

The Impact on L1 in an L1 vs. L2 Intervention for Dual Language Learners with Developmental Language Disorder

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Background

- Approximately 18% of individuals five years and older in the United States speak a language other than English in the home (Kohnert, 2010). We refer to children who are learning two languages as dual language learners (DLLs).
- By 2030, it is estimated that 40% of school-age children will be learning English as their second language (Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2020; Guiberson & Ferris, 2019).
- It is estimated that 7% of all children in the United States, including DLLs, have a developmental language disorder (DLD) (Kohnert, 2010).
- DLD results in “significant problems in the development of receptive or expressive language.” (McGregor et al., 2020).

Methods

- Armon-Lotem et al. (2021) strived to examine whether vocabulary gains in a school and home language can be achieved when using a bilingual narrative intervention (BINARI) with preschool-age DLLs.
- Ebert et al. (2014) focused on examining the effects of a monolingual, bilingual, and nonlinguistic cognitive processing intervention on language and cognitive-processing in Spanish-English bilingual school-age children.
- Restrepo et al. (2013) sought to explore the effects of an English vs. bilingual vocabulary intervention on English and Spanish skills in a preschool-age DLL.
- Thordardottir et al. (2015) aimed to evaluate the effects of a monolingual or bilingual intervention on L1 in DLLs.

** It should be noted two studies were completed outside of the United States.

Procedures

- Armon-Lotem et al. (2021) – The Puente de Cuentos program was adapted. Puente de Cuentos was created to enhance and develop the narrative and language skills of bilingual preschoolers.
- Ebert et al. (2014) – Consisted of an English, Spanish-English bilingual, and nonlinguistic cognitive processing group. The English and Spanish treatments focused on vocabulary, morphosyntactic constructions, and auditory comprehension. The nonlinguistic cognitive treatment targeted processing speed, sustained/selective attention, and auditory serial memory.
- Restrepo et al. (2013) – Four types of intervention were offered: bilingual vocabulary, English-only vocabulary, bilingual mathematics, or English-only mathematics; each intervention received vocabulary and MLU instruction.
- Thordardottir et al. (2015) – Included a monolingual and bilingual group; goals focused on vocabulary and syntactic targets.

Results

- Armon-Lotem et al.’s (2021) study found that participants made progress in both languages (Hebrew & English) and that the skills were maintained without intervention.
- In Ebert et al.’s (2014) study, both the monolingual and bilingual treatment groups made medium improvements in English language skills. The bilingual treatment group made small gains in Spanish. The nonlinguistic cognitive processing treatment led to small improvements in English language skills; it also resulted in medium improvements in Spanish non-word repetition tasks.
- Restrepo et al. found that those in the bilingual intervention made the most improvement. Additionally, the bilingual vocabulary group scored significantly higher than other groups on receptive and expressive vocabulary measures.
- Results from the Thordardottir et al. (2015) study showed overall significant differences in pre- and post-scores for expressive and receptive language in both the monolingual and bilingual treatment groups. There were no significant differences for the story retelling. MLU only increased for the monolingual treatment participants.

Discussion

- Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a high-incidence developmental disorder affecting approximately 7% of dual language learners (DLLs) in the United States. DLD is a disorder that can impact DLLs’ language (development and acquisition of L1 and L2), academic, and social outcomes if the appropriate measures are not taken (Kohnert, 2010).
- DLLs with DLD benefit most from a bilingual intervention. It is crucial for preschool special education programs to provide instructional time in L1 that is prepared, organized, and intensive to ensure the continuing development of L1 (Restrepo et al. (2013).
- Current guidelines highly advocate for parents to use their child’s L1 in the home setting. In accord, it is also recommended SLPs avoid counseling parents to switch their child’s language to the mainstream language (L2) (Thordardottir et al. 2015).

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