

## Results in Brief:

### Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs): A Review of the Foundational Literature

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English learners (ELs) consistently underperform peers who have never been ELs, and disproportionately score in the “below proficient” performance categories on assessments that measure academic content knowledge. Title III of the *Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA)* provides funding to support district and school efforts to help ELs attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet. As one of its strategies, Title III supports the development of high-quality language instruction educational programs (LIEPs) designed to assist states, districts, and schools in teaching ELs. This literature review examines the research literature on a range of topics that may factor into LIEP designs and functions, in order to support school districts in their decisions about how to choose appropriate LIEPs for their students’ needs.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **Theories of second-language acquisition.** How is second language acquisition (SLA) theorized to occur, and how can or should this process inform or influence instruction or program design?
2. **The construct of academic English language.** What is academic language, and why does it matter? How can instructors support and encourage ELs to acquire and use academic language?
3. **Models and considerations for LIEP design.** What are the characteristics of different models, and how can or should these be actualized in implementation? What characteristics of a model may be variable, and which are critical to its success?
4. **Instructional practices and professional development.** What specific practices and protocols can teachers adopt during their class instruction to support ELs’ acquisition of English or mastery of academic content? What are the content and components of promising professional development (PD) for teachers in LIEPs? How should PD be implemented and evaluated?
5. **School district, school and community culture.** What contextual and environmental factors in a school district, school or community may impact a LIEP’s ability to meet the requirements of Title III? What cultural and demographic factors in a school district, school or community are important to consider in implementing a LIEP?

6. **Indicators and evaluation of success.** What indicators might reflect whether a LIEP has been successfully implemented? What indicators would reflect effectiveness of the LIEP in terms of its own stated goals?

## METHODOLOGY

Four reviewers read over 200 articles and reports identified through a vetted search protocol. Reviewers were required to provide their rationale for including or excluding each article from the final list included in the literature review. Ultimately, reviewers included 173 documents that met established criteria and represent a range of voices and orientations toward LIEPs, EL instruction and other related topics.

This review is not a meta-analytic one about program efficacy or outcomes, nor an effort to determine which LIEPs are “best.” It cannot promise that certain programs definitely work, or guarantee specific outcomes, and, due to the nature of the literature and the field, does not support definite conclusions about program quality or efficacy. There simply are not enough experimental or quasi-experimental studies to sustain a comprehensive, outcome-oriented discussion about all the review topics. **Thus, no definitive conclusions can be drawn about outcomes or effectiveness for any of these topics.**

## Highlights

### GENERAL FINDINGS

- The literature reviewed suggests that ELs who receive some kind of language support or specialized instruction show better outcomes on various academic measures than those who receive no specific language learning support.
- Researchers also found examples of high-quality programs that come from both bilingual and ESL approaches which suggests that no single approach is effective at all times and under all circumstances.
- In addition to ESL and bilingual models, the literature revealed a subgenre of scholarship on ELs who are most commonly referred to as “newcomers”—generally, recent immigrants with low literacy and who may lack or have interruptions in their formal schooling.

### ESL APPROACH

- There is evidence that ESL models (language- or content-based) are likely to produce better outcomes on various academic performance measures than general instruction in English that does not follow an ESL model or acknowledge ELs’ specific linguistic needs. The ESL approach is not synonymous with “no LIEP.”
- Models under the ESL approach may focus on language instruction alone, or they may integrate language and content instruction. The review notes that experts agree (that the strongest programs include both dedicated language instruction and specialized content instruction.

### BILINGUAL APPROACH

- Two meta-analytic research syntheses, and one large-scale descriptive study found that students who receive native language instruction go on to reach the same or higher levels of achievement in English as those who do not. These syntheses also found that native language skills play a positive role in the development and acquisition of English language skills. One descriptive study also found evidence of transfer of academic language skills from students’ native language to English.

- At least two research syntheses, one large-scale descriptive study and one large-scale quasi-experimental study found that, with native language instruction, more is better—bilingual programs with extended instruction in students’ native language over time appear to result in better outcomes.

## General Emergent Themes

From the literature examined, the following 12 themes about LIEP design, implementation and evaluation emerged:

1. High standards and challenging content are good for ELs.
2. Having a LIEP is important.
3. No one approach or model is appropriate for all ELs.
4. Instructional practices are important variables in LIEP design and implementation.
5. Literacy and oral language development in English are critical instructional components for any LIEP.
6. Academic language seems to be important in EL instruction.
7. ELs need instruction that is specifically cognizant of their needs as second-language learners.
8. Teachers need to be prepared to teach ELs.
9. Newcomer models are a programmatic option that school districts may use to meet the needs of identified ELs at the secondary level.
10. ELs’ scores on academic content assessments should be interpreted with great care.
11. Current assessments may not be sufficient measures of the linguistic proficiency necessary to support success in mainstream content classrooms.
12. Culture and community matter.