

Checklist for Supporting Students in Dual Language Contexts



Background

Children who speak more than one language are at increased risk of delayed identification, under-identification and over-identification of language disorder.

Identifying a language disorder in a child who is learning an additional language can be challenging. There are many similarities between language disorder and incomplete second language (L2) acquisition. As well, many immigrant children have had experiences which impact their current first language (L1) abilities or their ability to perform in situations such as language assessments.

This checklist highlights key questions for speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) to consider when working with bilingual and multilingual populations.

Assessment

A language disorder will always be present in all of a child's languages. S-LPs must collect information about abilities in both languages of a dual language learner. This is the only way to obtain a more comprehensive picture of a bilingual child's language abilities.

Children who have or are at risk of language disorder must be identified as early as possible so that supports and interventions can be provided in a timely manner.

Most language tests are inadequate for evaluating the language abilities of children learning an additional language because they are based on monolingual children. S-LPs should supplement their assessments with additional evidence-based strategies such as dynamic assessment. This approach allows S-LPs to more accurately identify language disorder.

Your Checklist (check all that apply)

**S-LPs
should
ask...**

- ☐ 1. Do language assessment protocols include consideration of the child's first language abilities? See the [Alberta Language and Development Questionnaire \(ALDeQ\)](#) for an example of a tool that can help you do this.

- ☐ 2. Do language assessment protocols include task adaptations to help differentiate language disorder from incomplete second language acquisition, such as dynamic assessment or combining vocabulary across languages?
 - ☐ 3. Do oral and written language assessment protocols include tasks that are less sensitive to a specific language such as quasi-universal nonword repetition tasks or phonemic awareness tasks?
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Identification

Studies have revealed similar rates of language disorder in bilingual or multilingual children as in monolingual children. Screening and assessment practices should be examined closely when a higher proportion of children from diverse language backgrounds are referred for language assessment or are identified as being at risk of language disorder.

**S-LPs
should
ask...**

- ☐ 4. Are similar proportions of students identified with language disorder among students from other linguistic backgrounds? Is identification of these students as timely?
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Dual language instruction

Students with, or at risk of, language disorder should be fully included in immersion programs. Research shows that students with language disorder who are in French immersion programs attain the same language and academic outcomes as similar students in monolingual programs. They also develop higher levels of functional proficiency in French.

Children with language disorder need access to both special education supports and dual language learning opportunities in the school setting. Teaching approaches should include explicitly highlighting similarities and differences and helping students make connections across languages. Students also need multiple opportunities to use the languages of instruction in the classroom setting.

**S-LPs
should
ask...**

- ☐ 5. Are at-risk students or students with identified language disorder included in bilingual programs?
- ☐ 6. Are instructional strategies adapted to the stage of language acquisition?
- ☐ 7. In French immersion programs, do French Second Language (FSL) and English Language Arts (ELA) education teams collaborate when planning oral language and literacy instruction and supports?
- ☐ 8. Is the student's home language supported?
- ☐ 9. Are strategies that facilitate transfer of language skills from L1 to L2 and vice versa included in all spheres of instruction/intervention?

- ☐ **10.** In French immersion programs, are supports available in both French and English?
- ☐ **11.** Do interventions include goals that are common to all the child's languages (e.g., increase verb repertoire) as well as goals that are unique to each language (e.g., gender marking)?
- ☐ **12.** In French immersion instruction, do lessons integrate content (e.g., history) and language (e.g., past tense) goals?
- ☐ **13.** In French immersion instruction, do students have as many opportunities to hear the second language as they do to practice using it?



For more guidance on this topic, see Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. (2021). *Dual language development and disorders: A handbook on bilingualism and second language learning* (3rd ed.).