

Research Overview

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What do we know about dually identified students?

An Emerging Research Agenda

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Within the Stanford-Sequoia K-12 Research Collaborative, several questions have emerged about what we know and don't know about dually identified students. Dually identified students (also referred to as English Learners with Disabilities, ELLWD) are students who qualify for English Learner (EL) services and Special Education (SPED) services. In this research summary, we explore questions that our district partners have raised about this student subgroup to begin developing an emerging research agenda that can help guide future study designs.

BACKGROUND

What are the most prevalent disabilities among dually identified students?

Locally, in 2019, the John W. Gardner Center in collaboration with a Stanford-Sequoia Collaborative district found that the most common disabilities within this district were Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.) and Speech and Language Impairments (SLI) (e.g., stuttering, dysarthria, etc.) (Hernandez et al., 2019). These patterns are comparable to nationwide prevalence of disabilities, where dually identified students are more likely to be classified as having a SLD or SLI (US Department of Education, 2014).

As defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004, SLDs refer to a psychological processing disorder in understanding or using spoken or written language. Three of the most common (and often overlapping) SLDs are auditory processing, dyslexia, and

dysgraphia (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2014). SLIs refer to communication disorders that adversely affect educational performance, such as stuttering, language impairment, impaired articulation, or a voice impairment.

How are English learners represented in special education?

For many decades, the disproportionate identification and representation of dually identified students has been a concern and focus in the research literature (Umansky et al., 2017)—both overrepresentation or underrepresentation of dually identified students may negatively impact students' educational experiences.

- Overrepresentation implies that more students may be identified for special education services than actually need them (Bianco, 2005; Higgins et al., 2002). This can lead to students being placed in services they do not need.
- Underrepresentation implies that fewer students are being identified for special education services than actually needing them (Wagner, et al., 2005). This can limit student access to needed services.

Dually identified students are generally underrepresented in the early grades (e.g., primary school), and overrepresented in the later grades (e.g., secondary school). Researchers have noticed an increase in referrals to special education services for ELs beginning in third grade (Samson & Lesaux, 2009). In California, this pattern is notable since third grade marks the beginning of when state standardized assessments are administered. Misidentification, due to inadequate assessment, may contribute to this pattern of overrepresentation (Klingner & Artiles, 2003; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006).

Research conducted across multiple states and studies suggests that dually identified students take longer to reclassify compared to their EL peers (Liu et al., 2018). Indeed, many dually identified students are also identified as long-term English learners (LTELs). In New York, dually identified students take 4 years longer than EL students to meet reclassification criteria (Kieffer & Parker, 2016). Dually identified students can then become overrepresented in secondary grades and less likely to exit ELD services (Schissel & Kangas, 2018; Umansky et al., 2017).

IDENTIFICATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Identifying dually identified students can be a complex task, since educators must consider the different sociocultural factors that impact EL students' experiences in schools (Wagner et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is the challenge of trying to distinguish whether a student's academic difficulties stem from language proficiency or the presence of disabilities (Case & Taylor, 2005; Klingner & Artiles, 2003).

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires that children with disabilities be identified and evaluated to determine what special education and related services they need (Child Find Section 612(a)(3)). However, the exclusionary clause within IDEA states that a child cannot be eligible for special education services if the determination is lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, or limited English proficiency. Because of this clause, there may often be a delay in assessment of dually identified students—educators may want to ensure that EL students are receiving adequate instruction and progressing in their English proficiency before assessing disabilities.

How can we make sure we are properly identifying EL students for special education services?

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS; or Response to Intervention (RTI)) are intended to decrease the number of misidentified students to special education services. For EL students specifically, MTSS may help distinguish language proficiency from the presence of a disability.

In California, MTSS consists of a three-tiered system that includes academic instruction, social-emotional learning, and behavior support. Comprehensive English Language Development (ELD) is included and considered in all three tiers. The state encourages the use of Universal Design for learning (UDL) in the planning stage and throughout all three tiers (California Department of Education, 2019). Tier 1 describes high quality general education instruction, which all students receive. This includes content instruction integrated with ELD and L1 (e.g., first language) supports. Accordingly, Tier 1 is not considered an intervention. Tiers 2 and 3 include integrated language goals with culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Tiers 2 and 3 are layered on top of Tier 1's high quality instruction.

Recent research has shown that teacher capacity affects the Tier 1 instruction given to EL students suspected of having a disability (Park, 2019). In a study conducted by Park (2019), teachers expressed not needing additional training on Tier 1 supports, but rather indicated wanting curriculum materials around ELD. However, there is a lack of research on how ELs with suspected disabilities receive high level instruction and intervention before being identified for special education services.

When determining whether an EL student should be evaluated for special education services, research suggests they should be compared to their EL peers. This comparison to "like peers" may be useful in determining whether there are sociocultural/sociolinguistic factors at place or the presence of a disability. However, research is still needed on how to appropriately conduct these comparisons and the appropriate measures to use.

Is it language or disability?

Existing research does not yet provide a clear-cut way to distinguish whether a student's performance is affected by English language acquisition or the presence of a disability, but there are a few suggested recommendations to help determine where student behavior is stemming from. First, interdisciplinary staff members, such as speech pathologists, can identify specific behaviors that may indicate the presence of a disability. Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members can also use different sources of evidence when determining whether a behavior is related to language development or the presence of a disability. One tool, developed by Butterfield (2014), compares different indicators to help determine whether that student behavior is rooted in a language difference due to second language acquisition or the presence of a disability (see Appendix A). For example, for phonemic awareness and reading, if a child is unable to decode words correctly, it is recommended that the educator consider whether the sound occurs in the student's first language. If it is not, the student may not be able to pronounce the word once it's decoded, indicating a language difference. However, if the student consistently is confusing different letters and words that look alike and these differences are not related to their first language, the student may have a disability related to processing or memory.

What assessments are recommended for identifying a disability in an EL student?

IDEA includes a set of safeguards that are supposed to protect dually identified students and their families during the assessment and identification process. Assessments and tools used to evaluate for a disability must be “administered in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is not feasible to administer” (Section 614(b)(3)(A)(ii). Despite this recommendation, dually identified students are often only assessed in English. Assessments must be administered by bilingual personnel and trained interpreters, unless it is not possible to do so. Interpreters are often used for assessment, but they must understand the educational context to accurately convey meaning (Chu & Flores, 2011).

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

IDEA indicates that all states are required to offer free and appropriate public education to all students with disabilities, including dually identified students in the “least restrictive environment.” In other words, students should be integrated into core content coursework and should only be removed for additional support when their disabilities prevent them from receiving adequate education in a classroom with individualized support, such as an individualized educational program (IEP). An IEP describes the plan for a student’s educational program. This includes student goals, performance levels, educational placement, as well as what special education services are to be provided by teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff members.

Who should be included in developing an IEP?

When developing an IEP, research suggests that a multidisciplinary team collaborate to identify the current data and individual needs of each student (Hoover & Patton, 2017). This multidisciplinary team can consist of special education teachers, ELD instructors, translators, speech and language pathologists (SLP), and school psychologists. This type of collaboration ensures that multiple sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors are being considered in a student’s performance and ability (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). It also allows for more meaningful collaboration in determining instruction and services for students. Furthermore, some of these professionals may know how to differentiate between language acquisition and learning disabilities, while others may know specific instructional strategies that may be most beneficial to the student. Parents/caregivers must also be engaged to share information about how their child uses language outside of school.

What should be included in an IEP for an English learner student?

It is recommended that IEP goals reflect the integration of language learning and academic content goals. Furthermore, the IEP team must determine how dually identified students are able to demonstrate their English language proficiency. When determining the supports for dually identified students, the interdisciplinary team should consider the two major categories that must be prioritized: language-related needs and disability-related

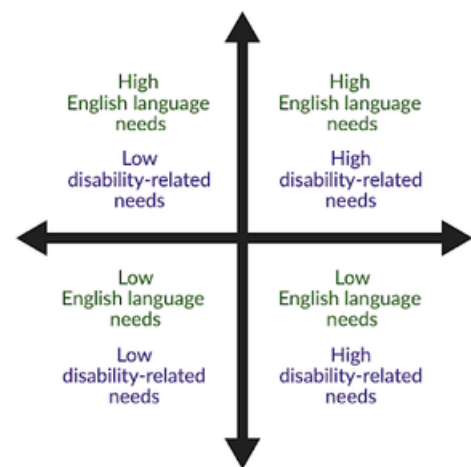


Figure 1. The Language and Disability Needs Matrix (Shyyan & Christensen, 2018; Shyyan et al., 2016)

needs. Although there is no way to conclusively determine and tell whether the student has more of a language need or disability need, team members can use students' current performance and progress to determine the best services.

Additionally, the team can utilize a language and disability needs matrix (Shyyan & Christensen, 2018; Shyyan et al., 2016) to determine the intensity and preferences of their needs. These kinds of matrices are divided into four quadrants (see Figure 1). Within each quadrant, individual students' needs will vary and should be addressed individually. This kind of matrix also allows for students' needs to change across time. By utilizing this type of matrix, educators can plan instruction based on students' language needs and disability needs.

Generally, students with high language needs and low disability needs will need more language-based instructional and assessment support. Students with low language needs and high disability needs will need more disability related instruction and assessment supports. Language- and disability-complexity should also be considered within these quadrants. For language, things like culture and communication should be considered, while for disability, the disability type, intensity should be considered.

One research study of a few case study sites suggested that educators sometimes prioritized special education services over ELD (Kangas, 2018). Part of this prioritization came from teachers not believing that ELD should be included in the IEP. However, ELD services and special education services can be integrated and individualized for the student.

How should progress be monitored?

It is recommended that progress toward IEP goals be monitored through multiple measures. This includes state and local assessments and informal evaluations. Relevant data can also include how students use language in and out of school. Exit decisions from EL services should not be based on a single score (Linquanti et al., 2016). By using multiple measures and evidence, multidisciplinary teams can identify what is affecting a student's performance and academic progress. When dually identified students are reclassified, the IEP can still include integrated supports and monitor English language development in subsequent years (Park & Chou, 2019).

INSTRUCTION AFTER IDENTIFICATION

Within the research literature, there is no one "best" instructional strategy. Districts across the nation approach instruction for dually identified students in different ways. Some provide EL services in the student's typical classroom or in a pullout model. Others believe that paraprofessionals can meet language needs. It is recommended that MTSS continue after identification with Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. Yet even MTSS can be inadequately applied—some researchers have found that when teachers apply inadequate instruction at Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, students were qualifying for further interventions based on instructional deficits (Orosco & Klingner, 2010), such as assuming students had specific background knowledge or using reading activities that were misaligned for students' level of English language development.

In general, research suggests that instruction for dually identified students should be asset-based, culturally responsive and focus on the strengths and varied experiences of each student (Flint & Jagers, 2021). Some research has found that the incorporation of students' racial, ethnic, and linguistic capital can be beneficial in their learning. One case study showed that a special education teacher encouraged students to incorporate their cultural and linguistic backgrounds during instruction, which made reading less daunting for students while also promoting their first and second language development (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Although studies have shown that instruction in a student's native language is beneficial to English development, dually identified students are less likely to receive direct instructional support in their native language. Instead, their first language is most commonly used to keep them on task and to allow them to participate in class (Paneque & Rodríguez, 2009).

ASSESSMENT AFTER IDENTIFICATION

Assessments developed for mainstream, English-only students may not be appropriate or provide valid outcomes for dually identified students (Abedi, 2009). However, there is not much research about the validity of assessments for dually identified students and very few comparable assessments exist (Wagner et al., 2005). More research is needed to develop valid and reliable accommodations and alternative assessments for measuring the English language proficiency of ELs with disabilities (National Academy of Sciences, 2017). Some recommendations include: (1) defining multilingualism inclusively, (2) developing comprehensive language assessments, (3) using caution when interpreting standardized assessments, and (4) utilizing adapted scoring, and incorporating responsive approaches to assessment (Goodrich et al., 2023).

What is the Alternate ELPAC?

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CONCLUSION

Dually identified students are often under- or over-represented. Instruction for these students begin in their general education classrooms, where more targeted intervention can be implemented if needed. Our summary suggests that there are several recommended practices but a need for more research and support.

Recommended...	Need For...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare dually identified students with their EL peers - Provide accessibility to assessments in student's first language and with bilingual personnel - A multidisciplinary team should be consistently working together to identify an individual student's goals, accommodations, achievement, and progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More curriculum materials and effective instructional strategies to support ELD - More research on how ELs with suspected disabilities receive high level instruction and intervention before being identified for special education services - More research on valid and reliable accommodations and alternative assessments for measuring the English language proficiency of ELs with disabilities

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