

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Reading and Language Outcomes of a Five-Year Randomized Evaluation of Transitional Bilingual Education”¹

What is this study about?

The study examined how the English reading and language performance of predominantly Spanish-speaking students in transitional bilingual education compared with the performance of predominantly Spanish-speaking students in structured English immersion.

The study analyzed data on three cohorts of students in six schools in Los Angeles; Denver; Albuquerque; St. Paul, MN; Rockford, IL; and Alamo, TX, from 2004 to 2009. Students were randomly assigned to receive either transitional bilingual education or structured English immersion upon entering kindergarten and were followed for three, four, or five years.

Proficiency in English reading and language was measured using standardized tests administered at the end of each year.

The study compared test scores of students in the transitional bilingual education group with those of students in the structured English immersion group. Scores on four English tests were examined.²

What Two Types of Instruction Were Contrasted?

Students in the transitional bilingual education group were taught to read exclusively in Spanish during kindergarten. Starting in first grade, they were gradually taught to read in English; by third grade, they read only in English.

Students in structured English immersion were taught to read exclusively in English starting in kindergarten.

Both types of instruction used the *Success for All* curriculum in either English or Spanish, as appropriate. Children in both conditions participated in English as a Second Language sessions daily.

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* The WWC modified this quick review in response to quality review team reviews conducted in September 2013 and February 2011. Based on the independent reviews, the WWC clarified the description of the study findings in the “What did the study find?” section. The WWC has not changed the study rating since the September 2010 report.

¹ Slavin, R. E., Madden, N., Calderon, M., Chamberlain, A., & Hennessy, M. (2010). *Reading and language outcomes of a five-year randomized evaluation of transitional bilingual education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.

² The study also examined Spanish reading and language outcomes. However, these fall outside the scope of the quick review protocol and are not covered by this quick review.

What did the study find?

At the end of kindergarten and first grade, students in structured English immersion had significantly better English reading and language skills than students in transitional bilingual education. The WWC interprets these effects as corresponding roughly to the skill difference between the 50th and 66th percentiles of English reading and language achievement.

By the end of second and third grades, when many students in transitional bilingual education had switched to instruction in English, the differences in skills were statistically insignificant for six of the eight outcomes.

By fourth grade, no differences in English reading and language skills between the groups were statistically significant according to the study authors. However, two of the four outcomes showed large enough differences favoring English immersion that the WWC considered them substantively important (that is, an effect size of at least 0.25 standard deviations).³ These effects were roughly equivalent to the skill difference between the 50th and 61st percentiles of English reading and language achievement.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report meets WWC evidence standards⁴

Strengths: This study was a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Cautions: Although all three cohorts of students are included in the analyses of first and second grade outcomes, the analyses of kindergarten and third grade outcomes include two cohorts, and the analysis of fourth grade outcomes includes only one cohort of students.

³ The WWC reports results for statistically insignificant effects if the estimated impact is 0.25 standard deviations or greater.

⁴ Although the version of the manuscript reviewed by the WWC did not contain baseline sample sizes, the study authors subsequently provided these to the review team.