



**Read Naturally[®]
Live—Español**

*& Rationale
Research*

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Why Read Naturally Live—Español?

For years, Read Naturally offered a Spanish translation of early levels of its intervention program (Read Naturally Master’s Edition, Spanish version) mainly to support English learners. Several factors clarified the need for a robust Spanish-language fluency program, which led to the development of web-based Read Naturally Live—Español (along with its print equivalent, Read Naturally Encore II—Español). These factors included:

- an urgent need to improve the educational approaches and outcomes for language minority students;
- growing advocacy and policy demands for implementation of research-based best practices for teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL), which include providing instruction and assessment in a learner’s home language;
- an unmet need for a research-based Spanish-language reading intervention to support the development of Spanish for diverse learners within varied educational programs and settings.

Read Naturally Live—Español is a web-based educational program that uses the research-based Read Naturally Strategy to help students improve their Spanish reading skills. Designed to be used in various educational settings, it can be used alongside Read Naturally Live to support multilingual students in both English and Spanish language development. It can be beneficial for Spanish-speaking students before or while learning English, and for English speakers wanting to learn Spanish.

Educational Needs of English Learners

This section briefly summarizes the number of English learners in the U.S., score gaps between students with and without English learner (EL) status, and the diverse profiles and unique needs of English learners.

Demographics and Trends

According to National Center for Educational Statistics data (NCES, 2022a), there was an increase in the number of English learners in the U.S. public school student population, from 9.2 to 10.4 percent, from 2010 to 2019. Among English learners, 75% identified Spanish as their home language. Over 15% of English learners were also identified as students with disabilities and were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Persistent Score Gaps

Student outcomes on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022) demonstrated a significant score gap between students identified as English learners and those who were not. These gaps have persisted over time at all grade levels and are seen across content areas. 2022 NAEP scores and score gaps by EL status for the reading assessment are shown in the following table.

2022 NAEP Reading Average Scores and Score Gaps by English Learner (EL) Status

Grade Level	EL Average Score	Not EL Average Score	Score Gap
4	190	222	32
8	225	264	39

These NAEP results demonstrate that English learners score significantly lower in reading than students whose first language is English. Limited English proficiency may adversely impact a student’s ability to learn from English-language instruction, participate in collaborative experiences with peers, and demonstrate their knowledge and skills within content areas. For these reasons there have been policy changes encouraging or requiring educational systems to evaluate and/or instruct students in their home languages.

Diverse Learner Profiles and Educational Programs

Students identified as English learners are highly diverse with widely varying backgrounds and linguistic profiles. They include:

- learners who are new to the United States;
- second-generation immigrants born in the U.S. with significant exposure to English;
- students adopted internationally into homes with native English speakers;
- students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE, itself a diverse category of learners).

Educational Needs of Spanish-Speaking Learners

This section briefly describes the number of Spanish-speaking learners in the U.S. and abroad, policy shifts promoting increases in Spanish language instruction in U.S. schools, and global needs for quality reading intervention in Spanish.

Demographics and Trends

At the time of the report, *Spanish: A living language, by the Cervantes Institute* (Fernández Vítóres, 2017), the United States had 43 million native Spanish speakers and another 15 million people with varying degrees of Spanish language competence. The report projected that by 2050 the U.S. will have the largest Spanish-speaking population in the world.

The number of Spanish speakers and students of Hispanic heritage in the U.S. continues to increase significantly. The percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in U.S. public schools more than doubled from 13.5% in 1995 to 28% in 2020 (NCES, 2022c). More than half of students enrolled in New Mexico (63.2%), California (55.9%), and Texas (52.7%) schools in 2020 were Hispanic, while another

five states had percentage enrollment distributions over 30% (AZ 47%; NV 43.6%; CO 34.7%; FL 35.5%, NJ 32.1%) (NCES, 2022d).

Changing Policies and Programming

Educational policy has shifted away from English-only instruction as educators and policy makers have acknowledged and embraced the benefits of multilingualism for individuals and the national economy in an increasingly global community. Student advocates have pressed for a move toward evaluating students' progress in general language, literacy, and content skills in their home language when possible. They argue that English-only assessments drive educational inequity and opportunity gaps. Federal data for the 2018-19 school year reveals that only 82% of students who are Limited English Proficient graduated from high school in four years compared to an overall graduation rate of 86% (NCES, 2022b). In addition, longitudinal research (as described in the research section of this paper) has identified significant benefits from long-term instruction in students' home languages.

Increasingly, U.S. school districts offer specialized schools or programs within schools that provide language immersion or dual language instruction in English and a selected additional language. Due to changing U.S. demographics and the geographic proximity of Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas, programs in Spanish are common. These programs attract English learners from native Spanish-speaking homes, Hispanic learners seeking instruction in the language of their heritage, and native English speakers learning Spanish as an additional language.

Educational Needs of Local School Districts

New policies and community demand for language programs have created a variety of needs within local school districts. This section summarizes these factors.

High-stakes Assessment

Passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 marked an increased focus on the learning of language minority students. This authorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) required all English learners to take federally mandated state accountability tests and required states to "make every effort" to provide state assessments in students' home languages when that language is prevalent in a significant portion of the student population. These high-stakes tests are used to evaluate educational systems and to target resources for student support and school improvement. For this reason, districts seek practices and supports to increase the likelihood that English learners' scores reflect their knowledge and abilities.

A policy brief from the Migration Policy Institute (Sugarman & Villegas, 2020) examined states' compliance with these mandates. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia identified in their state ESSA plans that Spanish was spoken by students to a significant extent. Some states have cited state laws or offered other arguments for not complying with the ESSA policy (Hanna, 2017). However, the policy brief found that a majority of states offered at least one state assessment in Spanish:

As of Spring 2020, 31 states plus the District of Columbia offer native language assessments, most commonly in math or science but sometimes in reading/language arts and social studies as well. These are typically available in Spanish, which is the most prevalent home language among ELs in most states (Sugarman & Villegas, p. 1).

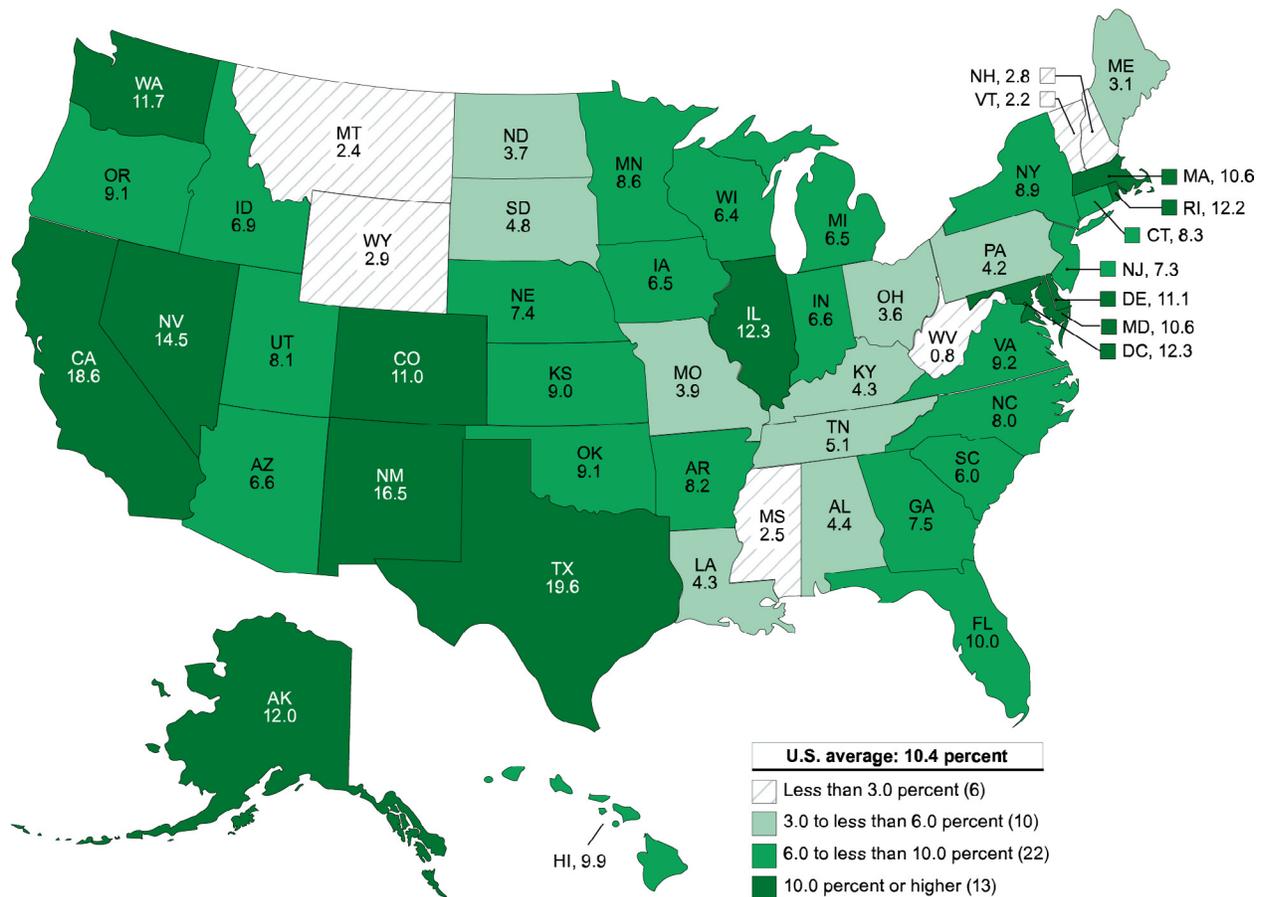
Federal law requires that ELs must take English/language arts assessments in English once they have lived in the U.S. for more than two years unless still under EL status, in which case they may take assessments in their home language for up to two additional years. Colorado (grades 3-4), New Mexico (grades 3-8 and high school), and Texas (grades 3-5) offer Reading/Language Arts assessments in Spanish (Sugarman & Villegas, 2020).

State Mandates

In addition to federal legislation, there are a variety of state statutes and initiatives that impact educational programs for English learners. Some policy changes have only come in response to court decisions finding that the needs of English learners have not been sufficiently met by school systems under previous policies.

For example, California passed the California Multilingual Education Act of 2016 (also known as Proposition 58), that reversed a nearly two-decade restriction on bilingual instruction for ELs (Proposition 227, 1998). The language of the new law now requires California school districts to provide bilingual instruction if 20 or more parents at a grade level or 30 or more parents at a school request it; it also removes a requirement that parents sign a waiver to enroll students in a bilingual or dual language program.

Percentage of public school students who were English language learners, by state (NCES, 2022)



Curriculum and Intervention for Varied Programs and Settings

Educational systems use a variety of delivery models to meet the diverse needs of English learners:

- English as an Additional Language (EAL) and transitional bilingual programs
- dual language programs
- immersion programs
- migrant education programs
- Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs
- mainstreamed general and special education classrooms

Research on Language Development

Benefits of Multilingualism to Individuals

Research has found that multilingual learners derive many benefits from speaking more than one language.

Cognitive Benefits

A meta-analysis of research from 68 studies with quality designs exploring the cognitive differences between monolingual and bilingual children and adults found that proficiency in more than one language had general positive cognitive effects (0.41) and moderate to strong effects demonstrating:

- improved attentional control (0.96);
- enhanced abstract and symbolic representation (0.57);
- improved metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness (0.33) when both languages have alphabetic writing systems (like Spanish-English) and are acquired early in life.

Studies also found moderate positive effects of multilingualism on working memory (0.48); however, these effects depend on the type of task being studied, and some studies found that monolingual individuals performed better in some tasks (Adesope et al., 2010).

Benefits of Instruction in a Student's First Language

A number of research studies have explored how students' abilities to read and write in their home language contribute to their English language development. Educators can use the information gathered through home language assessments to better understand the strengths and assets students bring to learning to read and write English. Those strengths may be obscured by language barriers when assessing a learner's weaker language (such as English for some English learners). For this reason, educators may find that an English learner's performance in their home language provides a more accurate evaluation of their overall reading ability than their performance in English.

Cross-Linguistic Transfer

Cross-linguistic transfer is the term for the knowledge and skills a learner knows in their first language that contribute to the learning of an additional language. In an analysis of the research findings in 160 studies of cross-language transfer of cognitive skills from alphabetic and nonalphabetic native languages to English, Shakkour (2014) found that the "linguistic components of [a person's home language], such as phonological awareness, morphological awareness, orthographic knowledge and meta-cognitive knowledge, all contribute to the development of reading and reading comprehension in a second language" (p. 547). In the same study, Shakkour found that **phonological awareness** transfers between a student's home language to English learning, whether the home language is alphabetic or logographic.

While the research base on the transfer of **morphological awareness** is small, studies have found that morphological knowledge from a transparent language like Spanish does transfer to opaque languages like English. In addition, morphological awareness in Spanish was found to be a good predictor of word reading in English (Ramirez et al., 2010, as cited in Shakkour, 2014). However, transfer has only been

found to go in one direction: from transparent language to opaque language (that is, morphological awareness neither transfers nor predicts word reading from English to Spanish).

Research findings are mixed on whether orthographic knowledge transfers from one alphabetic language to another.

Cognitive Retroactive Transfer

Research supports the benefits of home language instruction for students learning English as an additional language. Limited studies have also found that intervention in English as an additional language benefits learners' cognitive linguistic skills (phonological awareness, morphological awareness, syntax awareness, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension) in their home and other languages (Abu-Rabia, Shakkour, & Siegel, 2013; Abu-Rabia & Shakkour, 2014). The one notable exception to this is orthographic knowledge (that is, spelling), which did not reveal transfer. These bi-directional benefits may partially explain the strong evidence supporting the benefits of dual language instruction for English learners summarized later in this paper.

Transfer and Teacher Knowledge

It can be helpful for learners of an additional language to apply their home language knowledge to the additional language. These benefits typically occur when the knowledge or skills in both languages are the same (such as shared alphabet or sounds) or similar (like cognates—words that are similar in spelling, meaning, and origin). However, a learner's home language knowledge can also interfere with reading or speaking the additional language, causing errors (for example, a Spanish speaker vocalizing the English silent-e).

When educators understand the similarities and differences between two languages, they can explicitly reinforce the similarities and point out the differences. Some examples of similarities and differences between Spanish and English include:

- English and Spanish share 26 letters in their alphabets; however, the Spanish alphabet has four additional graphemes: ñ, ch, ll, rr.
- There are many letter-sound correspondences the languages have in common: b, c (hard), c (soft), d, e, f, g, k, l, m, n, o, p, s, t, v, w, x, y.
- The languages share many diphthongs; however, some of them may be spelled the same (they, rey) and some of them may be spelled differently (out, autobús).
- Both languages share common syllable types (e.g., open, closed) and syllable patterns (CV, VCV); however, the languages sometimes treat them differently (e.g., vowel sounds are regular and do not change in Spanish but vowel sounds do change in English).

Bilingual and dual language programs are typically either co-taught by a native English speaker and a native speaker of the additional language, or they are taught by a multilingual educator. This allows instructors to point out similarities and differences between the home language and additional languages, which accelerates the acquisition of students' language skills.

Language-Independent Knowledge

Beginning readers acquire a wide variety of language-independent knowledge and skills:

- meta-linguistic knowledge, including the idea that written symbols in alphabetic languages represent sounds;
- metacognitive knowledge, such as the concept that the purpose of reading is to understand what an author is communicating;
- literary knowledge, such as story grammar or genre.

Benefits of Bilingual Instruction on English Learning

Additional research clearly reveals the benefits of bilingual instruction for closing the reading performance gaps of English learners. This section summarizes some of those benefits.

General English Performance Benefits of Bilingual Programs

A meta-analysis (McField & McField, 2014) accounting for both the effectiveness of program implementation and research methodology found moderate positive effects of bilingual educational programs over monolingual instruction on performance outcomes (0.41).

Strengths of Dual Language Programs

While some educational systems provide transitional bilingual education for students who are learning English, increasingly systems are offering long-term dual language programs. The American Councils for International Education found in 2021 that there were more than 3,600 dual-language immersion programs across the United States, with 44 states reporting at least one program (2021). This data represented an increase of over 250% in a decade. Collier and Thomas' longitudinal research (2017) over a 30-year timespan demonstrated that sustained dual language programs, which provide grade level instruction in both the student's first language (L1) and the second language (L2), often close English learners' achievement gaps by the end of elementary school. Shorter transitional bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) instruction taught through content, however, only closes half the gap within the same time. Collier and Thomas also discovered through their research that students who receive dual-language instruction have higher levels of academic achievement than their peers who only receive instruction in the target language.

In its Literacy Leadership Brief (2019), the International Literacy Association revealed that it takes an average of six years of instruction in both a student's L1 and L2 for an English learner to reach grade-level proficiency in English. However, students who are not provided the opportunity to be taught in their home language may take 7–10 years or more to reach this milestone. In addition to the benefits afforded to English learners by dual language instruction, the brief also highlights the benefits of multilingualism for other historically underserved student groups:

Recent analyses of more than 3 million student records from the state of North Carolina over a three-year period found that by middle school, African American students of low income attending dual language classes were as much as two grades ahead of their peers not in dual language (p. 6).

Benefits of Read Naturally Programs

Building on Effective Literacy Instruction

The National Literacy Panel’s report on developing literacy in English learners (August & Shanahan, 2006, 2010) found in its review of quality studies that English learners clearly benefit from instruction in the key components of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—just as native speakers do.

The research supporting explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency has been previously summarized in other Read Naturally white papers and briefs. These documents also describe the evidence-based practices that form the basis of the Read Naturally Strategy and the benefits afforded by the program features of Read Live programs.

- For information on phonemic awareness and phonics, see the [Word Warm-ups Rationale and Research Brief](#).
- For information on fluency, see the [Read Naturally Strategy Rationale and Research Brief](#).
- For information on the science of reading and research on all three reading components specific to students with reading disabilities, see [Dyslexia and Read Naturally \(white paper\)](#).
- For information on the foundational reading skills, see [Foundational Reading Skills white paper](#).

The NLP report states that explicit instruction in the essential components of reading is necessary for all students but not sufficient for ELs. The panel recommends enhanced teaching for English learners that includes focus on oral language development, vocabulary in the new language, background knowledge, and attention to new sounds in the additional language that are not present in the home language.

Support for Spanish-speaking English learners

Read Naturally Live and Read Naturally Live—Español

- Curriculum materials are differentiated using evidence-based practices and provide comprehensive, customizable supports.
- Read Live’s educational technology offers ELs visual and audio support as they learn English.
- These research-based programs integrate several elements designed to improve English learners’ acquisition of English vocabulary. Easy access to the meanings of many words in each Read Naturally story provides ELs with the word knowledge necessary to understand the story while also developing their English vocabulary.
- Most lessons begin with the definitions of several words key to the understanding of the story.
- Definitions are available for many words in each story.
- Some of the nonfiction stories are an in-depth description of a word. For example, the story *Pioneers* defines the word and provides the cultural connection to the United States.
- Each story has at least one question that focuses on the meanings of words.

- Spanish translations available to use as a resource for 240 stories in Read Naturally Live and vice versa in Read Naturally Live—Español.

Read Naturally Live Sequenced Series

- The Sequenced series includes an optional Spanish Read Along step in levels 1.0-5.6. Spanish-speaking ELs working to develop reading fluency in English can listen to or read along with a Spanish translation of the selected story in order to build some background and vocabulary knowledge before continuing with the rest of the steps in English (Mielke, 2011).
- Audio directions are available in both Spanish and English.

Read Naturally Live Idioms Series

- The Idioms series is designed to provide native English speakers and English language learners an opportunity to learn common American idioms as they work on reading fluency and comprehension.

Read Naturally Live—Español

- The natural translations of Read Naturally Live—Español are designed to meet students' and districts' needs in a variety of educational settings and programs. This program can be paired with Read Naturally Live (both included in the Read Live suite) to support an emerging multilingual student's English and Spanish language development.
- Read Naturally Live—Español utilizes the highly effective, research-based Read Naturally Strategy with Spanish text to support reading development in Spanish. The program may be used with Spanish-speaking students before or while a student learns to read in English. The program also helps native English speakers or others to learn to read Spanish text fluently as an additional language.
- Students in dual language settings may greatly benefit from the ability to develop proficiency in both Spanish and English within a single platform.
- Supporting development of Spanish reading with Read Naturally Live—Español builds foundational knowledge of phonological and morphological awareness that also supports English learning.

Conclusion

The number of Hispanic students in US schools is predicted to increase over the next two decades. Score gaps on national and state tests and graduation rates reveal that these student groups continue to be underserved. School districts have enacted new educational policies to track students' needs and promote best practices for supporting English learners in a variety of settings and programs.

Research demonstrates the benefits of being multilingual and validates that strengths in a student's home language are transferred to the learning of an additional language. Studies of English learners have shown that they benefit from instruction in the components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), and that typical, best-practice instruction should be enhanced with additional supports to develop students' oral language, vocabulary, and background knowledge. Read Naturally's programs incorporate evidence-based practices with systematic, explicit instruction in the foundational reading skills to support multilingual learners in their overall language and reading improvement.

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