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MISIDENTIFYING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
SUZAN CEVHEROGLU

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
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MISIDENTIFYING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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APPROVED

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Abstract

This thesis explores the multifaceted issue of misidentifying English Language Learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LDs) in the educational system. The study begins by delving into the complicated reasons underlying such misidentifications, recognizing the significance of understanding the complex interplay between language acquisition challenges and learning disabilities.

Utilizing empirical evidence and conducting an extensive literature review, the research uncovers the intricate factors contributing to the misidentification of ELLs, including linguistic diversity, cultural biases, and the limitations of assessment tools. Following this exploration of the problem's dimensions, the thesis outlines solutions designed to prevent the misidentification of ELLs with LDs. These solutions encompass professional development for educators, culturally and linguistically responsive assessments, active involvement of parents and caregivers, individualized education plans, collaborative efforts, vigilant monitoring, and multilingual support. By embracing these solutions, educational institutions can ensure that ELLs receive the tailored support and interventions they require without the risk of being incorrectly labeled as a special education student. This research contributes to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, acknowledging ELL students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It underscores the imperative need for the education system to adapt and evolve, providing every student with the opportunity to thrive, regardless of linguistic or cultural differences.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report in 2022, the number of English language learners (ELLs) and bilingual children requiring special education services has increased dramatically in the United States for the last two decades. Disabilities, such as specific learning disabilities, are on the rise, with the number of people diagnosed in the United States increasing from 796,000 in 1976 to 2,368,000 in 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This trend poses a challenge for educators and policymakers who must provide adequate and appropriate support for this diverse and growing population.

However, not all ELLs and bilingual children who receive special education services have genuine learning disabilities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report in 2016, approximately 13.8% of ELLs in schools in the United States receive special education services. This is a disproportionately high percentage, as ELLs only represent 9.4% of the total student population. The prevalence of ELLs in special education programs suggests an over-identification of learning disabilities among this group, which can have negative consequences for their educational outcomes. Research conducted by Ochoa et al. (1988) found that classes for students with learning disabilities have an overrepresentation of ELL students. Similarly, Sullivan (2011) discovered that ELLs are overrepresented in special education, particularly in the categories of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Speech or Language Impairments (SLI). Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reported that American Indian or Alaska Native students were 1.8 times more likely and Hispanic students 1.1 times more likely to receive special education services for learning

disabilities than their peers (OSEP, 2020). With the growing number of minority students in the student population, addressing the issue of over-identification of learning disabilities among ELLs is crucial to ensuring equitable access to quality education.

Background

Choosing the topic of misidentifying English language learners with learning disabilities is deeply rooted in a combination of personal experiences, a passion for teaching, and a profound sense of empathy. As a second language learner who embarked on a journey to the United States nine years ago with virtually no knowledge of the English language, this writer experienced the challenges and intricacies of adapting to a new linguistic and cultural environment. These experiences shaped this writer's perspective and kindled a desire to explore and understand the intersection of language acquisition and learning difficulties within the educational system.

Throughout this writer's teaching journey, a passion for working with children with special needs grew, and an immense fulfillment developed in supporting and advocating for students facing unique challenges. While working in a charter school that served a diverse community with many refugee families and English language learners, suspicions emerged that some students were potentially misidentified with learning disabilities due to the language barriers they faced.

As an English language learner, this writer recognizes the unique struggles and obstacles such students encounter. A genuine concern for these students' welfare led to a deeper investigation to better understand how language challenges can sometimes be misinterpreted

as learning disabilities and how this misidentification can affect the academic trajectories and overall well-being of English language learners.

Thus, this research is not just an academic pursuit but a personal mission to shed light on an issue that resonates with this writer's journey and dedication to the educational welfare of English language learners. Hopefully, investigating the misidentification of English language learners with learning disabilities will contribute to a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape, ensuring that these students receive the support and opportunities they deserve.

What is an English Language Learner (ELL)?

To better understand this topic, gaining information about English language learners will be helpful. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, n.d.), students whose native language is not English and whose skill in English is a hindrance to their academic progress are known as English language learners (ELLs). Based on the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), 5 million (or 10.1%) English language learners are enrolled in public schools. In addition, about three-quarters (74%) of English Language Learners (7.6% of all public school pupils) speak Spanish at home. However, around 14% of the total number of ELLs have disabilities (about 718,000 students). As reported by NCES (2021), when evaluating English Language Learners, learning disabilities (LDs) are often the primary diagnosis.

How are ELLs identified?

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) provides comprehensive guidance on the identification and assessment of English language learners (USDE, 2016). Their guidance typically covers several key aspects of

this process. First, they often recommend the use of home language surveys to ascertain whether a language other than English is spoken in the student's home. Second, the USDE emphasizes the use of standardized language proficiency assessments to determine the student's English language proficiency level, which is essential for eligibility for English language support services. Third, they may also offer guidance on identification criteria and procedures, incorporating factors like teacher or parent recommendations. Furthermore, their guidance commonly addresses the assessment and monitoring of ELLs' language proficiency over time to ensure they receive appropriate support. The USDE also aims to ensure that ELLs have equitable access to the general curriculum and the necessary support to succeed academically (USDE, 2016).

Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), students who are classified as ELLs have access to language support services that are designed to help them become fluent in English and achieve the same high levels of learning that are required of all students. In addition, increased English proficiency among program participants has been linked to better academic performance. The number of ELLs enrolled in U.S. public schools increased from 9.2% in the autumn of 2010 (representing 4.5 million kids) to 11.3% in the fall of 2019 (representing 5.7 million students) (10.4%, or 5.1 million students) (NCES, 2021).

What is a Learning Disability?

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) provides a clear definition and diagnosis criteria for specific learning disabilities. As stated by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013), specific learning disability (SLD), also known as learning disability (LD), is a

developmental disorder that manifests in early childhood and is characterized by persistent difficulties in acquiring academic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic. First, a learning disability diagnosis is made when a person has trouble in at least one of the following categories for at least six months despite receiving specialized assistance: problem reading, difficulty comprehending what is read, difficulty spelling, difficulty writing, difficulty understanding numerical ideas, facts, or computation, and difficulty mathematically thinking. Second, ineffective teaching does not cause learning problems. Third, unexpected academic underachievement is a common symptom of learning disabilities in children. This means that the child's test scores or grades are much lower than what would be anticipated at that grade level expectations (APA, 2013).

The nature and prevalence of learning disabilities among students are defined and described by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) as individuals who often encounter linguistic challenges, impacting their proficiency in fundamental academic concepts. However, the definition excludes factors such as intellectual, physical, or emotional disabilities, as well as environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages. It is crucial to recognize these parameters when understanding the scope of learning disabilities. Additionally, the effects of learning disabilities extend to various domains, including reading, writing, spelling, thinking, communication, listening, and mathematics. Third, learning disabilities manifest as impairments in reading, writing, or spoken language comprehension. Furthermore, statistics reveal that approximately 6-8% of school-age children are diagnosed with learning disabilities, although

some specialists argue that underreporting is likely due to the lack of standardized screening procedures (APA, 2013).

The most common type of disability among students receiving special education services is specific learning disabilities. Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the 2020-21 school year, “specific learning disabilities” was the disability category with the highest reported proportion of pupils receiving special education services under IDEA. First, an inability to listen, think, talk, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations properly may be the result of a particular learning impairment, which is a dysfunction in one or more of the fundamental psychological processes involved in comprehending or utilizing spoken or written language. Second, 33% of students with special education needs had specific learning disabilities (NCES, 2023).

How are ELLs Identified with LDs?

One of the key aspects of providing appropriate education for English language learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LDs) is understanding the legal framework and principles that guide the identification and assessment of these students. According to Friend and Bursuck (2019), the six principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are as follows: free appropriate public education, zero reject/child find, nondiscriminatory assessment, individualized education, least restrictive environment, and due process. First, the term free appropriate public education refers to the mandate that requires all public schools to give kids with disabilities access to special education programs without charging the families any fees (Grassi & Barker, 2010). Second, students with impairments are guaranteed equal access to

public schools under the zero reject/child find principle. Third, pupils must undergo nondiscriminatory assessment; this means that they may only be evaluated for their need to participate in special education in accordance with fair methods and techniques that do not discriminate in any way (Friend & Bursuck, 2019).

The state-level variation in the proportion of students receiving special education services is influenced by federal and state policies and practices regarding the identification and assessment of students with disabilities. The varying proportions of school-aged children who get special education services among states may be attributable to a variety of factors, including variations in state qualifying rules and the challenges associated with identifying and assessing certain children suspected of having impairments. First, the primary federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2017), mandates that states establish policies and processes to identify, locate, and assess all children with disabilities living in the state who are in need of special education services. Second, local school districts are often responsible for enforcing these “Child Find” rules and procedures. Third, as part of IDEA, individual states have certain latitude in determining eligibility and establishing disability categories. However, each government has the option of developing its own systems for identification and evaluation. This means a child who qualifies for services in one state may not qualify for them in another (IDEA, 2017).

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2018) explains the two methods of determining eligibility for special education services for students with specific learning disabilities. The first method is to use evidence indicating below-grade-level performance, a

lack of responsiveness to well-designed therapies, and a deficiency in a fundamental psychological process that is associated with poor accomplishment. Others may refer to this as a lack of intervention response or identification via a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Districts do not need to apply for or get approval to use eligibility criteria inside an MTSS system; nevertheless, they must record their approach within the Total Special Education System (for more information, see Minnesota Rules, part 3525.1341, subpart 4). The second method is to employ a severe discrepancy between intelligence and performance in at least one of the eight domains associated with a specific learning disability. In cases when data and application of an MTSS system are not in place and executed with integrity, many schools continue to use discrepancy criteria. Districts are not obliged to submit qualifying criteria; yet, in a statewide poll of 1,500 schools, just 20% of schools report completely following MTSS, according to 2018 MTSS survey results (MDE, 2018).

This thesis aims to explore the factors that contribute to the misidentification of ELLs with LDs for special education services (SPED) and to investigate potential changes that can be made to assess language learners for special education support more accurately. This research is motivated by the critical importance of appropriately diagnosing and understanding whether a learner requires ELL services, special education (SPED) services, or both. Misidentification in this context is a multifaceted problem that impacts the educational journey of the learners involved. When ELLs with LDs are misidentified, they may not receive the specific support they need to succeed academically. This oversight can lead to a range of educational, social, and emotional challenges. Hence, this research endeavors to shed light on the root causes of

misidentification and to identify strategies and adjustments within the assessment process.

These measures aim to ensure a more precise evaluation, providing the appropriate educational support that students truly require. This work will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by ELLs and may offer insights into improving the accuracy and fairness of special education assessments, ultimately addressing the broader problem of misidentification.

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive answer to these two guiding questions:

- What factors contribute to the misidentification of English language learners with learning disabilities?
- What are solutions designed to prevent the misidentification?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

This section describes the methods and sources used to conduct a literature search on the topic of misidentifying English language learners with learning disabilities. Various databases and sources that cover education, psychology, linguistics, and social sciences were searched, including ERIC, PsycINFO, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, Social Sciences Citation Index, National Center for Education Statistics, Council for Exceptional Children, and the U.S. Department of Education. Keywords and phrases related to the topic, such as “English learners,” “learning disabilities,” “misidentification,” and “prevention strategies,” were used to search for relevant literature. The search was mostly limited to literature published within the last two decades (2003-2023) and written in English. The titles and abstracts of the search results were screened to select the most relevant articles for the topic. The references of the selected articles were also checked to identify additional relevant studies.

The literature review summarizes and evaluates the main themes, arguments, and evidence from the literature related to this topic and is organized into two main sections: (a) Causes of Misidentification and (b) Strategies for Prevention. The causes of misidentification are discussed in terms of linguistic, cultural, instructional, and systemic factors that influence the identification and assessment of English language learners with learning disabilities. The strategies for prevention are discussed in terms of best practices for screening, referral, evaluation, placement, and instruction of English language learners with learning disabilities.

The literature review also identifies the gaps and limitations in the existing literature and suggests directions for future research.

Contributing Factors to Misidentification

In the following chapters, this thesis embarks on a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to the misidentification of English language learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LDs). By delving into these causes, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding this issue and, ultimately, work towards more effective identification and support mechanisms for these students.

According to Fernandez and Inserra (2013), over the years, researchers have examined a variety of potential causes for the overrepresentation of ELLs in special education. Examples include assessments, the implementation of multilingual assessments, instructional methods, referral procedures, teachers' views and perspectives on English language learners, and teacher preparation (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013).

Assessment Issues

One of the main causes of misidentification of English language learners (ELLs) for special education services is the use of inappropriate assessment methods. The first contributor of misidentification lies in the area of assessment itself. Assessment, which is the process of evaluating a student's knowledge and skills, can sometimes lead to misidentification if the assessment is not properly designed or administered. According to Gearheart (1990), assessment is "a process that involves the systematic collection and interpretation of a wide

variety of information on which to base instructional/intervention decisions and, when appropriate, classification and placement decisions” (as cited in Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2006).

According to Figueroa and Newsome (2006), standardized tests, which are often used to measure students’ academic achievement and intelligence, are not suitable for assessing English language learners (ELLs) because they do not account for their linguistic and cultural diversity. Numerous researchers have reached divergent conclusions regarding the optimal method for evaluating students, particularly ELLs. It has been demonstrated that inaccurate assessments of ELLs increase the overrepresentation of this group of eligible learning disabilities in special education (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). Abedi (2006) and Solorzano (2008) argue that the level of linguistic and conceptual complexity of standardized student achievement tests does not adequately account for the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students being tested. As stated by the National Education Association (2007), historically, there has been a disparity between the assessment techniques and the method of instruction used in the classroom.

Another problem with standardized tests is that they cannot distinguish between learning disabilities and other factors that affect ELLs’ performance, such as low proficiency in English or their native language. According to Fletcher and Navarrete (2011) as well as Harry and Klingner (2007), inadequate assessment methodologies are a major factor contributing to ELL disproportionality. This difficulty arises whenever standardized testing procedures are required to identify instances of learning disability. As shown by Rinaldi and Sampson (2008), a norming sample demonstrates that standardized assessments can shed light on students’

intellectual capacity. Standardized testing instruments are necessary for determining whether a pupil qualifies for special education. As cautioned by Abedi (2006), both researchers and educators should be aware that the use of English in assessments diminishes the reliability of standardized test results since every test administered in English assesses students' language proficiency. The dependability of placement and program decisions based on these test scores has been called into question.

As a result of questions about the reliability of standardized test results, many researchers and educators have criticized the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, which relies on standardized test scores to identify students with learning disabilities. According to research conducted by Klingner and Harry (2014), standardized test scores cannot distinguish between a student's underperformance due to cognitive difficulties or other factors. As reported by Sanatullova-Allison et al. (2016), low levels of English proficiency, low levels of native language proficiency, and limited literacy proficiency in the native language are examples of these factors. As criticized by Artiles and Ortiz (2002) as well as Donovan and Cross (2004), numerous academicians have rejected the IQ-achievement disparities paradigm. Typically, ELLs who are simultaneously acquiring content and English perform inadequately on all English-based standardized assessments, including IQ tests.

Language Issues in Assessment

Language issues in assessment pose a significant barrier to identifying and serving ELLs with LDs. The next barrier to assessment is language. Language issues arise from differences in linguistic and cultural backgrounds since most tests are designed for native English speakers,

and translation is not sufficient for non-native English speakers. As reported by Huang et al. (2012), the lack of accuracy and validity, the injustice of the exam and the questions, and the over-referral of ELLs to special education are key issues with testing ELLs with LDs. The majority of our evaluations are based on English-speaking societal criteria, so there is little likelihood that they are pertinent, relevant, or beneficial (Huang et al., 2012). As stated by McLoughlin and Lewis (2008), many test creators, educators, and administrators believe it is possible to assess ELLs successfully if the same exam is administered in both the student's first and second language, with standards included in each iteration.

Language and cultural biases in test questions complicate the assessment of disabled students. According to Pichardo (2014), one of the challenges in assessing disabled students is the presence of language and cultural biases in test questions. The complexity and significance of addressing assessment challenges in evaluating disabled students become evident when considering the influence of language and cultural biases on test questions. It underscores the importance of using normed tests in both the student's native language and English. Additionally, variables such as test language difficulty and dialect variations can have a potential negative impact. These factors highlight the multifaceted nature of addressing assessment challenges for disabled students (Pichardo, 2014).

Translation difficulties and dialect variations affect the accuracy and validity of test questions for disabled students. Huang et al. (2011) noted that it may be difficult to translate a test question precisely without influencing its level of difficulty. For this reason, it is essential to utilize tests that have been normed in both the student's native tongue and English. Although

translated tests may have valid and accurate psychometric properties, they may be biased because the dominant American culture forms the basis for measures, which are influenced by their values, beliefs, and cultural heritage (McLoughlin & Lewis, 2008). Abedi (2014) states that as sources of construct-irrelevant variation, language, and cultural biases have a negative effect on these evaluations. Multiple variables, including test language difficulty, test structure, test length-related fatigue and distress, and page congestion, may have a negative effect on the test scores of disabled students (Abedi, 2014). Dialect variation between members of the same large linguistic group (for instance, native Spanish speakers) is possible for both the first language (L1) and second language (L2) due to the ubiquitous influence of factors such as language contact, place of origin, and translator (Solano-Flores, 2008). The Spanish spoken in Mexico is distinct from that of Puerto Rico and Spain; in fact, there is a vast divide between the dictionaries.

The lack of qualified translators and the bias of assessments hinder the accurate identification of ELLs with LDs. According to Huang et al. (2011), the challenges associated with the translation of examinations, a shortage of qualified translators for ELLs with LDs, and the complexities of assessing students who do not comprehend English underline the multifaceted issues surrounding assessment and the distinction between learning impairments and language distinctions. If examinations are translated into Mexican Spanish, Puerto Rican students may be exposed to a new language, which could affect their performance. Inadequate numbers of experienced and appropriately trained translators are available to work with ELLs who have learning disabilities, resulting in biased assessments and inaccurate outcomes (Huang et al.,

2011). Due to the inherent bias of all assessments, it is problematic to administer examinations to students who do not comprehend English (Abedi, 2008; Solano-Flores, 2008). According to Abedi (2008), acquiring a second language or being bilingual may have a substantial effect on the predictive validity, construct validity, and reliability of an examination.

The use of standardized tests in English to evaluate ELLs for special education is problematic and unreliable. Teachers may use a variety of standardized tests to identify the presence of learning difficulties; however, there is no single exam that can distinguish between learning impairments and language distinctions (Case & Taylor, 2005). In 2006, Klingner et al. investigated the use of standardized tests to evaluate English language learners for special education. They found that ELLs were routinely evaluated in English, regardless of the student's native language or level of English proficiency. Participants neglected to account for any language difficulties when analyzing test results. Since the year 2000, the literature has documented problems with ELL testing (Klingner et al., 2006).

Yzquierdo et al. (2004) examined the cognitive and language assessment records of English language learners who were evaluated for special education in a large, multicultural metropolitan district in the southwestern United States. The researchers questioned whether there was a correlation between how students' language abilities were evaluated and the language they were exposed to during cognitive assessments. They also explored whether the language of the cognitive exams affected eligibility for special education.

The Yzquierdo et al. (2004) study described the participants, the bilingual evaluation process, and the language assessment results of ELLs with LDs. Students who met the criteria for referral to special education services and whose parents conducted a home language survey participated in the study. The 98 students (57 men and 41 women) who comprised the cohort had complete access to all collected data. Other students spoke Vietnamese, Russian, Laotian, and other minority languages. The pupils diagnosed with learning disabilities ranged in age from infancy to senior year of high school. In order to execute a bilingual evaluation, parents were asked to complete a language form indicating their child's language proficiency at the beginning of the academic year. The majority of the 98 pupils took both the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III (WISC-III) and the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (KABC). Students were assigned a Language Assessment Scale (LAS) score between Level 1 (L1) and Level 5 (L5) after completing the KABC or WISC-III in Spanish, English, or both languages. The results of the LAS test indicated that the examinee could read, write, converse, and listen in both English and Spanish. The students' L5 scores indicated advanced language aptitude for their age group in their second language, whereas their L1 scores indicated a very fundamental comprehension of English (Yzquierdo et al., 2004).

The Yzquierdo et al. (2004) study found that the parents' perspectives and the language of the cognitive assessments influenced the special education eligibility of ELLs with LDs. Several chi-square analyses revealed a significant relationship between the parents' perspectives and their children's LAS scores. There were no statistically significant differences in who was referred for special education based on assessment language. Eighteen percent of the

Spanish-only group were students who completed cognitive assessments in Spanish but were determined to be unqualified for special education. Ten percent of the students who took the English comprehension test did not score high enough to qualify for special education, while 28% did. Spanish-speaking students learning English as a second language who completed the exams in their native language and earned a LAS score of L1 were more likely to be eligible for special education in the designated district than those who took the exams in English alone. (Yzquierdo et al., 2004)

Assessing the linguistic ability of bilingual students in the classroom is a complex and challenging task that requires more than just choosing the appropriate language or instruments. Yzquierdo et al. (2004) discovered that classroom assessments frequently misrepresent or fail to assess students' linguistic ability accurately. Only half of the students who struggled with language, culture, or being bilingual were able to complete the cognitive tests in their native tongue. The researchers acknowledged that their findings may have been affected by the small size of their sample and the paucity of detailed responses from parents. The authors claimed that evaluating bilingual students is a complex process that requires more than just picking the right language or instruments for the assessment (Yzquierdo et al., 2004).

The assessment of ELLs for LDs. is a complex and controversial issue that requires cultural and linguistic sensitivity. According to Schilder (2013), there is currently no single test that reliably screens ELLs for learning difficulties. While assessment can be implemented in numerous contexts, the focus of this discussion is the evaluation of ELLs in an effort to diagnose learning disabilities. When conducting such an assessment, cultural and linguistic awareness are

crucial factors to consider. There has been considerable controversy surrounding assessment and the referral process for special education over the years (Artiles et al., 2002). Educators and instructors frequently disagree as to whether the tests they are required to administer are biased or insensitive to the cultural backgrounds of students. If the existing examinations are biased or culturally inappropriate, it may be difficult and time-consuming to obtain new ones that are acceptable to the school.

The language and time constraints of tests hinder the accurate assessment of ELLs for learning disabilities. According to Artiles et al. (2002), it may be difficult for ELLs to take tests, either because they do not understand the language used on the test or because they lack sufficient time to input, interpret, and output the language used on the test. Many tests used in the special education referral process are designed to provide specific results that can be used to establish a diagnosis, making it difficult for ELLs to demonstrate proficiency on these tests. Another factor working against ELLs is the potential for cultural insensitivity and prejudice based on test results (Artiles et al., 2002).

Second Language Acquisition

Many educators face the challenge of identifying and supporting students who struggle with English due to learning disabilities or language barriers. Despite the fact that English language learners (ELLs) and students with learning disabilities frequently have diverse academic requirements and abilities, it may be challenging to distinguish between the two. Hamayan et al. (2013) argued that the core issue is determining whether a student's difficulties

with English are due to a disability. It is easy to attribute the symptoms of a learning disability to those experiencing a language learning problem.

Second language acquisition is a complex process involving both formal and informal learning opportunities for English language learners. Hamayan et al. (2013) stated that many international pupils who come to the United States but do not speak English immediately enroll in classes taught in English. ELLs acquire a second language when they study English. In general, "second language acquisition" refers to the process of learning a new language. It may also refer to the unconscious acquisition of a foreign language (Hamayan et al., 2013). It is necessary to go beyond solely formal methods of education, such as grammar classes, in order to acquire a second language. Conversations with peers on the playground or during lunch are also excellent opportunities for unintentional language acquisition. Children acquire a second language not only through formal instruction but also through immersion in an environment where that language is spoken. If students spend sufficient time with native English speakers, they will acquire the language even if it is not formally taught.

The translation process between languages poses a significant challenge for English language learners, especially those with learning disabilities. Nguyen (2012) stated that because of the translation needed between languages, all ELLs spend extra time on cognitive activities like knowledge processing. Information processing is a dual cognitive task for ELLs, especially ELLs with LDs. The time it takes to understand a question in English and then translate it into one's home language can be significant. After that, they have to respond in their own language, which takes time, and then translate it into English (Nguyen, 2012). The time it takes ELLs to do

this activity may give the impression that they are having trouble thinking. As they keep speaking English, they will become better at it on their own.

The transfer of literacy skills from the first language to the second language is a key factor in the academic development of English language learners. Cummins' (2016) reported results are supported by the findings of Case and Taylor (2005). A student whose first language is alphabetic will have an advantage in comprehending graphemes and how they can be combined to form words, according to the findings. According to Case and Taylor (2005), students who are proficient in languages that don't use alphabets, such as Chinese students, may face more challenges in learning to read and write in English, as they have to acquire a new system of sound-letter correspondences that is different from their native language. If their native language and English do not share the same system of sound-letter correspondences, students may have difficulty learning to read and write in English. There are substantial differences in phonology, vocabulary, and syntax between English and other languages (Case & Taylor, 2005). The German language has a lot of complex nouns, like "Dorfschullehrer," which means village school teacher. Students might try to create similar one-word compounds in English (Swan & Smith, 2011). According to Cummins (2016), children who have acquired reading and writing in their first language (L1) have an advantage when acquiring a second language (L2). Moreover, students with prior knowledge can advance their reading and writing skills more promptly and effectively than those who lack this foundation (Ediger, 2014). Despite the fact that this is language difficulty and not a disability, many teachers mistakenly view it as a disability and refer the child to special education.

One of the factors that contributes to the misidentification of ELLs with LDs is the lack of formal education prior to entering the U.S. school system. As stated by Klingner et al. (2006), English language learners perform worse academically, particularly in literacy, than their non-ELL counterparts. For instance, a significant number of new ELLs have either never attended school or have had their education temporarily suspended. Violence, becoming a refugee, persecution, conflict-related land loss, and other traumatic experiences have precluded many of these children from attending school (Cairo et al., 2012). SLIFE stands for "Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education," and describes students who have experienced significant disruptions in their formal education, often due to factors such as migration, refugee status, or other life circumstances. Freeman et al. (2002) state that SLIFE students typically face unique challenges in catching up with their education, especially when entering a new school system in a different language and cultural context. SLIFE students exhibit characteristics such as limited formal education, language challenges, below grade level in academic skills, cultural adjustment difficulties, diverse backgrounds, and a need for specialized support due to their unique educational histories. These difficulties emphasize the importance of tailored interventions to facilitate students' integration into the educational system and their academic success (Freeman et al., 2002).

Another factor that complicates the identification of ELLs with LDs is the complexity and distinctiveness of special education and language acquisition processes. Numerous professionals concur that newcomer ELLs (English language learners who have recently arrived in the U.S. and have limited or interrupted formal education in their home countries) differ

from other populations of ELLs due to the unique experiences and perspectives of each child. According to Huang et al. (2011), teachers may not always be prepared for the challenges of assessing children with both cognitive disabilities and limited English proficiency. A teacher with years of experience in the classroom may lack some of the tools required to assist these particular students effectively and find it difficult to differentiate between a learning problem and the normal progression of second language acquisition. This lack of tools and experience generates difficulties and leads to inequity for ELLs (Huang et al., 2011).

The misdiagnosis of ELL children with LDs is a serious issue that stems from the complexity and distinction of special education and language acquisition processes. Barrio (2017) stated that it is clear that both special education and language acquisition are complex processes with distinct requirements. Even though special education and second language acquisition are two wholly discrete processes, many ELL children are incorrectly diagnosed with learning disabilities (Barrio, 2017).

Inadequate Teacher Knowledge and Training

Discerning whether or not a student has a learning disability or is simply learning English is difficult. In particular, educators may not always be aware of the differences between learning and language difficulties. The perspectives of ELL students must be considered independently from those of English-proficient students. According to Cairo et al. (2012), newcomer ELLs are a subgroup of ELLs who require assistance with language, academic, cultural, and social development. Considering the cultural, linguistic, and literate contexts of today's students, research indicates that it is difficult to diagnose a learning problem (Case &

Taylor, 2005). As a result, before referring an ELL child to special education, teachers must consider a number of factors, such as testing in a learner's native language, parental involvement, cultural considerations, and collaboration with colleagues (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Case & Taylor, 2005).

One of the factors that contributes to the misidentification of ELLs with LDs is the lack of training for general education teachers. In a research conducted in 2007, it was found that general education instructors who were enrolled in a teacher-training program declared that they had taken an average of 1.5 courses that were specifically tailored towards inclusion or special education. Special education teachers, on the other hand, reported that they had taken around 11 courses that focused on the same topics (Mader, 2017). This shows a significant gap in the preparation and knowledge of general education and special education teachers, which may affect their ability to identify and support the diverse needs of their students.

Another factor that complicates the identification of ELLs with LDs is the challenge of teaching students with limited English proficiency. In different places, 41% of public school teachers were responsible for educating students with limited English proficiency at the start of the 21st century. Nevertheless, less than one-third of those teachers received sufficient training to assist English Language Learners (Mader, 2017). Moreover, educators are less likely to be able to instruct in a manner that assists students in acquiring a second language if they lack adequate knowledge of the process of second language acquisition and the typical needs of English Language Learners.

The academic success of English Language Learners depends on the quality and appropriateness of the curriculum and instruction they receive. According to Zimmerman (2008), to achieve academic success, English Language Learners require a curriculum adapted to their unique requirements. Children acquiring English as a second language, ELLs, have particular requirements. Providing education to these students requires the implementation of various techniques and strategies, given the complex nature of their learning needs (Zimmerman, 2008). Teachers cannot effectively educate ELLs if they are unaware that they must be trained in a specific method of instruction. Therefore, educators must receive training in order to instruct ELL students effectively. Unless this occurs, ELLs will continue to struggle and may not receive the necessary support.

Consequently, some educators may resort to hasty and inaccurate identification of learning disabilities in struggling students without considering the root causes of their difficulties. Hamayan et al. stated that some educators believe it is more effective to designate a struggling student as having a learning disability than to spend time identifying the underlying causes of the student's difficulties. It takes time and effort to ascertain the actual cause of a problem; therefore, it is tempting to presume that a child has a cognitive disability and refer them to a special education program. Worse, it is often not regarded that the school's practices may be to blame for the student's difficulties. It is disheartening that teachers and administrators do not always search for systemic issues that may be contributing to students' classroom difficulties. This is a rare occurrence, but even one such error would be unacceptable (Hamayan et al., 2013).

Similar Characteristics of ELLs and Students with LDs

According to Layton and Lock (2002), six common characteristics of ELLs are often misinterpreted as indicators of learning difficulties. Initially, ELLs may learn at a delayed rate, which could be misinterpreted as a processing issue. Second, communication difficulties may also indicate processing difficulties. Thirdly, disobedience to authority figures, absentmindedness, and a lack of eye contact are all potential signs of a disability. Reading difficulties are the fourth possible indicator of a learning disability. Fifth, the use of temporal and spatial concepts tends to point to a lack of expressive language abilities (Layton & Lock, 2002), which is also prevalent among special education students. Last, reading and writing skills, such as story-telling and the use of abstract language, are the areas in which students with learning disabilities struggle the most (Layton & Lock, 2002).

The causes and motivations of the behaviors of English language learners and students with learning disabilities are different and require careful analysis. According to Hamayan et al. (2013), a person unaccustomed to the demands placed on ELLs may mischaracterize all of these behaviors as indicative of a deficit in learning. Whether the behavior is internally or externally motivated is a major distinction between ELL habits and those of children with learning difficulties. Some individuals with cognitive difficulties have underlying mental health issues. Nonetheless, the difficulties of ELLs are typically attributable to factors beyond their control, such as their lack of experience with the English language and American culture (Hamayan et al., 2013). Despite the fact that English language learners and students with cognitive

difficulties may exhibit comparable signs and symptoms, the two groups require distinct approaches.

Although ELLs and students with learning disabilities share similar characteristics and behaviors, this does not imply that they require the same types of support. To ensure that all children receive an appropriate education, it is essential to differentiate between the behaviors of English language learners and those of students with learning difficulties. According to Artiles et al. (2002), improper placement of children in special education is problematic because it may be a barrier to people getting the excellent education that would improve their quality of life. For pupils without cognitive disabilities, special education is unnecessary. In actuality, Ortiz (1992) discovered that Hispanic children's test scores decreased over the period of three years in special education after they were initially placed there for purported learning difficulties. It is unethical for a teacher to identify a student incorrectly for any of the enumerated reasons or for any other reason.

The differences between reading in English as a first and second language can lead to misidentification of learning disabilities in ELLs. Klingner stated that reading in English as a second language is substantially different from reading in English as a first language. Due to this, "when the differences are minimized, teachers and others may not comprehend why ELLs do not progress as rapidly as their English-speaking peers when taught with the same methods" (Klingner, 2008, p. 4). Because of the subtle nature of these differences, some educators may determine that it is acceptable to designate a struggling child as having a learning disability. Hamayan et al. (2013) stated that instead of investing the time and effort needed to identify

the true cause of a problem, some educators might assume that a child might have a cognitive disability and place them in a special education program. Unfortunately, the possibility that issues with teaching, courses, or other educational procedures may be contributing to the student's difficulties is often overlooked.

Policy Issues

Policy issues in assessment are a major challenge in diagnosing learning disabilities (LDs) in English language learners (ELLs). As stated by Zimmerman (2008), policy issues in assessment refer to problems and lack of clarity in establishing guidelines, rules, and procedures that govern the process of assessing individuals, especially in the context of learning disabilities. These policies may encompass criteria for identifying and evaluating learning disabilities, the use of assessment tools, and the involvement of various professionals in the assessment process. Given the complexity of this issue, policies for diagnosing learning disorders in ELLs should be clearly defined to avoid misdirecting individuals (Zimmerman, 2008).

One of the policy issues in assessment is the lack of understanding and application of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by many educators. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contains numerous standards and details, many educators lack a firm understanding of its meaning and application within their own educational settings (DeMatthews et al., 2014). Errors and misidentification are more likely to occur when assessment policies are unclear and difficult to follow (Zimmerman, 2008).

Another policy issue in assessment is the non-adherence to state rules or regulations or established professional recommendations by some school psychologists who assess ELLs for

LDs. According to research by Figueroa and Newsome (2006), California school psychologists who assess ELLs for LDs do not adhere to state rules or regulations or established professional recommendations. The IEP team determines the eligibility of a student for special education based on the results of cognitive exams. Given that school personnel have difficulty identifying learning disabilities in ELLs, it is crucial to investigate alternative evaluations that are more dependable and provide a complete picture of a student's academic ability (Gottlieb & Sanchez-Lopez, 2008).

A third policy issue in assessment is the delegation of authority to local school boards and classrooms without providing explicit guidelines for supporting English language learners and students with other special needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is frequently criticized for being too general, according to DeMatthews, Edwards, and Nelson (2014). DeMatthews, Edwards, and Nelson (2014) state that IDEA and court decisions establish general service and quality standards but allow states, districts, and schools to devise their own education policies and programs. Delegating authority to local school boards and classrooms is sometimes the best course of action, but doing so necessitates the drafting and implementing of explicit guidelines for supporting English language learners and students with other special needs. Again, for IDEA to be implemented completely and accurately, it must be simplified and reduced to terms that those in authoritative positions can comprehend. Teachers have a difficult time distinguishing whether ELLs have learning difficulties due to the fact that this responsibility appears to be neglected in favor of other crucial education issues.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors

The cultural diversity of ELL (English Language Learner) students poses both challenges and opportunities for teachers and educational institutions. ELL students have many valuable talents to share with their instructors. In addition to providing a new perspective and language skills, they expose educators to worldviews that would have been missing in education. Everyone has preconceived conceptions based on their own experiences regarding other cultures. It is not just teachers who struggle with this issue. If there are significant differences between the cultural contexts of students and teachers, cultural biases may make it difficult for teachers to comprehend their students' behavior, language acquisition, and academic achievement. All educational institutions in the United States exhibit this prejudice. The educational system is based on and designed with white cultural norms in mind. Hollie and Mora-Flores (2013) mention "subtractive schooling," a term coined by Angela Valenzuela to characterize the process of rejecting one's own culture. Subtractive schooling deprives students of valuable resources, increasing the risk of academic failure and discouraging cultural identity (Hollie & Mora-Flores, 2013).

The cultural diversity of ELL students poses both challenges and opportunities for teachers and educational institutions. Answering the question of the overrepresentation of ELLs who struggle with language is challenging. Socioeconomic and cultural factors both play a role (Klinger et al., 2006). Due to their lack of access to appropriate medical services, nutrition, and stable families, students from low socioeconomic status families or those living in poverty may be at risk for cognitive difficulties (González 2001). Schools that serve low-income communities,

which often contain higher numbers of ELL students, frequently hire teachers with the fewest credentials and the least experience. As a result, the opportunities available to students and the quality of their education may suffer. The survey also revealed that lower-educated single parents were more prevalent in low socioeconomic households. This may make it more difficult for them to offer their offspring the same educational opportunities as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (González, 2001). This factor may also influence a parent's involvement with their child's daily academics.

Nondiscriminatory evaluation is essential for identifying and supporting ELLs with LDs. Evaluation that does not discriminate should only look for the existence of a disability while still taking into account any relevant cultural or language constraints. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that students are not eligible for special education services based on their culture, socioeconomic status, school environment, or native language (DeMatthews et al., 2014). This requirement ensures that all aspects, such as methods and data, of the nondiscriminatory evaluation (as promised) are accurate. This requires that they are not only prejudice-free but also sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity. Evaluation of English language learners must rely on nondiscriminatory assessment. As we have established, many ELLs are recent immigrants from countries with vastly distinct languages and cultures. This increases the likelihood that they will be incorrectly identified as requiring special education services. This researcher will now transition from dissecting the reasons behind misidentifying ELLs with LDs to looking toward the comprehensive solutions aimed at preventing these potentially detrimental misidentifications.

Solutions to Prevent Misidentification

In education, ensuring accurate identification and support for students is crucial. Misidentification of students, particularly those with diverse learning needs, can hinder their academic progress and overall well-being. This section looks for comprehensive solutions to prevent misidentification. It includes assessment strategies, teacher training initiatives, effective communication with families, and implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks.

Assessment Solutions

Assessing the academic abilities of English language learners (ELLs) presents a complex and challenging task for educators and policymakers alike. ELLs, students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of acquiring English proficiency, often face assessment processes that may not accurately represent their true academic capabilities. This section uses strategies and guidelines for a more equitable and accurate evaluation.

Dynamic assessments and the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) are two alternative assessment methods that can better capture the abilities of ELLs. Standardized tests, often administered in English, have been criticized for potentially misdiagnosing ELLs as having learning disabilities and leading to inappropriate placements in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1994). To address this issue, dynamic assessments and the SOMPA provide two effective alternatives to traditional standardized tests. (Guiberson, 2009). Dynamic assessment is a way of testing how well a student can learn a new skill. First, the evaluator teaches the student something they need to improve (based on another test or a

sample of their language). Afterward, the evaluator helps the student by modifying activities and providing scaffolding supports, which allows educators to assess how much support the student needs to succeed. Next, the evaluator measures how much they learned and how well they can do the skill, which shows their learning potential and current level of ability (Lidz & Peña, 1996). Dynamic assessment offers numerous advantages, such as evaluating an individual's potential with appropriate support, identifying effective teaching strategies, maximizing their potential, gaining an improved understanding of their needs, and creating a comprehensive profile of strengths and difficulties, all of which guide individualized learning (Orellana et al., 2019). Additionally, the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) has been recognized as an assessment tool that can accurately diagnose minority students, including ELLs. SOMPA delves into various factors, including parental roles, community influences, classroom dynamics, and student behavior, offering a more holistic view of students' abilities (Baca & Cervantes, 1978).

Navigating the landscape of assessments for English language learners requires a nuanced understanding of the challenges they face and innovative solutions to ensure fair and accurate evaluations. This section explores various strategies and policy measures aimed at enhancing assessment procedures for ELLs, acknowledging the importance of language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and equitable evaluation practices.

Enhancing Assessment Procedures

Some states have implemented policies to ensure fair and valid assessments for ELLs. State policies concerning ELL assessments vary widely, and some states have taken steps to

address the challenges faced by ELLs. For instance, academic decisions cannot be influenced by English-language examinations that are translated or interpreted. (Scott et al., 2013). These policy measures aim to ensure that assessments are conducted in a manner that respects the linguistic diversity of ELLs.

Classroom observations are an important source of information for assessing ELLs' learning needs and opportunities. Classroom observations have been identified as crucial elements of the assessment process for ELLs. They provide valuable insights into the broader context of a student's learning environment, considering factors like classroom dynamics and teaching approaches (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). Additionally, classroom observations can reveal whether students have had equitable opportunities to learn in culturally responsive settings, helping educators make more informed decisions.

Culture-free and culture-fair tests are proposed as solutions to reduce cultural bias in assessments for ELLs. To mitigate potential cultural bias in assessments, using culture-free and culture-fair tests has been recommended (Park & Thomas, 2012). These tests were designed to minimize the influence of cultural, verbal, and educational factors on the test performance and to provide a fair assessment of cognitive abilities across different groups of people (Urbina, 2011). The culture-fair tests (CFT) consist of four different subtests that require inductive reasoning, which is the process of finding patterns, rules, or principles from a set of observations or data. Inductive reasoning is a complex cognitive skill that involves various mental processes, such as abstraction, generalization, analogy, and classification (Molnár, Greiff, & Csapó, 2013). Urbina (2011) states that some of the advantages of the CFT are that it is

relatively feasy to administer and score, that it has a large and diverse normative sample, and that it reduces the effects of language and cultural differences on test performance. However, some of the limitations of the CFT are that it may still be influenced by some environmental and experiential factors, such as spatial ability, visual perception, and test-taking strategies, that it may not capture the full range of cognitive abilities that contribute to intelligence, and that it may not be sensitive to the changes in fluid intelligence over the lifespan (Urbina, 2011).

A comprehensive assessment of ELLs requires multiple sources of data to accurately identify learning disabilities. Furthermore, the comprehensive assessment of ELLs should encompass multiple forms of data, both qualitative and quantitative, to determine the presence of learning disabilities. This multifaceted approach helps ensure a more accurate assessment of a student's needs, considering various aspects of their educational journey (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988).

Evaluating Language Proficiency and Policy Development

The evaluation of language proficiency plays a pivotal role in the assessment of ELLs. Assessing proficiency in both English and the native language is essential (Cole, 2014). Determining the most proficient language helps educators tap into the student's knowledge base and ensures that reading achievements and English language learning are efficient processes.

One of the challenges that educators face when working with ELLs is finding the most appropriate language of instruction and educational placement for them, especially if they have special needs. Cole (2014) stated that investigating the language of instruction and educational

placement is particularly important when considering special education services for ELLs. Students who receive bilingual instruction in both English and their native language often demonstrate higher proficiencies in both languages, especially if instruction begins with a strong emphasis on the child's native language (Cole, 2014).

One of the solutions that researchers propose for improving the identification and education of ELLs with LDs is to implement clear policy guidelines and data-tracking systems. Clear policy guidelines are essential to address the challenges of identifying ELLs with LDs and to ensure effective collaboration between special education and ELL educators (Sánchez et al., 2010). Furthermore, data-tracking systems should be established to identify ELL students with LDs and support decision-making processes. These systems should link data related to English language learner education and special education, facilitating better coordination and informed decision-making (Keller-Allen, 2006).

In conclusion, assessing the academic abilities of English language learners is a multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of language proficiency, cultural factors, and equitable evaluation practices. By implementing strategies such as dynamic assessments, culture-fair tests, comprehensive data collection, and family involvement, educators and policymakers can work together to ensure that ELLs receive fair and accurate assessments, preventing misdiagnosis and inappropriate special education placements. Clear policy guidelines and data-tracking systems further strengthen the assessment process, leading to more informed decisions and improved outcomes for ELLs in the education system.

Teacher Training

Teacher training is pivotal in providing educators with diverse skills to navigate today's classrooms effectively. This section explores key elements, including teacher preparation, professional development, strategies for teaching diverse learners, and the importance of collaboration. This examination emphasizes the comprehensive approach required for an inclusive and effective learning environment, from language proficiency to cultural responsiveness and personalized accommodations to interdepartmental collaboration.

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation serves as the cornerstone of equitable education. Artiles and Trent (1994) underscore the importance of equipping educators with a diverse set of skills to employ various instructional approaches, including technology integration. This comprehensive training empowers teachers to adapt their instruction to cater to the diverse needs of their students, with a particular focus on ELLs and those with learning disabilities. One critical facet of teacher preparation, as advocated by Klinger, Thompson, and Rodriguez(2014), is ensuring that teachers are proficient in providing explicit instruction in the target language, English, through adult and peer modeling. Furthermore, teachers need to learn how to effectively implement accommodations such as extending time for tasks, clarifying complex directions, offering visual support, recording reading assignments, providing peer tutoring, and breaking down lengthy lectures into manageable segments.

Professional Development

Professional development emerges as a linchpin in addressing the diverse characteristics and needs of ELLs. Ortiz and Yates (2001) stress the importance of providing educators with in-depth training on various crucial aspects, including language acquisition, assessing both native and second languages, understanding socioeconomic and cultural influences, delivering effective instruction for native and second languages, and fostering collaboration with families of ELLs. Moreover, assessment personnel should receive targeted professional development on selecting appropriate assessment instruments, making modifications to standardized tests, and interpreting results in the context of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners with Disabilities

Effectively teaching ELLs with disabilities demands thoughtful methods. Rodríguez et al. (2014) highlight the significance of selecting the appropriate language of instruction. This decision should be guided by questions regarding a student's native language, English proficiency level, and the availability of instructional resources. Culturally responsive practices are also essential (Ladson-Billings, 2014), as they help teachers understand and positively respond to culturally diverse behaviors, fostering an inclusive classroom environment.

Teacher Collaboration

Effective collaboration among educators, including both general and special education teachers, is instrumental in achieving equitable education. Guiberson (2009) emphasizes the substantial benefits of collaboration before resorting to special education assessments. Special educators can closely observe and assess students within the general education environment,

gaining valuable insights into their responsiveness, teaching needs, and areas requiring additional support. This collaborative approach ensures that students receive targeted assistance without premature placement in special education programs. Also, interdepartmental collaboration is essential for comprehensively addressing the diverse needs of students. General and bilingual educators, along with special education professionals, should engage in collaborative efforts to discuss challenges, assess students' needs, and develop evidence-based support programs. This collaborative endeavor ensures a continuum of support across various instructional settings (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002).

Communicating with Families

Effective communication with families stands as a cornerstone in understanding and supporting the diverse needs of students, especially those with learning disabilities and varying linguistic backgrounds. This section delves into essential strategies for fostering meaningful connections between educators and parents or caregivers. Much like teacher training, where diverse skills are pivotal, this exploration addresses the importance of conducting in-depth parent/caregiver interviews, engaging parents in the educational process, and establishing robust home-school partnerships. From understanding developmental milestones to bridging cultural gaps, this examination highlights the comprehensive approach necessary for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

In-Depth Parent/Caregiver Interviews

Conducting comprehensive parent/caregiver interviews stands as a foundational step in comprehending a child's linguistic history and developmental background. These interviews, as

emphasized by the National Association for Bilingual Education and ILIAD Project (2002), offer educational evaluators and educators essential insights into a child's developmental milestones. Milestones such as these encompass critical details such as the age of first steps, first words, and initial sentence production. Moreover, the interviews shed light on the child's current language abilities, native language proficiency, family language dynamics, exposure to English, literacy behaviors, emotional indicators, and family history.

Parent Involvement

Parents play a crucial role in the identification and education of children with learning disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 underlines the indispensable role of parents in the evaluation, program placement, and reevaluation of children with learning disabilities. Parents serve as invaluable sources of functional, developmental, cultural, and linguistic information (Park & Thomas, 2012). Engaging parents enables educators to gain insights that may remain beyond reach through other means. These insights encompass the child's prior schooling experiences, family medical history, immigration journey, and acculturation process.

However, involving parents, particularly those who have emigrated from non-English-speaking countries and may not speak English, presents challenges. Researchers highlight logistical barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of consistent translation services as potential obstacles (National Association for Bilingual Education & ILIAD Project, 2002). Klingner and Harry (2006) also note instances of negativity from educators toward parents. Despite these

challenges, parent involvement remains paramount in understanding a student's holistic learning context.

Home-School Partnerships

The establishment of robust home-school partnerships further elevates the cause of educational equity. Bal et al. (2014) emphasize the significance of recruiting culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholders as advocates within the community. These advocates play a pivotal role in bridging the gap in culturally defined expectations and norms between teachers and students. By leveraging the concept of funds of knowledge, educators can tap into the wealth of knowledge that students have gained from their communities and home environments (Moll et al., 1992). This approach capitalizes on students' cultural backgrounds, making learning more relevant and effective.

Response to Intervention

Prevention and early intervention form the bedrock of an equitable education system. Ortiz and Yates (2001) underscore their significance, pointing out that these strategies are not only cost-effective but also essential for avoiding the misclassification of students who do not have disabilities. Effective early intervention, as articulated by Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, and Lee (2014), demands the delivery of intense supplementary instructional services at an early stage to empower students to thrive in a general education classroom. This approach necessitates teachers to conduct comprehensive assessments of students' academic performance, identify knowledge gaps, and tailor instruction to precisely address these gaps.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an effective framework for supporting students with diverse academic needs. Gersten et al. (2008) stated that RTI is a widely adopted educational framework designed to provide timely and targeted support to students who may be struggling academically. RTI is an educational approach that seeks to prevent learning difficulties by intervening early and systematically. Its core principle is to identify struggling students, provide them with tailored interventions, and monitor their progress over time (Gersten et al., 2008). One of the main components of Response to Intervention (RTI) is the use of multiple tiers of instruction and intervention. RTI is often associated with three key tiers, explained by Gersten et al. (2008) as follows:

- Tier 1 - Universal Instruction: In the first tier, all students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction. Educators use formative assessments to identify students who may require additional support.
- Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention: Students who do not respond adequately to universal instruction move to the second tier. Here, they receive more focused interventions, often in small groups, to address specific skill deficits.
- Tier 3 - Intensive Intervention: The third tier is for students who continue to struggle despite Tier 2 interventions. They receive individualized, intensive support to address their unique needs.

By using this tiered approach, RTI aims to provide timely and appropriate support to students with diverse academic needs. RTI provides a systematic and data-driven approach to support students who may be struggling academically in general education settings. Rueda and

Windmueller (2006) state that Response to Intervention (RTI) typically operates within general education settings, with the classroom teacher playing a pivotal role in administering the first level of intervention. Approximately 80% of the class achieves the expected norm through this initial intervention. After evaluation, a second intervention is applied to propel an additional 15% of students toward successful achievement. This may involve strategies like peer tutoring, small group work, or personalized interventions. Finally, about 5% of the class is assessed for pre-referral to special education due to a persistent and significant achievement gap (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). When the students' responses to the first two interventions do not suffice to reach the required standard, further measures are instituted. Eligible students may be offered special education services, leading to the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to address specific issues while maintaining them within the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Educators need to be aware of the potential biases that may affect the measurement of each student's response to intervention when implementing RTI, especially for ELLs. Measuring each student's response to intervention offers a beneficial means of determining their educational needs. However, this process introduces potential biases stemming from teacher expectations or lack of professional development in language acquisition skills (Zetlin et al., 2010). Given the significant number of ELLs in public schools today, greater emphasis is required on enhancing these skills to circumvent such issues.

Multilevel assessment and monitoring procedures are essential for identifying and supporting ELLs with learning difficulties. Johnson et al. (2015) state that recent findings suggest that assessing and monitoring procedures can be enhanced to maximize equity,

efficacy, and efficiency in identifying learning difficulties in ELLs. These approaches involve a multilevel focus encompassing individual cognition and motivation, social interaction, and environmental factors. Institutional and community ideals should align to address local needs, necessitating clear policies and substantial professional development (Johnson et al., 2015).

Educators need to consider instructional strategies when teaching English Language Learners to help them learn English and academic content. The National Research Council (2002) outlines instructional guidelines for effectively teaching English Language Learners, emphasizing strategies such as building vocabulary, using visuals to reinforce concepts, scaffolding learning through peer tutoring and cooperative learning, strategizing the use of the student's first language, and managing cognitive and language demands to prevent overloading the student.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

In conclusion, exploring the reasons for the misidentification of English language learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LDs) and the corresponding solutions to prevent misidentification has illuminated a multifaceted and crucial aspect of the educational landscape. This research has delved into the complex web of factors that contribute to the misidentification of students who require specialized support. The implications of this misidentification are far-reaching, as they can have lasting effects on students' academic and emotional well-being, not to mention the potential for long-term consequences in their educational trajectories.

The first major reason for the misidentification of ELLs with LDs revolves around language barriers and the challenges they present. The intricacies of second language acquisition are often misunderstood or overlooked in the assessment process. The use of standardized assessments designed for native English speakers fails to account for the unique linguistic characteristics of English language learners. These tests might not accurately gauge their abilities, potentially leading to an inaccurate diagnosis. Moreover, the linguistic and cultural biases present in these standardized tests can further exacerbate the problem, perpetuating the misidentification cycle.

Cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity to this issue. The cultural backgrounds of English language learners often differ significantly from the dominant culture within the educational system. This cultural divide can result in misunderstandings and

misinterpretations of students' behaviors and learning styles, leading to the misidentification of learning disabilities. Therefore, it is paramount that educators and professionals working with English language learners become more culturally competent, which involves understanding and appreciating the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students.

Furthermore, inadequate teacher training in the nuances of working with English language learners plays a significant role in the misidentification of learning disabilities. Many educators may lack the necessary training to distinguish between language acquisition difficulties and actual learning disabilities effectively. This knowledge gap can lead to the misattribution of learning challenges, potentially stigmatizing students and hindering their access to the appropriate support and resources they need.

The urgent need for early intervention is another pivotal aspect highlighted in the research. Early intervention can significantly impact the long-term academic success of ELLs with LDs. Delayed identification and intervention can cause students to fall behind, making it even more challenging to catch up to their peers. Therefore, identifying students' needs as early as possible and providing the necessary support is essential to prevent misidentification and offer a path to success.

In response to these complex challenges, the research has identified actionable strategies to mitigate misidentification and enhance the identification process. These solutions are diverse, reflecting the complicated nature of the problem itself. Prioritizing cultural competence among educators is a fundamental step toward improving the identification process. Developing cultural competence ensures that educators understand the unique

backgrounds and experiences of English language learners and can adjust their teaching methods accordingly.

Implementing screening and assessment protocols specifically designed for English language learners is essential. These protocols should account for linguistic and cultural diversity, reducing the risk of misdiagnosis. They should be culturally responsive and avoid linguistic biases, providing a more accurate representation of students' abilities.

Actively involving parents and the community in the educational journey is a critical aspect of preventing misidentification. Parents can provide valuable insights into their child's development and help educators understand any cultural or linguistic factors that may influence their child's learning. Community involvement can also provide additional support and resources.

Teacher training plays a pivotal role in addressing this issue. Educators must receive training not only in their specific subject matter but also in second language acquisition and multicultural education. This comprehensive training equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to differentiate between language acquisition issues and actual learning disabilities.

Fostering collaboration among professionals within the education system, including teachers, counselors, and specialists, is essential. By working together and sharing information, educators can create a more holistic understanding of each student's unique challenges and needs. This collaborative approach ensures that students receive comprehensive support.

Furthermore, developing strategies tailored to the unique needs of each student is crucial. Recognizing that one-size-fits-all solutions do not work, educators should customize

their approach based on each student's specific challenges and strengths. This personalized approach can lead to more accurate identification and more effective support.

As educators and stakeholders in the field of education, we are poised to apply the insights from this research to improve our own practices. It is our responsibility to take this knowledge and implement it within our schools and classrooms, providing more effective and equitable support to ELLs with LDs. This is not only an academic endeavor but a moral one, as it directly impacts the well-being and future opportunities of these students.

Furthermore, we have the power to influence broader changes in education. By advocating for the adoption of evidence-based strategies, the development of culturally responsive curricula, and policies that promote inclusive education, we can create a more supportive and equitable educational system. This research provides a strong foundation upon which we can build these positive changes, enhancing the educational experiences of all students, regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In addressing the research questions concerning the reasons for misidentification and the prevention of misidentification among ELLs with LDs, we have embarked on a journey to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This research not only enhances our understanding but also provides a roadmap for fostering positive change within the education system. Ultimately, our collective commitment to implementing these solutions will lead to better outcomes for our students, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to thrive in their educational journey. We must seize this opportunity to create a brighter and more equitable future for all students.

Limitations of the Research

The literature review on the misidentification of ELLs with LDs offers a comprehensive exploration of the issue and proposes actionable solutions. However, it is essential to recognize several limitations to ensure a nuanced understanding of the research findings. One significant challenge is the difficulty in generalizing conclusions due to the diverse methodologies used in the reviewed studies. Variations in participant demographics, assessment tools, and cultural considerations across sources limit the applicability of findings to specific contexts.

Furthermore, the review relies on existing research, potentially leaving gaps in understanding the misidentification issue. Some aspects may not have been thoroughly explored or documented, highlighting the need for further investigation. While the review touches on cultural competence, it falls short of a deep exploration of specific cultural and linguistic factors contributing to misidentification, which could enhance understanding and guide targeted interventions.

The discussion on inadequate teacher training suggests a knowledge gap without detailing specific shortcomings or proposing comprehensive solutions. A more in-depth examination of the specific training needs of educators and potential barriers to meeting those needs would strengthen the review. Although various strategies are suggested to mitigate misidentification, the review lacks empirical evidence or examples of successful implementation, crucial for assessing the practical applicability of the recommendations.

Temporal constraints may limit the review's coverage of recent studies or developments in the field. Educational practices and policies evolve, and the review might not capture the

latest insights or interventions. Additionally, while emphasizing the importance of involving parents and the community, the review does not address potential challenges or barriers to meaningful collaboration, hindering the feasibility of proposed solutions.

The term "English language learners" encompasses a heterogeneous group with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the literature review may not adequately account for this diversity. This oversight could lead to neglecting specific challenges faced by subgroups within the broader category of English language learners. Furthermore, the review encourages educators to apply insights but does not discuss potential barriers to implementing proposed changes in educational practices, which is crucial for successful adoption and sustained improvement.

Ethical considerations related to obtaining informed consent in the presence of language barriers and cultural sensitivities are briefly mentioned, but a more in-depth discussion of these ethical challenges and potential solutions is warranted to strengthen the ethical foundation of proposed interventions. By acknowledging these limitations, future research can build upon this foundation to address specific gaps and enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing the misidentification of ELLs with LDs.

Implications for Future Research

Future research in the field should adopt a context-specific approach to investigations, aiming to overcome the generalization challenge identified in the literature review. By focusing on particular educational settings, demographics, or cultural contexts, researchers can provide

more targeted insights into the misidentification of ELLs with LDs. This approach allows a more nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to misidentification in specific scenarios.

A critical aspect of future research involves actively addressing existing gaps in the understanding of the misidentification issue. Researchers should initiate studies to explore underrepresented aspects of misidentification or areas where the literature is insufficiently developed. This comprehensive approach will contribute to building a more thorough and accurate understanding of the complexities surrounding the misidentification of English language learners.

To enhance the depth of understanding, researchers should conduct in-depth explorations into specific cultural and linguistic factors contributing to misidentification. This in-depth examination can uncover unique challenges faced by diverse groups of English language learners, providing valuable insights for the development of interventions that consider the cultural and linguistic diversity within the student population.

A crucial focus of future research should be a comprehensive assessment of teacher training needs related to the misidentification issue. Delving deeper into the nuances of teacher training, including identifying specific shortcomings and proposing comprehensive solutions, will contribute to the professional development of educators. This, in turn, enhances their ability to address diverse learning needs and reduce the likelihood of misidentification.

To strengthen the practical applicability of recommendations, researchers should prioritize empirical studies assessing the real-world effectiveness of proposed solutions. Incorporating case studies, longitudinal research, or experimental designs can provide tangible

evidence of successful implementation, ensuring that the recommended strategies are feasible and impactful in educational settings.

Recognizing the dynamic nature of educational practices and policies, future research should aim to stay current with the latest studies and developments in the field. This will ensure that recommendations remain relevant and aligned with evolving educational landscapes, contributing to the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions.

To enhance the feasibility of involving parents and the community, future research should investigate and address potential challenges or barriers. Exploring strategies for effective collaboration and considering diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the community will contribute to meaningful and sustainable partnerships between schools and families.

Acknowledging the heterogeneity within the category of English language learners is essential. Researchers should adopt a more nuanced approach, conducting subgroup-specific studies to provide insights into the unique challenges faced by different linguistic and cultural groups. This approach allows for the development of more targeted interventions that address the specific needs of various English language learner subgroups.

Identification and mitigation of implementation barriers should be a priority in future research. Understanding these barriers and developing strategies to overcome them is essential for the successful adoption and sustained improvement of proposed changes in educational practices, ensuring that interventions are effectively implemented in real-world settings.

Lastly, researchers should conduct a more in-depth exploration of ethical considerations related to obtaining informed consent in the presence of language barriers and cultural sensitivities. Developing clear guidelines and ethical frameworks will strengthen the foundation of interventions aimed at preventing misidentification, ensuring that ethical standards are upheld throughout the research process.

Implications for Professional Application

As educators, the commitment to the academic and personal growth of students, including ELLs with LDs, is unwavering. However, the challenges of identifying and supporting these students have often been complex, leading to misidentification and potential educational disparities. The research presented in this thesis sheds light on both the reasons behind the misidentification of ELLs with LDs and the strategies to prevent it. As the exploration delves into the implications for professional application, consideration must be given not only to how this research applies to individual practices but also to how it can catalyze improvements across the field of education.

For the educator, this research provides a deeper understanding of the critical issues surrounding the misidentification of ELLs with LDs. It underscores the importance of cultural competence and the need to differentiate between language barriers and actual learning disabilities. To improve practice, a commitment will be made to prioritize ongoing professional development in these areas. Training will be sought that enhances the ability to recognize the signs of potential learning disabilities in English language learners, ensuring they receive the support they need in a timely manner. Additionally, efforts will be made to strengthen

relationships with families and communities, recognizing their pivotal role in the identification and support process. This research reinforces the commitment to personalized education, emphasizing the importance of individualized education plans (IEPs) and data-driven decision-making. Advocacy will be undertaken for the adoption of research-based screening and assessment protocols in the school and active participation in the development and monitoring of IEPs for students.

Moreover, the insights from this research challenge the educator to be a more informed proponent of policy changes at the local, state, and national levels. By joining professional networks and engaging with organizations that share the goal of inclusive education, contributions can be made to the creation of a more supportive and equitable educational environment. As a result, not only will the educator become a more effective educator but also a more active and influential member of the education community, striving for positive change in policies and practices.

Beyond the personal commitment, the findings of this research offer valuable lessons for the broader field of education. It underscores the necessity of reforming teacher training and professional development programs to equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to address the needs of ELLs with LDs. As a profession, a collective effort must be made to prioritize the development of culturally competent educators who can identify and differentiate between language barriers and learning disabilities, ultimately preventing misidentification.

Collaboration among professionals from various disciplines should be encouraged to create a holistic understanding of each student's unique needs. A strong emphasis should be placed on the development and implementation of individualized education plans (IEPs) that take into account the linguistic and cultural aspects of English language learners. Data-driven decision-making should be the cornerstone of educational practices, ensuring that informed choices are made about student placement and support services. Furthermore, the engagement of parents and caregivers should be actively encouraged, promoting trust and open communication between educational institutions and diverse communities.

Advocacy for policies that support inclusive education and equitable access to support services should be a collective endeavor among educators, administrators, and policymakers. By actively participating in professional networks and resources, educators can stay informed and apply the latest research and best practices in their classrooms.

In conclusion, the research presented in this thesis not only offers practical insights for personal application but also provides a roadmap for systemic improvements in education. By embracing these implications, educators can collectively work towards a more inclusive and equitable education system, ensuring that ELLs with LDs receive the support and opportunities they need to thrive. Educators are not only responsible for the education of students but also for shaping the future of educational systems, making them more responsive to the diverse needs of all learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the reasons for the misidentification of ELLs with LDs and the corresponding solutions to prevent misidentification has illuminated a multifaceted and crucial aspect of the educational landscape. Through this research, complexities arising from factors such as language barriers, cultural diversity, inadequate teacher training, and the urgent need for early intervention have been uncovered, all contributing to the misidentification of students in need of specialized support.

Equally important, actionable strategies to mitigate misidentification and enhance the identification process have been identified. These solutions include prioritizing cultural competence, implementing culture-free screening and dynamic assessments, active parent and community involvement, teacher training, early intervention, fostering collaboration among professionals, and developing strategies tailored to the unique needs of each student.

As educators and stakeholders in the field of education, individuals can apply the insights from this research to improve their practices, providing more effective and equitable support to ELLs with LDs. Furthermore, educators have the power to influence broader changes in education, advocating for the adoption of evidence-based strategies, the development of culturally responsive curricula, and policies that promote inclusive education.

In addressing the research questions concerning the reasons for misidentification and the prevention of misidentification among ELLs with LDs, a path has been embarked upon to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This research not only enhances understanding but also provides a roadmap for fostering positive change within the

education system. Ultimately, the collective commitment to implementing these solutions will lead to better outcomes for students, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to thrive in their educational experience.

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