



Spanish instruction in head start and dual language learners' academic achievement[☆]



Elizabeth B. Miller

New York University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

DLLs
Head Start
Spanish instruction

ABSTRACT

Data from the Head Start Impact Study ($N = 1141$) and the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, 2009 Cohort ($N = 825$) were used to investigate whether Spanish instruction in Head Start differentially increased Spanish-speaking Dual Language Learners' (DLLs) academic achievement. Although hypothesized that Spanish instruction would be beneficial for DLLs' early literacy and math skills, results from residualized growth models showed there were no such positive associations. Somewhat surprisingly, DLL children instructed in Spanish had higher English receptive vocabulary skills at the end of the Head Start year than those not instructed, with children randomly assigned to Head Start and instructed in Spanish having the highest scores. Policy implications for Head Start-eligible Spanish-speaking DLLs are discussed.

1. Introduction

Quality early care and education (ECE) has been shown to help prepare young learners for future academic success (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007), and this may be especially true for low-income children (Barnett, 2011; Ramey & Ramey, 2006; Schweinhart, 2006). Prior research suggests that Spanish-speaking Dual Language Learners (DLLs) – young children learning two languages simultaneously, their home language and English (Espinosa, 2013) – differentially benefit from quality ECE compared with children of other subgroups and monolingual-English children (Buysse, Peisner-Feinberg, Pérez, Hammer, & Knowles, 2014; Gormley, 2008; Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007). This same finding has also been shown with the Head Start program. The Final Report of the Head Start Impact Study (HSIS; U.S. DHHS, 2010a) found that Spanish-speaking DLL children benefitted more from random assignment to Head Start compared with monolingual-English children on some English outcomes, and Bloom and Weiland (2015) found that this was particularly the case for DLL children with low baseline levels of English receptive vocabulary skills.

Despite the positive impacts of ECE for Spanish-speaking DLLs, however, the literature has not sufficiently investigated the mechanisms underlying this finding, or what may account for these differential benefits. One idea that has garnered attention in recent years through

developmental policy reports (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; McCabe et al., 2013), research articles (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007; Pérez, Tabors, & López, 2007), and Head Start mandates (U.S. DHHS, 2008) is Spanish language instruction in the classroom. Such instruction may be an important pathway through which DLL children can maximize their English learning experiences in ECE, as developmentally, DLL children need a strong basis in one language before they can acquire another. When DLL children are exposed to the home language in the classroom, they may display faster rates of growth in English language skills than native English-speaking children (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). As such, understanding whether the effects of programs like Head Start on DLL children's development differ by use of Spanish instruction in the classroom remains a key issue. The recent joint policy statement on DLLs in ECE (2016) by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Education (ED) unequivocally states that using the home language in the classroom is optimal for DLL children's language and literacy development, but whether such instruction contributes to English language academic skills is critical and largely unknown.

Using data from the two largest, nationally representative datasets on Head Start – the Head Start Impact Study (HSIS; U.S. DHHS, 2002–2006) and the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, 2009 Cohort (FACES-2009; U.S. DHHS, 2009–2013) – the purpose of the current study is to determine whether Spanish language instruction

[☆] Research reported in this publication was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number P01HD065704. Research was also supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families under Grant Number 90YE0157. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

E-mail address: ebmiller@nyu.edu.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2017.07.008>

Received 11 March 2016; Received in revised form 28 April 2017; Accepted 24 July 2017
0193-3973/ © 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

is associated with school readiness skills for Head Start-eligible Spanish-speaking DLL children. Of particular importance is the examination of the relationship between Spanish instruction used by caregivers in Head Start settings and DLL children's subsequent English language academic achievement, as this may prove essential for their kindergarten readiness.

1.1. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in bioecological theory, which posits that human development results from the interplay of enduring reciprocal and continuous interactions between an organism and their environment known as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Through such interactions occurring on a regular basis over extended periods of time, children come to understand the world and their place in it. The effects of these proximal processes on developmental outcomes systematically vary based on the characteristics of the person and their environmental context. Consequently, children respond in varying ways to the environments they encounter. The current study considers the proximal processes of Spanish language interactions between teachers and DLL students in the context of Head Start classrooms.

This study is guided by bioecological theory such that as part of these classroom language interactions, children continuously and reciprocally converse with adults, which extend over many turns and utilize both English and Spanish. Consequently, children take part in the building of a complex linguistic structure where using the home language helps them to productively communicate in English. From early naming exchanges with adults, children eventually become more adept at responding to listener's cues and creating sentences with new information (Tabors, 2008). Therefore, early language interactions in one language can support and privilege later experiences in another (Uccelli, Hemphill, Pan, & Snow, 1999), and can be used to explore how DLL children fare in an ecological context like a Head Start classroom where they may be encountering formal academic English for the first time.

1.2. Spanish-speaking DLLs in the U.S.

As mentioned briefly above, this study uses the term “Dual Language Learner” to describe young children who are learning more than one language simultaneously – their home language and English (Espinosa, 2013). This term encompasses the diversity of this population, which includes children from a wide variety of language backgrounds. Young DLLs may be of limited English proficiency, completely bilingual, or may not speak their home language fluently (August & Hakuta, 1997). Regardless of their home language experiences, DLLs have less English language exposure and practice than monolingual English-speaking children – children from homes where English is the primary language – and do not perform on par with such children on various emergent English skills (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Moreover, the population of U.S. DLLs is growing rapidly. From 1994 to 95 to 2009–10, the number of school-aged DLLs increased by nearly 65% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011) – from 3.2 million students to over 5.2 million students, representing the fastest growing student segment in U.S. public schools (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). Among younger children in Head Start and Early Head Start, DLLs now represent close to 40% of all participants (U.S. DHHS, 2014). Furthermore, the population of Latino children represents the largest group of children in poverty in the U.S. (López & Velasco, 2011), which further places Spanish-speaking DLLs at risk for delayed English language development (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2013; Kieffer, 2010; Mancilla-Martinez & Vagh, 2013).

1.3. Spanish language instruction for DLL children's school readiness skills

Spanish language instruction in Head Start may be one way to boost DLL children's English school readiness skills. Unfortunately, at kindergarten entry, Spanish-speaking DLL children are already engaged in a game of “catch-up”, as they trail their monolingual English-speaking peers in important English language skills such as syntactic knowledge, phonological awareness, emergent literacy, and in particular, vocabulary (Hoff, 2013; Pérez et al., 2007). Further, persistent K-12 reading achievement gaps between DLLs and monolingual-English speakers (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013) suggest that DLL students are not equipped with the English language skills to succeed academically.

In addition to these gaps, assessing DLL children only in English is problematic, as it provides an incomplete picture of their language skills. Rather, research syntheses on second language acquisition demonstrate that a sufficiently high quality match between the classroom language environment and children's language capabilities can help children successfully become bilingual (e.g., McCabe et al., 2013). This may be particularly true when accounting for DLL children's skills inclusive of their home language and English (Hoff, 2013; McCabe et al., 2013; Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993). The revised hierarchical model for bilinguals suggests that DLLs represent their two languages with one conceptual system in which proficiency in one is thought to facilitate proficiency in another (Sunderman & Kroll, 2006). For instance, if a child learns the word *mesa*, they have a conceptual understanding of the word, enabling the acquisition of the English equivalent word of table. Further, DLL children's vocabulary knowledge has been shown to be distributed across languages, so accounting for both languages provides more accurate insight into DLLs' development and skills (Mancilla-Martinez & Vagh, 2013). Therefore, given children's conceptual understanding of language as well as the timing of sensitive periods for language development (Nelson & Sheridan, 2011), the preschool years may be an ideal time to learn two languages (Bialystok, 2001, 2011; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Kuhl, 2009; McCabe et al., 2013).

Some empirical work supports the view that using the home language for classroom interactions and instruction may be critical to Spanish-speaking DLLs' overall development. In particular, the research on cross-linguistic transfer implies that continued rich language opportunities in children's home language may transfer and promote English language and literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006), by helping children to integrate component skills in early literacy domains such as sound-symbol awareness, grammar, and decoding (Castro, Pérez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011). Rinaldi and Pérez (2008), for example, found that Spanish-language word reading skills contributed to the development of such skills in English, while Dickinson et al., (2004) found that among Spanish-speaking DLL children, phonological awareness in one language was strongly related to phonological awareness in the other.

Furthermore, prior research with preschool-aged DLL children, some of which is experimental, demonstrates that classroom use of both the home language and English may lead to improvement in Spanish word reading skills and at least equivalent English emergent literacy skills compared with Spanish-speaking DLL children in all-English contexts (e.g., Barnett et al., 2007; Burchinal et al., 2016; Durán, Roseth, & Hoffman, 2010; Pérez et al., 2007). Research on Spanish language instruction with older elementary-aged children suggests similar results for bilingual education compared with English-only programs by fourth grade (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2012; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Slavin, Madden, Calderón, Chamberlain, & Hennessy, 2011). Other work indicates that DLL children display better social skills and closer teacher-child relationships in classrooms where teachers use children's home language, and teacher ratings of DLL children's peer social skills and assertiveness may be positively associated with increased amounts of Spanish use (Chang

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4939147>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4939147>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)