

**PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENTS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH-PROFICIENT AND  
NON-SPANISH-PROFICIENT SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

**A Dissertation By**

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**Abstract:**

The overidentification of English learners (ELs) into special education programs has been a long-standing problem. This qualitative study sought to understand the decision-making process Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient school psychologists engage in when selecting their assessment instruments. The study also sought to understand school psychologists' perceptions about what supports they believe they need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of ELs. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that school psychologists rely on a comprehensive review of student records, information gathered from parent interviews, and collaboration with other educators when making these important decisions. The findings of this study also highlight the need for training specifically aimed at addressing the unique assessment needs of ELs.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose Statement .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Significance of the Study .....	6
Scope of the Study .....	7
Assumptions of the Study .....	7
Study Delimitations .....	8
Study Limitations .....	8
Definitions of Key Terms .....	8
Organization of the Dissertation .....	9
2. EXISTING RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	10
Theoretical Foundation .....	10
Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature .....	13
School Psychologists and the Training Programs .....	14
Assessment of Language Proficiency .....	16
Selection of Assessment Tools .....	18
Collaboration .....	20
Barriers to Assessment .....	21
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Chapter Summary.....	23
3. METHOD OF INQUIRY .....	24
Qualitative Research Methods.....	25
Research Design .....	26
Research Methods.....	27
Settings .....	27
Sample .....	28
Data Collection and Management.....	29
Data Analysis and Interpretation .....	31
Chapter Summary.....	33
4. FINDINGS.....	34
Sources of Information for Selection of Assessment .....	34
Review of Records .....	34
Parent Interviews.....	37

Collaboration .....	37
Assessments .....	40
Cultural Considerations .....	40
Perceptions of Support .....	41
Training.....	41
Access to Assessment Instruments .....	44
Chapter Summary.....	45
5. DISCUSSION.....	46
Interpretations .....	47
Review of Cumulative Records .....	47
Parent Interviews.....	48
Collaboration .....	49
Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment.....	49
Training.....	51
Implications .....	52
Implications for Policy.....	52
Implications for Practitioners .....	53
Implications for School Districts .....	54
Implications for Future Research .....	55
Recommendations .....	55
Time Allocation .....	55
Access to Assessment Instruments .....	56
On-Going Training for School Psychologists and Teachers.....	57
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Educators.....	58
Summary of the Dissertation .....	59
APPENDICES .....	60
A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	60
B. RECRUITMENT EMAIL.....	63
C. INTEREST SURVEY .....	64
D. EMAIL TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW .....	66
E. PHONE CALL TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW .....	67
F. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE .....	68
G. EMAIL TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST NOT SELECTED FOR INTERVIEW .....	70
REFERENCES.....	71

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. SELPA Demographic Profile .....	28
2. School Psychologist Participants .....	29

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Foundation of assessment of English learners .....	22

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The number of students enrolled in California schools who are English learners (ELs) has steadily increased over the last 40 years and will continue to increase (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Farnsworth, 2018; National Center for Education Research, 2020; Samson & Lesaux, 2008; Sullivan, 2011). The number of languages spoken in California is extensive; however, approximately 81% of ELs speak Spanish (California Department of Education). English learners in California experience a number of academic, cultural, and social challenges (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Harris et al., 2015; Klingner et al., 2006). A review of California's statewide assessment data reveals a significant achievement gap between ELs and their peers (DataQuest, California Department of Education). This achievement gap is concerning and may be attributed to a misalignment between student needs, support services provided, and the way ELs are identified for special education services (Yamasaki & Luk, 2018).

The issues of over identification of ELs into special education programs is a significant challenge for educators (Layton & Lock, 2002). Given the increase in ELs, school psychologists conducting assessments need to become better versed in the language acquisition process, better informed in their assessment practices, and better trained in understanding how to analyze assessment results to ensure these students are properly identified for special education services so that they can be provided with educational supports to ensure their academic success (Chu & Flores, 2011).

#### **Background of the Problem**

The United States Office of Civil Rights has monitored the on-going problem of overidentification of minority children in certain disability categories since the 1970s. Several landmark legal cases, such as *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Riles* (1971), challenged biases inherent in standardized testing procedures used to identify students for special education programs. In *Diana v. State Board of Education*, a class action suit was filed on behalf of

nine Hispanic children who were administered IQ tests in English and, as a result, were found eligible for special education services under the eligibility category of educable mental retardation (EMR), which is referred to today as intellectual disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). These same students were later reassessed by a Spanish-speaking examiner, at which time only one of the nine children was found to meet the criteria of EMR. In a similar suit, *Larry P v. Riles* (1971), the parents of six African American elementary school children in San Francisco filed suit against the California Department of Education claiming biased assessment practices that resulted in the overidentification of minority children as EMR. As a result of the biased assessments, the students were placed in restrictive special education classes for students with mental retardation. The suit alleged that as a result of placement in the special education classroom, the students did not learn the skills they needed to return to a general education classroom. Both cases emphasize the importance of selecting appropriate assessment tools and the importance of appropriate assessment practices so that racial and linguistic minorities are not overidentified for placement in special education programs.

The number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse homes is steadily increasing in the state of California and is expected to continue to grow in the future (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Bilingual children, also referred to as ELs, by definition are learning two languages; however, the level of exposure they receive in each language and the social context in which they learn those languages influence their development (Paradis, 2010). There is substantial evidence suggesting that students identified as culturally and linguistically diverse, including ELs, are not receiving the types of services and supports they need to be successful in school (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Ortiz & Kushner, 1997). This presents a challenge for school psychologists because they must be able to determine when a student should be assessed and select the most appropriate assessment tools, must know how to differentiate language dominance, and how to analyze assessment results to determine if the student is going through the normal process of second language development or whether the student's academic challenges are due to a disability, specifically, specific learning disabilities and speech and



language disabilities (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Artiles et al., 2005; Chu & Flores, 2011). Therefore, school psychologists must have extensive training in understanding the unique learning and language acquisition profiles of ELs. Layton and Lock (2002) investigated the complex issues involved in assessing second language acquisition and differentiating this from a learning disability. Their study found that teachers who did not receive specific training in the unique needs of ELs often mistook the process of second language acquisition as indicators of a learning disability. This study highlights the importance of training assessors to understand the role of language proficiency in the assessment process.

The ability to differentiate students who have disabilities from those who are learning English has presented difficulties for assessors and for the teachers who are responsible for their education (Barrera, 2006). The use of appropriate identification procedures should result only in students with true disabilities being placed into special education programs. However, evidence suggests that this is not the case. Extensive research has found culturally and linguistically diverse students, including ELs, are disproportionately represented and overidentified for special education programs (Ortiz & Kushner, 1997; Sullivan, 2011). These students are not only disproportionately found eligible for special education but are also disproportionately represented in more restrictive placements and programs. Although issues with disproportionality, more specifically overidentification, have been researched and analyzed for years, the analyses and debates have failed to address critical questions that can help educators implement best practices in the form of early identification and intervention as well as assessment and progress monitoring (Samson & Lesaux, 2008). The longstanding issues of disproportionality and overidentification suggest that there are systemic problems in the assessment of EL within the educational system.

School psychologists undergo years of rigorous training in the area of assessment and identification. Despite specific training in assessment practices for special education eligibility, most special educators lack adequate knowledge when it comes to assessing students who are not primarily English speakers (Barrera, 2006). One identified gap in school psychologists' knowledge is

the lack of training in the process of second language acquisition for ELs. Ortiz and Kushner (1997) noted that individuals involved in teaching, identification, referral, assessment, and eligibility of ELs do not understand the basic concepts of language proficiency, second language acquisition, or how a student's level of language proficiency affects their learning. Acquiring proficiency in a new language takes time. The process of learning a second language can take anywhere from five to seven years, and students who are in the process of learning English can have characteristics similar to those of students with learning disabilities (Cummins, 1984, 1999, 2000). English learners may take longer to learn new skills and struggle with vocabulary, reading, and writing, which can easily be mistaken for a learning disability (Barrera, 2006).

Researchers have studied many factors that may lead to the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education and have found that there isn't just one factor that contributes to disproportionality (Sullivan, 2011). The lack of appropriate assessment procedures, instruments, bilingual personnel, and those trained to accommodate ELs in the assessment process contribute to the overidentification of ELs in special education programs (Ortiz & Kushner, 1997). According to Pieretti and Roseberry-McKibbin (2016), English language proficiency is correlated with academic success across the curriculum. It does not simply impact performance in the area of language arts. Because of these difficulties, ELs are frequently over referred for special education. Differences in sentence structure, vocabulary, and the uses of language are common when children are learning a new language. Unfortunately, these characteristics are similar to those of children with learning disabilities or speech and language impairments, and as a result, referrals for assessment often result in misidentification because the assessors have not appropriately assessed students to differentiate between the language acquisition process and a true disability (Chu & Flores, 2011).

Jim Cummins (1980) hypothesized learning language required two separate skills, which he refers to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1980, 2016) identified the distinction after analyzing psychological assessments of more than 400 students from immigrant backgrounds. The referrals from teachers

and psychologists suggested that teachers and psychologists assumed that the children had overcome all difficulties with English because they were able to communicate easily in English (Cummins, 1981a, 1984). However, these children did not perform well on English academic tasks in the classroom or on language-loaded cognitive assessments. As a result, many of these students were identified as having learning or communication disabilities despite the fact that they had been learning English for a short period of time (1-3 years). Cummins (1984) later noted that he made the distinction between BICS and CALPS after his discussions with school psychologists in his study, who expressed concerns about biased practices with assessing bilingual students. Understanding this distinction is important for assessors so they may select the appropriate assessment instruments and analyze their findings.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that this study addresses is the overidentification of students from Spanish-speaking households as needing special education because they have not been adequately assessed. Inadequate assessments contribute to an overidentification of ELs in special education programs who otherwise could be served in more appropriate settings (Chu & Flores, 2011). This is first and foremost a problem because it results in students who are going through the developmental process of learning a new language being identified as students with disabilities. Overidentification of ELs as students with disabilities also results in students' being removed from the general education classroom to receive specialized academic instruction with specialists or being placed into special education classrooms. These programs limit their access to general education curriculum and opportunities to participation with their general education peers. More importantly, it inappropriately labels these children as having a disability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify school psychologists' decision-making process when determining what assessments to conduct to ensure students are assessed using linguistically appropriate practices. This study also seeks to understand what school psychologists

believe they need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of ELs. This study will contribute to understanding the extent to which inappropriate assessments contribute to disproportionality in the identification and placement of ELs, specifically Spanish-speaking students identified as ELs, into special education programs.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this qualitative research study:

1. How do school psychologists select their assessment instruments to ensure ELs are assessed using linguistically appropriate assessment procedures?
2. What supports do school psychologists perceive they need in order to conduct appropriate assessments of EL students?

### **Significance**

As the numbers of ELs in California schools continue to increase, this research is more important than ever and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because it will help institute policy changes in assessment practices of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The inappropriate assessment practices resulting in overidentification of ELs into special education programs is disadvantageous to students. Participation in special education classes reduces student participation with their general education peers, limits access to general education curriculum, labels students who are going through the language acquisition process as having a disability and limits their access to English language development programs they require to obtain English proficiency.

Notwithstanding the student costs, inappropriate placement in special education programs also result in increased monetary costs to school districts because they must hire special education teachers, school psychologists, and speech and language pathologists to conduct assessments and provide therapy, as well as absorb the associated costs to run the classrooms. Researchers have found restrictive placements often result in fewer opportunities for students to access post-secondary education and in fewer employment opportunities (Rea et al., 2002; Ryndak et al., 2010). In California, high school special education coursework does not meet the A-G requirements for enrollment in a four-year university, thereby limiting a student's postsecondary educational

opportunities. Furthermore, in some districts, disproportionate representation results in racial segregation, with culturally and linguistically diverse students being placed in more restrictive classroom settings (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). If culturally and linguistically diverse students are disproportionately impacted, this could hinder group-level educational attainment and social mobility. As Latinos are a growing segment of the state population, educational gaps in their college completion will impact the future of California's economy.

Aside from the direct consequences to the students themselves, over-identification of the students is closely monitored by the California Department of Education, which can result in district sanctions if the problem becomes persistent. The California Department of Education monitors school districts for disproportionate representation of groups of students, like ELs, to special education programs and closely monitors their progress in the programs. Many of these students are overidentified as students with specific learning disabilities because these groups of students share many of the same learning characteristics (Chu & Flores, 2011). School districts who are found to reflect such disproportionality must go through lengthy and complicated compliance monitoring processes that cost school districts in staff time to complete the required reports and training. Proper assessment of students from Spanish-speaking households is essential to ensuring that districts are not disproportionately identifying students for special education programs.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study will focus on school psychologist self-efficacy, assessment practices, and the selection of assessment tools when assessing ELs.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The assumptions underlying the study are that participants will participate truthfully during the study interviews. The study also assumes school psychologists find benefit in assessing language proficiency as part of their assessment battery. A last assumption of the study is that school psychologists feel underprepared to appropriately assesses students who come from Spanish-speaking households.

## Study Delimitations

This study was delimited to school psychologists practicing within seven school districts in eastern Los Angeles County.

## Study Limitations

This study was limited to one year for completion. The participants in this study may not be representative of all practicing school psychologists in California or other states in the nation. Study participants may have chosen not to participate in the interviews or may not have answered questions truthfully. Participants may have provided responses they believe to be best practices in assessment but which are not necessarily those that they practice.

## Definitions of Key Terms

*Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)*. Linguistics skills needed in everyday, social face-to-face interactions. It takes a learner from six months to two years to develop BICS (Cummins, 1980).

*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)*. Proficiency in academic language or language used required for use in the classroom. Language identified as CALP is abstract and requires students to develop skills such as comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring when developing academic competence. It takes five to seven years to develop CALP (Cummins, 1980).

*English learner (EL)*. A pupil who was not born in the United States or whose primary language is a language other than English or who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant and whose difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, writing, or understanding English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement as defined by Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

*English language proficiency*. A student's level of proficiency in learning English.

*Language acquisition*. The process of acquiring proficiency in a second language.

*Linguistically appropriate assessment.* An assessment that takes into consideration the student's language proficiency in English and their primary language.

*English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC).* The ELPAC is a required state test of English language proficiency that must be given to students in California whose primary language is not English.

*Overidentification.* To identify something or someone excessively and often incorrectly.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 of this dissertation provided context regarding psychoeducational assessment practices of students from Spanish-speaking homes. I further discussed the implications of overidentification of ELs in special education programs as a result of inappropriate psychoeducational assessments that do not fully consider language proficiency in English and the primary language. Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature pertaining to the research questions. Chapter 3 contains the research design, including data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 reviews the study's findings, and Chapter 5 is a discussion of my conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations for policy and practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXISTING RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The placement of minority students into special education programs has long been a complex issue for educators (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Artiles et al., 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). The issue was first brought to widespread attention in the mid-20th century, when Dunn (1968) noted that 60% to 80% of students placed into classrooms for students with mild mental retardation, which is currently referred to as intellectual disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) were children from minority backgrounds, including African Americans, American Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and students who were ELs. In the 21st century, the overidentification of minority students in special education programs continues to be a challenge for educators and an ongoing issue of equity.

Traditional assessment models have their own unique challenges and there is considerable evidence that these models are especially inadequate for assessment of students who are ELs (Abedi, 2008; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Artiles et al., 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). Many of these assessments were developed for native English speakers and the test items are linguistically complex, which compromises their validity and reliability when used with ELs (Abedi, 2008, 2009). There is substantial research showing that the technical use and interpretation of traditional, standardized assessments for determining special education eligibility can result in overidentification of ELs (Artiles et al., 2002). Given the history of assessment challenges surrounding ELs, school psychologists must understand that the foundation to understanding of a child's educational needs begins with a thorough and proper assessment.

#### Theoretical Foundation

A psychoeducational assessment conducted by a school psychologist is the foundation for understanding a student's learning processes (Canter, 2010; Sattler, 2018). A comprehensive assessment of a student who is an EL includes an assessment of the student's proficiency in both their primary language and in English (Farnsworth, 2018). Assessing the student's proficiency in both languages provides the school psychologist with valuable information that is used to select the most



appropriate assessment tools and to determine whether the student should be assessed in English only, using nonverbal assessments, or with a combination of English and primary language assessments (Sattler, 2018). While understanding a student's proficiency in both languages is important, overall proficiency alone is not sufficient for conducting an appropriate psychoeducational assessment.

Cummins (1980) hypothesized that learning language required two separate skills, which he refers to as BICS and CALP. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are described as the necessary language skills needed to facilitate conversation in social contexts that take place in informal settings, such as conversations with peers, discussing sports and other topics of interest, or social conversations during lunch or recess. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, on the other hand, involves the more complex language skills required for academic learning. Cummins (1980) noted that language development, in any language, follows a developmental course.

The distinction between BICS (social) and CALP (academic) language is recognized by researchers, educators, and policy makers (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Cummins, 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 1999; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). Based on Cummins's conceptualizations of levels of language acquisition skills, it is widely accepted that BICS are often achieved after about two years of exposure to English, while CALP takes approximately five to seven years to develop (Cummins, 1999). When students have limited English proficiency, it makes it more difficult for them to fully benefit from classroom instruction and to understand assessment questions in the same way as their native English-speaking peers (Abedi, 2009).

Thoroughly assessing and classifying a student's language proficiency is especially important given the growing number of ELs in our schools (Abedi, 2008). If language proficiency is not formally assessed, school psychologists may only rely on informal assessment by asking students questions in English about their daily activities, likes, and dislikes (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). These types of questions generally assess BICS and do not provide school psychologists with sufficient information about the student's CALP development (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). The use of informal assessments

exclusively will not provide school psychologists with the detailed information they need to select appropriate assessment tools based on the student's language proficiency. Recognizing the developmental process of learning a second language is necessary for school psychologists to conduct appropriate assessment of ELs because it is imperative for school psychologists to understand a student's language proficiency when selecting assessment tools and determining the language of assessment.

Cummins's (1984) framework of language learning is a valuable framework for assessing ELs because it makes a distinction between the two aforementioned types of language proficiency, which will assist school psychologists in completing a thorough and accurate assessment of ELs' true skills and will allow them to distinguish between the process of learning a second language and a true learning disability.

As discussed above, there is extensive research documenting the overrepresentation of ELs in special education (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002). There are distinct language nuances to consider when students are ELs, and failure to consider them can result in overrepresentation or overidentification (Arnold & Lassman, 2003), which is why assessing language proficiency in BICS and CALP is important to the assessment process. By assessing language proficiency, school psychologists can tease out if the difficulties are due to actual disabilities or a general misunderstanding of linguistic differences of the student learner or whether the testing procedure of assessors is not able to distinguish true disability from second language acquisition (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Inappropriate assessments can lead to students' being identified as having a learning disability, when in reality they are simply students going through the process of developing CALP (Abedi, 2008; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). For this reason, it is important that assessments conducted by a school psychologist provide a clear and accurate assessment of the student's language proficiency so they may thoroughly assess and understand their overall functioning skills.

There are many complex and interconnected reasons for the overidentification of ELs in special education programs, such as misunderstandings about the needs of ELs, poorly designed assessment instruments, the linguistic complexity of the assessment, and weak assessment practices (Abedi, 2009; Artiles et al., 2002; Counts et al., 2018; Sullivan, 2011). This study specifically explores school psychologists' understanding of how language proficiency impacts the assessment process, including determining the language of assessment, the selection of assessment tools, and the interpretation of results to ensure students are accurately identified for special education programs and to reduce overidentification of ELs into special education programs. A school psychologist's failure to ensure students who are ELs are properly assessed results in significant equity ramifications for students, teachers, and school districts.

Inappropriate assessments of ELs result in issues of equity, such as the overidentification of ELs in special education programs, removal of ELs from general education curriculum and access to education with general education peers, and limited access to A-G requirements, which can limit students' access to a four-year university. In addition, the overidentification of ELs as students with disabilities can result in time-consuming and costly state monitoring of assessment practices.

### **Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature**

Students who are ELs are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States (Samson & Lesaux, 2008; Sullivan, 2011). Literature has shown that some racial and ethnic groups are identified as having disabilities in larger proportions than what would be expected given their numbers in the general population and has long been a concern for educators and policy makers (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Samson & Lesaux, 2008). This is also true for ELs.

The over-representation of ELs in special education programs occurs for a variety of reasons. According to Chamberlain, overidentification of ELs occurs because of invalid and inappropriate assessment practices and because assessors do not collect appropriate data to make appropriate eligibility determinations (Chamberlain, 2005). The use of invalid and inappropriate assessments of ELs has been found to lead to a disproportionate number of students being placed into special

education programs (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002).

School psychologists' training in assessment practices when assessing ELs also plays a significant role in their overidentification in special education programs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). The factors below have been found to contribute to the overrepresentation of ELs in special education programs.

### **School Psychologists and Training Programs**

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has long advocated the need for increased diversity among school psychologists (Bocanegra, 2012). The number of minority students, including ELs, in special education programs is disproportionately large; however, the majority of educators serving these students are primarily middle class, White and female (Artiles et al., 2002; Ochoa et al., 2004; Walcott et al., 2018). A 2015 survey conducted by the NASP found that only 6% of school psychologists surveyed reported being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and only 7% of those surveyed reported fluency in Spanish (Walcott et al., 2018). This disparity between the students and the school psychologists who assess them is a concern because as the number of ELs increases, so does the need for culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists who understand the nuances of language development and how to analyze it in the context of differentiating between disability and the typical progression of English acquisition (Counts et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2015; Noland, 2009). Conducting valid and reliable assessments of ELs has presented a dilemma for school psychologists and is made even more difficult by the small number of bilingual school psychologists (Noland, 2009).

As student diversity in the United States increases, so does the need for culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists (Ding et al., 2019). Simply being bilingual does not qualify a school psychologist as a bilingual psychologist unless they have had “systematic and comprehensive coursework and fieldwork” with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ding et al., 2019). Unfortunately, there are very few programs that provide training specifically aimed at assessing ELs, and only a few states have certification requirements for bilingual school psychologists (O’Byron & Rogers, 2010).

As such, many school psychologists report they do not have the required training to conduct thorough assessments of ELs (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Ochoa et al., 1997). Understanding the unique needs of ELs assists educators in conducting accurate assessments and designing more appropriate educational programs. For example, Sullivan (2011) found that teachers who have English as a Second Language certification were more likely to place ELs in less restrictive environments. A study conducted by Ochoa, Rivera and Ford (1997) found that nearly 70% of the school psychologists who were surveyed reported that they had “less than adequate training” in the assessment of ELs (Ochoa et al., 1997). More specifically, the respondents reported that their training was less than adequate in the competency areas of “(a) knowledge of second language acquisition factors and their relationship to assessment; (b) knowledge of methods to conduct bilingual psycho-educational assessment; and (c) ability to interpret the results of bilingual psycho-educational assessments” (Becker & Deris, 2019; Ochoa et al., 1997).

Most training programs address the legal and ethical responsibilities of school psychologists to conduct assessment in the child’s native language; however, inadequate training, lack of knowledge about language acquisition, lack of materials, and outdated and inadequate assessment practices continue to present challenges (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Sullivan, 2011). The lack of school psychologists trained in assessing students from linguistically diverse backgrounds results in inappropriate diagnosis and eligibility decisions (Ochoa et al., 2004).

If positive changes are to be made in this area, it is essential that school psychology programs prepare prospective school psychologists in understanding the unique curriculum and language needs of minority students, especially in understanding language development of ELs (Artiles et al., 2002; Sotelo-Dynega, 2015).

Unfortunately, many school psychologists have not been adequately prepared to understand linguistic concepts and how they can influence the results of a psychoeducational evaluation (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Ochoa et al., 2004). In the school setting, school psychologists rely on academic achievement and cognitive assessments to determine a student’s strengths and areas

of need and to identify disabilities. Many of the standardized assessment tools used for these purposes measure CALP, the results of which will likely underestimate an EL's functioning. There is convincing proof that traditional norm-referenced assessment tools are not appropriate for use with students who are ELs (Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). In their study on the assessment practices of school psychologists, McCloskey and Athanasiou (2000) found that 57% of respondents assessed students using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), a heavily language loaded assessment instrument, and found the WISC was used frequently with second language learners being assessed for special education purposes. If school psychologists do not have a fundamental understanding of the process of learning a second language and the types of language proficiency identified by Cummins (1984), they will have a difficult time assessing and interpreting findings, and as a result, they may overidentify ELs as students with disabilities.

### **Assessment of Language Proficiency**

As stated above, ELs are disproportionately represented in special education programs and there are many complex reasons for this occurrence. The IDEA (2004) clearly outlines the responsibilities of school districts and school psychologists when assessing students who are ELs. The IDEA requires assessors to consider the student's level of proficiency in English when determining the appropriateness of assessment tools and other evaluations materials used. It also requires that evaluations be conducted in the student's native language when such evaluation will provide useful information to inform assessment findings. The intent behind the law is to ensure that a student's language needs can clearly be distinguished from any potential learning disability-related need. Most importantly, the law mandates that assessors not identify students as individuals with disabilities solely because of their limited English proficiency. It is critical to assess a student's academic language proficiency in order to distinguish true learning disabilities from linguistic differences (Cummins, 1984). Failure to take any of these into consideration can result in students' being inappropriately identified and potentially overidentified for special education. Understanding the process of language acquisition is essential for conducting a valid assessment of ELs (Abedi, 2008).

Therefore, culturally, and linguistically responsive school psychologists play a critical role in decreasing overrepresentation of ELs in special education (National Association of School Psychologists, 2015).

Prior to conducting a psychoeducational assessment, school psychologists must first have a good understanding of a student's proficiency in English. In California, all students in kindergarten through 12th grade whose primary language is not English are assessed using the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC). The initial ELPAC administration identifies students' English proficiency. After the initial administration, students are assessed annually to monitor their progress in acquiring the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English (California Department of Education). This information is then used to inform assessment practices for ELs with disabilities.

When school psychologists assess students who are ELs, they must assess CALP to determine the most appropriate language in which to assess (Olvera & Gomez-Cerrillo, 2011). Determining language proficiency in the student's primary language and English through formal and informal assessments is a necessary first step in the assessment process (Farnsworth, 2018). It is recommended that students be assessed in their primary language and English and that language proficiency be assessed as well (Ortiz & Yates, 2002). According to Farnsworth (2018), language proficiency involves the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Given the complexities of assessing ELs, assessors should conduct both formal standardized and informal assessments to get a full understanding of the student's linguistic abilities to reduce overidentification of learning disabilities (Farnsworth, 2018). Parents are a valuable source of information, and their participation in the assessment process can reduce misdiagnoses. High-quality interviews have been found to be a valuable way to gather information about the parents' understanding of their child's behavior and needs (Blatchley & Lau, 2010).

## **Selection of Assessment Tools**

### ***Linguistically Appropriate Assessments***

The administration of standardized assessments plays a principal role in school psychologists' practices and conducting those that are linguistically appropriate can be a challenge for school psychologists. English learners differ from their monolingual English-speaking peers not only in their English language proficiency but also in their cultural and educational backgrounds (Lane & Leventhal, 2015). English learners face many challenges in assessment, including second language acquisition barriers and assessment tools that are not well designed to assess their knowledge and skills. Even when school psychologists are aware of students' linguistic needs, there are limited assessment instruments that are intended for use with this population (Ochoa et al., 2004). As a result, ELs are disproportionately represented in special education programs. Artiles, Rueda, Salazar and Higareda (2005) found that ELs with minimal English proficiency were at greater risk of being identified as disabled and placed into special education programs. Issues with the screening process, invalid assessment instruments, accountability pressures, and a belief that language differences constitute a disability were identified as proposed reasons for overidentification (Artiles et al., 2005).

Given the unique differences among ELs, school psychologists face many psychometric challenges when selecting assessment tools, specifically challenges related to norming and validity. For example, Solórzano (2008) found fairness and bias issues when administering high stakes tests with ELs because many ELs may be placed into remedial English classes and do not receive exposure to the same content and skill development necessary to do well on these tests. In turn, these same concerns apply to standardized assessments administered by school psychologists because many of these tests are not developed and normed with ELs in mind. Even if accommodations are put in place to support primary language needs, research studies have shown the accommodations alter the constructs being measured, which affects the validity and integrity of the test (Abedi et al., 2004). The population of students for whom tests are designed is a crucial aspect of the test and affects the integrity of the test (Solórzano, 2008).



One commonly utilized assessment tool is the WISC. Research has shown that bilingual students perform more poorly on the WISC than their monolingual peers because the WISC is heavily language loaded, meaning that the linguistic demands of the test are very complex (Cormier et al., 2014). Thus, it is important that school psychologists understand the influence of language when assessing ELs (Cormier et al., 2014). Many of the standardized cognitive assessment used by school psychologists require the student have a high level of language proficiency to understand the test directions and be able to respond verbally to the questions (Cormier et al., 2016). For example, Cormier et al (2014) investigated the linguistic demand of the oral subtest directions of the WISC-V and found that the oral directions for each of the subtests required relatively high linguistic understanding, which should be taken into consideration when selecting and interpreting the results. Despite IDEA requirements that assessors consider the student's level of proficiency in English when determining the appropriateness of assessment tools and other evaluations materials used, research has shown this is not always the case. One research study found that large numbers of students in their sample had incomplete records that provided information on their language ability and that only half of students who were bilingual or monolingual in a language other than English were assessed in their native language (Yzquierdo et al., 2004). Similarly, McCloskey and Athanasiou (2000) found that 57% of respondents in their study frequently used the WISC with second language learners, despite the fact that the WISC has been found to be heavily loaded with academic language.

Assessing in the student's primary language is another option for school psychologists; however, this too has some limitations. Spanish-speaking students born in the United States have very different learning and language experiences, in terms of vocabulary and grammar, than Spanish-speaking students born in a Spanish-speaking country. One of the major limitations to assessing students in their primary language is that the normative sample for many of these tests are not representative of ELs in the United States (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000). In their study, McCloskey and Athanasiou (2000) found that assessors often used the Escala de Inteligencia para Nivel Escolar Wechsler (WISC-RM), however, this test was outdated and was normed on children

from Mexico City, who are linguistically different from Spanish speaking children in the United States or other Spanish-speaking countries.

### ***Alternative Assessment Options***

Other options for assessment of ELs include the use of nonverbal intelligence tests or the use of interpreters in the assessment process. Given the limited numbers of bilingual school psychologists, as noted above, it is very likely that monolingual English-speaking school psychologists will be conducting the majority of evaluations of ELs. Many assessments administered by school psychologists are standardized and must be administered as directed in the manual. If the English assessment is simply translated by the examiner this will invalidate the results (Sattler, 2018). Thus, it is important that school psychologists receive training in linguistically appropriate assessments and in how to use interpreters appropriately in the assessment process. When using interpreters during assessment, it is important that school psychologists review the assessment with the interpreter beforehand and discuss key concepts (Arroyos et al., 2018). Interpreters should be trained in each assessment tool used and the procedures for standardized administration. In addition, interpreters should also be trained to understand their role in facilitating oral conversation between the school psychologist and the student due to language barriers but be cautious of integrating their own opinions and biases into the assessment interpretation (Arroyos et al., 2018; Ochoa et al., 2004). Most importantly, it is important that interpreters are highly proficient and understand the linguistic and cultural background of the students they work with (Arroyos et al., 2018).

### **Collaboration**

Consultation and collaboration services provided by school psychologists are an essential component of a comprehensive system of support in schools (Ysseldyke et al., 2009). Collaboration across disciplines provides valuable information during assessment that can enhance the assessment team's understanding of a child (Finello, 2011). Collaboration between school psychologists and speech and language pathologists has also found to be especially valuable because both have specialized training and skills related in the area of literacy skill acquisition and

instruction (Nellis et al., 2014). O'Bryon and Rogers (2016) explored the consultation experiences of bilingual school psychologists with teachers about EL students and referral concerns, classroom observation, challenges encountered, and resources needed to improve educational outcomes for ELs. Through consultation, the school psychologist and the teacher can work to determine whether the academic difficulties an EL is displaying could be ascribed to a learning disability or the student's language abilities. Although the consultation addresses a variety of concerns, the school psychologists in O'Bryon and Roger's study found their consultation most frequently responded to language-related academic concerns. The collaborative practices among school professionals, school psychologists, and speech language pathologists have been found to provide a mechanism for better understanding student needs, improving services, and improving outcomes for students with disabilities (Kellems et al., 2016; Nellis et al., 2014).

### **Barriers to Assessment**

An important component of the assessment process is identifying the need for language assessment and determining which language or languages to assess in (Klotz & Canter, 2006). Researchers have found there is a lack of valid and reliable instruments for assessing ELs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Becker and Deris (2019) investigated the role of staff member efficacy in the proper determination of an EL with a language difference or disability and found that there was a need for assessment instruments that are reasonable for Spanish-speaking and bilingual students.

School psychologists inevitably encounter barriers when assessing ELs; however, research in this area is almost nonexistent. Some identified barriers to school psychologists' providing therapeutic intervention include limited access to supervision, practice, and access to resources, and limitation of service time allocation (Atkinson et al., 2014). The ratio of school psychologists to students has also been previously identified as a barrier to providing comprehensive services (Curtis et al., 2002). If the student-to-school psychologist ratio is high, this limits the amount of time school psychologists have to provide comprehensive services and assessments. Similarly, Wilczynski, Mandal, and Fusilier (2000) identified time constraints as a major barrier to school psychologists

providing consultation. To address these barriers, school psychologists must advocate for resources and policies that promote comprehensive and integrated service delivery (Castillo et al., 2017).

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Cummins's BICS and CALP theoretical framing of language learning and empirical literature that has identified best practices for assessment of ELs by school psychologists (see Figure 1). The foundation to accurate identification of ELs begins with systematic training of school psychologists in culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment practices (Ding et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2015; Ochoa et al., 1997). School psychologists who are trained in understanding the developmental process of language acquisition will understand the need to thoroughly assess a student's language proficiency in English and their primary language before selecting the assessment tools of their psychoeducational assessment. Proper training in culturally and linguistically appropriate practices will assist school psychologists in selecting assessment tools that will more accurately measure a student's cognitive and academic skills and guide them in interpreting assessment results in order to differentiate between the typical language acquisition process and a disability, resulting in proper identification for special education services.

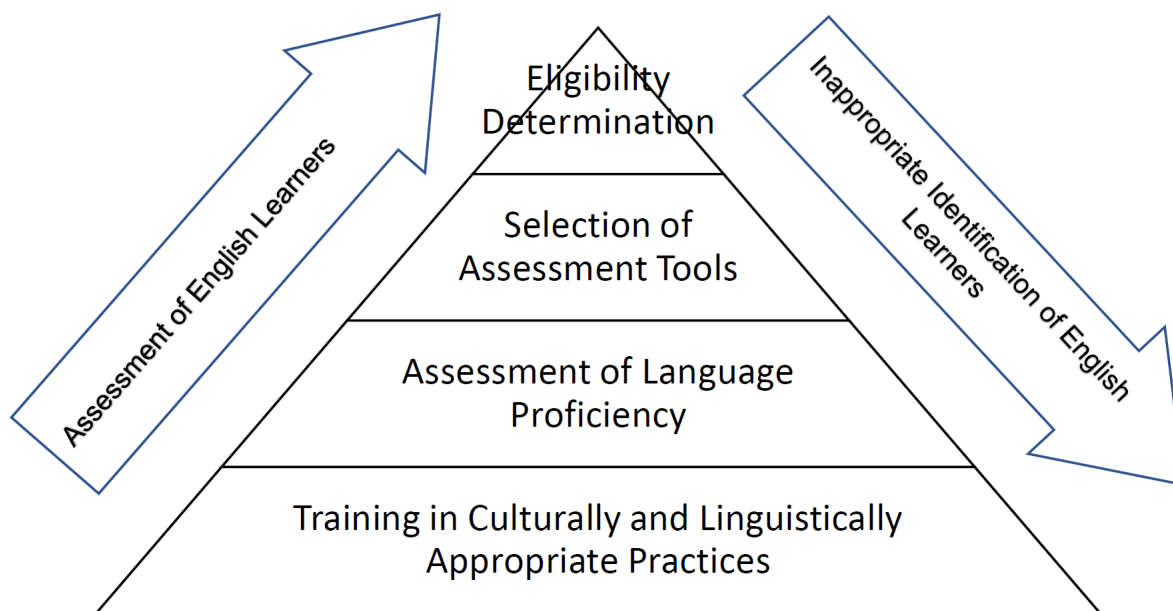


Figure 1. Foundation of assessment of English learners.

## Chapter Summary

The over-identification of ELs into special education programs has long been a problem for educators (Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). School psychologists play a critical role in assessment process and must be able to assist individualized education program teams in differentiating between typical second language acquisition and a true disability.

As school district populations become increasingly diverse, there is an even greater need for school psychologists with training in culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment practices (Ding et al., 2019; National Association of School Psychologists, 2018; Noland, 2009). Culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment practices benefit ELs and ensure that assessments are appropriately selected to meet the unique needs of each individual EL, resulting in appropriate identification for special education services.

It is essential that school psychologists understand the role of language acquisition in differentiating between the process of second language acquisition and disability. The assessment of the student's language proficiency in English and their primary language will guide school psychologists in selecting appropriate assessment instruments and in interpreting assessment results.

The inadequate use and interpretation of assessments of ELs results in equity issues of overidentification of ELs in special education programs. School psychologists have a responsibility to select assessment instruments that are valid and reliable for use with ELs and that will provide the most useful information to assist them in making appropriate eligibility determinations to not only reduce the overidentification of this population of students in special education programs but, more importantly, to guide school districts in developing equitable and appropriate instructional programs to support their unique language needs.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD OF INQUIRY

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making process school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to ELs. In addition, this study explored school psychologists' perceptions of the supports they believe they need to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students. The results of this study will inform school psychology preparation programs and provide school districts with valuable information for supporting school psychologists in completing more appropriate assessments of ELs. In addition, this study will contribute to and expand research in the area of assessment of ELs.

This research study sought to address the following research questions: First, how do school psychologists select their assessment instruments to ensure ELs are assessed using linguistically appropriate assessment procedures? What records do they review prior to selecting their assessment instruments and to what degree do they assess language proficiency in English and the student's native language? Second, the study explored what supports school psychologists perceive they need in order to conduct appropriate assessments of ELs, including from their university training programs and from the school districts in which they are employed. Furthermore, this study sought to understand what training and experiences school psychologists believe will better prepare them for conducting linguistically appropriate assessments of ELs.

This chapter presents the methodology for this study, including a discussion of its philosophical foundations. The following sections of this chapter provide a description of the research design and the methodological approach used for this study. This chapter also includes a detailed description of the research methods used in this study, including information about the setting; sample; data collection, including instrumentation and procedure; data analysis; research validity; and the role of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study.

## Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry, or the investigation of something in a systematic manner (Merriam, 2016). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people's experiences, how they make sense of their world, and the meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2016). Through qualitative research, the researcher explores a problem by collecting text and data through the experiences and views of the participants (Clark & Creswell, 2014). One important characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2016, p. 16). As the primary source of data collection, the researcher can immediately respond, adapt, clarify, summarize information, and check with the respondent to ensure accuracy of the interpretation and to follow up on any unusual or unexpected responses.

Qualitative research is an exploratory form of research and can be used when the researcher does not know what to expect (Clark & Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2016). It is useful in exploring participants' experience with a phenomena and gaining meaning by collecting data and analyzing the significant meaning gathered through the data (Clark & Creswell, 2014). This study sought to understand school psychologists' assessment and decision-making processes for assessing ELs. By focusing on school psychologists, the study explored their understanding of the role of language proficiency and how this contributes to their selection of assessment instruments and their interpretation of assessment results in determining eligibility for special education purposes. The study also sought to understand what supports school psychologists perceive they need to conduct appropriate assessments of ELs.

One strength of qualitative research is that it is flexible, which allows the researcher to change the conditions of the study. As a result, it produces richly descriptive information that conveys what the researcher has learned about the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 2016). One limitation of qualitative research is that humans as researchers have preconceptions that can impact the study. It is therefore important to identify and be aware of the preconceptions and monitor them.

This study was conducted as a qualitative study because it allowed me to get an in-depth understanding of the decision-making processes school psychologists go through in determining what assessments to conduct to ensure their assessments are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The study also investigated the school psychologists' perceptions about the types of supports they feel they need in order to conduct more thorough and appropriate assessments of students who are ELs. This methodology is most appropriate in answering the research questions because it provides an opportunity for participants to expand and elaborate upon their responses, which could lead the discussion in other directions. In contrast, a quantitative study would force the uses of identified categories and rankings.

### **Research Design**

The use of in-depth qualitative interviews is a primary tool of qualitative researchers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through in-depth interviews, researchers are able gather rich, detailed information about the phenomena being studied. Through this approach, the researcher is able to gather examples, detailed experiences, and narratives. The questions provided are open-ended, which allows the interviewee to respond any way they choose and to elaborate on their responses or to raise new issues. It also allows the interviewer to query the responses, make up new questions, or follow up on new insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

An in-depth qualitative interview research design was selected for this study because it allowed me to interview Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient school psychologists to understand their unique, individual experiences assessing ELs and to understand why they make the decisions they do. Using an interview research design allowed the gathering of detailed information about their personal experiences and perceptions. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, interviews were conducted with each participant individually by telephone or via video conferencing. Benefits to conducting the interviews in this manner include allowing each individual enough time to share their experiences and allowing them to be candid in their responses without the concern of other school psychologists' being critical of their responses.



## Research Methods

In this section, I describe the specific research methods that I utilized in this interview study. Specifically, I discuss the setting, sample, data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure validity or trustworthiness.

### Setting

This study was conducted in a multidistrict Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) located in eastern Los Angeles County. A SELPA is a consortium of geographically located school districts that work together to provide special education services to children who reside within the SELPA boundaries (California Department of Education, 2021). The SELPA where this study was conducted is comprised of seven school districts. Table 1 provides an overview of each of these school districts and the total number of school psychologists employed at the SELPA.

The SELPA employs school psychologists who serve the seven school districts. There are approximately 60 school psychologists employed throughout the SELPA. Each school psychologist is employed by one of the seven school districts. The school psychologists who are employed by the school district only work with students within that school district. The SELPA psychologists are employed by District G but are assigned to support regional programs throughout the seven school districts that comprise the SELPA. These school psychologists may work and assess students within any of the seven-member school districts. This SELPA was an adequate setting for this study because the member school districts have a large population of students who are ELs and require linguistically appropriate assessments.

Table 1. SELPA Demographic Profile

District	Grades Served	Total Enrollment	% SPED	% EL	% Soc-Eco. Disadvantaged	#School Psychologists	Ratio
A	Infant-8	8,570	11.7	11	56.2	9	952:1
B	PK-22yr	8,472	11.8	17.2	74.2	13	652:1
C	PK-8	4,335	12.6	15	69	4	1,083:1
D	PK-8	1,558	17.5	29.8	85.2	3	519:1
E	PK-8	2,716	15	41.9	89.9	4	679:1
F	PK-8	6,072	11.2	15.6	78	7	867:1
G	9- 22yr	11,404	12.9	9.4	73.1	7	1,629:1
SELPA	-	-	-	-	-	12	-

Source. California Dashboard 2019

### Sample

Five Spanish-proficient and five non-Spanish-proficient school psychologists were interviewed for this study. (See Table 2 for participant demographics.) School psychologists were selected for interviews because this study investigated the decision-making process school psychologists go through when assessing ELs. Individuals self-selected to participate in the study. Self-selection bias occurs when individuals select themselves to participate or not participate in a study. Although self-selection sampling is an easy and useful tool for obtaining participants, it also results in self-selection bias (Maxwell, 2013). Self-selection bias in this study could possibly occur because only those school psychologists who were interested in or knowledgeable about assessment of ELs may have volunteered to participate, and they may not be representative of the entire population. The participants selected for interview had a minimum of two years of experience as a practicing school psychologist in the school setting. In addition, this study investigated school psychologists' perceptions about the supports they require to conduct more appropriate assessments of ELs. School psychologists are expected to consider the student's language dominance when selecting assessment tools; therefore, they are an appropriate sample within whom to conduct interviews. This

sample size was selected because it is sufficient to reach the point of saturation, meaning that interviewing additional participants would not yield new additional data.

Table 2. School Psychologist Participants

Psychologist	English language proficiency	Years of experience
P1	proficient	3
P2	proficient	8
P3	proficient	3
P4	proficient	10
P5	proficient	3
N1	nonproficient	24
N2	nonproficient	2
N3	nonproficient	16
N4	nonproficient	17
N5	nonproficient	27

### **Data Collection and Management**

In the following section, I describe the instrumentation, procedures and data management used for this study.

#### ***Instrumentation***

All data was gathered through an interview protocol developed in collaboration with the dissertation committee. (See Appendix A for the interview protocol.) The interview protocol consisted of 13 open-ended questions designed to allow participants to respond freely and provide detailed information on their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes around assessing students who are ELs. This style of questioning allowed me to probe responses, check for clarification, and engage the participants in discussion. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then analyzed and coded by me. The responses were coded for similarities and differences in participants' responses. In addition to the information gathered through the interview, I also analyzed field notes from the interview session.

## ***Procedures***

Prior to beginning the study, I obtained permission from the superintendent of each school district and the executive director of the SELPA. All school psychologists within the SELPA were emailed recruitment information using their district email addresses. To recruit participants, I sent an email to all school psychologists who work within the SELPA. The email included a brief description of the study and the anticipated length of the interview and included a short survey that collected the participant's name, number of years as a practicing school psychologist, contact information, school district where they worked, and whether they were Spanish proficient or non-Spanish proficient. Please see Appendix B to review the recruitment email and Appendix C to review the interest survey. Ten school psychologists completed the survey expressing their desire to participate in the study. Of these 10 school psychologists, five identified as Spanish proficient and five identified as non-Spanish proficient, and each participated in a 30- 40-minute individual interview. Selected participants were contacted by email to schedule an interview at a time that was most convenient to them. Please see Appendix D for a copy of this email. All 10 interested participants replied to the email request to schedule an interview, and there was no need to follow up with an additional email or phone call. Please see Appendix E for phone script that would have been used in this instance. Nine of the interviews were conducted through a video conferencing format but only audio was recorded. One interview was conducted by telephone. Upon beginning the interview, I provided participants a more detailed description of the study, explained the interview process and time requirements, and obtained their consent to participate. Please see Appendix F for the consent form. Because only 10 school psychologists completed the interest survey, there was no need to decline participants. Please see Appendix G to review the email that would have been used in this instance. The selected participants were asked a series of questions utilizing an interview protocol developed in collaboration with dissertation advisors. The purpose of conducting interviews with Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists was to compare and contrast their experiences assessing ELs, as

well as to understand what they perceive they need to be able to conduct more appropriate assessments of ELs.

### ***Data Management***

With the permission of the participants, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. All audio recordings and transcriptions were stored in a password-protected computer and cloud-based storage system.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In this section I provide information on steps taken for data analysis, trustworthiness, and the role of the researcher.

### ***Data Analysis***

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The raw transcriptions were coded to identify conceptual categories. I analyzed the data to identify emergent themes using Dedoose software. Dedoose is a web-based data management application that allowed me to organize, code and analyze my research data. All transcriptions were loaded into the web-based data management system. I developed codes in the system and used these to code the raw data.

### ***Procedures to Ensure Validity and Trustworthiness***

All researchers are concerned with ensuring their research is valid, reliable, and conducted ethically. Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals and school psychologists working in the field. Ensuring that a study is valid and reliable requires that the study be carried out ethically and with rigor, meaning that researcher and others have confidence in the study and the results (Merriam, 2016). For this study, I paid careful attention to the interview questions and queried vague responses to make sure the questions provide enough detail so that the participants' provided me with sufficient detailed experiences. One strategy used to ensure credibility and validity is the triangulation of data. Data triangulation involves comparing and cross-checking multiple points of data to corroborate the evidence from different participants. This helps to ensure themes identified through the study are credible representations of the participants' experiences (Clark & Creswell,

2014). Another strategy I used for ensuring validity was respondent validation. Respondent validation involves soliciting feedback on preliminary findings from some of the participants interviewed (Merriam, 2016). Respondent validation is an important way of making sure information the participants share is not misinterpreted or misunderstood. In addition, it allows the researcher to check their own biases and possible misunderstandings of what they observed. As a former school psychologist who has experience assessing ELs, I had biases about how to assess a student's language proficiency, what type of assessment instruments to use, and how to make eligibility determinations. I used respondent validation by sharing preliminary findings with two participants to ensure the information gathered was accurate and that the data was interpreted accurately. The last strategy to ensure validity and trustworthiness involves spending adequate time collecting the data and purposefully engaging with the data. This involves making sure sufficient data is collected so that similar themes are repeated over and over again, and no new information arises. This is often referred to as data saturation (Merriam, 2016). The sample size selected for this study was sufficient in size and scope to ensure the collection of rich data.

### ***Role of the Researcher***

Recognizing the researcher's role and biases is imperative in a qualitative study because the researcher becomes the research instrument through which information is gathered. Reflexivity refers to the researcher's role and power relations in the participants' lives (Merriam, 2016). One way in which my privileges and positionality may have impacted research bias included my position as an administrator within the SELPA in which the study was conducted. While I do not directly supervise school psychologists within the SELPA, I do provide a large majority of the training provided to school psychologists. I was aware of the impact my position in the SELPA may have had on participants' willingness to openly share information about their experiences. I addressed this issue by taking sufficient time to develop rapport with the participants prior to initiating the interview protocol. I also made sure that none of the participants were to be formally evaluated by me. Participants may have viewed me as an authority and, therefore, interviews were not conducted at the SELPA office, but

rather via videoconferencing or by telephone. In addition, I am a former bilingual school psychologist, with experience conducting bilingual psychoeducational assessments. Because of my experience as a bilingual school psychologist, I have presumptions about conducting linguistically appropriate assessments and the data the school psychologist should take into consideration. I am often called upon to consult on assessment cases by school psychologists, specifically with regard to bilingual assessment. Because of my experience as a practicing school psychologist, I am intimately familiar with the subject and was mindful of my bias.

Over the years, I have served as a school psychologist supervisor to four school psychologists employed throughout the SELPA. As a result of my positionality, respondents may feel pressure to respond to questions in a way they think I want them to or may feel uncomfortable being completely straightforward. To address this, I informed participants prior to beginning the interview that my role in the interview was to learn about their unique experiences assessing ELs and that there were no right or wrong answers. In addition, I was intentional in the questions asked during the interview protocol to make certain the data collected addressed the questions being examined for this study.

These biases and positionality issues were addressed by carefully wording the questions in the interview protocol so as not to negatively influence the participants' responses. I was also mindful of my behavior and actions with the participants.

### **Chapter Summary**

Assessing students who are ELs requires that school psychologists have a good understanding of the language acquisition process, that they review student records to determine the most appropriate assessment tools to use and that they assess the students in a language that is most likely to yield accurate results. Through my research, I examined the process school psychologists go through in determining what assessment tools to use to ensure ELs are assessed using linguistically appropriate assessment instruments. This research study also inquired about the supports school psychologists believe they need in order to conduct appropriate assessments of ELs.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This study was conducted as a qualitative study and the findings were analyzed using qualitative analysis of interview transcripts. This methodology was selected because it provided an opportunity for participants to expand and elaborate upon their responses and provided rich qualitative data to analyze. In this section, I present the themes that emerged through analysis of the data.

Overall, school psychologists elaborated on information they review and data they collect to help them make selections about strategies used to select instruments to ensure their assessments of ELs are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Some of the strategies the participants utilize include a thorough review of cumulative records, parent interviews, and collaboration meetings with other specialists. It also became clear throughout the interviews that school psychologists want more training in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students.

#### **Sources of Information for Selection of Assessment**

The first question this study aimed to answer was, how do school psychologists select their assessment instruments to ensure ELs are assessed using linguistically appropriate assessment procedures? Analysis of the data collected revealed the following themes: the importance of reviewing students' records, parent interviews regarding educational and language history, and collaboration with other professionals. Similarities were found among Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologist practices when it came to reviewing records and interviewing parents. Differences were noted with regard to cultural consideration of assessment instruments and with whom each of them collaborates with when assessing ELs.

#### **Review of Records**

Opportunities to thoroughly review student records were consistently reported by all psychologists interviewed for this study as the main source of information used to determine how to proceed with their psychoeducational assessment and make decisions about the selection of



assessment tools. A thorough review of records included a review of the student's cumulative file, which often includes work samples, report cards with extensive teacher comments about the student's progress, information about the student's progress on English language development, review of standardized statewide assessments, previous psychoeducational assessments, and individualized education plans. Review of these records was consistently cited as a source of information for determining the selection of assessment instruments for both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists. Participant P5 shared,

I just look at the history. I do a lot of, um, kind of, background work, for lack of a better term, to see . . . to get as much information as I can before I assess, um just to kind of give me a sense of where I think they are. I know that there's a lot of information but in my opinion, as a psychologist, I have to look, and kind of analyze and interpret, you know, what that information means to make the best decisions for the student and the evaluation.

The home language survey completed by parents upon a student's enrollment was the first source of information participants reviewed and considered when making decisions about what assessment instruments to select and whether to assess the student in English, Spanish, or a combination of both. Every participant, except those working with high school students, noted the usefulness of the home language survey. The participants were clear that the home language survey, while particularly important, was just one piece of important information they consider when making decisions.

One of the most important aspects of the file review involved reviewing the results of the statewide standardized assessment that assess the student's proficiency, such as the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) and the more recently adopted English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). These assessments measure a student's English proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. It is important to note that while the CELDT and ELPAC provide valuable information about a student's proficiency in English, the state does not offer an equivalent assessment for determining proficiency in the student's native language.

While all the psychologists interviewed discussed the importance of knowing a student's language proficiency in both English and Spanish, the Spanish proficient psychologists

overwhelmingly used other individually administered standardized assessment tools, such as the Bilingual Verbal Abilities Test or Woodcock Language Survey to formally measure the student's language proficiency in both languages. The Spanish-proficient psychologists also overwhelmingly referenced the student's BIC and CALP level and the role of these when selecting tools and interpreting their assessment results. According to psychologists, having information about the student's BIC and CALP helps them determine what assessment instruments to select and to consider whether a student can be administered an assessment that is "language loaded," meaning that it requires the student have a higher level of understanding of linguistic concepts. Depending on the results of the language proficiency assessment, the psychologists then made decisions about whether to assess the student in English, Spanish, both, or to use a nonverbal measures that remove linguistic demands all together.

A few of the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists mentioned BIC and CALP but did not seem to find this information as helpful as did the Spanish-proficient psychologists in making selections of assessment tools. There were a few instances in which the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists mentioned soliciting help from other psychologists, intern psychologists, or interpreters to conduct language proficiency assessments. However, this was not standard practice, and they did not involve Spanish-speaking psychologists or interpreters in all their assessments of ELs. The only exception to this was the school psychologist who conducts every assessment in collaboration with a speech pathologist and bilingual speech language pathology assistant that serves as an interpreter during assessments.

All the psychologists interviewed for this study work within the same SELPA and geographic area. Despite the similarities in the student demographics within their respective school districts, it was interesting to note the significant difference in the number of ELs each of them reported working with. During the interview, participants were asked to give an approximation of the total number of ELs they have experience working with. Spanish-proficient psychologists all reported interacting with significantly higher numbers of ELs than did their non-Spanish-proficient counterparts. This difference

could be attributed to the unique school-level population of students each of them work with or which students they consider to be ELs.

### **Parent Interviews**

Parental interviews in the assessment process were found to be a common theme shared by almost all participants. Only participant N5 did not cite parent interviews as a source of information used to make decisions about how to proceed with the assessment; however, it should be noted that Participant N5 works only with high school students and parents typically are not as involved in the assessment process at that age. Information gathered through parent interviews was consistently cited as invaluable in helping the psychologists understand the student's language history, including information about how many years the students had lived in the United States, the language of instruction students had previously received, and information about the student's social language usage at home and in the community. The valuable information parents shared about the student's language usage and educational experience was consistently cited by school psychologists as the first source of information gathered to help them make informed decisions about the language of assessment and what assessment tools to use during the assessment. Participant P4 noted,

really it is the interview with the parent, regarding what language they use in the home, or what language they use casually when they're having dinner, when they're outside, in the community, with the family, uh, what language they're being exposed to when they're watching television. Uh, all that information comes from the parent interview.

Participant N4 stated,

We have a very extensive interview with our parents before we do any assessment, so we bring them in and we're with parents at least, probably an hour. We don't engage in any testing until we do a complete uh interview.

The school psychologists in this study report the information gathered through the parents helps establish the course of their evaluation.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration was the most prevalent theme shared by all the participants who were interviewed. All the participants noted the importance of collaborating with other professionals to make determinations about how to approach the assessment, select the most appropriate

assessment tools, and make determinations about the eligibility of students who are ELs. For example, Participant P5 reported that collaborating with others is essential to understanding the student's language needs.

I can't make those decisions by myself. If the collaboration with the parent . . . talking to the parent, getting that information . . . collaboration with their teacher, whether that be their special education teacher or their general education teacher. How's their language? How do they share? Do they share with others? Do they volunteer? How do you . . . what language do you notice they're speaking? Um, and then collaboration with, um maybe my . . . my intervention teacher, if they were a student of hers. Um, how are they? How are they compared to the other students in . . . in intervention? Do you feel like they're struggling more than others? Um, so definitely collaboration with others to get all of that information, um, that I can, um, to make my decisions. I couldn't do it, um, by myself and I definitely need all of the other information to make informed decisions.

While there was some mention about the role of the general education teachers and special education teachers in the assessment process, all participants overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of collaborating with the speech and language pathologists. The extent of collaboration described by interviewees ranged from a quick discussion about students while passing in the hallways to a formal meeting where the school psychologist and speech and language pathologist both reviewed the student's records, discussed language proficiency, and reviewed preliminary assessment results. They described the speech language pathologist as being an essential collaborator because of their extensive knowledge in understanding language development and language acquisition. The participants all strongly expressed the value of having opportunities to have discussions with their partner speech pathologist to fully understand the student's language needs, which, in turn, helped them to select the most appropriate assessment instruments and interpret their findings. Participant N4 stated, "I always consult with the speech and language pathologist, uh, they would usually give me, uh, great information regarding language development."

The speech and language pathologist's experience in understanding the progress of language development was most often cited as being the most important factor in their collaboration. Both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists described collaboration with the speech pathologist as especially important because of their experience and training in understanding language development and how this factored into the analysis of ELs assessment results. Participant

N4 shared that he works closely with the speech pathologist to make determinations about whether the student's difficulties are due to second language acquisition or the result of a disability. According to Participant N4, "I partner, all my assessments with the speech pathologist so it's, it's a discussion that we have together. Um, do we feel like this is language processing in general or do we feel like this is a second language issue."

Opportunities for collaboration with other professionals was found to be valuable to both the Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists; however, the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists also noted the importance of working closely with other Spanish-proficient specialists or interpreters when assessing ELs. Non-Spanish-proficient psychologists described collaborating with Spanish-proficient school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, speech language pathology assistants, or trained interpreters. It was interesting to note that while the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists found value in collaborating with other, Spanish-speaking professionals, they only did so for a small number of their assessments and not for every assessment of an EL. The decision to reach out for Spanish-language support was made by each individual psychologist, and there did not appear to be specific criteria for determining when it would be necessary to do so. Collaboration was so important that even Spanish-proficient psychologists found value in collaborating with other Spanish-proficient specialists when assessing ELs. They shared that collaborating and consulting with others was important because it helped them ensure that the information they'd gathered was sufficient to assist them in making appropriate determinations about assessment tools to select and in making final eligibility determinations.

Opportunities for collaboration with other professionals was continuously cited by all participants throughout the interviews; however, there was very minimal mention of collaboration between the participants and general education or special education teachers. The psychologists all referenced the importance of interviewing the teachers and gathering information about the student's performance and use of language in the classroom, but they did not describe engaging in in-depth conversations about the selection of assessment instruments or their analysis of findings. This is an

interesting finding since teachers spend a great amount of time interacting and communicating with students. Teachers have a wealth of information about student's language usage, and this may be a missed opportunity for school psychologists to gather valuable information about language proficiency from the teachers. Most of those discussions appeared to take place between the school psychologist and speech language pathologist.

### **Assessments**

All psychologists interviewed conduct some type of assessment in English, regardless of the student's language proficiency. They reported that this allows them to gather valuable quantitative and qualitative data; however, sometimes assessments were conducted in English because there weren't any other options available. The psychologists shared that access to assessment tools in Spanish was a challenge. They noted that their school district is wonderful about purchasing assessment tools they need, but in some circumstances, the tools they need do not exist. The Spanish-proficient psychologists were more apt to conduct assessments of students in both English and Spanish while the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists often used nonverbal cognitive measures and conducted the remaining assessments in English. In a few instances, non-Spanish-proficient psychologists collaborated with a Spanish-proficient assessor or translator to assess in Spanish; however, they reported low numbers of instances where this was done. While nonverbal measures provide valuable assessment information, they do have limitations because they do not allow assessors to gather valuable information about the student's verbal abilities.

### **Cultural Considerations**

It was abundantly clear during these interviews that both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists care deeply about conducting thorough assessments and making appropriate eligibility determinations of ELs. They all shared feeling a responsibility to "do right" by the student. The Spanish-proficient psychologists felt especially strongly about this and often spoke about their own experiences being an EL and feeling like they understood the student's experiences. Nearly all the Spanish-proficient psychologists considered the student's language proficiency when selecting

assessment tools but also took into consideration cultural factors and how those cultural factors could impact the outcome of the assessments. Participant P2 shared,

I'm bicultural. And, um, um, I understand sometimes, uh, that culture plays a role. Uh in how a student is going to interact with others, with the adults in the class. Uh, compared to, uh, so what I do with the students that I know have been in this country for a short period of time, um I do a lot more observations. It's not that they don't understand or don't have language, it just that they're just soaking it all in. And a lot of times, that silence translates to others as a learning disability but it's not.

The consideration of cultural factors in assessment was not cited by the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists.

### **Perceptions of Support**

The second research question this study aimed to answer was, what supports do school psychologists perceive they need in order to conduct appropriate assessment of EL students? Analysis of the data collected revealed that school psychologists need more training in assessment practices for ELs and need access to appropriate assessment tools. This theme was consistent for both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists.

### **Training**

#### ***Need for More Training***

An analysis of the data revealed that school psychologists want more training specifically addressing the assessment of ELs. The need for training in assessing ELs was a consistent theme shared by all participants who were interviewed. The majority of the school psychologists interviewed shared that their university training programs did a good job preparing them to conduct psychoeducational assessments, but their university program did not specifically offer coursework that focused on assessment of ELs or culturally diverse students. Participant N3 noted,

I would say the program that I was in did not provide a great deal of experience other than just mostly, how to conduct assessment, but also to take into account, uh cultural characteristics and language proficiency, but I would say that the majority of learning about that probably came on the job. I wouldn't say that I had like a course in assessing English language learners.

This was a consistent finding among both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists.

Similarly, Participant P4 said,

I think it's very telling that I don't remember like, like a full bilingual, I think there was one where it was meant for bilingual assessments but other than that, besides learning about the tools and how to administer them and interpreting and understanding the results, that didn't come until internship.

Participant P4 also shared that she was the recipient of a grant specifically for bilingual, Spanish-speaking psychologists and through that grant she was able to take two courses designed for assessing linguistically and culturally diverse students, but she noted that because these courses were for grant participants, not all the students in her training program took these courses. Many of the participants shared that their general assessment courses briefly addressed best practices in assessing ELs and culturally diverse students, but the courses did not specifically discuss assessment tools, nor did it require that they assess an EL student as part of their training.

Despite the university training received, all the psychologists interviewed sought additional training through workshops or conferences. In a few instances, this training was provided through their school district, but most often the training was sought out by the psychologist because they felt they needed more training in this area. The need for on-going training was also consistently cited by both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists interviewed. According to Participant N5, school psychologists,

should seek out, you know, continual training, but I think it's something that if you don't use it on a regular basis, um, you might not remember certain important parts. Plus, there's new research so I think, however, whether it's provided by the school district, whether it's provided by the SELPA, or whether psychs are seeking it out on their own, I think that refreshers and current training based on current research is always really, really important.

### ***Training in Language Proficiency***

Many of the psychologists interviewed discussed the need for more training specifically in assessing language proficiency and how language proficiency factors into the selection of assessment instruments and the decisions school psychologists make about special education eligibility. While this was identified to be an area of need for both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists, more non-Spanish-proficient psychologists felt training in this area was necessary. Participant N3 shared,



I would say just training on how to defensively determine English language proficiency versus their proficiency in Spanish and how to determine which one is stronger and where to proceed if English is stronger and how to proceed if Spanish is stronger.

### ***Learning on the Job***

All the psychologists interviewed stated they learned to conduct assessments of ELs “on the job,” either during their internship experience or by working closely with a school psychologist experienced in assessing ELs. Working with experienced psychologists provided them with an opportunity to learn firsthand about available assessment tools and how to select the most appropriate assessment tool based on the student’s unique needs and recommended assessment practices. According to Participant P4,

I learned most of what I do and practice by my supervisors and watching them, and during my internship year, having the exposure and having the opportunity, uh to evaluate and interpret results. I think that’s truly when I learned what it looked like and how to do it.

Regardless of the extent of their training specifically in assessing ELs, all but one of the psychologists interviewed felt confident in their ability to assess ELs because they had developed strong skills in psychoeducational assessment and interpretation. When asked if he feels confident differentiating between second language acquisition differences and learning disabilities, Participant P1 stated, “I think I am. I mean, as long as I gather the data, as long as I gather information and, interviews. You know, have a solid amount of information to analyze in conjunction with the team.” All but one non-Spanish-proficient psychologist felt confident in their ability to differentiate between language difference due to language acquisition and true learning disabilities. Participant N1 stated she did not feel confident in her ability to differentiate second language acquisition differences and learning disabilities and felt she lacked training and experience in doing so.

### ***Investing Time in Assessing***

Even though many of the school psychologists’ felt confidence in their ability to assess ELs, many expressed that making this differentiation was “hard” or “takes more time.” As Participant P1 noted, the time invested is “worth it to make a recommendation you feel confident in, comfortable

with, you know. That's in the best interest of the student." Participant P5 reiterated the importance of investing time in these assessments so that she has an outcome she can be confident in:

I feel like I'm like I'm making the best decision as I can as I move on that by the time I get to that decision making process . . . I like to feel . . . I feel that a lot of times . . . I feel that I have done my professional responsibility to make sure that I acquired as much information I can. I acquired the best and most valid information as I could. This is the information that I have, and I feel like I made the best decisions that I could. So, this is the information that I have, and I feel that I made the best decisions along the way where I can make that decision at that time. If I didn't do that, and I just . . . then I would feel like, "ugh" I don't know if . . . I don't know, and I don't want to be in that position. Which is why I feel I take the time in the front end to do that work. That way by the time I get to a point where I have to make a decision, I can feel confident in the decision that that I'm making.

Many of the psychologists interviewed shared that conducting assessments of ELs is more time consuming because psychologists often administer additional assessments to ELs. They stressed the important of administrators' understanding this and taking this into consideration when determining school psychologists' caseloads. Additionally, participants felt it was important for administrators to advocate for school psychologists so they have sufficient time in their schedule to conduct thorough assessments and make appropriate determinations.

### **Access to Assessment Instruments**

Access to appropriate assessment tools was a recurring theme shared by both Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists. All psychologists interviewed shared that their school districts have been supportive in purchasing requested assessment instruments and noted that this helped them conduct thorough assessments. The psychologists also expressed a desire to stay up to date on assessment instrument revisions or newly developed instruments and also shared the importance of receiving training to use them. Although collaboration with administrators was mentioned minimally during the interviews, the psychologists emphasized the important role of administrators in advocating for school psychologists to have access to the assessment tools necessary and the time necessary to conduct appropriate assessments of ELs. According to Participant P3,

I think some of the challenges in the beginning was, um, we didn't have the, tools, like the right assessments to give. I remember in the one . . . like the first year, um we didn't have the, I think, the Woodcock Munoz was the one that we were originally using, and we couldn't find an

assessment, so we kind of had to scramble to kind of purchase a new test and something that had both in English and Spanish assessment components to it, in order to be able to get the, the BICS and CALPS.

Not having access to the appropriate assessment tools was a challenge for the psychologists interviewed. In addition to having access to the tool necessary, the psychologists emphasized the importance of receiving on-going training and staff development so they could continue to be well informed of new instruments being published and how to use them as part of their assessments.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the results of qualitative analysis were presented. Conducting culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments of ELs is a complex process. The school psychologists in this study consistently shared themes involving the importance of reviewing the student's records, interviewing parents about their child's use of language and instructional history, and the importance of collaborating with other specialists to ensure their assessments of ELs were culturally and linguistically appropriate. The study also clearly revealed school psychologists' desire to receive between training in assessing ELs in their university training programs and that they receive on-going training in support throughout their career.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The IDEA (2004) was designed to provide much-needed special education services and supports for students with disabilities. While this includes students student who are ELs, school districts must develop policies and procedures that are well designed to ensure that ELs are appropriately identified for services. The placement of minority students into special education programs has long been a complex issue for educators (Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). Traditional assessment models have their own unique challenges, and there is considerable evidence that these models are especially inadequate for assessment of students who are ELs (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). Many of these assessments are developed for native English speakers, and the test items are linguistically complex, which compromises their validity and reliability when used with ELs (Abedi, 2008, 2009). There is substantial research showing that the technical use and interpretation of traditional standardized assessments for determining special education eligibility can result in overidentification of ELs as needing special education support (Artiles et al., 2002). Given the history of assessment challenges surrounding students who are ELs, school psychologists must understand that the foundation of a thorough understanding of a child's educational needs begins with a thorough and proper assessment.

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making process school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to ELs. In addition, this study explored school psychologists' perceptions of the supports they believe they need to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students. I interviewed participants and analyzed transcripts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do school psychologists select their assessment instruments to ensure ELs are assessed using linguistically appropriate assessment procedures?
2. What supports do school psychologists perceive they need in order to conduct appropriate assessment of EL students?

This chapter provides my interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed detailed information about school psychologists' experiences assessing ELs. They provided information about the records they review and data they collect to help them make decisions about how to select assessment instruments that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. Some of the strategies the participants utilize include a thorough review of cumulative records, parent interviews, and collaboration meetings with other specialists. It also became clear throughout the interviews that school psychologists want more training in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students.

### **Interpretations**

The research questions for this study were viewed through the lens of Jim Cummins's (1980) framework, which asserts that learning language required two separate skills, which he refers to as BICS and CALP. He described BICS as the language skills needed to facilitate conversation in social contexts that take place in informal settings, such as conversations with peers, discussing sports and other topics of interest, or social conversations during lunch or recess. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, on the other hand, involves the more complex language skills required for academic learning. According to Cummins (1980, 1984), language development, in any language, follows a developmental course. His framework of language learning is a valuable framework for assessing ELs because it makes a distinction between the two aforementioned types of language proficiency, which assists school psychologists in completing a thorough and accurate assessment of ELs' true skills and allows them to distinguish between the process of learning a second language and a true learning disability.

### **Review of Cumulative Records**

All the school psychologists interviewed referred to the importance of reviewing records to help them make decisions about what language to assess students in and to help them select their assessment instruments. Every participant referenced the importance of reviewing the home language survey. The home language survey consists of four questions that are completed by the

parent. If the parent indicates that the home language is something other than English, the student is considered an EL and must be assessed with the ELPAC to determine their proficiency in English. Two of the psychologists interviewed shared experiences in which the parent completed the form and marked the home language as “Ingles.” This was a clear indication to them that the student being assessed was exposed to Spanish in the home and the psychologist needed to further assess the student’s language proficiency in English and their primary language. It is important that school psychologists understand these nuances when reviewing records so that they are making decisions about assessment instruments that are best for the student being assessed.

All the participants also referenced reviewing the ELPAC scores as part of the record review. The ELPAC is a state-administered assessment that measures the English language proficiency skills that students need to succeed in school. English language proficiency is measured in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and students are provided an overall score. While reviewing the overall ELPAC score is valuable to school psychologists, they must have a good understanding of how the test is structured and how to analyze the scores to make decisions. The school psychologists in this study referenced reviewing the ELPAC scores but did not detail how to analyze the information the assessment yields. It is important that school psychologists be taught how to critically analyze students’ records, including ELPAC scores, to assist them in making decisions about language proficiency and in the selection of assessment instruments.

### **Parent Interviews**

Parent interviews were cited as an essential component of the assessment process by all but one school psychologist, who works exclusively with high school students. The participants used the interview as an opportunity to gather detailed information about the student’s language usage, exposure, and proficiency. Conducting high-quality interviews has been found to be a valuable way to gather information about the parents’ understanding of their child’s behavior and needs (Blatchley & Lau, 2010). Including parents as active participants in assessments can reduce misdiagnosis and inappropriate special education placements (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002).

## **Collaboration**

Collaboration across disciplines provides valuable information during assessment that can enhance the assessment team's understanding of a child (Finello, 2011). Every school psychologist in this study shared the value of collaborative opportunities with their peers in helping them to better understand the needs of their students and make determinations about language proficiency and the selection of assessment instruments. Collaboration between school psychologists and speech and language pathologists has also found to be especially valuable because both have specialized training and skills related in the area of literacy skill acquisition and instruction (Nellis et al., 2014). This is consistent with the findings of this study. Both the Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists regularly sought to collaborate with the speech pathologists when assessing ELs because of their knowledge and expertise in understanding language development. Interestingly, there was very little mention of collaboration with general education and special education teachers or reading interventionists. This is in contrast to research studies that have shown that collaboration between the school psychologist and classroom teacher helped to determine whether the academic problems an EL was displaying could be ascribed to a learning disability or the student's language abilities (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2016).

## **Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment**

The school psychologist's assessment is used to determine a student's eligibility for special education services. School psychologists have a responsibility to ensure the assessments they select to administer are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the individual student they are assessing. These instruments must especially consider the student's language proficiency in English and their primary language to ensure that they are truly identifying students with disabilities and ruling out second language acquisition as a contributing factor that might be impacting their academic progress in the classroom. The selection and use of inappropriate assessments can result in ELs being inappropriately identified for special education services, especially if they are still in the process of developing CALP (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002).

Research has found the use of invalid and inappropriate assessments of ELs has been found to lead to a disproportionate number of students being placed into special education programs (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002).

The school psychologists in this study recognize the importance of having access to appropriate and updated assessment tools. School psychologist must have the necessary tools readily available to assess students so their time can be spent thoroughly assessing and interpreting their results. Participant P3 gave an account of a situation where not having access to the necessary tools led to a “scramble”:

We couldn't find an assessment, so we kind of had to scramble to kind of purchase a new test and something that had both in English and Spanish assessment components to it, in order to be able to get the BICS and CALPS.

This example highlights the added challenges that result when school psychologists do not have the assessment instruments they need readily available, and they are left scrambling to piece together an assessment. A major difference noted between Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists was that Spanish-proficient psychologists almost always conducted formal standardized language proficiency assessments to obtain BICS and CALPS levels. The non-Spanish-proficient psychologists conducted these on occasion but not as regularly as the Spanish-proficient psychologists did. Overall, Spanish-proficient psychologists were more likely to conduct standardized language proficiency assessment in comparison to non-Spanish-proficient psychologists.

One striking difference between the Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient school psychologists was their awareness of the impact of cultural implications in the assessment process. While the non-Spanish-proficient psychologists were knowledgeable regarding the need to consider language proficiency, they did not reference the potential impact of cultural implications in the administration and interpretation of assessment results. Almost all the Spanish-proficient psychologists referenced the need to consider these factors in the selection of assessment instruments and interpretation of assessment results. This was not only factored in when they selected assessment instruments based on how “language heavy” an instrument was and the



required CALP skills necessary for the student to fully access the instrument, but they also took into account variances in vocabulary and language usage and overall exposure among students from different Spanish-speaking countries. There was greater awareness expressed by Spanish-proficient psychologists, for example, Participant P1 shared,

Socioeconomic realities of some of the families we are working with. I know there is a, there's a TAP question, a question on the TAPS 3 where it would ask the kiddo, um you know, 'why don't we have a birthday every year?', or something like that. And, um, a lot of my . . . the kiddos at work, um you know, in working class would say 'um because we don't have no money.' I can't really give them credit for that but I kind of understand . . . they do understand, they kind of understand the question. So, I feel like, I don't think that's, a processing deficit but I can't give them credit for that.

Participants P2 shared another example of linguistic influence in the assessment process:

There's that cultural piece where the assessment tools are not providing them . . . they don't really translate, like for example, we have the word 'grass,' and they have to . . . the word grass in Spanish is 'cesped' or 'zacate,' depending on what region you're coming from. And now if I'm having these tests given to the student where I'm asking them a question in Spanish and the word 'cesped' appears, they're looking at me like 'what is he talking about?'

## **Training**

The participants in this study overwhelmingly expressed a need for training specifically aimed at assessing ELs. The need for training was consistent across Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient psychologists. The training school psychologists receive in assessing ELs plays a significant role in the overidentification of ELs in special education programs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research findings, which have shown that school psychologist training must include "systematic and comprehensive coursework and fieldwork" in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ding et al., 2019). Most of the participants shared that their university training programs provided a brief overview in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, but this was generally integrated into their general assessment courses and, in their opinions, was insufficient. This is consistent with previous findings, which have shown that there are very few programs that provide training specifically aimed at assessing ELs, and only a few states have certification requirements for bilingual school psychologists (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010). Even though participants felt they lacked sufficient university training, the majority of

them felt confident in their ability to conduct thorough assessments of ELs, which is contrary to the previous research that found that many school psychologists report they do not have the required training to conduct thorough assessments of ELs (Becker & Deris, 2019; McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Ochoa et al., 1997). This is consistent with Ochoa et al.'s (1997) study that found that nearly 70% of the school psychologists surveyed reported that they had "less than adequate training" in the assessment of ELs.

Aside from having the necessary assessment instruments, school psychologists must have extensive training in the administration and interpretation of these assessment tools so they can be confident that they have made appropriate eligibility determinations.

### **Implications**

Each of the themes discussed above has implications for policy that districts and university programs should consider as well as implications for educational leaders to consider for implementation. This section will also consider theoretical implications and ideas for future research consideration.

#### **Implications for Policy**

This study revealed similar themes around the type of information school psychologists use to make decisions about their assessment practices. However, it was clear that school psychologists want more guidance and training about how to proceed with assessments of ELs. Although school psychologists are well trained in assessment practices, they want school districts to be more explicit about how their assessments should be conducted, including what type of information to review and what kinds of assessments to administer. For example, Participant P5 shared,

I think there should be more of a protocol. I think because English language learners are such a unique population, and a lot of times they are, you know, overrepresented in special education, you have to keep in mind that we might have to do extra. You know, for those students, so there might have to be a more unique approach that we take to these students. And you might have to do it a specific way than you may be used to for another student.

Assessments of ELs conducted by school psychologists who do not fully consider language proficiency could result in issues of equity and overidentification of ELs in special education

programs. Inappropriately identifying an EL as a student with a disability results in their removal from general education curriculum, reduced access to education with general education peers, and limited access to A-G requirements which can limit student's access to a four-year university. This is a significant equity issue for school districts to consider. It is recommended that school districts establish procedures for identifying ELs for special education programs to reduce instances of overidentification and establish general education supports and programs for ELs who are still in the process of acquiring CALP.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

The most prevalent theme shared by participants was the importance of collaboration with peers. The participants' responses indicated the importance of collaboration when making decisions about language proficiency and, thus, the decisions they make about what language to use when assessing students and what assessment tools to utilize. Additionally, the participants also noted that collaboration with their peers was helpful when making decisions about eligibility. Collaboration across disciplines provides valuable information during assessments that can enhance the assessment team's understanding of a child (Finello, 2011). School districts should consider mentorship opportunities where school psychologists with extensive training and experience in assessing ELs work closely to mentor and train new school psychologists in assessment practices. School psychologists' assignments will also need to be considered to ensure they have sufficient time to conduct assessments of ELs and to collaborate with other specialists.

Classroom teachers have abundant information about their students and thus play a fundamental role in the assessment process, yet the participants in this study engaged in minimal collaboration with teachers. It is recommended that school psychologists further integrate into the school community to strengthen and maintain relationships with teachers and engage in collaboration with teachers throughout the assessment process.

## Implications for School Districts

The participants in this study overwhelmingly shared that opportunities to engage in collaborative activities with other assessors and educators was beneficial to them in determining the most appropriate language of assessment and in selection of assessment tools. The participants found most value in collaborating with the speech and language pathologist because of their training and background with language. They found the time spent collaborating with the speech and language pathologist was also beneficial in helping them make determinations about eligibility for special education. As participant P1 shared, “I always consult with the speech and language pathologist, they would usually give me great information regarding language development.” Staff assignments should be considered to ensure opportunities for collaboration between the school psychologist and speech and language pathologist can occur on a regular basis, but especially for assessments of ELs. Additionally, opportunities for collaboration between school psychologists, teachers, and interventionists is highly encouraged.

It was evident throughout the interviews that collaboration among school professionals is essential for thorough assessments of ELs. School districts should consider embedded professional learning opportunities among special education and general education staff that focuses not just on the selection of assessment tools, but rather on how to ask driving questions about student needs, engage in meaningful discussion, focus on identifying intervention recommendations for students who are ELs, and change how these professionals think about and thus serve ELs.

The need for on-going training was also identified by study participants. Given the unique needs of ELs, school districts should envision how they provide training to both general education staff and special education staff. Staff development and training that includes opportunities for following up and coaching have been found to be most effective for teaching new strategies (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Districts should envision their training formats to include opportunities for follow-ups. One consideration includes monthly case studies of ELs’ assessments where the assessment team, including the general education teacher, can engage in thoughtful

discussion about the student and their needs and work together to determine if additional assessment or new interventions are necessary in order to increase the student's access to the curriculum.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The participants in this study recognize the important role that thorough assessments play in the educational decisions made for students. Research has continually shown that inappropriate assessment practices contribute to the overidentification of ELs into special education programs (Abedi, 2008; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). More specifically, research has found that culturally and linguistically diverse students are overidentified as having behavior and mental health issues. Future research could explore the role of school psychologists' assessment practices in the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students identified as individuals with behavioral and mental health issues.

School psychologists inevitable face barriers in assessment of ELs, however, the research in this area is virtually nonexistent. This is an area that needs to be explored. Throughout this study, Spanish-proficient psychologists discussed how being bilingual, bicultural, and speaking the same language as the student factored into the decision-making process when assessing Spanish-speaking ELs. Future research could explore how these experiences might influence Spanish-speaking psychologists when assessing ELs whose primary language is not Spanish.

## **Recommendations**

### **Time Allocation**

#### ***Time to Conduct Assessments***

Many of the school psychologists in this study shared that conducting assessments of ELs requires additional time. Reportedly, these assessments take considerably more time because they must conduct a more thorough record review and assess for language proficiency. It was suggested that these assessments can take almost twice as long as a standard assessment completed only in English. For instance, Participant P4 noted,

it's more time in assessment. I wouldn't count it as just, I don't want to say the other ones are just run of the mill, but because, there's a lot more information gathering, cause there's a lot more interpretation happening. I think it's more time, and that's challenging.

School psychologists inevitably encounter barriers when assessing ELs; however, research in this area is almost non-existent. Some identified barriers to school psychologists' providing therapeutic intervention include access to supervision, lack of practice, access to resources, and limitation of service time allocation (Atkinson et al., 2014). The ratio of school psychologists to students has also been previously identified as a barrier to providing comprehensive services (Curtis et al., 2002). If the student-to-psychologist ratio is high, this limits the amount of time school psychologists have to provide comprehensive services and assessments. School districts must consider the student-to-psychologist ratio and staffing assignments to ensure school psychologists have an adequate amount of time to conduct comprehensive assessment of ELs, including assessments of language proficiency.

### ***Time for Collaboration***

The study participants continually shared the value of collaboration in their decision-making practices, yet the amount of time spent collaborating varied from psychologist to psychologist. Opportunities for collaboration are also left at the discretion of the school professionals. It is recommended that collaboration time be embedded into assessment practice to ensure all assessors have adequate time to have these important conversations about a student's language proficiency and, ultimately, eligibility determinations. The SELPA, district, and site administrators must commit to supporting school psychologists by considering their workloads to allow ample time for these important conversations to take place.

### **Access to Assessment Instruments**

Participants continually expressed the importance of access to the necessary assessment instruments to conduct thorough assessments of ELs. It is recommended that SELPA, district, and school administrators reserve funds for making purchases and ensuring school psychologists have access to the most valid and reliable assessment instruments. English learners face many challenges

in assessment, including second language acquisition barriers and assessment tools that are not well designed to assess their knowledge and skills. Even when school psychologists are aware of students' linguistic needs, there are limited assessment instruments that are intended for use with this population (Ochoa et al., 2004). As a result, ELs are disproportionately represented in special education programs. It is important that school psychologists understand the influence of language when assessing ELs (Cormier et al., 2014).

### **On-Going Training for School Psychologists and Teachers**

The need for training was a consistent theme shared by Spanish-proficient- and non-Spanish-proficient participants. According to previous research, many school psychologists report they do not have the required training to conduct thorough assessments of ELs (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Ochoa et al., 1997). This is consistent with the findings in this study. All the school psychologists interviewed reported that, while their university training program provided them with a good foundation in assessment skills, they did not receive adequate training in assessing the needs of ELs. The participants shared that they did not receive enough training in understanding second language acquisition, in the selection of appropriate assessment tools, or in the interpretation of assessment findings. This finding is consistent with previous research, which found the respondents reported that their training was less than adequate in the competency areas of "(a) knowledge of second language acquisition factors and their relationship to assessment; (b) knowledge of methods to conduct bilingual psycho-educational assessment; and (c) ability to interpret the results of bilingual psycho-educational assessments" (Ochoa et al., 1997, p 329). Unfortunately, many school psychologists have not been adequately prepared to understand linguistic concepts and how they can influence the results of a psychoeducational evaluation (McCloskey & Athanasiou, 2000; Ochoa et al., 2004). The findings of this study clearly identify the need for school psychologists to receive training in understanding the unique needs of ELs, second language acquisition, and how these can influence the assessment process so that they can conduct accurate assessment and designing more appropriate educational programs (Sullivan, 2011).

The participants in this study also identified the need for teacher training. More specifically, the participants identified the need for on-going training in understanding the unique needs of ELs for both general education and special education teachers. Training for teachers is important because teachers often are the first to identify students who are struggling or to make referrals for assessment. Therefore, it is essential that teachers receive training in understanding the language acquisition process, language development milestones for ELs, and strategies for supporting ELs in the classroom. Additionally, it is important that teachers receive training in the referral and assessment process to ensure that referrals for special education assessment are appropriate referrals so that those students identified for special education services are truly students with disabilities and not students whose needs are the result of the second language acquisition process.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Educators**

As student diversity in the United States increases, so does the need for culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists (Ding et al., 2019) and for school psychologists trained in assessing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ochoa et al., 2004). However, simply being bilingual does not qualify a school psychologist as being competent unless they have had “systematic and comprehensive coursework and fieldwork” with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ding et al., 2019, p 237). School district administrators should consider hiring both culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists as well as nonbilingual psychologists trained in understanding the unique curriculum and language needs of minority students, especially in understating language development of ELs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Sotelo-Dynega, 2015). Many of the participants interviewed for this study shared that they learned most of their skills “on the job” by working closely with school psychologists experienced in assessing ELs. The Spanish-proficient psychologists recognized the advantage that being bilingual and bicultural gave them when assessing ELs. These psychologists expressed a shared experience and felt they understood the students better because they had shared similar experiences in school. Unfortunately, research has shown that on-going supervision and mentoring is often provided by supervisors who



are not school psychologists, let alone experienced in the assessment of ELs. This provides additional evidence supporting the need for school districts to hire culturally and linguistically diverse staff in addition to staff trained in the cultural and linguistic needs of ELs (Walcott et al., 2018). Hiring considerations should include school psychologists who are proficient in the student's native language and those with awareness of cross-cultural differences and knowledge in the assessment practices of ELs (Ochoa et al., 1997).

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

The assessment and placement of culturally and linguistically diverse student into special education programs is a complex issue, and traditional assessment models have posed unique challenges in the assessment of ELs. (Abedi, 2008; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz & Yates, 2002). This study provided insight into the decision-making process Spanish-proficient and non-Spanish-proficient school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to ELs. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that school psychologists rely on a comprehensive review of student's records, information gathered from parent interviews, and collaboration with other educators when making these important decisions.

This study explored school psychologists' perceptions of the supports they believe they need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students. The findings of this study highlight the need for training specifically aimed at addressing the unique assessment needs of ELs. Special education programs are an invaluable resource for serving students with identified disabilities. It is important that school psychologists conduct appropriate assessments of ELs to reduce issues of overidentification and any potential negative consequences for students who are inappropriately placed.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

RQ's:

1. How do school psychologists determine which students require a bilingual psycho-educational assessment?
2. What supports do school psychologists perceive they need in order to conduct appropriate assessment of EL students?

Date:

Time:

Location:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Kristine Ramos and I will be conducting this interview. I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of today's interview is to understand the decision-making process school psychologists' go through when determining when a bilingual psychoeducational assessment is necessary. Additionally, I hope to understand what you think you need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of English Learners. Your expertise in the area will help us better understand your needs and inform future research in the area of assessment of English Learners.

In an interview like this, it is very important that you express yourself openly- there are no right or wrong answers. I really just want to know what you think. I also want you to know that you can decline to answer any question or ask to discontinue the interview at any time.

The interview should last between 30 and 45 minutes. Any information you share with me today will remain confidential. Your name and any information you share with me today will not be identified in any way in the final study findings. For your protection, please do not attribute any illegal activities specifically to yourself or anyone other person by name.

I will be audio recording our session in order to ensure accuracy as I write up the findings. Because I am recording, it is important that you speak clearly. Do you give your consent for me to conduct this interview and to audio record?

Before we begin, I'd like for us to get acquainted. I've shared a little bit about myself. Can you tell me your name, title and how long you've been in your position?

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Can you tell me about your experience as a school psychologist?
  - a. How long have you been working as a school psychologist?
  - b. How long have you worked as a school psychologist within the SELPA?
  - c. What grade levels have you worked with?
2. Do you have experience conducting assessments for students who are English Learners?
  - a. Tell me about your experience assessing students who are English Learners?

- b. Approximately how many of these students have you encountered in your career?
  - c. What grade level were these students in?
3. What language do you typically use to assess EL students?
    - a. How do you determine what language to assess the EL student in?
    - b. What information do you consider when making this determination?
    - c. What process do you go through to make these decisions?
    - d. Are there certain data sources or records that you review to help make these decisions?
    - e. How do you decide what assessment tools to use?
  4. Tell me about your experience conducting bilingual assessments?
  5. How do you know when you should conduct a bilingual assessment?
    - a. Did you assess using any accommodations?
      - i. Tell me more about that?
    - b. Approximately how many bilingual assessments have you conducted in your career?
    - c. How old were the students you conducted these assessments with?
    - d. What tools or assessment batteries did you use specifically?
    - e. Can you tell me how you select your assessment tools?
    - f. Do you use English only tools?
    - g. Nonverbal assessment tool?
    - h. Assessment tools in the student's primary language?
  6. How did you learn to conduct bilingual assessments of English Learners?
  7. Have you used bilingual assessments? How?
    - a. How do you decide when to use them?
    - b. How did you learn to conduct assessments of English Learners?
    - c. Tell me about the training you received to conduct these assessments?
    - d. Did you receive formal training at the university, through workshops or on the job?
    - e. Who taught you?
  8. Tell me how you use the information you obtain from your assessment to differentiate between typical second language acquisition and a learning disability?
    - a. Is this easy for you to do?
    - b. Do you feel prepared to make this determination?
  9. What has been helpful to you in assessing English Learners?
  10. What challenges, if any, have you encountered in assessing English Learners?

Thank you for sharing your experiences assessing English Learners. Now I'd like to talk about the support and training you've received around assessing English Learners.

11. Thinking back on the training you received and your experience as a school psychologist, what is your overall assessment of the training you received?
  - a. What aspects of your training prepared you to do a good job assessing ELs?
  - b. What do you think could have been done differently to better prepare you to assess English learners?
  - c. What has been the most helpful?
  - d. What has helped you the least?

12. What do you believe school psychologists need to be able to conduct appropriate bilingual assessments?
  - a. Think back to when you were a student, what could have been done to prepare you?
  - b. Think about your experiences working in a school district. What do you think school districts can do?
  
13. What additional type of training do you feel is required so that school psychologists can be confident they have identified the student has a true disability and the academic difficulties the student is having are not the result of language acquisition issues?

That was my last question. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences and sharing your opinions on the topic. We are done with our interview. Do you have any questions for me before we conclude?

**APPENDIX B****RECRUITMENT EMAIL**

Dear School Psychologist [Insert Name]:

I am excited to share that I am embarking on a study seeking to learn more about assessment of students who are English Learners. The purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to English Learners. This study will explore school psychologists' perceptions of the supports they believe they need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students. The results of this study will inform school psychology preparation programs and provide school districts with valuable information for supporting school psychologists in completing more appropriate assessments of English Learners. In addition, this study will contribute to and expand research in the area of assessment of English Learners.

I am seeking your cooperation and participation in a 30–45-minute interview to learn about your experiences assessing English Learners. I also hope to get insight from you about the supports you believe you need to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students.

This study has been reviewed and approved by California State University's institutional review board. If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the interest survey by clicking on this link [link to form here].

I would greatly appreciate your support in this study. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at [kramos@csu.fullerton.edu](mailto:kramos@csu.fullerton.edu). I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Kristine Ramos  
Doctoral Candidate, California State University, Fullerton

**APPENDIX C****INTEREST SURVEY**

## Assessing English Learners

Please complete this interest questionnaire to participate in the doctoral dissertation research study being conducted by Kristine Ramos, graduate student at California State University, Fullerton.

The purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process monolingual and bilingual school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to English Learners.

\* Required

1. Name \*

---

2. Email Address\*

---

3. Phone\*

---

4. What is the best way to reach you? \*

*Mark only one oval*

Email

Phone

5. School District of Employment\*

*Mark only one oval*

District A

District B

District C

District D

District E

District F

District G

SELPA

6. How long have you worked as a school psychologist? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you consider yourself to be a bilingual school psychologist? \*

*Mark only one oval*

Yes

No

8. If you answered yes, which language(s), other than English, do you speak?

9. For bilingual psychologists only, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your overall proficiency in the language you noted above?

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
not proficient at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very proficient

Thank you for completing this survey. Participants will be randomly selected to participate in an interview. You will be contacted with more information shortly.

**APPENDIX D****EMAIL TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW**

Hello [Insert Name]:

Thank you for completing the survey to participate in the research study exploring school psychologists assessment practices around English Learners. You were randomly selected to participate in an individual interview.

The interview should take 30-45 minutes. My goal during this interview is to learn about your experiences assessing English Learners. I also hope to get insight from you about the supports you believe you need to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students.

We can schedule this interview at a time and location convenient to you (or via videoconferencing if stay at home orders continue to be in effect). I would like to schedule an interview with you as soon as possible. I would appreciate if you would please send me some dates and times that are most convenient for you. I will work around your availability.

I have also attached a consent form for you to review. The consent form provides additional information about the study. Please review the consent form carefully and return a signed copy to me at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me via email or on my cell at (562) 833-5269. I look forward to hearing from you soon.



## APPENDIX E

### PHONE CALL TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW

Hello [Insert Name]:

This is Kristine Ramos and I am calling about the recent survey you completed to participate in a study exploring school psychologists assessment practices around English Learners. You were randomly selected to participate in an individual interview. The interview should take 30-45 minutes. My goal during this interview is to learn about your experiences assessing English Learners. I also hope to get insight from you about the supports you believe you need to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students. We can schedule this interview at a time and location convenient to you (or via videoconferencing if stay at home orders continue to be in effect). When would be a convenient time for us to conduct the interview?

Set date and time.

Thank you so much for participating in this study. I am looking forward to meeting with you on [date and time]. I will send you an email confirming this date and time (including link for videoconference, if appropriate) and will include a consent form for you to review prior to our meeting. You can return that consent form to me via email as soon as we're done. Do you have any questions? [wait for response]. If you have questions at any time, feel free to reach me via email or on my cell [number provided]. Thank you again. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Kristine Ramos

Doctoral Candidate, California State University, Fullerton

## APPENDIX F

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

**Study Title:** Conducting Appropriate Assessments of English Learners  
**HRS:** #19-20-5  
**Researcher:** Kristine Ramos, M.A., California State University Fullerton, under the advisement of Dr. Maria Estela Zarate

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by the researchers listed above. This consent form explains the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you don't understand.

#### **What is this study about?**

The purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process school psychologists engage in when determining which assessments to administer to English Learners. In addition, this study will explore school psychologists' perceptions of the supports they believe they need in order to conduct more appropriate assessments of this population of students.

You are being asked to take part because you are a school psychologist who assesses students who are English Learners.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?**

You will participate in an interview that will last about 30 - 45 minutes and that will take place in a location that you choose. The interview will ask your opinions about assessment in general, and the information you consider when assessing students who are English Learners.

#### **Are there any benefits or risks to me if I am in this study?**

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study. The results of this study will help schools and policy makers understand how to better support school psychologists in assessing English Learners. There is no foreseeable risk to your participation.

#### **Will my information be kept anonymous or confidential?**

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. We will keep all electronic files, including audio files of interviews, in a password protected cloud storage that only the researchers can access. You will be assigned a pseudonym for our notes, transcriptions of the interview, analysis, and reports. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain confidential. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. The data for this study will be kept for 3 years until the publication of the results.

#### **Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?**

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. Participants will be compensated with a \$15 gift card to Starbucks.

#### **Who can I talk to if I have questions?**

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact Kristine Ramos. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (657) 278-7719, or e-mail [irb@fullerton.edu](mailto:irb@fullerton.edu)

### **What are my rights as a research study volunteer?**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

### **Statement of Consent**

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- I give permission to audio record the interview
- I do not give permission to audio record the interview.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX G****EMAIL TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST NOT SELECTED FOR INTERVIEW**

Dear School Psychologist [Insert Name]:

Thank you for completing the interest survey for participation in the research study about assessment of students who are English Learners. Interested participants were randomly selected for the interview phase of the study. You were not selected for interview.

I would like to express my gratitude for your willingness to participate. School psychologist such as yourself make a positive impact on the lives of so many students. The results of this study will inform school psychology preparation programs and provide school districts with valuable information for supporting school psychologists in completing more appropriate assessments of English Learners. In addition, this study will contribute to and expand research in the area of assessment of English Learners. Thank you again for expressing interest in this important area of research.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at [kramos@csu.fullerton.edu](mailto:kramos@csu.fullerton.edu).

Sincerely,

Kristine Ramos

Doctoral Candidate, California State University, Fullerton

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