Dual Language Learners: The Latest Social and Emotional Development Research

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Overview

• Introduction
• Definition of dual language learners
• Who are DLLs?
• What do we know about DLLs’ development?
• Key take-aways from the research
• Policy and practice implications
• Questions and discussion
About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by conducting high-quality research and sharing the resulting knowledge with practitioners and policymakers.

We . . .

1. take a whole child approach
2. study children in the real world
3. want children to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development and knowledge transfer

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Child Trends

Vital Stats:
• Founded in 1979
• Nonprofit, nonpartisan research center
• Approximately 120 staff in CO, MD, MN, NC, NYC

Research Areas:
• Child Poverty
• Child Welfare
• Early Child Development
• Education
• Fatherhood and Parenting
• Hispanic Children and Youth
• Indicators of Child Well-being
• Marriage and Family
• Positive Youth Development
• Teen Sex and Pregnancy
Early Childhood Development
Research Approaches

• Survey design
• Measures development
• Program/System evaluation
• Implementation evaluation
• Data analysis
• Observational studies
• Qualitative approaches
• Literature review
Definition of dual language learners (DLLs)

Dual language learners are children who are acquiring two or more languages simultaneously, and learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language.

Who are the young dual language learners in the U.S.?

- **Numbers:** Depending on the definition used, 23.8M (6.3M <5 yrs.) in households where English is not the only language; 4.6M K-12 students (DoE)
- **Home language:** for two-thirds, Spanish, followed by Chinese, Vietnamese, and others
- **Poverty rate** is higher among children in Spanish-speaking households (33 percent) than among English-only households (19 percent)
- **Family Structure:** As a group, DLLs are more likely than English monolinguals to live with two parents
What do we know about young DLLs’ cognitive development?

• Young bilingual children have better attention and inhibitory control compared to monolingual children.
• DLL children perform less well on reading and math assessments at the start of kindergarten than their peers.
• Among DLLs, children who are proficient in English by the end of kindergarten do better on academic outcomes over time.
What do we know about young DLL children’s social-emotional development?

• Not as much!

• A recent review of scholarly research published between 2000-2011 found only 14 peer-reviewed studies that examined social-emotional outcomes among DLLs in family, school and peer contexts.
Social-emotional development: What is it?

• Capacity to form close and secure relationships
• Regulate and express emotions appropriately
• Explore and learn

Components include:

Self Regulation  Social Competence  Social Cognition  Problem Behaviors
Why social-emotional skills matter

• Social-emotional development is one of five essential school readiness skills

• Teachers and parents repeatedly cite cooperation, respect for others, and paying attention as more important than reading and mathematics skills for children’s success in kindergarten

• There is evidence of important linkages between early social-emotional development and later cognitive and academic outcomes
Key findings about young DLL children’s social-emotional development

• DLLs function as well as if not better than English-speaking monolinguals in the social-emotional domain

• DLLs tend to be judged as having:
  • Better self-control
  • Better interpersonal skills
  • Fewer behavior problems
Factors that influence DLL children’s social-emotional development

- Maternal stress

+ Parents’ literacy involvement

+ High levels of school stability and supportive teaching environments

+ Use of the child’s primary language by the caregiver/teacher in early care and education settings
Key Take-Away Messages

• Dual language learners tend to have more flexible mental abilities than monolinguals
• Dual language learners who acquire English proficiency earlier have better academic outcomes than those who acquire English proficiency later
• DLLs tend to have better social-emotional outcomes (better prosocial skills and fewer behavioral problems) than English-speaking monolinguals
• Use of the home language in early childhood classrooms by teachers can have a positive effect on teacher-child and peer relationships
Policy Implications

• Be inclusive of dual language learners in policy discussions – they overlap with but are also distinct from other important subgroups

• Promote workforce development so that early childhood educators are equipped to meet the unique needs of dual language learners

• Promote language development in English while still supporting the child’s home language in all early care and education settings from infancy through school entry

• Target resources, curriculum and training in early care and education settings in support of DLLs’ cognitive and social-emotional development
Practice Implications:
How early care and education environments can support young DLL children’s development

• Classroom environment and practices
• Teacher-child relationship
• Peer relationships
• Home-school connection
Questions and Discussion
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