

## ABSTRACT

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Title: The Identification of Developmental Language Disorder in Bilingual Children: A Study Examining the Referral of English Language Learners for Speech Services in New Haven Elementary Schools

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The United States is a culturally and linguistically diverse country that continues to experience a steady influx of multilingual speakers. Despite the large multilingual population, there is a relative lack of appropriate resources to directly evaluate these individuals for language disorders. During the evaluation process, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) often utilize standardized assessments and normative data in order to identify delayed and disordered speech and language abilities. As the majority of assessment tools are designed for monolingual English speakers, SLPs commonly face challenges when evaluating multilingual speakers. Moreover, research indicates that bilingual and English language learning (ELL) students tend to be disproportionately represented in special education services, including speech-language therapy, with evidence of both over and under-identification. This thesis intends to determine whether bilingual children have been over-referred for speech and language evaluations in the New Haven public elementary schools by analyzing referral data from the past five school years (2017-2022). Additionally, this research examines Connecticut school-based SLPs' confidence and perception of evaluating the multilingual population through a survey. Findings from the study reveal that bilingual children in New Haven public elementary schools might have been referred for speech and language evaluations at higher rates than their monolingual peers over the past five years. However, more comprehensive data is required to reach any overall conclusions regarding the over-referral of ELL students in the district. The collected survey responses suggest that although the responding SLPs feel confident in their own abilities to distinguish between language differences and disorders, the relative lack of standardized assessment tools and normative data specific to bilingual children can be a barrier to their overall confidence in evaluating this population.