

Voices of California Public School Teachers on English Learners in Secondary Schools*

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Abstract

This report identifies two main factors that bring difficulties in achieving academic literacy and success in school and later life to English learners (ELs) enrolled in public high schools by interviewing 12 teachers of secondary schools in California. It also clarifies the teachers' challenges and their views on bilingual programs that were carried out until a few years ago. The two factors are (1) the lack of time necessary to attain academic literacy by the time they graduate, (2) the lack of financial as well as other various support mainly from family. After some background information on English learners is explained, the responses from the teachers are presented and discussed. Though the number of teachers interviewed is limited, it qualitatively exemplifies the kinds of challenges and situations in a microscopic way. Such an approach to English learners clarifies situations that may not have received due attention. It is expected their situations and challenges are better known and improved in future.

I. Introduction

This report explores the situations and challenges that English learners (hereafter abbreviated as ELs) face at public schools in California as described by their teachers. It attempts to clarify teachers' perspectives on issues surrounding their teaching in secondary schools. Among various aspects from which the problems are recognized, this report takes a socio-cultural perspective toward the issues, and educational practices and techniques from linguistic perspectives are not discussed.

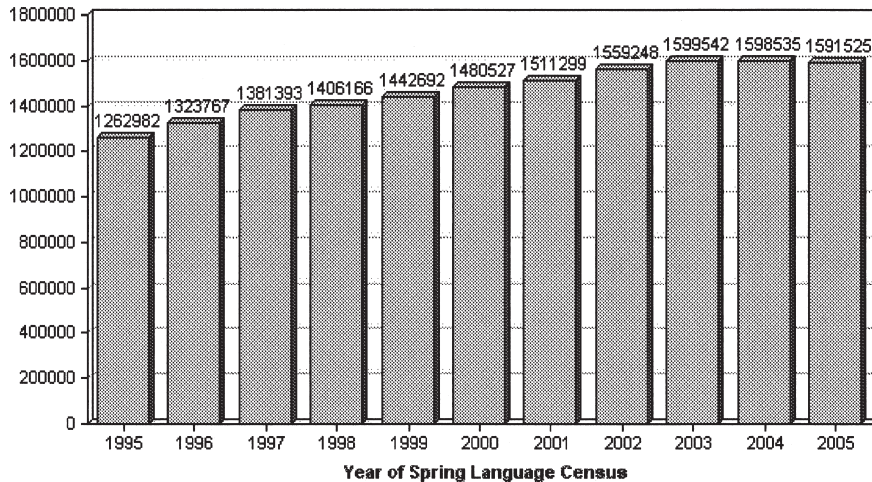
The California Department of Education defines ELs as:

Those students for whom there is a report of a primary language other than English on the state-approved Home Language Survey **and** who, on the basis of the state approved oral language (grades kindergarten through grade twelve) assessment procedures and literacy (grades three through twelve only), have been determined to lack the clearly defined English language skills of listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs.⁽¹⁾

These students in California have steadily been increasing for the past ten years (except for the

recent two years), as shown in Figure 1 below. Their education is thus an important issue not only for them and their families but also for public schools and their teachers, in order to prepare them for higher education and also to meet the demands of society.

Figure 1: Statewide Number of English Learners (1995-2005)



Source: Dataquest, California Department of Education⁽²⁾

One major policy that directly affected ELs was Proposition 227,⁽³⁾ prohibiting bilingual education. Before and around the passage of the law in 1998, there was much debate regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education, involving educators, researchers, policy makers, parents, and so on (for details, see Rossell and Baker (1996), Greene (1998), and Nishimura (1999, 2000)). This study also attempts to find what effect Proposition 227 has had on the educational practices of ELs, and includes teachers' views on bilingual programs that existed several years after its passage. This report also includes teachers' views on more recent situations, such as the requirement of California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), in which academic content standards of tenth grade English language arts and mathematics are tested, and students must pass in order to graduate beginning with the class of 2006.

II. English Learners: Background

Given the total number of ELs, how are they spread in each grade of public schools? If we look at them more closely, their distribution in each grade varies considerably. The majority of ELs (close to 70 %) are enrolled in the elementary grades, kindergarten (K) through grade six. About 30 % are enrolled in the secondary grades, from grade seven to twelve. The number and the percentage of ELs compared with the entire enrollment by grade are given in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Number and Percentages of ELs in California Public Schools by Grade (2005)

Grade	ELs		All students		% of ELs
	Number (B)	% (B/A)	Number (C)	% (C/D)	
K	170,559	10.7	455,149	7.2	37.5
G1	171,472	10.8	477,557	7.6	35.9
G2	173,889	10.9	474,854	7.5	36.6
G3	164,203	10.3	481,280	7.6	34.1
G4	147,057	9.2	488,045	7.7	30.1
G5	130,638	8.2	492,895	7.8	26.5
G6	113,873	7.2	491,308	7.8	23.2
Grades K-6 Subtotal	1,071,691	67.3	3,361,088	53.2	31.9
G7	102,303	6.4	492,919	7.8	20.8
G8	96,617	6.1	498,806	7.9	19.4
G9	103,952	6.5	549,463	8.7	18.9
G10	80,880	5.1	497,197	7.9	16.3
G11	64,474	4.1	459,125	7.3	14.0
G12	50,719	3.2	409,576	6.5	12.4
Grades 7-12 Subtotal	498,945	31.4	2,907,086	46.0	17.2
Ungraded	20,889	1.3	53,993	0.9	38.7
Total	1,591,525(A)	100	6,322,167(D)	100	25. 2

Source: Dataquest, California Department of Education

Table 1 shows that while the total enrollment is evenly distributed in grades K through twelve (roughly around 7% in each grade), the distribution of ELs is skewed toward lower grades. That is, the percentage is much higher (above 10%) in lower grades, whereas in the upper grades, the figure goes down around 5 to 6%. When looking at the percentage of ELs in each grade, the lower the grade is, the more ELs are concentrated, such as close to 40% in grades K through two. One interpretation for the smaller percentage in secondary schools could be a result of students learning enough English over the years of schooling, and their reclassification from ELs to Fluent English Proficient.⁽⁴⁾ A deeper look into this issue of reclassification, however, will show a somewhat different picture, and interviews with the teachers will highlight problems associated with challenges of ELs in secondary schools in particular, in later sections of this study.

Regarding the home languages of the ELs, 85.3% of them are Spanish speakers. The remaining ELs speak more than sixty languages, and the speakers of each such language do not even reach 1% of the English learner population, except for the next 5 languages that come after Spanish, which include Vietnamese (2.2%), Cantonese (1.4%), Filipino (1.3%), and Korean (1%) (Dataquest, 2005). While the majority of ELs speak Spanish at home, we should also pay due

attention to this enormous ethno-cultural diversity among ELs in the classrooms of California public schools.

As the population of California is expanding, the total enrollment in public schools is growing as well. Notice also that the yearly increase rate of ELs exceeds that of the total enrollment. While the yearly increase rate of the total enrollment in California schools is about 1.5 to 2 %, the ELs' counterpart is approximately 2 to 4 % (except for 2004 and 2005) (Dataquest). The exact figures are given in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Comparison of Yearly Increase Rate between Total Enrollment and ELs in California Public Schools, 1995-2005

Total Enrollment											
Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number	5,341,025	5,467,224	5,612,965	5,727,303	5,844,111	5,951,612	6,050,895	6,147,375	6,244,642	6,298,774	6,322,167
Increase from previous year	N/A	2.36%	2.67%	2.04%	2.04%	1.84%	1.67%	1.59%	1.15%	0.87%	0.37%
ELs											
Number	1,262,982	1,323,767	1,381,393	1,406,166	1,442,692	1,480,527	1,511,299	1,559,248	1,599,542	1,598,535	1,591,524
Increase from previous year	N/A	4.81%	4.35%	1.79%	2.60%	2.62%	2.08%	3.17%	2.58%	-0.06%	-0.43%

Source: Based on Dataquest, California Department of Education

Then what do public schools do to cope with the specific needs of growing number of ELs? The California Department of Education explains that specific instructional settings including Structured English Immersion and Alternative Course of Study are offered. For example, Structured English Immersion settings have 755,137 ELs, or 47% of the total ELs, and Alternative Course of Study is offered to 120,849 ELs or 8%. About 40% of them study in English Language mainstream classes either by meeting the criteria (39%) or by parental request (2%). (Dataquest, 2005) Structured English Immersion refers to "classes where EL students who have not yet met local district criteria for having achieved a 'good working knowledge' (also defined as 'reasonable fluency') of English are enrolled in an English language acquisition process for young children in which nearly all classroom instruction is in English but consists of a curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language." (Glossary) Also, "An alternative course of study contains classes where EL students are taught English and other subjects through bilingual education techniques or other generally recognized methodologies permitted by law." (Glossary)

As for the services they receive, the following table shows the kinds of services and the number and the percentage of ELs who receive them:

Table 3: Statewide Number of ELs Receiving Instructional Services (2005)

ELs Receiving English Language Development (ELD) Services	ELs Receiving ELD and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)	ELs Receiving ELD and SDAIE with Primary Language (L1) Support	ELs Receiving ELD and Academic Subjects through the Primary Language (L1)	ELs Receiving Other EL Instructional Services	ELs not Receiving any EL Instructional Services	Total ELs
174,406	804,202	337,031	111,920	125,359	38,607	1,591,525
11 (%)	51(%)	21(%)	7(%)	8(%)	2(%)	100(%)

Source: Dataquest, California Department of Education

English Language Development (ELD) is “a specialized program of English language instruction appropriate for the English learner (EL) student’s (formerly LEP students) identified level of language proficiency. This program is implemented and designed to promote second language acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.” (Glossary) Specially Designated Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) is “an approach to teach academic courses to English learner (EL) students in English. It is designed for nonnative speakers of English and focuses on increasing the comprehensibility of the academic courses typically provided to FEP and English-only students in the district.” (Glossary) Instructions given in sheltered classes belong to this category. The State as a whole thus makes efforts to meet the needs of the huge number of EL students with these services in several instructional settings.

If we only look at these aggregate statistics, however, it might not be easy to see what is really happening in California public school classrooms where ELs are taught. Teachers face these students every day through their instructions, and these “micro situations” may be quite different from “macro statistics” I have just presented. Thus, it would be beneficial if the teachers’ perspectives on issues surrounding ELs are better known. Though the number of teachers interviewed in this report is limited, it exemplifies aspects of educational challenges, and highlights individual teachers’ efforts to cope with ELs’ situations and challenges in a “microscopic” way.

A large-scale survey by Gandara, et. al. (2005) reports views of California teachers of ELs in grades K through twelve on their challenges. This survey collects responses from some 4500 teachers throughout California. Such a quantitative work is valuable, as it clarifies teachers’ concerns and professional needs on the whole. However, it also has its own shortcomings, one of which is that it sometimes lacks information of specific and local aspects of problems. The present study is intended to focus on one specific aspect of ELs’ problems, namely, those at high school levels. This study is designed to highlight situations in depth and to portray challenges

that might not have received due attention, since previous research including Gandara, et. al. (2005) has focused more on elementary levels of education. This study can thus be considered as complementary to Gandara, et. al. (2005) in that it describes a less-known subgroup of ELs' situations in detail.

This report is also unique in the sense that interviewing took place in an area where students' academic performance is comparatively high, and the overall education at the schools in this area is considered to be successful. Problems surrounding ELs in such secondary schools might not be given a proper attention, though, of course, teachers facing ELs are aware of their students' serious challenges and situations.

In this study, among ELs in the secondary schools, I pay more attention to those students who are enrolled in California junior or senior high schools for the first time in their teens. This rather higher age of new students at secondary schools could mean that there is an extremely large diversity among them, including not only linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversities but also levels of literacy based on previous experiences of schooling. Facing such varied students with a multitude of backgrounds, teachers are also facing challenges in their education. Though the number of such students may be small, the present work qualitatively reveals the nature of the problems facing such students and their teachers' efforts in a comparatively privileged neighborhood. Such qualitative analysis sheds light on what a large-scale research might not discover.

III. Procedure

This research is conducted in local middle and high schools in Southern California. It utilizes ethnographic interview to elicit the teachers' views on the education of ELs. I visited each individual teacher's classroom/office or a preferred place at the time of his or her convenience. The interview was digitally audio-recorded for quality and recordability and its summary was created from a rough transcription of the recording.

Interview questions began with the experiences as teacher, and then ask about their general concerns about ELs, classroom practices, perspectives on ELs' preparation for future (including exit exams and higher education), and views on bilingual programs.

I interviewed twelve public school teachers: eight at a senior high school (grades 9 through 12), and four at a middle school (grades 7 and 8). Both of the secondary schools belong to the same School District. I met with one interviewee per session. The teachers were recruited through my personal contact, including those who taught my daughter at the time of interview and those who had taught her previously. I asked them to spend about half an hour for interview, though the time varied depending on the interviewee. The recorded spoken data sets were

classified roughly according to the subject including English or other subjects such as math and science. The Interviewee Profile is given in the Appendix.

IV. Interview Responses and Their Implications

Based on the interviewee responses, I found ELs, especially newly enrolled EL students in secondary schools are faced with a multitude of serious challenges, which come from a number of factors. Most clearly articulated factors can be summarized in terms of the **lack** of two important factors, which include (a) time and (b) support, among many others. All of these contribute to their difficulties in attaining success in school. Details of the students' challenges are identified through interviews, and their responses with respect to the above-mentioned two factors are given below, beginning with the first factor, lack of time. After these factors on the part of the students are explored, as one of the factors that cause difficulty in teaching, I discuss (c) challenges facing the teachers resulting from an enormous diversity in students' background. Finally, (d) comments on bilingual programs with respect to high school ELs will be presented.

(a) Lack of time

What is meant by lack of time is that for newly enrolled high school ELs, there is not much time left to acquire academic literacy including command in English until they leave high school (unlike those in elementary schools who have more time until then). Below are typical responses regarding this factor of too little time. This lack of time applies to the mastery of not only English literacy but also academic literacy in all subjects. However, since half the teachers interviewed at the high school are teachers of English, there are more responses regarding English literacy than the literacy in other subjects.

One of the hardships in achieving success is seen in the insufficient mastery of English language arts and mathematics as tested on the high school exit exam by the time they graduate from high school. With respect to mastery in English literacy, one high school teacher of English says (indented direct quotes are numbered consecutively throughout the paper):

- (1) It takes a minimum of 4 years to become somewhat fluent in the language; in the meantime, they're living and have to graduate; they try to compete with people born here; high school is not like adult education, where interested people come and study, whereas they have to take the language to be competitive. It's an enormous, daunting task. Whether they like to or not students have to study. I could talk about my concerns for a number of hours.

Her remark on the number of years has grounding by research in this field (for example, Hakuta, et. al. (2000)). Another teacher of English at the high school mentions about one of her classes:

- (2) My course is designed to get kids to pass the high school exit exam; California standard is what I teach; it would be great if they could read and fluently write, which is not the case; with different levels, [I need to] teach individually, as there's a great variety....

She further says, “the content standard for the tenth grade is easy for most students, but not for ELs.” A third teacher of English at this high school discloses her concern, saying, “One of my concerns is allowing ELs to graduate, even if they haven't acquired the language skills and knowledge.” Thus the teachers' concerns even extend to situations after ELs graduate. She anticipates even greater hardship in life after high school.

If there were no time limit (fixed deadline) for students to master literacy, this would be completely a different story. They could study in a situation like adult education, where high school diploma is not relevant. Or if they were enrolled in elementary schools, they could somehow attain literacy in English during the years of schooling, and could exit from ELs' instructional settings as explained earlier, and can be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. But they are too old to be enrolled in elementary schools, and do not have time.

It is true that some ELs are redesignated to Fluent English Proficient, but reclassification itself does not solve ELs' problems, as the following quote by a high school English teacher shows:

- (3) My Reading-for-success class is not specifically for ELs; it is for students with low reading skills; a big portion is ELs; some of them have transitioned out of ELs classes; such reclassified students are weaker in English, definitely.

She further explains the situation with an analogy, saying:

- (4) ELs are trying to merge onto the freeway, after they have barely learned at least to get to the freeway entrance. But they are not fast enough to get on the freeway. Meanwhile mainstream students are far ahead of them, and so they will never catch up.

Thus, though reclassification itself is not a bad thing, it does not guarantee the mastery of English literacy. It only shows certain progress. For these high school ELs, this fact of lacking the necessary time before graduation because of their physical age will have a consequence that would affect them for many years to come.

Then, what in particular makes it difficult for them to acquire English literacy as well as literacy in other subjects during the years in secondary schools, and makes it hard for the teachers to have them or help them acquire both kinds of literacy? Though the situation on the students' side affects that on the teachers' and both situations are interrelated, the second factor, the lack

of support, which involves a number of reasons, play an adverse role in attaining not only English literacy but also other content subjects.

(b) Lack of support

The second factor, which brings difficult challenges to ELs, is lack of support in many ways. One of the main reasons for this situation comes from their financial disadvantage. The following remark by a high school English teacher clearly points this out:

- (5) Three years ago I was at junior high school. Students I have now are really new; they're learning, working hard; they have much less time; they work after school, have family obligation, and go to work to help family; high school students have different life that impede study of English. It is frustrating that some don't care; they need to have intrinsic motivation, and it varies from student to student and from family to family.

As the above remark clearly indicates, the situation in high schools is severe for those new students, because they have to work and cannot spend as much time as they like or need to for their study because of their financial situations. They are not only pressed with a longer span of time until they graduate to attain literacy, but also pressed with time every day because of their part time job to support their family and themselves. By the teacher's observation we are made aware of these working high school ELs. We now know such working ELs support their family at the cost of their time to study. Unlike other financially well-to-do students who can expect support from their family, such working students cannot expect that other members of their family will provide financial support for them. Of course there are mainstream students who have to work after school hours. However, the difference is that ELs need more time to attain English literacy but cannot afford the time, while mainstream students do not need to spend time for basic mastery in English.

Similarly, another teacher of English at this high school expresses her concerns as follows:

- (6) I see society is becoming technologically oriented; ELs in general are lower socio-economic class; technology is broadening the gap; [we have] programs to help them with computer, such as labs; teachers communicate via email, then I'm losing a lot of parents who don't have access to email. Another thing is parental involvement; they work round the clock. Also, though so many students are college bound, English learners do not always go to college; such an academic high school is not necessarily providing vocational opportunities; [for them] education is not a priority.

From this remark, we find the support they are lacking is not only financial, but also concerns

with other areas where parents and the high school could help, if in a different situation. Part of the reason for the teacher's losing communication with students' parents comes from financial reasons that result in unavailability of emails. However, because parents are too busy working, she points out, they may not be paying attention to their children in a way she would like them to. She further mentions about the situation at this particular high school. Because the majority of the students focus on college admission, the ELs' career plans may not be well responded to, as seen in the lack of vocational programs. This teacher reminds us that not all the students go to college, and the support from this high school is lacking in this respect.

In areas where parental support matters, the parents of EL students, many of whom are newly arrived immigrants, are also those who need support in terms of language proficiency. In that sense, EL students are doubly handicapped, as it is difficult for them to expect their parents to help them, unlike regular students. When we pay attention to the EL students' situation at home, we find another serious reality. As Butler (2003) points out, some parents do not know how to support their school-aged children in a culture different from theirs, even though they expect to do so. Though the interviewee below does not explicitly mention what cultural background he is referring to, the following remark by a high school physics teacher illustrates challenges associated with their family and parental help:

- (7) I agree that cultural challenges are most difficult. In a culture that encourages education, typically if the parents are educated, then even if students have language problems, they overcome them. Struggling students are the ones who are not encouraged at home; such parents are typically not as educated and don't value education as much, and those students have much more difficult time, because they lack the motivation plus the language obstacles that they face. Education ultimately is up to individual students because learning takes place in one person's head; we need to work as team to encourage and support success.

From this remark we can infer that this teacher points out the gap between families in which education is encouraged and those where it is not or cannot. He indirectly mentions the difference in the kinds of encouragement students are given between the families that they belong to and those they do not, and between home and school. We can interpret that this teacher most typically is referring to immigrant families from Mexico, though of course there may be less educated parents who may not encourage their children as much in other kinds of families.

Similarly, a middle school social science teacher mentions about the issue related to culture, saying, "They face difficult challenges; cultural expectations are a big issue; certain culture emphasizes importance of education than other cultures..."

Again, there is no explicit mention about what culture in particular he is referring to, but we can

infer he has Hispanic culture in mind, as the majority of ELs are of Spanish background.

So far we have seen the two main factors that directly affect EL students' difficulty in attaining success at school. In the next section, I will point out challenges on the part of teachers, which make teaching more difficult.

(c) Teachers' challenges due to diverse students' background

As one of the causes that make teaching difficult, on the part of the teachers, the following remark by a middle school social science teacher illustrates the point from his experiences in teaching a sheltered class:

- (8) In a sheltered class there're many different varying levels of abilities among students; I try to help students at a lower level improve, while upper level students are still challenged to progress, too; in teaching a sheltered class, I wonder on which to focus more, content or English.

Among the classes this teacher is currently teaching, this sheltered class is the only one that is specifically for ELs, and the rest of the four classes are mainstream classes. The purpose of sheltered classes is to teach ELs both English and content simultaneously. The clearly stated challenge for the Teacher is on which to place more focus, English or content. Because of the varying levels in academic literacy among diversified students, this teacher also needs to devise his class to meet multiple needs, which would definitely be more challenging than just aiming at students with similar levels.

In fact, these students' diversity in their backgrounds relates to not only the number of schooling years, but also the level of academic literacy each student has achieved in his or her native language. On the one hand there is a group of newly arrived ELs who may be children of migrant farmers, and have not had appropriate literacy in their grade level. On the other hand, some newly arrived ELs already possess highly developed academic literacy, even though command in English is lacking. Under such circumstances, ELs, as mentioned earlier, are not always enrolled in their specialized instructional settings and some of them study in mainstream classes. One math teacher who also has Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) classes mentions about the ELs in his classes:

- (9) ELs are two or three per class; they're very well motivated, children of university people like professors; they have strong support from their parents. My concern is too much pressure imposed on them from their parents; they have pressure to perform; A is not good enough, and B is not, either; in a culture different from ours, they have different sets of values.

We see from this quote that the math teacher describes an exceptional sub-group of ELs. Though the percentage of such privileged ELs would probably be extremely small, we are reminded that there is a very wide spectrum of ELs, and on one end is this blessed group and on the other end, which would constitute the majority, there are such unprivileged learners as those with very limited or no experience of schooling who are now enrolled in secondary schools in California. We need to be aware of this enormously vast diversity in the students' backgrounds among those labeled as "ELs." This quote from the math teacher is presented to illustrate the extraordinary wide range among ELs.

The next remark is presented to illustrate the teacher's challenge that concerns with students conduct. One high school English teacher says:

- (10) My biggest challenge is understanding their behavior; by the time they get to high school so many habits have already been formed such as those of getting out of classroom and goofing around; I try to correct them without punishing them... hardest part is to stay calm and try to be compassionate; those with low motivation, that's hard, too; I try to make personal connections.

From this quote, we can see how conscientiously and honestly this teacher interacts with her students.

(d) Comments on bilingual programs

Bilingual education was carried out in elementary schools, and the discontinuation of the programs did not affect secondary schools directly, though students who had been in the programs went on to study in the secondary schools afterwards. Questions on bilingual program are asked in the interview because it is of interest to see how teachers view the program, as the program had great impact on ELs of Spanish background. Specifically, the questions aimed at finding whether the teachers are in favor of the end of the program, as they believe the program did not help ELs, or they believe the programs were helpful.

A most typical opinion on bilingual programs among the teachers is that the ideas of teaching academic content in the child's mother tongue while learning English would theoretically be plausible, and the programs would have been effective if in practice they had been carried out in a way that should have been. One high school English teacher clearly articulates this, saying:

- (11) I finally believed in bilingual, but bilingual programs worked only in an ivory tower; you have to have a very strong consistent program at a practicing level, so that when kids are developmentally ready to be pushed harder, you have teachers that knew that, and can push

him.

Also, one physics teacher says, “the way we were doing bilingual education was not the correct way of doing it, but the way we eliminated it was not an answer, either.” There are such mixed feelings toward bilingual education, as expressed by this physics teacher, and such an attitude would represent most other teachers.

There are so many factors that would make it difficult to run the programs ideally, such as inadequate teacher training and insufficient funding from the government. Thus, one ESL teacher says:

(12) The bilingual program was more detrimental than helpful to students. Students I tutored, who were in bilingual program were harmed; If it had been some enhancement program, such as additional Spanish instructions to children of Spanish background, that would have been very different; the problem with the program was political; the program handicapped kids.

She further mentions the need to shift to English at an earliest possible stage, so that more input in English can be given to the child. She considers bilingual education to have been a disservice to those who were in the program. Another English teacher gives an episode of a boy who she knew went through bilingual programs, and did not master the grade level English literacy.

One English teacher correctly points out that in order to compare the effect of bilingual program, there have to be at least two groups, one of which went through the programs and the other that did not. Since it is difficult to trace back what programs each EL has received when they are in high school, teachers do not normally know a particular EL student’s educational background. As has been identified in this report, ELs have so many kinds of different backgrounds that whether or not they went through bilingual programs may not mean too much at high school level to teachers there. The following comment on bilingual programs by a former bilingual teacher, who teaches English and Spanish at the high school, hits the point. She says, “Involved in bilingual education since 1978, I have seen a lot on both sides, because I speak Spanish; the age group of the students makes all the difference.” This remark reminds us of the very first factor of time, raised at the beginning of Section 4, which directly relates the age of the students. The age determines how much time is left for students to attain academic literacy in a high school context, and it is thus crucial for high school teachers to help them progress to reach a more advanced level within the remaining time.

V. Concluding remarks

So far this report has identified two main factors that cause ELs difficulties in succeeding in

high school and later life, namely the lack of time and support. Though the two are interrelated, attempts have been made to identify individual causes separately, in order to clarify specific difficulties based on teachers' own voices. This report identifies first that the amount of time that ELs can spend for mastering academic literacy is very limited in high school settings, and the requirement of the high school exit exam imposes an additional burden on them. Also, the second factor, lack of support is definitely a disadvantage. It is highly expected that some other alternative measures to help high school ELs will overcome this adverse situation.

The interview also finds challenges on the part of the teachers helping ELs. Their difficulties come from the enormous diversity in students' backgrounds. ELs in high schools with such various experiences might include those who received bilingual programs, and this report also clarifies teachers' views on the overall consequences of the program. Feavorable reactions, in general, to the elimination of bilingual programs are found, though with some complex reservations.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the specific locality and the environment where the high school is located. When the academic performance in certain school district or schools is achieving a high level, in general, there is a tendency to believe that the district or the schools are doing excellent jobs and do not have problems. In fact, because of overall successful performance, we are sometimes blinded with some specific challenges surrounding certain students because of their relatively small percentage. This does not mean that there is no problem. On the contrary, there are students with specific needs and challenges, many of which are very difficult for them to solve themselves.

One implication of this report is that it enables us to pay more attention to some overlooked difficulty of seemingly fluent ELs (who are perhaps reclassified as FEP) to reach a level of the academic literacy that is needed for higher education. Though not all of the ELs are college bound, teachers do encourage them to pursue such a course and it is expected they receive better education with better literacy.⁽⁵⁾

Finally, a new federal policy called "No Child Left Behind"⁽⁶⁾ was enacted by President Bush in 2001 and it has influenced not only California, but also the entire United States. Its impact on ELs has not been included in the discussion here, since the interviews took place before the impact of its legislation could be measured and so this topic was not brought up by respondents. If further interview is going to take place, how this law affects ELs is an important question that has to be asked. Teachers' classroom practices from linguistic and educational perspectives are also expected to be included in future projects.

This present work is an attempt in which some aspects in the difficulties of high school EL students are clarified, from a viewpoint in which a large-scale study might not necessarily be

taking. It is expected their situations and challenges are better known and improved in any way in future.

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Notes

- (1) Other terms used to refer to ELs are “English Language Learner (ELL)” and “Limited English Proficient (LEP)”. Here “English learner” is used throughout this paper. This definition is from Glossary of Terms, California Department of Education web site, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/glossary.asp#p> Retrieved Sep 10, 2005. All the information obtained from the Glossary is based on this URL, and the citation for Glossary refers to this online source. For details of such procedures in identifying the learners, determining the levels of their proficiency, and assessing their progress in the language skills, see, for example, California English Language Development Test (CELDT) Assistance Packet for School Districts/Schools (2005) prepared by the California Department of Education.
- (2) The bar graph is reproduced from Dataquest, Educational Demographics Unit, California Department of Education web site, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/lc/NumberElState.asp?Level=State&TheYear=2004-05> Retrieved Sept 10, 2005. All the statistical information obtained from the California Department of Education is based on this URL, and the citation for Dataquest refers to this source.
- (3) Proposition 227 is “an initiative that limits non-English language instruction for students who are learning English. Approved by voters in June 1998, Proposition 227 permits parents to petition a school to provide instruction in students’ native language as well as in English.” This description is from Ed-Data, Education Data Partnership, at: <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=/Glossary.asp> Retrieved Sep 10, 2005. The information on this website comes from the California Department of Education. All the information obtained from Ed-Data is based on this URL, and the citation for Ed-Data refers to this source.
- (4) There are two groups of students among those whose home language is other than English: those who are already proficient and are classified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP), and those who do not meet the state criteria of proficiency and identified as English learner. The first group of students is not officially included in the category of ELs. Some ELs are reclassified in their annual assessment from EL to FEP, and those redesignated are excluded from the category of ELs. The rate of reclassification by school, school district, county and state is open to the public and available online.

- (5) The publication, *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities*, though it seems not very widely known, is beneficial to those who seriously consider higher education in California, in that it highlights what is expected of high school graduates upon entering colleges and universities. EL students' difficulties are also referred to in this publication.
- (6) No Child Left Behind is "the 2001 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that places comprehensive accountability requirements on all states, with increasing sanctions for schools and districts that do not make adequate yearly progress toward proficiency in English/language arts and mathematics or fail to test 95% of all students and all significant subgroups." (Ed-Data)

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Appendix : Interviewee Profile

Interviewee	Gender	Approx age	Total Years of teaching	Years at current school	School classification	Subject area	Approx Average Number or % of ELs in class	Date interviewed
1	M	30's	7	1	High	Physics	10%	11-Dec-02
2	F	40's	6	2	High	English(Sheltered), Spanish	100%	11-Dec-02
3	M	40's	15	6	High	Math	Less than 10%	11-Dec-02
4	M	50's	15	15	Middle	Math/ Science	5 or 6,max 10	12-Dec-02
5	F	40's	3	2	Middle	English , art	15-23, 18-22	12-Dec-02
6	M	40's	10	2	Middle	Social Studies	4 or 5	12-Dec-02
7	F	20's	4	3	High	English	5% in main stream class	16-Dec-02
8	M	40's	5	4	Middle	Social Studies	7-10%	16-Dec-02
9	M	30's	2	2	High	Engineering	A few	17-Dec-02
10	M	50's	14	8	High	Math/Economics	A few	19-Dec-02
11	M	40's	20	2	High	English(Sheltered)	100%	16-Dec-02
12	F	40's	13	2	High	English	50%	27-Feb-03

