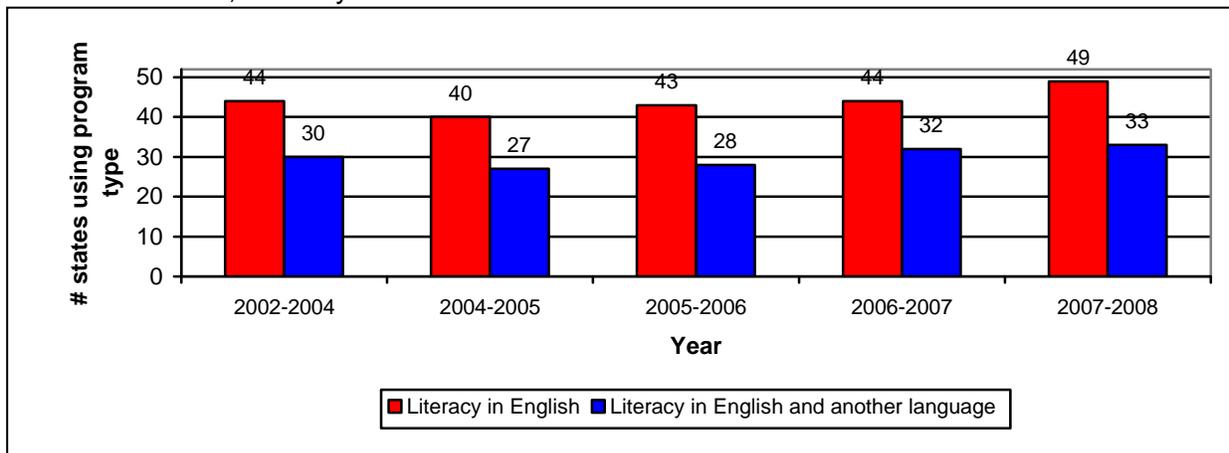


Figure 3 compares the usage of LIEPs that focus only on English with those that provide instruction in another language along with English, as reported in the two *Biennial Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program, 2002-2004 and 2004-2006* and the two recent CSPRs (2006-07 and 2007-08). Educational programs that only focus on English language literacy and development continue to be used to a greater extent than those that also use the home language of the student.

Figure 3: Comparison of English literacy LIEPs and dual literacy LIEPs, as reported by states, for the years 2002-2008



The emphasis on instructional programs that focus on English is supported by other research and reports that have documented trends in education. Data from the CSPR shows that currently only four states provide native language content area assessment. Native language assessment is an indication that students are being provided with educational programs in their students' home language.

Three states have passed legislation in the last decade severely limiting bilingual education in their states. California, Arizona and Massachusetts have restrictions on educational programs that use students' home languages. Salas explains that "despite the evidence that properly implemented bilingual education works for English language learners, English learners are being pushed into English-only programs or getting less instruction in their primary languages. Voters in three states (California, 1998; Arizona, 2000; Massachusetts, 2002) have passed referenda mandating "English-only" education and outlawing bilingual instruction" (2006, Retrieved from [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/20\\_03/bili203.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/20_03/bili203.shtml) on 12/04/2009).

### **Growth in Student Numbers**

ELLs continue to grow in numbers in classrooms in the United States.

According to 2005-2006 data from the states, approximately 5,074,572 LEPs are enrolled in grades pre-K through 12. Based on state-reported data, it is estimated that 5,074,572 LEP students were enrolled in public schools (pre-K through Grade 12) for the 2005-2006 school year. This number represents approximately 10.3% of total public school student enrollment. Among the states, California enrolled the largest number of public school LEP students, with 1,571,463, followed by Texas (640,749), Florida (253,165), New York (203,583), Illinois (204,803), and Arizona (152,962). The outlying areas had the highest overall percentages of LEP students, with the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands identifying approximately 100% of their students as Limited English Proficient (NCELA website, retrieved from <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/faqs/> on 12/04/2009).

The language group that is increasing in greatest numbers among ELLs includes those who come from a Spanish speaking background. Spanish is the most frequently spoken language by ELLs in classrooms in the nation. Please see Table 2 for more information on languages used by ELLs.

### **Need for Instructional Approaches**

The growth of ELL student numbers and current requirements for all students to meet academic achievement goals has caused increased awareness for the need for effective instructional programs for ELLs. ELLs lag significantly behind their peers in academic achievement. Raising achievement levels for ELLs has been the motivation to research educational methods and strategies that will support student achievement.

Table 2: Ten native languages most frequently spoken by K-12 ELL students

Language	Percentage of LEP students reported	
	By states	By districts
Spanish	79.6	76.9
Vietnamese	2.0	2.4
Chinese (includes Cantonese, Mandarin, and unspecified dialects)	2.1	1.8
Hmong	1.6	1.8
Korean	1.0	1.2
Haitian Creole	0.9	1.1
Arabic	0.9	1.2
Russian	0.8	0.9
Tagalog	0.7	0.9
Navajo	0.9	0.9

(USDE, 2008, retrieved from [http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/files/uploads/3/Biennial\\_Report\\_0406.pdf](http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/files/uploads/3/Biennial_Report_0406.pdf) on 6/11/2010)

The need for appropriately trained teachers and effective instructional programs are expressed by those in field of education. Nearly all states documented the need for more credentialed ELL teachers in CSPR data. In a recent report the Council of Great City Schools stated that “school districts face a critical shortage of qualified ELL teachers” (2009, p. 31).

Along with a number of educational approaches that incorporate English language development along with content area instruction, bilingual and dual language methods are cited as successful methods to ensure student success. Collier and Thomas explain.

Our longitudinal research findings from one-way and two-way dual language enrichment models of schooling demonstrate the substantial power of this program for enhancing student outcomes and fully closing the achievement gap in second language (LE2). Effect sizes for dual language are very large compared to other programs for English Learners (ELLs). Dual language schooling also can transform the experience of teachers, administrators, and parents into an inclusive and supportive school community for all (2004, retrieved from <http://njrp.tamu.edu/2004/PDFs/Collier.pdf> on 6/11/2010)

Advocates for bilingual and dual language programs also stress the advantages of such an education for the future of our world.

Dual language education is a program that has the potential to promote the multilingual and multicultural competencies necessary for the new global business job market while eradicating the significant achievement gap between language minority and language majority students. The appeal of dual language programs is that they combine successfully education models in an integrated classroom composed of both language majority and language minority students with the goals of full bilingualism and biliteracy, academic excellence for both groups, and multicultural competencies (Lindholm-Leary, 2000, p. 5).

### Summary

Data available from school districts and states document that bilingual education and dual language programs continue to be used as instructional approaches that provide appropriate educational experiences to ELLs. Rather than increasing, though, the trend appears for

decreases in student enrollment in educational programs that support home language literacy. This decrease is in contrast to the increase in student numbers. ELLs continue to increase in classroom through the nation. Along with this increase in numbers is greater emphasis on the need to find effective teaching and instructional methods that will support the students in meeting the high academic achievement goals expected of all students.

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