

ENGLISH LEARNERS

FALL 2019 | BRIEF 2

WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

English learners (ELs) are students with a native or home language other than English who have yet to score proficient on the state English Language Proficiency Assessment. Many of these students struggle to succeed in English-speaking academic settings without formal supports. Factors such as academic history, native language literacy and migration history can all influence how students adjust to and progress in school. The descriptions below provide a general picture of the assets ELs bring to the learning environment and the challenges they may encounter.

Newly Arrived with Adequate Schooling in Their Home Language

Newly arrived ELs are recent arrivals with fewer than five years in the U.S. in grades 2-12. They received adequate schooling in their home country but may initially struggle in reaching proficiency on standardized tests administered in English. This group tends to make rapid academic advances.

Newly Arrived with Limited Formal or Interrupted Schooling

These ELs have less than five years in the United States. They are typically in grades 2-12 and have limited native language literacy. These students tend to be below grade level in math and often struggle to demonstrate high academic achievement.

Long-term English Learners (LTELs)

LTELs have seven or more years in the United States, are typically in grades 6-12 and generally demonstrate limited literacy in both their native language and English. LTELs may achieve adequate grades but often tend to struggle on standardized tests. These students have often experienced erratic and/or subtractive schooling as well as various, and inconsistent, types of supplemental EL services.

Sources: Freeman and Freeman (2002); Menken and Kleyn (2009); Olsen and Jaramillo (1999)

WHY IT MATTERS

- The graduation rates for ELs in the United States are lower than that of any other nationally reported demographic. In 2017, Oklahoma's graduation rate for ELs was 59% compared to the overall graduation rate of 82.7%.
- In a survey regarding teacher perspectives, teachers expressed more apprehension about teaching ELs than they did for any other group of students, including those with special needs (English Proficiency Evaluation, 2013).

THINGS TO CONSIDER

EL students with **adequate schooling** in their native language go through a process of recalling and pulling from previously acquired academic skills. The transition to a new language and culture may initially be difficult, but they are generally able to adapt quickly and transfer their concept knowledge and academic language into English. These students face the fewest academic challenges when compared to their other EL peers.

Students with **limited formal schooling** are often quick to be referred for learning disabilities. In reality, the issues they present are often due to a lack of academic exposure in their native language. This group of students faces the greatest challenges when compared to other EL peers.

Long-term English learner students tend to lack academic proficiency in their native language, and because of this they struggle to acquire academic proficiency in English. They may be successful in primary grades, but as content becomes more challenging and dependent on academic reading and writing, their success often depends on the strategies their teachers use to scaffold information.

Source: Adapted from Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002 in Himmele & Himmele, 2016)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

English learners are often orally bilingual and may sound similar to native English speakers. However, they typically have limited literacy skills in their native language, and their academic literacy skills in English are not as well developed as their oral skills.

English learners generally fall into two main groups. One group is transnational students who have moved back and forth between the United States and their family's country of origin and have attended school in both countries, and the other is mobile students who have received inconsistent schooling in the United States and have moved in and out of bilingual education, English as a second language, and mainstream programs in which they received no language support services.

Language is learned by utilizing it in an understandable context. As such, teachers should focus on comprehension to help EL students make sense of the content and new academic vocabulary within a text.

Source: Menken and Kleyn (2009)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the student's academic history in both U.S. and foreign schools?
- What intervention models have the student been exposed to?
- How can I best use the additional tools or resources I have available to assist ELs?
- How might we help EL students make sense of what they read and hear?
- What nonverbal scaffolds can support success in school for these students?

ENGLISH LEARNER TEAM
(405) 522-0862
[BIT.LY/OKELPA](https://bit.ly/OKELPA)



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