



RESEARCH BRIEF #8

Factors Associated with Development of Dual Language Learners: Results from a Secondary Analysis of the ECLS-B

Introduction

The United States has experienced a demographic shift that has dramatically increased the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity among young children and families, making it important to understand the early development of children from all heritage groups. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) is a large dataset of a nationally representative birth cohort sample of 14,000 children born in the U.S. in 2001, including an oversampling of children from diverse linguistic and cultural heritages. The ECLS-B data provide an opportunity to examine patterns of development and influencing factors over the first few years of life for both dual language learners (DLLs) and monolingual children. This brief report describes findings from secondary analyses addressing the cognitive, academic, and social development of DLLs in relation to children's home language, country of heritage, and maternal birth place.

Results

- 1. There was considerable variability in family characteristics with respect to heritage groups.** DLLs are a heterogeneous group of children, representing many different economic levels and heritage countries. There were large differences in demographic factors such as parental education and family income both within and between different cultural and linguistic groups. For example, families from Latino ethnic groups tended to have lower levels of parent education and family income than those from Asian groups, although there is considerable overlap across groups.
- 2. Few differences were found in cognitive or social skills for DLL versus non-DLL children.** Comparisons were made between families who reported speaking only English at home (non-DLLs) versus those who spoke another language at home, either alone or in combination with English (DLLs). No differences were found for 8 of the 11 outcomes examined. The exceptions were that DLL children showed higher levels of math skills than did non-DLL children, and parents of DLLs rated their children as slightly less well liked by peers and as showing slightly more anger than did parents of non-DLLs.
- 3. Maternal education had a differential influence on children's development for DLLs versus non-DLLs.** Higher levels of maternal education were more strongly associated with higher reading and math skills for non-DLLs than for DLLs. In contrast, mothers' levels of education had a stronger positive influence on ratings of DLL children's social skills compared to non-DLLs.
- 4. Outcomes for children whose mothers were immigrants compared to those who were native-born varied depending on the child's home language.** For DLLs (those whose families spoke a heritage language at home, either alone or in combination with English), having an immigrant mother (born outside the U.S.) was associated with better cognitive outcomes and fewer behavior problems compared to children with non-immigrant mothers (born in the U.S.). In contrast, for non-DLLs (those whose families spoke only English at

home), having an immigrant mother was associated with poorer cognitive outcomes compared to children with non-immigrant mothers. Furthermore, for children whose mothers were born in the U.S., ratings of problem behaviors were higher for non-DLLs than DLLs, whereas there were fewer differences in problem behaviors on the basis of DLL status for children of immigrant mothers.

5. Opposite patterns of gender differences for DLLs as compared to non-DLLs were found for cognitive and social-emotional outcomes.

Gender differences favoring girls were larger on cognitive outcomes for non-DLLs than DLLs. In contrast, for social-emotional outcomes, gender differences favoring girls were larger for DLLs than non-DLLs.

Conclusions

These results provide further evidence that the general patterns of cognitive, academic, and social development are similar for DLLs and non-DLLs. There were few effects for DLL status alone. However, family and child characteristics such as maternal education, maternal immigration status, and child gender predicted outcomes differently for young DLL and non-DLL children. ●

Method

Data from child assessments, observations of parent-child interactions, and interviews with primary caregivers were examined for the 9-month, 24-month, year prior to kindergarten, and kindergarten time points. Parent interviews were conducted in various languages; child assessments were administered in English and Spanish only. Hierarchical linear model analyses were conducted to examine the level and change in developmental outcomes. The analyses tested the extent to which developmental trajectories varied as a function of DLL status (home language), taking into account country of heritage, maternal immigration status, and other demographic characteristics (family income, child gender, and maternal education) as well as the interactions between home language and the other predictors.

About CECER-DLL

CECER-DLL is a national center that is building capacity for research with dual language learners (DLLs) ages birth through five years. CECER-DLL aims to improve the state of knowledge and measurement in early childhood research on DLLs, identify and advance research on best practices for early care and education programming, and develop and disseminate products to improve research on DLLs. CECER-DLL is a cooperative agreement between the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care.

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