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This entry focuses on a population of students who have come to be called long-term English learners (LTELs). LTEL is a term that appeared in the early 2000s (e.g., Freeman et al., 2002), although similar terms have been used by practitioners and researchers. This population of students, who are considered to be learning English as a second language, has been referred to variably in the research literature as long-term limited English proficient students (Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999), long term English learners (Olsen, 2010), and long-term English language learners (Menken et al., 2012). Other terms for this population that have been used among practitioners include ESL lifers (Valdés, 2001) and low-literacy students (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000).

There is not a single set of criteria that researchers or policymakers have used to identify a student as an LTEL. The most frequently used criterion is the number of years a student has been identified as a student who is learning English within the school system. However, there is even variation in the minimum number of years a student must remain classified as “learning English” to be considered a LTEL. For example, the minimum number of years can range between five and seven (Menken et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Despite differences in identification criteria, LTELs are commonly described as academically struggling students who are orally bilingual for social purposes; yet, they have limited academic language and literacy abilities (e.g., Olsen, 2010). However, extant research demonstrates that these dominant narratives are overly homogenous and erase students’ linguistic, literate, and academic abilities (e.g., Brooks, 2016; Thompson, 2015).

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231

The origin of the LTEL label in the U.S. educational system does not limit its use to national boundaries. Cushing-Leubner and King (2015) note that it is also used in Canada and Australia. In contexts where the official label does not exist, the beliefs about bilingual students that accompany the LTEL label may still be present. For example, Flores (2017) and Rosa (2016) note that the predominant narrative that describes LTELs as bilinguals with less than “full” proficiency in two languages reflects the discredited concept of Scandinavian origin: semilingualism. Notably, similar conceptions about bilingual young people are encompassed in the Flemish term *zerolingual* (Jaspers, 2011). Ideas about bilinguals who seemingly speak a language, but lack linguistic proficiency, are international.

Given the predominance of deficit perspectives about this population, research must continue to interrogate the LTEL label and accompanying ideologies (Brooks, 2017). Specifically, scholars should attend to the role of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) and multilingual perspectives on language teaching, learning, and assessment (García & Wei, 2014; Gorter & Cenoz, 2017; Kibler & Valdés, 2016; Makalela, 2016). Moreover, the field must not overlook the consequences of extended classification as “learning English” for students’ academic trajectories (e.g., Umansky, 2016). Finally, there is a need to develop instructional approaches that center equity and build upon the linguistic, literate, and academic strengths of this student population (e.g., Ascenzi-Moreno et al., 2013).

The Research Questions

1. How do educators, counselors, and school leaders conceptualize the linguistic and academic abilities of students who are considered to be long-term English learners (LTELs)?
2. How has the institutionalization of the LTEL label impacted course placement practices in K-12 settings?
3. What are the educational histories of students who have been identified as learning English for more than five years?
4. How can English language assessments be designed to recognize the skilled use of minoritized Englishes as proficient uses of language?
5. How do teachers who identify as monolingual and bi/multilingual articulate the perceived potentials and limitations of multilingual group-work?
6. What aspects of the reclassification process serve as roadblocks to students being identified as proficient in English?
7. How do language teacher educators engage in pedagogy that legitimizes dynamic linguistic practices of language-minoritized students and raise awareness about language and power? (Flores & Rosa, 2015)
8. What are the educational experiences of students who are dually-identified as LTELs and in need of special education services?

9. What does LTELs language use in “non-academic” contexts reveal about their linguistic abilities?
10. How can researchers and practitioners collaborate to integrate new understandings of multilingualism into instruction for students considered to be long-term English learners? (Kibler & Valdés, 2016)?

Suggested Resources

Brooks, M. D. (2015). “It’s like a script”: Long-term English learners’ experiences with and ideas about academic reading. *Research in the Teaching of English, 49*(4), 383–406.

In this year-long multiple case study of five adolescent long-term English learners (LTELs), Brooks examines participants’ classroom reading experiences and individual ideas about reading. This focus on reading as it is instantiated in their day-to-day lives is a move away from the predominant perspective in research that had focused primarily on standardized test scores. The findings illustrate how students’ day-to-day experiences with reading and their understanding of what counts as successful reading is distinct from the reading assessed as English proficiency. Reading on assessments is silent and individual, whereas their classroom experience emphasized oral language, teacher interpretation of meaning, and group reading of texts. As a result, Brooks points out that low standardized test scores cannot be solely attributed to English proficiency. Students must be treated holistically to understand that performances may be a reflection of history of experiences with instruction and thus warrant a different approach to education.

Estrada, P., & Wang, H. (2018). Making English learner reclassification to fluent English proficient attainable or elusive: When meeting criteria is and is not enough. *American Educational Research Journal, 55*(2), 207–242.

An essential factor in the educational history of LTELs is that they have not been reclassified as proficient in English for multiple years. In this article, Estrada and Wang draw on quantitative and qualitative data from two districts over the course of multiple years to examine patterns in reclassification. They call attention to the phenomenon of students who meet the criteria of English proficiency without being reclassified as proficient in English. Specifically, their findings document how reclassification criteria and policies can facilitate or impede ELs’ exiting the LTEL classification. In addition, the authors identify the role of the school staff in hindering the reclassification of students who meet eligibility criteria. Families and students were frequently absent from these decision-making processes. Together, this research underscores the fact that immediately assuming that a student’s on-going classification as an EL is solely related to their “limited English proficiency” ignores the bureaucratic processes involved.

Flores, N., Kleyn, T., & Menken, K. (2015). Looking holistically in a climate of partiality: Identities of students labeled long-term English language learners. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 14(2), 113–132.

Flores and colleagues' study calls attention to the role of *epistemic racism* in the lives of students who are considered to be LTELs. This epistemic racism positions an idealized monolingualism that is situated in White supremacy as "the unmarked societal norm" (p. 118). The authors argue that epistemic racism's integration into the foundation of social institutions, like schools, results in the erasure of the linguistic abilities of students of color. The authors' analysis of interviews of 28 LTEL high school students, classroom observations, and written classroom artifacts provides concrete examples as to how this phenomenon occurs. Furthermore, Flores and colleagues use of student interviews provide a forum for adolescents to talk about their own experiences and self-understandings. This focus on LTELs' discussions of their own identities was absent from previously published literature. Together, these contributions provide a necessary framework for research and practice that resists deficit perspectives about this population.

Kibler, A.K., Karam, F.J., Futch Ehrlich, V.A., Bergey, R., Wang, C., & Elreda, L.M. (2018). Who are 'Long-term English learners'? Using classroom interactions to deconstruct a manufactured learner label. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(5), 741–765.

Kibler and colleagues' multiple case study of six students in sixth-grade examines US-educated adolescents classified as EL's peer-to-peer and teacher-student oral interactions. The focal students, who had varied histories of academic success, had been educated in the same district since kindergarten. Rather than relying on static characterizations of students linguistic and academic abilities, this study situates students' oral language use within their classroom-based opportunities for interaction. The six participants demonstrated diverse ways of interacting. Among other factors, the authors found that the focal students' interaction with peers and teachers reflected their individual identities, various interpersonal dynamics, and the way in which teachers' structured opportunities for communication. Specifically, the findings noted limited opportunities for "substantive dialogic academic discourse" (p. 21). This research challenges simplistic notions about students who are considered to be LTELs. Moreover, it emphasizes the consequence of how educators construct opportunities for oral interaction through assignments and interpersonal engagement.

Kibler, A. K., & Valdés, G. (2016). Conceptualizing language learners: Socioinstitutional mechanisms and their consequences. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(S1), 96–116.

Kibler and Valdés illustrate that language learner categories are a by-product of transforming language, a system of communication, into an academic subject. This process is what Valdés terms in her earlier work 'curricularization.' The authors analyze these categories to demonstrate how they are embedded with, among other

beliefs, particular understandings about language, language learning, language teaching. Through highlighting the lack of neutrality of language learner labels, they underscore their significance for how teaching and learning occurs. Within this broader examination of language learner categories, the authors analyze the LTEL label. Kibler and Valdés highlight the way in which embedded conceptualizations of language and language learning within popular and scholarly understandings of this category can limit LTEL students' educational opportunities and minimizes their existing abilities. Recognizing the significance of labels, the authors call for research-practice collaborations that are situated in multilingual perspectives that challenge deficit characterizations of these student populations.

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