

Dissertation proposal on speech shortage in schools

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



According to the ASHA, as few as 2 percent of licensed SLPs in any given state are also bilingual. Given the fact that there is already a critical shortage of SLPs throughout the school systems in the United States, who are skilled in English, this makes teaching and learning especially difficult for English Language Learners. A study in Colorado asked 154 SLPs who served children coming from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds about their comfort level working in a diverse environment (Guiberson & Atkins, 2012). The outcome of the study was that the SLPs felt comfortable when the diversity was of a cultural or racial type. However, cases involving linguistic minorities caused a great deal of anxiety among respondents. The SLPs would access interpreters to help them work with the students, instead of relying on family members, but even finding an interpreter was often a struggle. Also, the fact that these students could not access the English-language assessment tools also meant that there was some difficulty providing accurate diagnosis and services. Because of the reported shortage in available tools for assessment, and a lack of norming data for the development of language in children from diverse linguistic backgrounds, the quality of services provided was likely to suffer.

A 2012 study of 128 SLPs who attended a seminar about linguistic and cultural diversity for the SLP provided similar results. Although almost half of the respondents reported minimal skill in a language besides English, only 9.4 percent reported proficiency in another language. However, the participants reported that, on average, they had each served an average of 59.4 children who had multilingual backgrounds. Significantly, many of the respondents were responsible for assessing the speech of children (50.5

percent) without any assistance – not even from an interpreter. Roughly a third (34.2 percent) were responsible for assessing all of language skills without any assistance from anyone familiar with the native language of the students (Williams & McLeod, 2012). The respondents also reported their anxiety about serving children from multilingual backgrounds without any support in those native languages, either in the form of language-specific assessments or other forms of training. Because of the lack of precise instruments, the SLPs reported difficulty in differentiating between the diagnoses of speech and language disorder as opposed to a mere difference.

Obviously, the ultimate danger that goes with this anxiety that SLPs are reporting is reduced levels of performance by the students whom they serve. If students receive inaccurate assessments of their speech and language abilities, then they will not be able to advance at the same rate as their native-language peers – and it is this difference that the purpose of bilingual education and English Language Learning programs are supposed to ameliorate. The shortage of bilingual SLPs means that children who come into American classrooms without the ability to speak English may go through the public school systems without having their difference every identified (Pena, Gillam, Bedore & Bohman, 2011). Ultimately, the school system will have failed those students, because of their inability to attract bilingual SLPs to serve the students. The task for every district is to seek out and find professionals to fill those roles, so that students can receive the services that they deserve – and that they need in order to move through school at the appropriate level.

Works Cited

Guiberson, M. & Atkins, J. (2012). Practices and perspectives on serving culturally and linguistically diverse children. *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 33 (3): 169-180.

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