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## Accommodations for English Language Learners on Statewide English Language Proficiency Assessment

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This exploratory research study was conducted to examine federally-mandated annual English language proficiency (ELP) assessment of English language learners (ELLs) and their use of accommodations on the assessment. The literature was examined for differences and similarities between the three types of testing scenarios as well as identifying gaps in the literature for students who are both ELLs and who also have a disability and how their ELP is assessed, taking into account their disability. The results from investigating data related to ELLs with disabilities and specific accommodations used by ELLs with disabilities contributes to the limited current research available regarding this subgroup as well as how the annual ELP assessment mandate is actuated at the state, district, and classroom levels. The researchers used one state's existing quantitative ELP assessment data to examine types of accommodations for ELLs with disabilities on the statewide ELP assessment and then explored potential relationships between specific disabilities and accommodations used. The researchers investigated factors that contribute to the relationships between disabilities, accommodations, and performance on the ELP assessment through qualitative data from interviews with state, district, and school level personnel to further expand on results from the quantitative ELP assessment data.

*Keywords:* English language learners, disability, assessment, accommodations.

### **Background**

English language learners (ELLs) make up 9% of the Kindergarten-Grade 12 student population in the United States (Zehr, 2009). Between the years 2000 and 2005, the

ELL enrollment increased by 18% and in the 2005-2006 school year over 4.5 million ELLs were enrolled in U.S. public schools (Zehr, 2009). There are over 100 different languages spoken natively by ELLs in U.S.

public schools and along with different languages comes new cultural backgrounds and diversity (Kindler, 2002; Zehr, 2009). Many families of ELLs are socioeconomically disadvantaged by parental education, employment, and poverty status and these disadvantages may put many ELLs at risk academically.

Policies from the federal government are in place to target English Language Proficiency (ELP) and promote academic achievement among all ELLs. The most significant policy in education for ELLs is Title III. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Title III Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students is a federal program that assists immigrant and limited English proficient (LEP) students.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the LEP Title III Program is to assist school districts in teaching English to students with limited English proficiency. Additionally, the Title III funds are to be used in helping these students meet the same challenging state standards required of all students (NCLB, 2001). Under Title III of the NCLB Act of 2001, states have two major responsibilities for the development and measurement of ELP among ELLs. Specifically, states must implement ELP standards and monitor programs to help ELLs acquire ELP at a sufficient level to learn content material such as mathematics and science; or stated another way, ELP should not be a barrier to ELLs' learning content material (NCLB, 2001). Also, states are required to assess the ELP of ELLs with tests that yield valid and reliable scores (NCLB, 2001).

With regard to the state standards and assessments, Title III requires state education agencies (SEAs) to develop ELP standards aligned with content area standards. Supported by SEAs, local education agencies

(LEAs) must provide equitable Title III services to students identified as limited English proficient. LEP is the term used in the legislation referring to ELLs receiving services for English language acquisition. SEAs must provide an annual assessment of ELP for all students in the state in grades K-12 in the domains of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and comprehension. State education agencies are required by Title III under NCLB to set Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) that relate to ELLs' progress in attaining ELP (AMAO 1), attainment of ELP (AMAO 2), and achievement in the content areas (AMAO 3) as a way to track student and school district-level achievement under Title III. Yet, few states have been able to validate their current ELP assessment or accountability system because of validity issues in assessing ELLs' ELP (Wolf, Farnsworth, & Herman, 2008; Wolf, Griffin et al., 2008). Considering the significant role of assessments in guiding decisions about accountability of states, districts, and schools as well as decisions for individual students, it is critical that more states are able to provide a validity argument for their assessment systems of ELP.

Among the 4.5 million children in the nation who are ELLs, 9% are ELLs with disabilities (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Pendzick, & Stephenson, 2003). Passing or failing the statewide annual assessment of ELP is directly linked to Title III funding states receive (NCLB, 2001). Considering 9% of ELLs have disabilities (all types of disabilities are included), how are SEAs handling the assessment of ELLs who have disabilities which can prohibit their participation in all or any one of the domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening? The focus of this study was on types of accommodations provided for ELLs with disabilities in statewide ELP tests and the relationship between accommodations and ELLs' achievement in ELP tests.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "ELL" is used instead of LEP throughout this manuscript due to current conventions ...

### **Accommodations for ELLs With Disabilities**

Some states are providing accommodations when possible and some are not; some states borrow the list of allowable accommodations for their statewide assessments of content areas and apply it to the statewide ELP assessment (Albus & Thurlow, 2008). Testing accommodations are commonly defined as a change in the way that a test is administered or responded to by the person being tested and are intended to offset or correct for distortions in scores caused by a disability (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997). Accommodations can be grouped into four categories: setting accommodations (e.g., separate room, small group administration, provisions of special furniture, etc.); scheduling accommodations (e.g., additional time, provision of frequent breaks, completion of a section per day, etc.); testing materials accommodations (e.g., large-print version, Braille version, etc.); and test procedures accommodations/modifications (e.g., directions read aloud, repetition or clarification of directions, answers marked in test booklet, etc.) (Christiansen, Lazarus, Crone, & Thurlow, 2008). Some states give control to the LEAs and let the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) drive what accommodations should be provided for the ELP assessment (Albus & Thurlow, 2008). Accommodations research has chiefly been directed to either student with disabilities (Bolt & Thurlow, 2004; Johnstone, Altman, Thurlow, & Thompson, 2006), or ELLs (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004; Kieffer, Lesaux, Rivera, & Francis, 2009), but rarely for students who are included in both subgroups. ELLs with disabilities are assessed by both statewide ELP assessments and statewide content area assessments. Although groundwork has been laid for each population separately in assessment, research specifically on accommodations for ELLs with disabilities is needed for fair and

appropriate assessment, which is the focus of this study.

Some ELLs have disabilities that require special consideration when taking the federally-mandated statewide ELP assessment. The IEP team makes the decisions about how these students participate in the ELP assessment and documents their decisions in the IEP. There are particular regulations to which IEP teams must adhere, based on state specific policies and guidelines. Ideally, accommodations are intended to “level the playing field” for particular domains for some ELLs with disabilities. For some ELLs, accommodations cannot function as they are supposed to because the domain to be measured (reading, writing, speaking, or listening) does not exist or is fundamentally different for them. For example, ELLs who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be able to listen as required in the listening component of the ELP assessment. American sign language cannot be substituted for oral English because it is an entirely different language and the law requires that states measure listening in English. Likewise, students who are physically unable to produce speech never can demonstrate speaking skills. Other forms of expressive communication, such as writing, cannot be substituted for speaking. For some ELLs with special needs, accommodations are ineffectual. Overall, this poses a critical issue for ELLs with disabilities and the programs that serve them. Exit from language support services, which must include ELP assessment scores, is impossible because these students are not able to demonstrate ELP as it is defined in the law. As explained previously, scores in each of the domains on the ELP assessment are required. Until the law is updated with these issues in mind, states must continue to find ways to assess this specific group of students or, unfortunately, these students receive scores of zero on particular domains of the ELP assessment.

It is a legal requirement that students must receive accommodations on assessments specified in the IEP. This requirement is in place so that students with disabilities can access test content. Just as students with disabilities are provided with accommodations to access assessments, some ELLs use accommodations to access assessments as well. Examples of accommodations for ELLs include extra time, a bilingual dictionary, and a test with simplified English. It is important for ELLs to be provided with necessary accommodations on assessments so that language is not a barrier to the tested content. For ELLs with disabilities whose IEP requires them to receive specific accommodations, it is legally binding that the accommodations be provided on all specified assessments, including ELP assessments.

For those students who are provided with accommodations to access the assessment, the body of research on appropriate accommodations for ELLs with specific disabilities is limited (Albus & Thurlow, 2005). Based on a critical review of the literature, this topic is limited to ELL populations with specific disabilities from a particular native language group, who have a specific disability, or who use of a specific accommodation. No research has been published that reflects student-level data across school districts or statewide data for ELLs' use of specific accommodations according to disability or level of achievement on the assessment.

Currently, the majority of research on assessment for ELLs focuses on content area assessment or ELP assessment (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Hejri, 2004; Abedi et al., 2004; Albus & Thurlow, 2008; Bolt & Thurlow, 2004; Kieffer et al., 2009; Wolf, Farnsworth et al., 2008). Some of that research specifically examines accommodations for ELLs on content area assessments (Abedi, Hofstetter, Baker, & Lord, 2001; Albus,

Thurlow, Liu, & Bielinski, 2005; Kopriva, Emick, Hipolito-Delgado, & Cameron, 2007; Rivera & Stansfield, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ELLs with specific disabilities are participating in and/or gaining access to a federally-mandated statewide ELP assessment and the relationships that exist between specific disabilities and use of particular accommodations. This study further examined the relationship between accommodations provided and ELLs' achievements in ELP tests.

There are two sources of literature on accommodations for ELLs with disabilities on ELP assessments that are applicable to the research presented here. One article involved universal design considerations based on 33 experts' opinions from the fields of ESL, Special Education, and Assessments. Based on two rounds of ratings, *concise and readable text* had the greatest relevance on ELP assessment (Liu & Anderson, 2008). The other source involved patterns and variations across the nation of what accommodations states allow for ELLs with disabilities on annual statewide federally-mandated ELP assessments. Results showed half of the states nationwide use the students' IEP, 504 plan, or a decision from the ELP team. Of utmost importance, results showed that ELP assessments are limited in their construction and accommodations may not level the playing field for particular domains (Albus & Thurlow, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What accommodations are used for ELLs with disabilities in statewide ELP assessments?
2. Is there a relationship between the disability category and the accommodations provided to ELLs with disabilities? If so,

what are the factors contributing to the relationship?

3. Is there a relationship between the accommodations provided to ELLs with disabilities and their achievements on ELP tests? If so, what are the factors contributing to the relationship?

4. What are perceptions that exist on accommodations on annual ELP assessments for the specific population of ELLs with disabilities among state, district, and classroom level educational professionals?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding the current study was derived from the systems theory that emphasized independent relationships between and among

multifaceted factors across varied levels. The relationship that reflects the context, content, and focus of the study is depicted in Figure 1. The outer circles represent the context: administrators at state and district levels, implementers at school and classroom levels. The focus is represented by the three squares in the inner cluster: ELLs, disability categories and accommodations. The circle in the inner cluster represents the authors’ intent to funnel down to the content of the study which is influenced by the three areas of focus represented by the squares. The inner circle assesses content of the study: participation of ELLs with disabilities on statewide ELP assessments. The design of the study reflects the cyclical nature of education policy. The underlying theoretical,

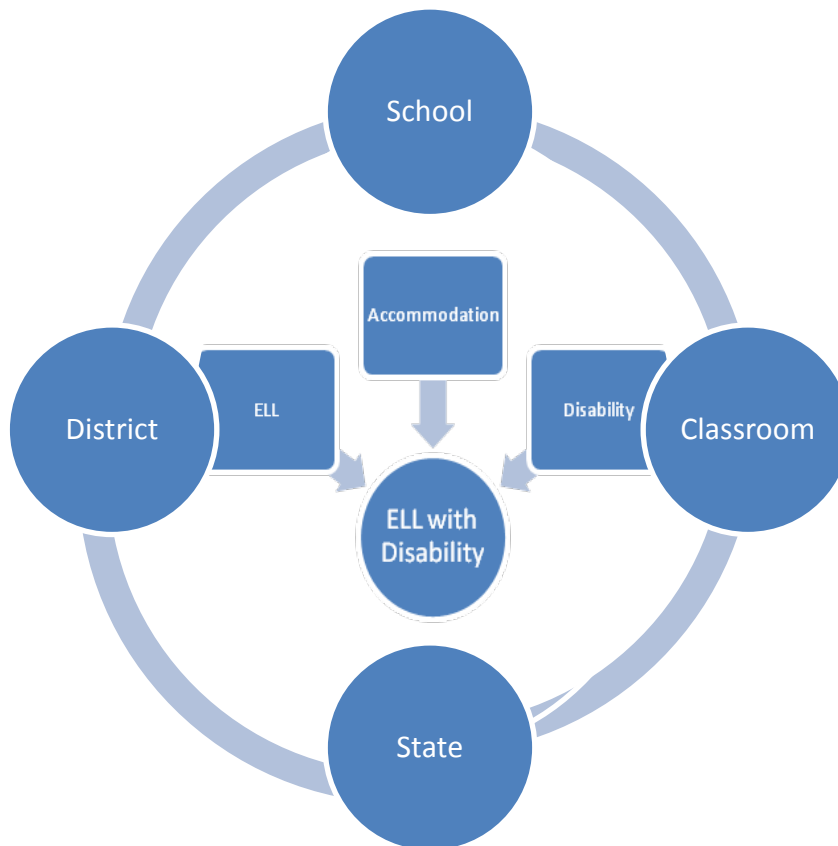


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

framework is education as a system and the ways in which policy impacts the state district, and classroom and each of these layers also affect policy in return.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants and Settings**

This study involved existing quantitative data from central East Coast states in the United States, originally collected from students' participation on the federally-mandated statewide ELP assessment. A total of 52,517 ELL students from K-12 were included in the quantitative dataset as participants with their ELP scores and demographic information. Additional participants in this study included nine professionals who were administrators or ESL teachers interviewed by the first author with semistructured interview questions. The interviewees were selected by their role and represented the "contexts" from the conceptual framework for the study. The interviewees represented state-level administrators from the state in which the qualitative data was used. The school/district-level administrators and teachers were selected from a district which was representative of the state's ELL population. For both the state and school administrators, 3 interviewees from the state and school district were selected based on their role (administrator of assessment, administrator of Special Education, and administrator of ELLs). Both teacher interviewees were teachers who had teaching and testing experience with ELLs with disabilities. The interviews were conducted onsite in administrative school offices or in teachers' classrooms from one public school in the state from which the data were collected.

#### **Research Design**

The research design for this study was nonexperimental, correlational study with mixed methods approach. The research study was exploratory in nature using extant quantitative data from the state and qualitative data collected by the researchers. Variables identified for the quantitative part of this study included the following: disability status code, types of accommodations, grade and overall scale score on the assessment.

#### **Measures**

The quantitative data used in this study were from the federally-mandated statewide ELP assessment in a central East Coast state, the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English Test (ACCESS) for ELLs, created by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium and produced by Metritech (2007). Qualitative data were collected through interviews with state, district, and school-level personnel. The researchers completed an analysis of the data specific to ELLs with disabilities and their use of specific accommodations using SPSS (a data set of over 50,000 ELLs) and by performing content analysis of qualitative data (total of nine transcribed interviews). The interview topics were focused on Title III and Special Education legal overlap and requirements, participation of ELLs with disabilities on the federally-mandated statewide ELP assessment, fidelity to the administration guidelines, accommodations to the assessment, and advice to consider for the reauthorization of Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (1997, 2004).

#### **Procedures and Data Analysis**

The first research question was addressed through descriptive statistics by examining types of accommodations and categories of disabilities. Accommodations

that were most often used by ELLs with particular disabilities were identified. The second research question was examined through chi square statistical analysis. The relationships between specific disabilities and accommodations provided for the assessment were examined. The researchers further investigated contributing factors to the relationships through analysis of the qualitative data collected from interviews. This analysis provided potential factors that contribute to relationships between ELLs with specific disabilities and accommodations. The third research question was addressed by conducting a univariate analysis of variance to examine the relationship between accommodations and ELLs' achievements on ELP assessment. The researchers analyzed qualitative interview data to further explore the contributing factors to a relationship between achievement on the assessment and use of accommodations. The fourth research question was addressed through data analysis of the qualitative interviews. Due to the small number of participants for the interviews, qualitative analysis was hand-coded and no qualitative software analysis program was used. Interviewees responses were coded based on key words in their responses related to each of the questions in the interview protocol. The coded responses were then grouped by topic of response and with other similar responses to each question which allowed for grouping of coded responses.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data the researchers used triangulation of the data and the methods along with participant feedback agreement to address research validity (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In terms of reliability, particularly for the qualitative data, the researchers involved an additional researcher. A researcher with qualitative research experience and content knowledge

reviewed 25% of the interviewer transcripts to ensure reliability of the transcriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). An additional researcher with qualitative research experience and content knowledge reviewed 25% of the coded transcripts to ensure reliability of the coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

## **Results**

### **Accommodations for ELLs With Disabilities in Statewide ELP Assessments**

Results for the first research question (accommodations used by ELLs with disabilities) provide descriptive statistics regarding ELLs with disabilities. Among the 11 total accommodations provided to ELLs with disabilities, 4 of them are the most frequently provided. These four types of accommodations include modified test directions (445), modified timing (367), other approved accommodation (333), and modified presentation format (220). The frequency of all accommodations provided ranged from 1 to 445. Of the 15 disability status codes that were represented, the 4 most common disability codes were learning disability (4,638), speech/language impairment (953), other health impairment (550), and emotional disturbance (223). See Table 1. The frequency of all disability status codes ranged from 1 to 4,638. For analysis purposes, the top four types of accommodations and the top four disability status codes were used. The fifth ranking accommodations and codes and beyond did not provide large enough numbers to demonstrate significance. Although the number of students who were coded as deaf, blind, or those with significant cognitive disability was too small to be entered for data analysis, it was noted in the qualitative data that some educators felt that current requirements for ELP assessment are not appropriate for students who are blind, deaf, or those with significant cognitive disability. Data show that accommodations for students



with these disabilities are not provided frequently.

### **Relationship Between the Disability Category and the Accommodations**

The results of the chi-square test show that modified presentation/format, modified timing/scheduling, and modified test directions each have a significant relationship with the disability status ( $P < .01$ ). Qualitative data from interviews support that

educators of ELLs agree that relationships exist between specific disability categories and types of accommodations provided. In fact, both teacher interviewees reported that some accommodations are good for ELLs with many different disabilities. However, four interviewees did concede that although they believe there are relationships between disability category and accommodations, there are challenges with knowing if the

Table 1

#### *Disability Status Codes*

<b>Disability status codes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Learning disability	4,638
Speech/language	953
Other health impairment	550
Emotional disturbance	223
<b>Accommodations</b>	<b>Total</b>
Modified directions	445
Modified timing	367
Other approved accommodation	333
Modified presentation	220

accommodation is for the disability or if it is given because of language issues and challenges with identifying disability from language learning. This concession is consistent with previous research (Barrera, 2008; Abedi, 2006, 2008).

### **Relationship Between the Accommodations and Achievements on ELP Tests**

In order to analyze whether there is a relationship between the accommodations provided to ELLs with disabilities and their achievements on the ELP test, the researchers conducted a factor analysis using univariate analysis of variance with the quantitative assessment dataset. The independent variables were disability status (of the highest four frequencies of disability categories: learning disabled, speech/language impairment, other health impairment, and emotional disturbance) and accommodation provided. The dependent variable was the composite scale score on the ELP test. Results suggest that there is no significant relationship between accommodations provided to ELLs with disabilities and their achievement on the ELP assessment ( $P > .05$ ). In fact, results show that students with disabilities who did not use accommodations on the assessment actually scored better than those who used accommodations across almost all the four disability status codes. There were two exceptions to these results in which students with the disability code of *other health impairment* scored slightly better with modified test directions than those without modified test directions and students with the disability code of *emotional disturbance* scored slightly better with *other approved accommodation* than without the other approved accommodation. Although a small percentage of variance in scores could be explained by the use of specific accommodations and by disability status type, there was no interaction effect because no significant relationships were found between

disability status and accommodation and score ( $P > .05$ ). Qualitative data suggested that students using accommodations should have more practice throughout the year with the accommodation.

The authors ran a regression as additional analysis of the quantitative data to more deeply address student achievement on the assessment, considering that grade and length of time in the program may have related to a student's achievement on the assessment. Results from the regression show that grade predicts about 62% of ELLs' scale score, when grade was entered first in the model. When grade was controlled as the covariate, the length of time seems more meaningful (the length of time was not more meaningful when grade was controlled as the covariate; instead, the length of time made additional prediction of the scale score when grade was controlled). Length of time in the program predicts additional .6% of ELLs' scale score when grade was controlled as the covariate. This percentage is small, but still statistically significant ( $P < .001$ ). See Table 2.

### **Perceptions on Accommodations**

Finally, results for perceptions regarding accommodations for ELLs with disabilities suggest that there are specific challenges with assessing ELLs with disabilities (this is specifically with regard to blind, deaf, and significant cognitive disabilities because the construct of the domain of the test limits access to the assessment due to the disability). For example, one interviewee with an ESOL background said the following regarding challenges for testing specific disabilities:

Yes, in particular I think that I had an interesting case this year where a child was diagnosed with a disability as a selective mute, so it is next to impossible to assess their ability to

speaking English and we find that students who are deaf or hearing impaired, again it is nearly impossible to assess their listening as well as their speaking in some cases. With those who are blind or who have a visual impairment, you certainly can read the test aloud, but there is currently no Braille version, but that is only useful if you have a child who has learned Braille and with our case so many of the children come from countries where they wouldn't have that opportunity. Also, at times it is difficult to assess children with significant cognitive disabilities because for obvious reasons, cognitively they are unable to respond. You could, I guess, lump them together, children who are autistic. Occasionally emotionally disturbed children are difficult to assess because of the inconsistencies in behavior.

Test Administration issues were also a common theme from interview data, particularly in the areas of training for test administrators and fidelity to the testing manual and the accommodations guide. One interviewee with a testing background said the following in relationship to training:

It is done through the actual training itself and we have not done a good job with that and I think what we are finding is the test is relatively new for us to give and we are just now getting to the point where we are comfortable with it and realizing that we do have students that have additional needs, for years we have had the guidance for what to do with those students

who are dually identified, but the guidance for the ACCESS test to me is not clear and it hasn't been clearly communicated, although in the IEP one would think you would follow the same protocol. It is very unclear as to how that should happen. I would say as a district we have done a fairly good job training our people on how to administer the ACCESS test, I am not sure we have done such a good job with the accommodations.

Also, tracking the actual use of provided accommodations during test administration was an issue noted by interviewees.

Interview data also included recommendations for reauthorization of ESEA. Based on interview data, the concept of "lifers" was discussed, which refers to those ELLs not eligible for special education and the possible use of RTI with that group of students; interview data also strongly highlighted consideration of disability before language. Accessibility to the ELP assessment for students with specific disabilities was also a common topic. Also, more collaboration at the classroom, district, state, and federal level was documented along with the need for more research to inform policy and practice.

### **Discussion**

Most common disability status categories were LD and Speech/Language which present similar behaviors to language learning. The descriptive statistics for this study suggest the need for further investigation of identification of ELLs with disabilities. Assessments used to determine the eligibility of ELLs in special education, particularly with these designations also need deeper scrutiny.

Table 2

*Chi-Square Test of Four Most Frequent Test Accommodations and Disability Status Codes*

Variables	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> *	
Mod. Dir. X DS	3	0.913	.434	
Mod. Timing X DS	3	0.558	.643	
Other App. X DS	3	1.558	.198	
Mod. Present X DS	3	1.204	.307	

Variables	<i>t</i>	B	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i> *
Step 1:				
Grade	86.457	.786	.617	<b>.000</b>
Step 2:				
Length of time	8.524	.089	.006	<b>.000</b>

\**p* < .01

Of additional concern after eligibility for Title III services or special education services is the level of awareness of the legal requirements of each type of service. Educators of ELLs with disabilities were knowledgeable about the instructional practices and assessment requirements of under special education, but the converse was not true. Understanding of appropriate instructional practices and assessment requirements for students who are ELLs with disabilities is needed beyond just those specifically assigned to teach language learning.

Educators are likely struggle to make research-based decisions on which accommodations to provide to ELLs with disabilities, because of the extremely limited research on the topic. Interview data alluded

to the idea that there may also be potential for practitioners to assign commonly provided accommodations that are easy to administer, assuming that it cannot hurt to do so. For this reason, additional research is needed for educators to make decisions regarding a students' participation in assessments with the use of accommodations that provide access to test content as intended.

Data from the study highlighted in this manuscript suggests that students with disabilities who were not provided with accommodations actually performed better on the ELP assessment. This finding may seem to conflict with previous research on accommodations (Kopriva et al., 2007); however, additional information from the interview data may help explain this result. Educators who were interviewed said that the

test was timed, which is unlike the statewide achievement assessments of the state that provided the assessment data. This means that students are unaccustomed to being timed during an assessment. Secondly, several educators cautioned that students need to be using the accommodation throughout the school year in preparation for the assessment. The lack of familiarity with the timed assessment or limited familiarity with using an accommodation may have also resulted in lower scores on the assessment. Thirdly, there could be a difference of achievement performance at the baseline point between students with disabilities who were provided accommodations and those who were not provided accommodations. However, because this study did not have baseline data of all ELL students, this interpretation is inconclusive.

Findings from the hierarchical regression using grade and length of time in program did prove to be significant, suggesting that grade and length of time in the program were significant predictors of ELP assessment scores for ELLs with learning disabilities. This finding indicates that grade was a strong predictor of the score on the ELP assessment for ELLs with learning disabilities. This evidence suggests that the higher the grade of the student, the longer the amount of time the student has been receiving services, in most cases. Therefore, the higher the student's grade, the better score the student achieved. The finding suggests that the longer the student is in the program and spends longer amounts of time receiving services, the more likely the student will achieve on the assessment. Perhaps a positive implication of this finding is that English language instruction programs have a positive effect on ELLs' performance which may suggest good quality English instruction program for ELLs.

### **Five Main Ideas for Perceptions and Reauthorization**

Qualitative data suggests five common perceptions among ELL educators as well as suggestions for reauthorization of ESEA. First, educators seemed to agree that specific disabilities make ELP assessment challenging. Students who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, students who are blind or have a visual impairment, and students with significant cognitive disabilities are particularly challenging to assess. Second, educators recognized that they had limited knowledge of accommodations for ELP assessment and further, that there should be stronger fidelity to the test administration guide for accommodations. Third, another common sentiment across educators was the need for students receiving accommodations on the test to use them year round so that they are comfortable using the assessment on a high stakes assessment. This is particularly important for students receiving the modified timing scheduling accommodation. The statewide achievement tests are untimed in the state where this research was conducted; therefore, students who are provided the accommodation of extended time must understand that the ELP assessment is timed and that even with extended time, they need to move from question to question in a speedy fashion. Fourth, the concept of lifers (ELLs with disabilities who plateau and struggle to move beyond a given proficiency level) was another widespread topic. Due to the nature of their disability, some ELLs stay at the same proficiency level and cannot seem to move beyond one proficiency level to get to another. For these students, educators request more guidance for how to best instruct and/or assess the student for him or her to move beyond the current proficiency level. Guidance could also come from collaboration between teachers of ELLs and special education teachers on developing and implementing curriculum-based assessment to

monitor students' progress in order to provide focused instruction to enhance specific skills for students to move beyond the plateau. This type of collaboration could and should also involve the classroom teacher to provide a multi-faceted approach with common instructional goals. Lastly, there was a general consensus (except for one of the interviewees) that a student's disability is the student's primary label and then the limited English proficiency is secondary to the disability. In this way, considerations for instruction and assessment regarding the disability come first and then the language learning perspective is secondary. Once the primary disability and accommodations are determined, ELL specialists and teachers can consider the students' language learning needs and what accommodations might work well and/or overlap with the student's IEP. According to interview data it is customary to include a teacher with expertise in teaching ELLs when creating the IEP goals and objectives. This teacher can provide guidance on incorporating language goals and objectives into the IEP based on ELP assessment data.

### **Limitations**

Although this research contributes to the current literature by examining potential relationships between disabilities and accommodations for ELLs, and between accommodations and ELLs' achievements on ELP tests, several limitations exist. First, using only one state's ELP assessment data limits the generalization of the findings to other states. Consequently, the data are limited to that state's specific ELL population, ELP assessment, and, purportedly, addresses the ELP standards specific to that state. The state is a member of a consortium to which 26 other states belong. Members of this consortium share the same statewide ELP assessment and ELP standards. While use of just one state's data remains a

limitation, because 26 other states use the same standards and assessment for the ELL population, future research lends itself to comparable data through the same assessment and standards for the other consortium member states.

The population of ELLs in this research is specific to the state from which the data was provided. For this state, the majority of ELLs are from Spanish-speaking countries, but the population is varied and includes speakers of over 100 different native languages. This state's ELL population is close to 90,000 ELLs. The other population to take into consideration is the population of students with disabilities. In 2008-2009, students with disabilities were 13.3% of the student population in the selected state. Because the research focuses on ELLs with disabilities, it is critical to consider that both of these populations (ELLs and students with disabilities) adhere to state-specific identification and eligibility processes; and for students who are included in both subgroups, there are particular guidelines to specify how ELLs with disabilities will participate in the statewide ELP assessment and specific procedures to identify accommodations to be provided to these students. It is critical to consider that the identification and eligibility processes are susceptible sources of error (Abedi, 2006).

Another limitation to the research is that the data are limited to the accommodations that are provided to the students. Although the accommodations are provided, there is no way of accounting for use of the accommodations by the students. It is quite possible that an accommodation is counted as provided, but is not actually used or is used infrequently by the student. Future research in this area should include tracking actual use of the accommodations provided to students, which can be done particularly by use of online assessment.

A final limitation is due to the research design. The design for the quantitative element of this study is based on secondary datasets. The researchers did not collect primary data and cannot account for potential flaws in test alignment to standards, test design, test administrator training, test administration, flaws in scoring, or errors in reporting.

### Future Research

Based on the results of this study there are three major areas for which future research is needed. First, future research should include data from pre- and post-test scores on the ELP assessment to determine and compare students' previous ELP levels. Pre- and post-test scores could then include comprehensive analysis of between group comparison as well as within group analysis regarding ELLs with disabilities, accommodations, and achievement on the assessment.

Tracking of accommodations actually used by students on the assessment is another opportunity for future research. Although accommodations are provided, of interest is the amount of use of the accommodation by the student and how the student uses the accommodation. Online assessments provide an avenue of further exploration.

Another area for future research and a concern for professional development stems from data related to lack of familiarity with instruction and assessment of ELLs among the special education professionals interviewed. Future research and collaboration should include investigation of collaboration models, successful professional development, and examples of coordination and overlap between assessment, special education, and English language learner education.

Further research is desperately needed both at the district level and for policy makers to ensure the appropriateness of particular

testing practices and specific accommodations for students with specific disabilities. The theoretical framework used for this study provided a means for creating a relationship and relevance to each of the contexts (state, school, and classroom) as well as the areas of focus (ELLs, disabilities, and accommodations) and the specific area of focus on accommodations for ELLs with disabilities. The framework supports not only addressing these issues at the classroom level, but also the effect of policy in real classrooms with read students. The cyclical nature represented in the framework represents should influence further research as reauthorization of ESEA approaches. It is critical that the construct of the test is not confounded by the student's disability. Research regarding the most appropriate assessment and instruction practices for ELLs who are also deaf, blind, or who have significant cognitive disabilities is most needed.

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