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AUTHOR Munoz, Marco A.
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ABSTRACT

School districts are reporting large increases in English language learners in their student populations. In some instances, English language learners are the fastest growing student population. This paper explores the impact of an urban school district English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program on language minority students for a period of 2 school years in the areas of reading and writing. The findings showed that there was yearly progress in English language proficiency in reading and writing scores. The gains reached statistically significant levels using both chi-squares and dependent-sample t-tests. Data indicated that the program was successfully meeting the needs of the language minority students of the local educational agency under study. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/SM)

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Program Evaluation of Educational Services to Limited English Proficient Students in an
Urban School District
Marco A. Munoz
Jefferson County Public Schools

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Abstract

School districts are reporting large increases in English language learners in their student population. In some instances, English language learners are the fastest growing student population. This paper explores the impact of an urban school district English as a Second Language (ESL) program on language minority students for a period of two school years in the areas of reading and writing. The findings showed that there is a yearly progress in the English language proficiency in reading and writing scores. The gains reached statistically significant levels using both chi-squares and dependent-sample t-tests. Data indicated that the program is successfully meeting the needs of the language minority students of the local educational agency under study.

Program Evaluation of Educational Services to Limited English Proficient Students in an Urban School District

School districts are reporting increases in Limited English Proficient (LEP) student enrollments in the last decade (Anstrom, 1996). In this regard, the needs of the LEP are now considered a priority across the nation public schools. Language minority students are expected to become mainstream, but educators are not prepared to deal with instructional requirements of diverse learners. Collaboration is a must for successful schooling of LEP students (Fradd, 1992).

Kentucky is not an exception to the trend at the national level. As of 2000, one third of the 176 school districts in the state had students who came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (approximately 4000 students who are speakers of over 70 different languages). Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) have the largest number of LEP students in a single district (2000 students) with speakers of over 41 languages. In JCPS, several new English as a Second Language (ESL) sites have been opened to accommodate the growing number of this student population, including more than 40 ESL certified teachers and more than 40 bilingual associate instructors.

Topics of research and discussion are the issues of time needed by LEP students to master English language and the definition of progress in English language proficiency. According to Cummins (1981; 1999; 2000), under best circumstances, it may take up to three years for a language minority student to acquire Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and between five and seven years to acquire Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). When the student reaches any stage of CALP development, he/she is ready to exit the ESL program (Cummins, 1980). In the past

decade, Cummins' research (initially reported in 1981) has been replicated and expanded in a series of studies by Collier and Thomas (Collier, 1995; Thomas and Collier, 1999).

De Avila, Cervantes, and Duncan (1978) developed the probabilistic approach. The researchers reasoned that children should be considered as eligible for program entry whenever their English proficiency is significantly below that of their English monolingual peers. By extension, the authors argued that children should remain in programs until such time as their expected level of academic achievement or probability of success is indistinguishable from that of mainstream children. The logic of the argument followed from the Lau versus Nichols decision (1974) that reasoned that children were failing because they did not understand what was taking place in the classroom.

In addition to the discussion about time needed for mastery of English language, a controversial topic associated with LEP is the definition of language proficiency and its impact on the process of measuring progress. Language proficiency has been variously defined as consisting of input-output, receptive and productive skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These are the principal skills used to categorize students as Non-English, Limited, and Fluent speakers. There is a strong relationship between oral language proficiency and academic performance (De Avila, Cervantes, & Duncan, 1978). Subsequently, Cummins (1984) showed that the quality of first language development was directly associated with "readiness" for mainstream schooling. In fact, knowing that a student is linguistically proficient means that he/she is able to benefit from instruction in the language of the classroom. As a consequence, language proficiency needs to be tested. Testing for purposes of accountability has played a significant role in education in

the last decades. The use and mastery of language is critical for school success. If language proficiency is not assessed, it will affect other dimensions of learning (Spolsky, 1992).

ESL Programs

ESL programs focuses on teaching students English using a variety of instructional strategies to convey academic content in the absence of native language teaching (Walling, 1993). ESL teachers provide instruction for groups of students from mixed language background in the same classroom.

In most cases, students who enroll in an ESL program belong to one of the following categories: (a) refugees, (b) immigrants or (c) foreign exchange students. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), refugees are people who flee their home country in fear of their lives and their families. Their destinies are linked to international politics and they may wait for months or years in refugee camps before they are sent somewhere else. CAL defines immigrants as those people who also come from another country, but they make a conscious decision to leave their native land or may change their mind altogether about emigrating. Foreign exchange students come to a new country in order to learn more about its people and to improve or learn English; in most cases, they stay no longer than a year.

Upon entering a school in the United States, these types of students will face a variety of difficulties which they will have to overcome to adapt to the new environment. The most common factor that affects ESL students learning is the linguistic isolation. The older the student, the longer it usually takes to acquire the language.

One of the main goals of an ESL program is to teach students English. Key elements include maintaining and producing academic progress, providing for the students integration into the mainstream of school, and validating and preserving the students' native language and culture (Walling, 1993). Some ESL students need to acquire "school skills" as well, particularly refugee youngsters, whose schooling may have been interrupted for a prolonged period of time or may never have attended a school. In addition, parent involvement is an integral part of a successful ESL program. Involving parents of ESL students is important not only for their academic success, but also for supporting the family's integration into a larger society and for validating their native language and culture. What is clear is that language diversity has a strong influence on the content and process of schooling practices for language minority students as well as language-majority students in the nation.

Currently, the new federal legislation has put the language minority students at center stage. On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965. It redefines the federal role in K-12 education and will help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The limited language proficient students are one of the critical groups for which assessment of yearly progress and data disaggregation is required by law. By 2014, the federal government has set targets for school districts across the nation. Based on the literature review and on the need to evaluate the ESL services, a program evaluation was conducted to assess yearly progress of participating students.

Method

Participants

Three hundred and fifty six ESL students were involved in the reading and writing study associated with the school year 2001-2002. Complete demographic information was available for 317 students. Most of the students were on free/reduced lunch status (88%), high school students (59%), and living with both father and mother (62%). In terms of gender, the participants had a similar distribution. Table 1 provides additional information about the participants.

Table 1

Student Profile of the Participants in the ESL Program (N = 317)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gender		
Female	148	47%
Male	169	53%
School Level		
Elementary (Grades 3-5)	56	18%
Middle (Grades 6-8)	73	23%
High (Grades 9-12)	186	59%
Special Education	2	<1%
Family Structure		
Single Parent	121	38%
Dual Parent	196	62%
Lunch Status		
Free	221	70%
Reduced	55	18%
Pay	41	12%

Five hundred and forty one ESL students were involved in the reading study for the school year 2002-2003. Complete demographic information was available for 484 students. Most of the students were on free/reduced lunch status (84%), high school students (50%), and living with both father and mother (60%). In terms of gender, the participants showed a similar distribution. Table 2 provides additional information about the participants.

Table 2

Student Profile of the Participants in the ESL Program (N = 484)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gender		
Female	231	48%
Male	253	52%
School Level		
Elementary (Grades 3-5)	26	5%
Middle (Grades 6-8)	207	43%
High (Grades 9-12)	244	50%
Special Education	7	2%
Family Structure		
Single Parent	190	39%
Dual Parent	294	61%
Lunch Status		
Free	367	76%
Reduced	40	8%
Pay	77	16%

Seven hundred and six ESL students were involved in the writing 2002-2003 school year study. Complete demographic information was available for 591 students. Most of the students were on free/reduced lunch status (84%) and living with both father and mother (60%). In terms of gender and school level membership, the participants showed a similar distribution. Table 3 provides additional information about the participants.

Table 3

Student Profile of the Participants in the ESL Program (N = 591)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gender		
Female	281	47%
Male	310	53%
School Level		
Elementary (Grades 3-5)	25	4%
Middle (Grades 6-8)	270	46%
High (Grades 9-12)	289	49%
Special Education	7	1%
Family Structure		
Single Parent	235	40%
Dual Parent	356	60%
Lunch Status		
Free	441	75%
Reduced	55	9%
Pay	95	16%

Instrumentation

The Language Assessment Scale (LAS) is a battery of tests used to assess language proficiency in English. The LAS represents a convergent approach to language assessment in which the total score is based on a combination of discrete-point subtest-items and integrative or holistic subtests. According to Davies (1978, 1990), the most satisfactory view of language testing and the most useful kind of language tests are combinations of these two views. It is intended to be developmentally, linguistically, and psychometrically appropriate for children. The LAS family of tests were developed in four steps, namely (a) blue print specification and item development, (b) tryout and field testing, (c) analyses and item selection, and (d) final production. It includes oral, reading, and writing components. The LAS Reading and Writing family of tests represents a comprehensive set of measures designed to assess the probability of success in an American mainstream classroom.

The LAS English measures language skills necessary to succeed in an academic environment. The LAS is not an achievement test in the strict sense and does not attempt to measure achievement in course content, specific ESL objectives or minimal competencies as contained in any particular curriculum. It is intended to be “curriculum free” and sufficiently “robust” to accommodate any approach to the acquisition of English. In this sense, LAS is an ability test and a performance test that can be used as (a) diagnostic device (i.e., to provide identification, placement, and reclassification information for language minority students) and (b) to evaluate progress at both student and program level. For more details, please refer to the technical reports (De Avila & Duncan, 1990, 2000; Duncan & De Avila, 1988).

Design and Procedure

The study was quantitative in nature. Descriptive and inferential statistical were used to analyze the data. In specific, chi-square tests were used with categorical variables (i.e., levels of English language proficiency) and dependent-samples t-tests used with continuous scores (i.e., standardized scores ranging from 1 to 99). The alpha level was set at the .05 level. The analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.1.

Results

PERIOD: 2000-2001 (BASELINE) AND 2001-2002 (TREATMENT YEAR)

CROSS TABULATION OF PRE-POST COUNTS BY READING LEVELS

		LAS Reading 02 level			Total
		1	2	3	
LAS Reading 01 level	1	84	56	25	165
	2	20	90	79	189
	3			2	2
Total		104	146	106	356

While on the year 2001 only two students were on the third category, by the year 2002, 106 students reached the highest level of reading English proficiency. In addition, the number of students of the first category, decreased by the year 2002. As presented on the table below, the differences reached statistically significant levels at .001 alpha level.

NON-PARAMETRIC STATISTICAL ANALYSIS BY READING LEVELS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
Pearson Chi- Square	78.812	4	.000

CROSS TABULATION OF PRE-POST COUNTS BY WRITING LEVELS

		LAS Writing 02 level			Total
		1	2	3	
LAS Writing 01 level	1	63	103	12	178
	2	7	140	28	175
	3	1	1	1	3
Total		71	244	41	356

While on the year 2001 three students were on the third category, by the year 2002, 41 students reached the highest level of English proficiency in writing. In addition, the number of students of the first category, significantly decreased by the year 2002. As presented on the table below, the differences reached statistically significant levels at .001 alpha level.

NON-PARAMETRIC STATISTICAL ANALYSIS BY WRITING LEVELS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	58.552	4	.000

COMPARISON OF PRE-POST MEANS ON LAS READING AND WRITING SCORES

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	LAS Read 01	55.03	356	19.710
	LAS Read 02	65.46	356	22.516
Pair 2	LAS Write 01	52.17	356	18.113
	LAS Write 02	63.47	356	13.779

The reading and writing tests showed a positive gain in scores when the students were pre- and post-tested. The difference reached statistically significant levels across the two domains tested to the ESL students that participated in this research.

STATISTICAL COMPARISON OF PRE-POST MEANS ON LAS READING, AND WRITING SCORES (PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TEST)

		Paired Differences Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	LAS Read 01 – LAS Read 02	-10.43	-10.394	355	.000
Pair 2	LAS Write 01 – LAS Write 02	-11.31	-12.551	355	.000

PERIOD: 2001-2002 (BASELINE) AND 2002-2003 (TREATMENT YEAR)**CROSS TABULATION OF PRE-POST COUNTS BY READING LEVELS**

		LAS Reading 03 level			Total
		1	2	3	
LAS Reading 02 level	1	106	112	36	254
	2	24	107	152	283
	3	0	0	4	4
Total		130	219	192	541

While on the year 2002 only four students were on the third category, by the year 2003, 192 students reached the highest level of reading English proficiency. In addition, the number of students of the first category decreased by the year 2003. As presented on the table below, the differences reached statistically significant levels at .001 alpha level.

NON-PARAMETRIC STATISTICAL ANALYSIS BY READING LEVELS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
Pearson Chi- Square	129.18	4	.000

CROSS TABULATION OF PRE-POST COUNTS BY WRITING LEVELS

		LAS Writing 03 level			Total
		1	2	3	
LAS Writing 02 level	1	108	123	12	243
	2	23	338	96	457
Total	3	2	1	3	6
		133	462	111	706

While on the year 2002 six students were on the third category, by the year 2003, 111 students reached the highest level of English proficiency in writing. In addition, the number of students of the first category significantly decreased by the year 2002. As presented on the table below, the differences reached statistically significant levels at .001 alpha level.

NON-PARAMETRIC STATISTICAL ANALYSIS BY WRITING LEVELS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	177.47	4	.000

COMPARISON OF PRE-POST MEANS ON LAS READING AND WRITING SCORES

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	LAS Read 02	58.01	541	15.28
	LAS Read 03	69.77	541	17.12
Pair 2	LAS Write 02	56.43	706	17.06
	LAS Write 03	65.22	706	14.78

The reading and writing tests showed a positive gain in scores when the students were pre- and post-tested. The difference reached statistically significant levels across the two domains tested to the ESL students that participated in this research.

STATISTICAL COMPARISON OF PRE-POST MEANS ON LAS READING, AND WRITING SCORES (PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TEST)

		Paired Differences Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	LAS Read 01 – LAS Read 02	-11.76	-18.44	540	.000
Pair 2	LAS Write 01 – LAS Write 02	-8.79	-15.53	705	.000

Gains of Limited English Proficient Students

Analysis of Gains in Reading for the School Year 2002-2003

N	Mean Pretest	SD	Mean Posttest	SD	Gain	t-test
Level 1						
254	44.77	11.27	60.95	16.54	16.18	16.55*
Level 2						
283	69.52	5.72	77.40	13.45	7.87	10.16*
p < .001						

Analysis of Gains in Writing for the School Year 2002-2003

N	Mean Pretest	SD	Mean Posttest	SD	Gain	t-test
Level 1						
243	37.57	15.66	55.74	15.21	18.17	17.62*
Level 2						
457	66.14	5.27	70.17	11.82	4.02	7.33*
p < .001						

Discussion

The use and mastery of language is critical for school success. The findings showed that there is a yearly progress in the English language proficiency of the participating students. In reading and writing, the 2002 ESL students improved in their test scores when compared to the previous year. Similar results were found for the 2003 ESL students when compared to the previous year. The gains reached statistically significant levels using both chi-squares (levels of English proficiency) and dependent-sample t-tests (standardized scores). The program, based on this data, is successfully meeting the needs of the language minority students of the district that served as research site for this study.

Testing for purposes of accountability has played a significant role in education in the last decades. This is even more important in light of the recent legislation entitled *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965. It redefines the federal role in K-12 education and will help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers.

Further research needs to address the gains in English language proficiency at the school and at the classroom level. The expected gains could be compared with actual gains to address the challenges of the value-added education framework (Millman, 1997). Future research might also analyze the gains on students coming from different home languages and schooling experiences.

Currently, expected gain has become an important concept in the study of LEP students. In this regard, valid and reliable assessment systems that are sensitive to gains are critical. An improper metric such as categorical or nominal scales can obscure growth. It is important to understand that gain scores based on continuous scores are more sensitive than levels of English language proficiency because they are less able to show change.

Setting a realistic expected gain must begin with a determination of where the student enters the program and measuring growth in increments sensitive to language development changes. Overall, extent of growth is limited by how far along the student is on the learning curve when enters or begins a program. It cannot be expected the same growth for all students regardless of entry point. Another topic of interest is changes in different domains associated with English language learning. Growth in reading and writing is more difficult than changes in oral proficiency since they are more directly linked with instruction in schools.

The LAS can provide a valuable metric for evaluating student progress and program effectiveness (De Avila, 1997). The idea is that all students will reach their expected gain. Further research will need to take into consideration when calculating expected gains the impact of the school level and family background of the students.

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