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Best Practices for English Learners with Disabilities in US Schools – A Systematic Review

Samiratu Bashiru
Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, sbashiru@purdue.edu

Jennifer E. Smith
Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, smit3863@purdue.edu

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Samiratu Bashiru https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4125-2909 Jennifer E Smith httpd://orcid.org/0000-0002-3831-4473 We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Samiratu Bashiru, Purdue University, 100 N University St, West Lafayette, IN 47907. Email: sbashiru@purdue.edu

Introduction

English language learners (ELL), a diverse group of students who bring a dynamic blend of cultures and languages into American classrooms, have profoundly shaped the educational landscape of the United States. Each year, U.S. public schools enroll many children from Families with Non-Native English Speakers (NASEM, 2017). In 2014-15, U.S. public schools enrolled 4.8 million ELLs; the number almost doubled by the 2018-19 school year (i.e., 8.9 million ELLs; NCES, 2021). Schools depend on the expertise of qualified professionals, including teachers specialized in instructing English as a Second Language (ESL), language specialists, bilingual educators, and language assessment specialists to address these students' linguistic and educational needs. Language educators first carry out language competence assessments to determine instructional decisions and language requirements, including tailored curriculum plans and targeted support strategies for each student. The types of assessments may include standardized tests, language proficiency interviews, and classroom observations (Jia et al., 2006). Once the language proficiency levels are determined, schools can provide ELLs with language-targeted instruction and support tailored to their needs (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). This specialized approach aims to help ELLs acquire the necessary English language skills to excel academically (Stanat et al., 2012).

Some ELLs may require additional support determined through further assessments to identify challenges beyond language needs (Wagner et al., 2005). Specially trained educational professionals may evaluate these ELLs to determine eligibility for special education, thus classifying the students as English Learners with disabilities (ELDs; Rhodes et al., 2005). The concept of ELDs recognizes that some ELLs may experience difficulties beyond language acquisition (Gersten & Baker, 2000). ELDs may face language processing difficulties, communication barriers, executive functioning deficits, social and emotional issues, limited access to appropriate instructional strategies, complex assessment and evaluation, and limited resources and support (Sandberg & Reschly, 2011; Wagner et al., 2005). To effectively tackle the language deficiencies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing that ELDs face, it is advisable to provide ELDs with comprehensive and individualized support, along with accommodations tailored to their unique educational requirements (Fareed et al., 2016; Rao, 2017). Confronting these challenges mandates the provision of comprehensive and individualized support systems, ensuring a holistic approach to addressing both language learning and the distinct special educational needs of ELDs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002).

By classifying ELLs as ELDs, educational professionals ensure that they provide appropriate resources, interventions, and accommodations to help these students thrive academically and reach their full potential (Hill, 2011; Valdés & Castellón, 2010). Therefore, teachers, specialized support personnel, and families have to collaborate to create a conducive learning environment that supports language development and facilitates the attainment of the general education curriculum (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010).

Besides language proficiency and specific learning needs that impede the educational success of ELDs, other factors may also hinder learning outcomes for ELDs (Park & Thomas, 2012). These include ineffective teaching methods, limited interaction with native speakers, crowded classrooms, an unoptimized curriculum, and a shortage of highly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Kara & Tümer, 2018). ELDs' challenges highlight how these difficulties significantly affect their lives in public schools (Gan, 2013; Lin & Lin, 2014;

Tompkins, 2000). For instance, the language barrier presents difficulties in understanding instructions, expressing themselves, and comprehending academic content, potentially leading to frustration, disengagement, and isolation (Martiniello, 2009). Social isolation occurs as they find it challenging to interact and form friendships with English-speaking peers, leading to feelings of loneliness (Gándara & Orfield, 2010). Cultural adjustment can be overwhelming as ELDs come from diverse backgrounds and navigate new educational systems and norms (Berliner, 2019).

In support of addressing the needs of ELDs, K-12 public education policy has established opportunities for school districts to receive educational grants aimed at supporting the language development of ELDs (Hirschfeld, 2015; Santos et al., 2012). These grants enable school districts to organize language courses to address the unique needs of ELDs. These programs often incorporate best practices in teaching and learning to promote language acquisition and academic growth (Craft, 2002). Schools can also utilize the funding to provide learning opportunities for teachers, enabling them to enhance their knowledge and skills in effectively instructing ELDs (Taylor & Sobel, 2011). The resources and support offered to ELDs serve as crucial tools in helping these students overcome language barriers and thrive academically within the U.S. school system (Radford, 2019; Slavin et al., 2011).

English Language Programs for ELDs in U.S. K-12 Schools

English programs for ELDs in U.S. schools are essential for assisting students from ELL families in language acquisition and academic success. These programs are designed and implemented from pre-K to 12 to support language development, academic progress, and overall inclusion of students in the educational setting (English, 2017). In grades pre-K to 12, two main programs are available to support English learning for students with or without disabilities. The programs are ESL, which uses English as the primary language for instruction, and bilingual education, which also uses English and the student's home languages (English, 2017). ESL and bilingual education may implement different models of instruction (Faulkner-Bond et al., 2012).

There are three models for ESL programs, and they primarily use English as the medium of instruction: the ESL model, the content-based ESL model, and the sheltered instruction model. In ESL models, highly certified teachers provide explicit language instruction, explicitly focusing on developing English proficiency (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Content-based ESL instructional programs involve ESL-certified teachers delivering language instruction using the curriculum content to enhance students' language skills (Reed & Railsback, 2003). In sheltered instructional programs, teachers employ targeted instructional strategies to effectively integrate language and curriculum content while being responsive to the linguistic needs of the ELDs (Faulkner-Bond et al., 2012).

Each English language program with students with or without disabilities aligns with federal regulations. The regulations that align with ELDs include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (Bornfreund et al., 2019; ESSA, 2015). These regulations ensure that ELDs receive appropriate accommodations and support for their language and academic needs (Jones, 2019). Findings from evaluation research of these ESL programs for ELDs in K-12 schools have found that the programs can have meaningful impacts on the academic achievement, language development, and overall engagement of ELDs who participate in the programs (Fritzen, 2011; Intarapanich, 2013; Wright, 2010).

There are two models of instruction for bilingual education programs: the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) model and the Dual Language (DL) model (Boyle & Collier, 2015). In TBE programs, students usually begin learning in their first language during kindergarten or first grade and gradually develop English proficiency (Slavin et al., 2011). The objective is to attain English proficiency as rapidly as possible while utilizing students' first language to facilitate language acquisition (Slavin et al., 2011). TBE may be accelerated under this program, and learners typically transition out of the program before reaching third grade. The DL model is an educational approach that provides instruction in two languages. The aim is to promote bilingualism and biliteracy (Dorner, 2015). Students receive academic content in their native and second languages, fostering dual language proficiency and cultural appreciation (Mora et al., 2001). Research shows that DL programs enhance language skills, cognitive flexibility, and academic achievement (Heinrichs, 2016; Lindholm-Leary, 2016). Successful implementation of DL requires trained teachers, community support, and a commitment to language and cultural diversity (Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Freeman, 1996).

Research results on TBE have revealed that bilingual instructional models are beneficial in supporting ELLs with or without disabilities to acquire language proficiency and academic success (May 2017). Multiple research studies have noted that TBE programs for ELDs can significantly benefit and support their academic and linguistic development (Geier & Culp, 2015; Nuraeni, 2019; Ozsevik, 2010). Ozsevik (2010) and Nuraeni (2019) emphasized that bilingual education positively impacts language development and academic achievement. These studies further contend that TBE and the DL educational programs improve students' listening, speaking, reading, vocabulary acquisition, and writing skills. De Jong et al. (2020) collaborated on the contention that language education programs in K-12 settings enhance all students' cognitive skills, socio-emotional well-being, cultural identity, and linguistic growth.

Purpose of the Study

Including ELDs in U.S. educational settings presents a unique challenge for the students, their families, educators, and policymakers (Kaylor & Flores, 2007). The need for stakeholders to adopt and implement best practices is necessary to provide effective instruction and support to ELDs (Ford et al., 2008). Neglecting best practices in educating ELL can lead to lower academic achievement, language barriers, dropout rates, social isolation, cultural disconnection, reduced career prospects, and legal compliance issues (Darling-Hammond, 2007). It is critical to explore educational service providers' implementation of best practices with ELDs and their families (Enwefa et al., 2002). One cannot underestimate the significance of implementing best practices in ELD education. In line with this, this systematic review of research literature, focusing on best practices specifically tailored to meet the educational needs of ELDs in US schools, is necessary. This review adopted the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2014) Quality Indicators (QIs) to evaluate best practices' appropriateness, effectiveness, and impact. These QIs served as a standardized framework, ensuring the quality and rigor of research-based strategies and practices, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the review's findings.

The primary research questions that guided this review were: (a) what evidence-based intervention programs or interventions are available to support the academic achievement of ELDs in U.S. schools, and (b) how effective are they in improving outcomes for this student population? By synthesizing and analyzing the existing research, this review sought to identify practical instructional approaches and best practices that meet the unique needs of ELDs. The

review strives to disseminate the findings so that educators, policymakers, and stakeholders gain valuable insights into evidence-based interventions and best practices that can enhance the academic and linguistic development of ELDs. Furthermore, this review bridges existing knowledge gaps and provides recommendations that can guide future research and practice regarding the educational success of ELDs within the U.S. school system. This review intends to enhance the educational success of ELDs by offering a thorough understanding of effective practices and interventions designed for this student population.

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a systematic review design that adhered to PRISMA (2022) guidelines for transparency and bias reduction. The approach enabled a comprehensive analysis of the relevant literature on evidence-based strategies and best practices for ELDs. The PRISMA guidelines ensured a transparent, accountable, and fair review process, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study's findings.

Inclusion Criteria

Reviewers undertook a comprehensive search to identify studies that implemented evidence-based and best practices specifically focused on ELDs. The reviewers searched six EBSCOhost databases: ERIC, Academic Search Complete, APA PsycINFO, Education Full Text, and Education Source. The search strategy focused on terms and phrases about ELDs and evidence-based practices. The search process used the terms *English learners, disabilities, instructional practices,* and *English language learners AND special education AND best practices*. Reviewers deemed eligible for inclusion only English language peer-reviewed articles. Reviewers did not impose any restrictions on the publication dates of the articles.

Exclusion Criteria

This systematic review adopted stringent exclusion criteria to maintain the validity of the research. Consequently, reviewers excluded studies on ELDs not attending U.S. public schools that did not utilize best practices and were conducted in languages other than English. By focusing on studies conducted in only the English language, the review ensured the accurate interpretation and evaluation of the content of the selected studies. The selection process entailed screening potential titles and abstracts and thoroughly assessing full-text articles that met the inclusion criteria. Reviewers conducted the search procedures in December 2022.

Data Extraction

The data extraction involved a comprehensive selection process that utilized automated software and web-based tools to eliminate duplicate entries and irrelevant or non-peer-reviewed studies. Reviewers set the web-based tools to remove duplicate and unrelated studies. Through this process, the web-based tools removed 210 duplicate studies, an additional 66, due to their lack of relevance to the research questions. The web-based tools eliminated 641 studies out of 769 because they needed to meet the peer-review criteria, resulting in 128 remaining for further assessment and analysis. Reviewers used a detailed screening process that involved analyzing titles, abstracts, and full-text screening, and they excluded 114 of the remaining 128 studies because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion and were outside the scope of the review. Some of the studies still needed their full-text versions.

Following the application of the inclusion criteria, the reviewers identified fourteen studies as eligible for inclusion in the systematic review. In order to enhance the comprehensiveness of the search, reviewers undertook a thorough examination of the reference lists from the initially included studies. This process led to the retrieval of three additional articles that met the requirements for inclusion. These articles were incorporated into the analysis to evaluate the research questions comprehensively.

Reviewers conducted a supplementary gray literature search that involved searching beyond traditional academic databases such as the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* and the *Journal of English Learner Education*. Following the gray literature search, limited to publications from 2021 and 2022, reviewers added no additional studies. The purpose of the gray search was to retrieve relevant information from conventional academic sources that have yet to be indexed. The selection of studies for review included 17 articles—the process of selecting articles adhered to the guidelines outlined in the PRISMA (2022). The reason was to ensure maximum comprehensiveness, procedural objectivity, and reproducibility (Higgins & Green, 2011). This comprehensive selection formed a strong foundation for thoroughly analyzing the research questions. Table 1 lists the retrieved and included articles after the screening procedure. Figure 1 briefly accounts for the number of studies included in the review.

Figure 1

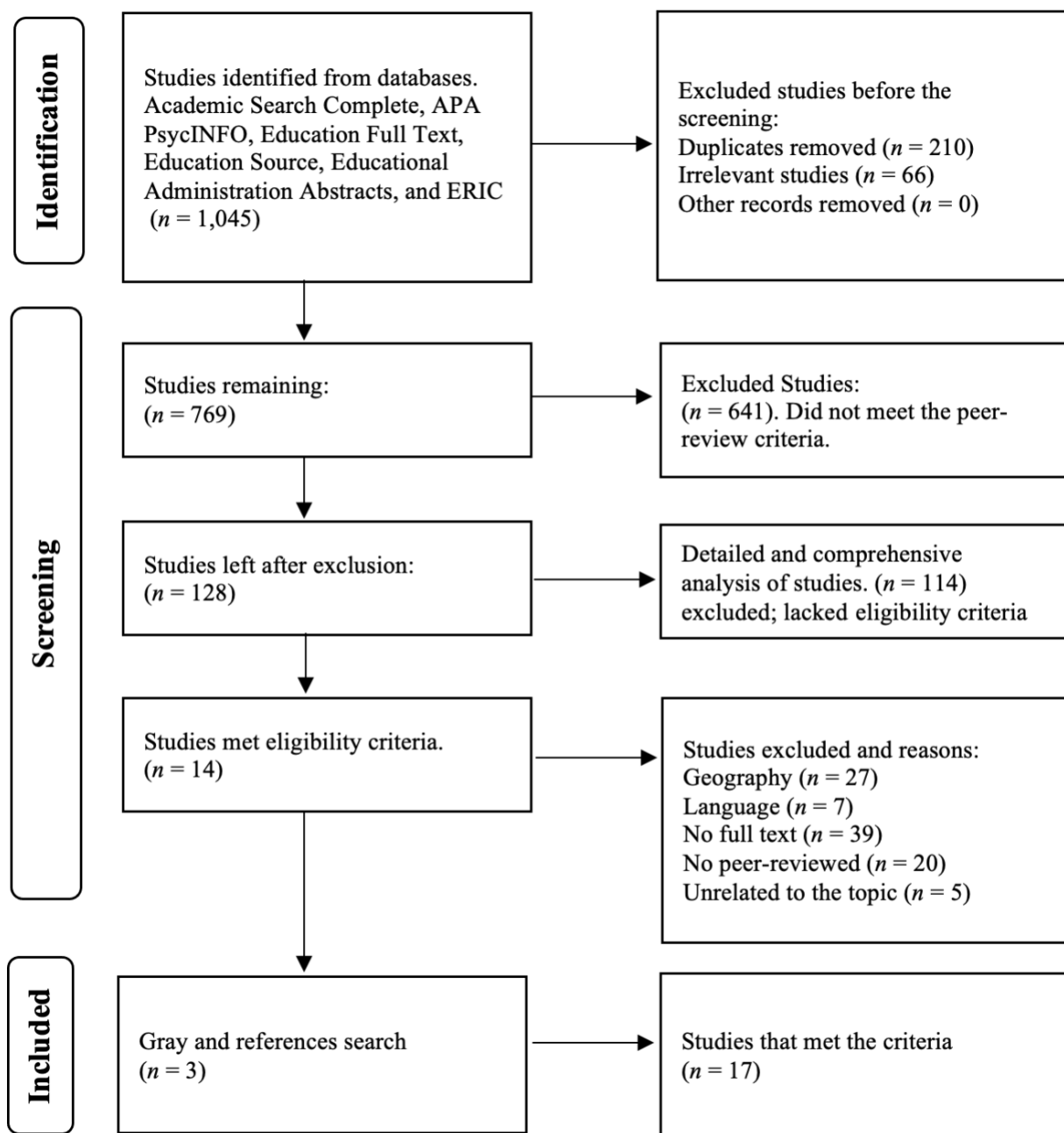*Summary of Included Studies After Screening*

Table 1

List of Articles Recovered and Included After the Screening Procedure

Study Title	Authors & Year	Journal Title
"English Language Learners with Disabilities: Classification, Assessment, and Accommodation Issues"	Abedi (2014).	*Applied Testing Technology*
"Culturally Appropriate Context: Unlocking the Potential of Response to Intervention for English Language Learners"	Xu & Drame (2008).	*Early Childhood Education Journal*
"What's a Middle School Teacher to Do? Five Evidence-Based Practices to Support English Learners and Students with Learning Disabilities"	Hovey et al. (2019).	*Alternative Education for Children and Youth*
"Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities"	Klingner & Soltero-González (2009).	*Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*
"Reading Interventions for Elementary English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities: A Review"	Boon & Barbetta (2017).	*Insights into Learning Disabilities, 1*
"Reimagining Language Proficiency Assessment for English Learners With Significant Cognitive Disabilities"	Shenoy and Pacheco (2022).	*Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities,*
"The Influence of Technology in Educating English Language Learners at-risk or with Disabilities: A Systematic Review"	Jiang et al. (2022).	*Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*
"Resettled Refugee Teens' Perspectives: Identifying a Need to Centralize Youths' Funds of Strategies" in Future Efforts to Enact Culturally Responsive Pedagogy"	Daniel & Zybina (2019).	*Urban Review*
"English Language Learners and Native English-Speakers' Spelling Growth after Supplemental Early Reading Instruction"	Dussling (2020).	*International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*
Supporting Teachers of English Learners by Leveraging Students' Linguistic Strengths.	Jiménez et al. (2015).	*Reading Teacher*
"Beyond Compliance: An Approach to Serving English Language Learners with Disabilities"	Stinson (2018).	*TESOL Journal*
"When Special Education Trumps ESl: An Investigation of Service Delivery for Ells with Disabilities"	Kangas (2018).	*Critical Inquiry in Language Studies,*
"Culturally Responsive Instruction for English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities"	Orosco & O'Connor (2014).	*Learning Disabilities*
"Grammatical Verb Errors: Differences Between English Learners with and Without Diagnosed Language-Based Learning Disabilities"	Fumero & Wood (2022).	*Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*
"Using an iPad App to Improve Phonological Awareness Skills in Young English-Language Learners with Disabilities"	Chai et al. (2016).	*Special Education Technology*
"Evidence of the Validity of Teaching Strategies Gold¾ Assessment Tool for English Language Learners and Children with Disabilities"	Kim et al. (2013).	*Early Education & Development,*
"Hispanic parents' Involvement and teachers' Empowerment As Pathways to Hispanic English learners' Academic Performance"	Rivera et al. (2019).	*Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*

Coding Procedures

The coding procedures in this systematic review adhered to the 2014 CEC eight Quality Indicators (QIs) and the sub-indicators. Reviewers based the scoring system for each study on how well they fulfilled specific sub-indicators. For example, studies that fulfilled all nine sub-indicators received a score of nine. Reviewers assigned lower scores when the studies met fewer sub-indicators. Studies that did not have any sub-indicators received a score of zero.

Based on the CEC 2014 Quality Indicator (QI), Context and Setting has one sub-indicator and scored 1 out of 1 when studies described essential attributes such as classroom type, school type, or curriculum. The second QI, Participants, has two sub-indicators. There was a 2 out of 2 score when participants' characteristics provided sufficient information. The third QI, Intervention Agent, had two sub-indicators and scored 2 out of 2 when there was a detailed description of the intervention agent. The fourth QI, Description of Practice, has two sub-indicators. A study scored 2 out of 2 when it provided complete information about instructional strategies, materials, and resources. The fifth QI, Implementation of Fidelity, also has three sub-indicators. Studies scored 3 out of 3 when they accurately implemented best practices as intended by the researchers. The sixth QI, Internal Validity, had nine sub-indicators applicable to group comparison and single-case designs. A study scored 9 out of 9 when all nine indicators were present. The seventh QI, Outcome Measures, has six sub-indicators applicable to single-case and group comparison studies. A study had 6 out of 6 when it had all the six sub-indicators. The eighth QI, Data Analysis, has three sub-indicators, and a study had a score of 3 out of 3 when it included the three sub-indicators, which include graph and data analysis techniques. This review used these indicators to evaluate how effective best practices are for ELDs. Meeting all indicators demonstrated a strong correlation between these practices and positive outcomes. Conversely, if the scores were low, it indicated a weak connection between these practices and positive outcomes.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the results of a systematic review that aimed to identify best practices available to support the academic achievement of ELDs in U.S. schools and to determine their effectiveness in improving educational outcomes for this student population. The review assessed 17 articles using the eight CEC 2014 QIs.

Table 2

Summary of Results of the Research Studies

Study Title	Context and Setting	Participants	Intervention Agent	Description of Practice	Implementation Fidelity	Internal Validity	Outcome Measures	Data Analysis
Abedi (2014)	1/1	1/2	1/2	0/2	0/3	5/9	0/6	0/3
Xu and Drame (2008)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	8/9	5/6	3/3
Hovey et al. (2019)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	9/9	4/6	3/3
Klingner et al., (1998)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	8/9	4/6	3/3
Boon & Barbetta (2017).	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	6/6	3/3
Shenoy & Pacheco (2022).	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	6/6	3/3
Jiang et al. (2022)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	7/9	4/6	2/3
Daniel and Zybina (2019)	1/1	1/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	6/9	4/6	2/3
Dussling (2020)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	6/6	3/3
Jiménez et al., (2015)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	9/9	4/6	3/3
Stinson (2018)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	4/6	3/3
Kangas (2018)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	6/6	3/3
Orosco & O'Connor, R. (2014)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	9/9	4/6	3/3
Fumero & Wood (2022)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	3/3	7/9	5/6	3/3
Chai et al. (2016)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	7/9	2/6	2/
Kim et al. (2013)	1/1	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/3	7/9	4/6	3/3
Rivera & Li (2019)	1/1	2/2	1/2	2/2	1/3	7/9	2/6	2/3
Average Score	1/1	1.88/2	1.88/2	1.88/2	2.24/3	7.24/9	4/6	2.78/3
Percentage	**100.00%**	**94.00%**	**94.00%**	**94.00%**	**74.67%**	**80.44%**	**66.67%**	**92.67%**

Interrater Agreement

Two independent recruiters collaborated to establish an interrater agreement of the QIs. The percentage agreement for context and setting between the recruiters was 100 %. The raters agreed that all studies' context and setting had the description indicated by the CEC 2014 QI. The interrater agreement for participants, intervention agent, description of practice, implementation fidelity, and data analysis was remarkably high at 94.1%. However, the interrater agreement for internal validity and outcome measures was relatively lower at 62.5%. All agreements were tallied and divided by the total ratings, resulting in an inter-rater agreement of 88.2%. An overall score of 88.2% indicates a good level of consistency among raters in their assessments of the studies (Richards-Tutor et al., 2016).

Analysis

In this study, researchers analyzed quantitative data from studies about best practices for ELDs using the CEC 2014 QIs as benchmarks. These benchmarks serve as standards or criteria that help assess and ensure the quality of programs and services related to special education and exceptional children. Each study was evaluated against these QIs and compared with typical research components to determine if the study adhered to CEC's best practices for teaching and learning. It ensured that the reviewed studies met the CEC's standards for effective ELD instruction.

Context and Setting

Following an in-depth assessment of the context and setting in the 17 studies, the average score was 1 out of 1 (100.00%). The context and setting of each of the 17 studies received a score of 1 out of 1, indicating each study provided a detailed description of their context and setting as CEC 2014 QIs described. Such description includes program or classroom type, school type, curriculum used, and nature of the classroom's physical environment. The other described features that indicate adherence to the CEC 2014 QIs are participant demographics, geographical location, and the specific study time frame. A score of 1 highlights the researchers' commitment to demonstrating a dedication to upholding the integrity and robustness of their research endeavors.

Participants

Reviewers reviewed the participant descriptions of the 17 studies, and the average score was 1.88 out of 2 (94.00%) for this QI. Of the 17 studies, 15 scored 2 out of 2 for participant description (see Table 2 for a list of studies). These studies captured the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as their age range, grade levels, cultural background, and language proficiency level. There was a detailed description of the study participants with a score of 2. The detailed participant description allows for a better understanding of the study population and, consequently, the potential generalizability of the findings.

However, two studies, Abedi (2014) and Daniel et al. (2019), scored 1 out of 2 for participant description. It was due to limited and insufficient information about the participant characteristics in those studies. Adequate participant description is essential in educational research as it allows for proper interpretation and applicability of the study's findings. The average score of 1.88 reflects the overall high quality of participant descriptions of each of the 17

studies.

Intervention Agents

The average score of the intervention agents of the studies was 1.88 out of 2 (94.00%) for this QI. Of the 17 studies, 15 scored 2 out of 2. These studies provided detailed information about the best practices, evidence-based strategies, and interventions ELDs received. Moreover, the roles and qualifications of the intervention agents, namely special education teachers, ESL teachers, language specialists, support staff, speech-language pathologists, bilingual educators, or collaborative teams, were also specified. Additionally, these studies provided information about the specific intervention methods, approaches, materials, and resources schools applied to support ELDs. This comprehensive description of intervention agents ensured transparency, allowing for replication and better implementation of the interventions.

However, two studies, Abedi (2014) and Rivera and Li (2019), scored 1 out of 2 for the intervention agents. These studies needed more detailed information regarding the best practices, evidence-based strategies, support, and interventions received by the participants. The description of intervention agents in these studies was vague and lacked specificity, making it unclear which professionals or resources were involved in delivering the interventions. Moreover, these studies needed to provide more detailed information about the intervention agents' roles, qualifications, or expertise. Information needed in this instance should include the specific intervention methods, strategies, materials, or resources utilized. The description of intervention agents in these two studies required revision to ensure a comprehensive assessment and replication of the findings.

Description of Practice

The average score for the description of practice was 1.88 out of 2 (94.00%). Of the 17 studies, 16 received a high score of 2 out of 2. The score indicates that these studies provided a comprehensive account of the best practices for educating ELDs. Moreover, these studies provided detailed information about the teaching strategies, learning activities, materials, resources, and pedagogical approaches. They also included descriptions of the activity sequence and the use of technology. In addition, the studies described the role of teachers, ESL facilitators, and the strategies they used to enhance ELDs' learning experience. The detailed description of the practice in these studies underscores the researchers' commitment to providing comprehensive information.

Abedi (2014) scored 0 out of 2 in one study for the practice description. This study needed more comprehensive information about the teaching, learning activities, specific techniques, materials, resources, and pedagogical approaches utilized. It also needed to provide detailed information on the activity sequence, the type of technology and resources used, and the roles of special education teachers, support staff, and ESL facilitators who enhanced ELDs' learning experience. The absence of such crucial detailed information in Abedi's study may limit its potential for replication or comparison with other best practices or interventions in different settings.

Implementation of Fidelity

The average score for fidelity implementation for this QI is 2.24 out of 3 (74.67%). This score indicates a generally moderate level of fidelity across the various studies. Two studies, Abedi (2014) and Rivera and Li (2019), scored 0 out of 3 and 1 out of 3, respectively. These low scores were due to these studies' non-adherence to intervention protocols, incomplete data presentation of ELDs, and lack of explanation of training and support ELDs received. Six studies had a moderate score of 2 out of 3. These scores were due to partial adherence to intervention protocols, inconsistencies in implementation, and moderate participant engagement, suggesting the need for further improvements in fidelity.

Nine studies scored 3 out of 3. These studies displayed strong adherence to intervention protocols. They also demonstrated a comprehensive implementation approach and received sufficient training and support. Additionally, the studies' effective monitoring and feedback, along with utilizing best practices, underscored the successful execution of their interventions.

The varying fidelity levels observed in the studies underscore the importance of researchers, educators, and policymakers maintaining strict adherence to intervention protocols and providing ample support and resources to ensure successful fidelity implementation in educational research. It also highlights the potential for improvement in implementing interventions effectively to achieve higher validity and overall effectiveness.

Internal Validity

The average score for internal validity was 7.24 out of 9 (80.44%). The studies by Abedi (2014) and Daniel et al. (2019) received scores of 5 out of 9 and 6 out of 9, respectively, indicating a relatively lower level of fidelity in their implementation. These studies showed limited adherence to intervention protocols and potential shortcomings in the implementation process. Furthermore, the studies needed more comprehensive documentation, adequate training or support, and precise data collection.

On the other hand, some studies scored 7 out of 9. This score indicates that a study had a moderate level of validity in its implementation. Although some inconsistencies or limitations existed, these studies demonstrated reasonable adherence to intervention protocols. They provided adequate training and support to implementers and had decent participant engagement.

The studies with scores ranging from 8 out of 9 to 9 out of 9 indicate a higher level of validity in their implementation. These studies demonstrated strong adherence to intervention protocols, comprehensive implementation, and effective monitoring and feedback. They also showcased best practices, clear documentation, participant engagement, and rigorous evaluation, ensuring high validity in their interventions.

The studies with higher internal validity scores demonstrate a robust implementation of interventions, while those with lower validity scores exhibited varying levels of adherence and limitations. The results highlight the significance of following intervention protocols, comprehensive implementation strategies, and robust evaluation methods to ensure the validity and effectiveness of interventions.

Outcome Measures

For some studies, the average score for the outcome measures was 4 out of 6 (66.67%) and 6 out of 6 (100%). See Table 2 for a list of the studies with high scores. A high score indicates a generally favorable level of effectiveness of the outcome measures. On the other hand, some studies obtained lower scores of 2 out of 6. The low score indicates some limitations in the effectiveness of the best practices. Abedi (2014) received the lowest outcome measure with a score of 0 out of 6, implying potential weaknesses in the effectiveness of the interventions or research methods.

The studies with higher outcome measures demonstrated rigor in evaluating the intervention outcomes, employing standardized assessments of academic achievement, language proficiency, or other relevant skills. For example, Kim et al.'s (2013) study utilized the teaching strategies GOLD assessment tool, while Rivera and Li (2019) used the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). Standardized assessments enhanced the outcome measures' accuracy and comparability, further solidifying their findings' credibility.

Data Analysis

Reviewers used the eight QIs to conduct data analysis of each study. The average score for this QI was 2.78 out of 3 (92.67%). This score suggests that the studies conducted high-quality and appropriate data analysis. Studies, including Abedi (2014), scored a 0 out of 3, indicating shortcomings in their data analysis procedures. Meanwhile, 12 studies received a 3 out of 3. It demonstrates high rigor and accuracy in their data analysis methods. The studies with scores of 2 out of 3, including Jiang et al. (2022), Chai et al. (2016), and Rivera and Li (2019), have some room for improvement in their data analysis procedures to enhance the credibility of the results.

Discussion

This systematic review aimed to explore best practices that enhance the academic outcomes for ELDs that align with CEC 2014 QIs for evidence-based practices for students with disabilities. Through a comprehensive analysis of 17 relevant studies, five key themes emerged as essential practices for supporting ELDs: (a) culturally responsive practices, (b) evidence-based practices, (c) technology integration, (d) challenges in service delivery for ELDs, and (e) inclusive assessment and the validity of assessment tools. These themes provide valuable insights that can guide educators and policymakers in effectively meeting the unique needs of ELDs and fostering an environment conducive to their learning and growth.

Culturally Responsive

Culturally responsive practices in supporting ELDs are well-supported by various research studies. Studies reviewed, including Xu and Drame (2008), Klingner and Soltero-González (2009), Daniel and Zybina (2019), Jiménez et al. (2015), Stinson (2018), Orosco and O'Connor (2014), and Rivera et al. (2019), emphasized the significance of culturally responsive practices in supporting ELDs. These studies advocate for using instructional approaches that consider the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of ELDs. The studies highlight the importance of centralizing students' cultural experiences to create culturally responsive

classrooms and supportive learning environments. The strengths of these studies lie in their collective promotion of cultural responsiveness to better support ELDs. They offer valuable insights into the potential benefits of inclusive and culturally affirming practices in the classroom.

The studies further shed light on the significance of collaboration between parents and educators to enhance the educational experiences of ELDs. One potential area for improvement across these studies is the need for detailed implementation guidelines of best practices. An implementation guide could allow the practical applicability of the best practices. Additionally, the studies had a relatively small sample size or focused on specific demographic groups, which could impact the generalizability of their findings. Several studies supported the use of culturally responsive practices in supporting ELDs. Johnson (2007), Minkos et al. (2017), Klump and McNeir (2005), Bottiani et al. (2018), Dray and Wisneski (2011), and Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) highlighted that culturally responsive practices are significant in fostering inclusivity, improving student outcomes, and transforming school cultures. The studies underscore the importance of culturally sensitive leadership, professional development, and mindful reflection for educators to meet students' diverse needs effectively.

Evidence-Based Practices

Reviewed studies strongly emphasize the effectiveness of evidence-based practices in supporting ELDs. Notably, Hovey et al. (2019), Boon and Barbetta (2017), and Chai et al. (2016) have asserted that evidence-based practices have proven to be beneficial for ELDs. Similarly, Chai et al. (2016) explored iPad apps' effectiveness in augmenting phonological awareness skills in young ELDs. The research offered promising insights into the potential of technology-based interventions to support the language development of ELDs.

Other research studies have presented a compelling case for adopting evidence-based practices in supporting ELDs. For instance, Haas and Brown (2019), Burr et al. (2015), Kangas (2018), and Tankard Carnock and Silva (2019) have advocated for equitable support for ELDs. These studies have significantly contributed to advancing knowledge and practices that enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of ELDs. As mentioned, the reviewed and other research studies strongly support using evidence-based practices in providing valuable support to ELDs.

Technology Integration

Technology integration practices have proven effective in supporting ELDs. Jiang et al. (2022) explored the role of technology in assisting ELDs. The study revealed that digital tools have tremendous benefits in addressing the unique needs of ELDs. Similarly, Chai et al. (2016) investigated the effectiveness of iPad apps in enhancing phonological awareness in young ELDs. The study revealed that iPads support the interactive and engaging learning experiences of ELDs. These studies collectively highlighted the significance of technology in fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. Their findings enable educators to integrate technology into teaching and learning. Beyond the reviewed studies, other researchers, such as Duran (2022), Wen and Walters (2022), Costley (2014), and Anglin (2017), also support technology integration to enhance learning outcomes for ELDs. The findings in the studies above underscore

technology's transformative potential in empowering ELDs to actively participate in their education, enhance language skills, and promote academic growth.

Challenges in Service Delivery for ELDs

As the unique needs of ELDs take precedence for educators and policymakers, understanding the challenges they face in accessing specialized services becomes imperative in education. In the reviewed study, Kangas (2018) shed light on the complexities and implications of service delivery practices for ELDs. The challenge is further compounded by state policies and identification practices for ELDs, as discussed by Keller-Allen (2006). The policies and practices often influence the allocation of resources for ELDs. The challenges in serving ELDs extend beyond compliance as it requires a more comprehensive approach. Stinson (2018) proposes a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to support ELDs. This approach emphasizes recognizing and valuing students' linguistic and cultural strengths while providing tailored interventions to meet their unique learning needs.

Another challenge in service delivery is the identification and evaluation of ELDs. Studies have observed that conventional assessment methods may need to be more inherently unbiased and culturally appropriate. Roseberry-McKibbin and O'Hanlon (2005) offered a tutorial on nonbiased assessment techniques for ELDs. The study advocates for more inclusive and equitable evaluation practices. Conroy (2006) discussed that the challenges in service delivery are more pronounced in rural settings. Their study highlighted limited access to specialized resources, technology, and internet access as some specific challenges ELDs in rural areas face. That underscores the need for making these resources accessible to ELDs living in rural communities.

Inclusive Assessment and Validity of Assessment Tools

Inclusive assessment practices for ELDs have solid backing from multiple research studies. Abedi (2014) and Shenoy and Pacheco (2022) have emphasized the significance of inclusive assessment practices for ELDs. While Abedi's research addressed the classification challenges, Shenoy and Pacheco's article focused on reimagining language proficiency assessment for ELDs. The studies advocate using inclusive assessment and appropriate tools for evaluating students for special education services. Kim et al. (2013) have contributed to this theme by advocating using valid assessment tools for ELDs. Other studies have provided compelling evidence supporting the adoption of valid inclusive assessment practices for ELDs. Notably, Kaur et al. (2017), Tai et al. (2021), Ruiz-Primo et al. (2014), and Lane and Leventhal (2015) emphasized the significance of inclusive assessment practices for ELDs. They highlight the need to use appropriate assessment tools to meet the unique needs and experiences at school.

By integrating culturally responsive practices, evidence-based practices, technology integration, and inclusive assessment, educators can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments for ELDs. These efforts, coupled with collaborative approaches involving teachers, parents, and students, hold the potential to empower ELDs and facilitate their academic growth and success.

Implications

Evidence-based practices, technology integration, and culturally responsive approaches hold considerable promise for improving academic outcomes in ELDs. When educators, parents, and other stakeholders collaborate effectively and adeptly implement these best practices, they can successfully address the distinctive learning requirements of ELDs and elevate their academic performance and achievements.

This review has added to the growing call for promoting inclusivity and equity in education. Employing culturally responsive practices can achieve inclusivity. Educators can establish inclusive and equitable learning environments that foster academic success for all ELDs by acknowledging and utilizing students' linguistic and cultural strengths and conducting unbiased assessments to determine or identify students who need special education services.

This review underscores the pressing need to address the challenges for ELDs. It urges policymakers and educators to move beyond mere compliance and adopt comprehensive frameworks considering the intersectionality of linguistic, cultural, and disability-related factors. This approach would ensure that accessible services are available to meet the diverse needs of ELDs.

Moreover, this review has contributed to the increasing demand for prioritizing technology integration as a powerful tool to empower ELDs. The review highlights the importance of incorporating technology into educational practices to enhance the learning experience of ELDs. By leveraging technology such as digital language tools and interactive learning devices, educators can effectively engage ELDs in their education, enhance their language skills, and promote academic growth.

The review corroborates the crucial role of collaboration and communication among teachers, parents, and students. The studies emphasize the importance of fostering effective partnerships and open channels of communication to create a supportive learning environment that positively influences the academic progress and overall well-being of ELDs. Engaging parents will help provide valuable insights into students' cultural backgrounds and strengths, contributing to more effective and culturally affirming support. Therefore, fostering strong partnerships between educators and families is crucial in creating a supportive and empowering learning environment for ELDs.

Moreover, this review stresses the need to provide educators with access to professional development and training to effectively implement best practices, technology integration, and culturally responsive practices to promote learning among ELDs. Investing in teacher training will help equip educators with the skills to establish an inclusive learning environment that fosters academic success and well-being.

Limitations

Though the systematic review of best practices for ELDs offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Different studies exploring best practices for ELDs may use terms like "bilingual education," "dual language immersion," or "English-only instruction." Using these terms may need to be clarified. Due to this and to foster greater clarity and agreement in defining key concepts and variables, there is the need for standardization of these

terminologies. This standardization may enhance understanding of these terms, ultimately helping educators and stakeholders use them efficiently. With clear and consistent definitions, it becomes easier to understand what the terms mean and how to apply them to support the language development and academic success of ELDs. These examples demonstrate how diverse terms may complicate the synthesis of findings and draw meaningful conclusions. To address these challenges, scholars and educators must work towards standardizing terminology and definitions in studying ELDs. Again, the diverse characteristics of ELDs, encompassing varying linguistic, cultural, and disability-related factors, present a challenge in capturing their unique needs and challenges, potentially overlooking specific interventions beneficial to specific subgroups.

Despite these limitations, the systematic research review provides valuable insights and guidance for educators, policymakers, and researchers to support ELDs better. By acknowledging these limitations, future research can build upon existing knowledge and contribute to more effective and inclusive educational practices, fostering a supportive and empowering learning environment for this diverse student population.

Conclusion

This systematic review of investigating best practices and their effectiveness in improving academic achievement for ELDs in U.S. schools has yielded valuable insights. The comprehensive and rigorous selection process identified 17 peer-reviewed articles that shed light on best practices for ELDs. The results of these studies carry substantial implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers, offering guidance on effectively supporting this diverse student group and creating a conducive learning environment that promotes academic success and inclusivity.

The best practices (i.e., culturally responsive practices, effective implementation of best practices, technology integration, addressing challenges in service delivery for ELDs, and promoting collaboration and communication among educators, parents, and students) that emerged from the analysis constitute essential support for ELDs in U.S. schools. In order to implement these practices to achieve academic success for ELDs, there is a need for ongoing teacher professional development. Educators are central in implementing best practices; therefore, providing them with relevant training and support help ensure the successful implementation of these practices.

This review has called for further research supporting ELDs. There is a pressing need to continue exploring effective practices, including integrating culturally responsive practices, technology, and interdisciplinary collaboration, to better cater to the diverse needs of ELDs in educational settings. Additionally, future research should continue developing and improving inclusive assessment tools that accurately measure ELDs' progress and align policies with best practices to create a more nurturing and supportive learning environment for these students. By expanding the knowledge base and implementing best practices, educators and policymakers can foster an inclusive and empowering educational experience that maximizes the academic success and overall well-being of ELDs.

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