

## Chapter 7

# The Effects of Transitional Bilingual Education vs. Dual Language Immersion on English Language Learners' Reading Assessment Scores

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This action research study was completed in a North Texas school district where English language learners comprised 52% of the K-12 student population during the 2015-2016 academic school year. Data from a campus which used a two-way dual language immersion (DLI) program and another campus which used a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program were evaluated. The study analyzed the district's third to fifth grade reading assessment results of 128 students from the DLI campus and 223 from the TBE campus. Researchers compared the scores of students in each program to determine if one bilingual model produced higher scores than another. The results showed that there were greater gains for ELLs in the TBE program at all grade levels (third to fifth). Although the TBE program resulted in higher student scores, limitations make it unclear to what degree the program impacted students' achievement.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3955-1.ch007

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bilingual education exists as an approach that uses the native language to support the second language in a carefully structured and sequenced manner (Texas Education Code, 1995). In Texas, there are four different program models that can be used in bilingual education, but all have a component of structured English instruction and use the native language as a support to develop the second language. Amongst the different program models are the transitional bilingual education (TBE) and dual language immersion (DLI) programs. While some studies report that both transitional and dual language programs produce similar results (Gersten & Woodward, 1995; Murphy 2014; Nakamoto, Lindsey, & Manis, 2012), others argue that dual language programs result in higher long-term academic achievement than other bilingual education program models (Lindholm-Leary 2012; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008). Thus, more research is needed to help determine which program produces higher student achievement and how long students must be in a given program to see results.

In this study, the researchers completed an extensive literature review comparing the characteristics of the TBE and DLI program models. Next, reading assessment results of ELLs were collected from two campuses, which implemented the two different program models: a transitional bilingual education classroom (TBE) and a two-way dual language immersion program (DLI). Finally, the findings were analyzed and evaluated in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of each bilingual education model.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **ELLs and Bilingual Education in Texas**

English language learners (ELLs) are those who are “in the process of learning English” (Ovando & Combs, 2012, p. 456). In contrast, the term limited-English proficient (LEP), although commonly used in state and federal legislation, is controversial as it has been argued that it defines children in terms of what they are missing, rather than focusing on their strengths (Ovando & Combs, 2012). When possible, the authors will use the term “ELL,” but may use the term “LEP” when this is the language used in the legislation referenced. ELLs or LEPs are those whose English assessment scores do not meet or exceed standards set forth by a given school or district. ELLs may also include students that are currently receiving direct LEP services and language accommodations.

In the 1970s, Texas was among several states that were changing their own state laws to reflect the updated educational policies of the nation. On June 3, 1973, the Bilingual Education and Training Act was signed into law in Texas (Rodríguez, 2010). This important legislation set official guidelines for school districts regarding ELLs. For instance, the act mandated that public schools with 20 or more LEP students in a particular grade level must provide bilingual instruction to those students (Texas Education Code, 1995). Essentially, the prior mandate of English-only instruction was lifted and replaced with bilingual education. With the population of ELLs in Texas rising over the last 10 years (Texas Education Association, 2016), this change in the Texas educational policy was a much awaited shift that benefited ELLs and their families.

By the mid-1970s, selected Texas schools instituted bilingual education programs. These schools began experimenting with the ratio of English and Spanish instruction used throughout the day (Rodríguez, Tamayo-McGee, Acosta, & Morales, 2006). From campus to campus, the bilingual education

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