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Impact of Reclassification of Assessments Tests of English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) on the English Language Learners

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**Impact of Reclassification of Assessments Tests of English Language
Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) on the English Language
Learners**

**Senior Capstone Draft
Nivardo Martinez
LS 400 Capstone**

Abstract

The reclassification process of English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) significantly impacted the English Language Learners (ELLs) in educational settings. This senior capstone examines the multifaceted impacts of reclassification of assessment tests of ELPAC on the ELLs, and discusses its implications for academic achievement, language proficiency development, and socio-emotional well-being on them. Through a comprehensive review of literature, interviews with English language teachers and anonymous survey for middle school and high school students, the findings indicated that there are benefits as well as challenges for the ELL students when they take the ELPAC assessment tests involving a much more complex dynamics surrounding the reclassification of ELPAC.

Introduction and Background

When I was fourteen, I had recently arrived from Mexico. It was my first time being in the country, soon I will find what it is like to be in a totally different country. As I started school in August 2015 in the 8th grade, I was asked if I speak English. Then, I proceeded to say “yes,” because that was the only word I knew. So, they proceeded to take me to normal English classes where they were speaking English only. I knew I wasn’t going to make it there. So, the teacher asked me questions that I couldn’t understand. I was glad that she took the initiative to switch me to the English Language Development (ELD) classes where I could learn from a teacher that spoke a little bit in Spanish. However, my brother, a high school student in the 11th grade had the exact same problem. He could not speak a word of English. Then, they proceeded to put him in ELD classes. But no sooner or later, he had to take an extra course, including one extra year of high school to graduate. This is the consequence of the reclassification of the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) on the ELL students.

Reclassification has become an opportunistic and harmful impact on a student's academic performance, self-esteem, and mental being for the ELLs. As the diverse population increases in California in the year 2000, more Spanish speaking students are coming from different countries, with the majority from Spanish speaking countries (Public Policy Institute of California, 2021). This reclassification of the ELPAC would impact them the most. After the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, California's top priority to identify the ELL students, adopt and implement the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The main purpose of CELDT is to do assessment for students in K-12 grade whose primary language was not English by law to measure student’s English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing categories (California Department of Education, 2023). The assessment was tied

with California common core state standards in English Language Development content adopted by the State Board of Education (California Department of Education, 2007). Implementations of CELDT by the state became imminent since Congress increased the federal spending for elementary and secondary schools, they had to implement standardized testing. However, “it is because of issues with construct validity, interrater reliability, and nonstandard administration, the CELDT may not be sufficiently valid and reliable for making crucial educational decisions about *individual* students” (Guinan & Goldenberg, 2010, p. 1). Pre-mature implementations of CELDT by the state became a problem rather than a solution for many students and teachers. At the same time, this emphasis would result in increased educational focus on the subjects of reading and mathematics, while taking away instructional time from subjects not covered by the law (Ravitch, 2010). As institutions were pushed to standardized testing, educators lost control of their teaching methods, thinking that the only way to measure students' cognitive skills was testing.

Given this, as a future educator, and a valuable member of our education system, I want to see the answers to my primary research question: How does the reclassification of the assessments Tests English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) impact English language learners? My secondary research questions are:

1. What is the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) test? Why has the ELPAC assessment test been implemented only for English language learners? What do the state standards and/or Common Core standards say about the mandated ELPAC assessment test for local school districts?
2. What does research say about the impact of reclassification of the ELPAC on the English language learners?

3. How has the ELPAC assessment test impacted the English language learners according to teachers, principals, and students? If so, in what ways?
4. What are the criteria for reclassification ELPAC? To what extent, does the ELPAC assessment test measure a student's progress in learning the English language and to identify the student's level of ELP?
5. Lastly, What could the future hold for the ELPAC assessment test according to principals and teachers?

In order to answer these questions, I will start with a review of academic literature.

Literature Review

The following subsequent paragraphs will discuss the reclassification of the ELPAC assessments that are very important to English Learners in multiple ways. The ELPAC assessments make it sometimes difficult for the ELD students to either continue with their studies or impact them for the reset of their lives. Despite the significance of ELPAC reclassification, the process can present opportunities for English learners, potentially inspiring their academic trajectories with new opportunities. The following paragraphs contain discussion about the impact of the ELPAC assessment tests on the ELD students.

Maximizing the Impact of the English Language Proficiency Assessments of California (ELPAC) for Early Identification and Comprehensive Support. The California Department of Education (2021) emphasizes the significance of identifying students in need of English language support through the English Language Proficiency Assessments of California (ELPAC). This aligns with existing research highlighting the importance of early identification

of English learners (ELs) to ensure they receive appropriate support to succeed academically (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2013). Identifying ELs early allows educators to implement targeted instructional interventions tailored to their language development needs, promoting their academic achievement across all subjects (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2016). Moreover, the information obtained from the ELPAC serves as a valuable resource for teachers in providing comprehensive support to ELs in various language domains, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Research suggests that effective language instruction requires a holistic approach that addresses all aspects of language development (Cummins, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2014). By utilizing ELPAC data, educators can design differentiated instruction that targets specific language skills and scaffolds learning experiences to meet the diverse needs of ELs (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). This personalized support fosters language proficiency and academic success among ELs, ultimately contributing to their overall educational attainment (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006).

Navigating the Pitfalls of Standardized Language Assessments: Implications for English Learners and the Role of ELPAC. One significant challenge with reliance on standardized language assessments is the risk of misclassification or underrepresentation of English learners' (ELs) language proficiency levels. Research suggests that these assessments may not fully capture the linguistic abilities of ELs, leading to inaccurate placement and inappropriate educational interventions (Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Rivera & Stansfield, 2015). Such misclassification can have detrimental effects on ELs, as they may not receive the level of support necessary for their language development, ultimately hindering their academic progress (Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

The emphasis on language proficiency testing may inadvertently perpetuate deficit views of ELs and their linguistic capabilities. By focusing solely on language assessments, educators and policymakers may overlook the rich cultural and linguistic assets that ELs bring to the classroom (García & Kleifgen, 2010). This narrow perspective can lead to stigmatization and marginalization of ELs, impacting their self-esteem and sense of belonging in the educational environment (Cummins, 2001; Wiley, 2006). Moreover, the pressure to perform well on standardized assessments can create undue stress and anxiety among the ELs, further exacerbating the negative effects of testing. Research indicates that high-stakes testing environments can contribute to increased levels of stress, which may impair ELs' cognitive functioning and academic performance (Valdés, 2001; Abedi, 2002).

In light of these challenges, educators and policymakers must adopt a more critical and nuanced approach to language assessment and support for ELs. While the ELPAC provides valuable data for identifying language needs, it should be supplemented with multiple measures of language proficiency and ongoing formative assessments to ensure a comprehensive understanding of ELs' abilities and needs (Cummins, 2008; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2017). Additionally, educators should strive to create culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments that celebrate the diversity of ELs' linguistic backgrounds and promote their academic success and well-being.

Understanding ELPAC's Impact: Addressing Challenges and Shaping Equitable Language Support for tomorrow's best education. While the English Language Proficiency Assessments of California (ELPAC) serves an important function in identifying English learners in need of support, it's essential to recognize and address the potential negative consequences

associated with high-stakes language assessments. By adopting a more holistic and inclusive approach to language assessment and support, educators can better meet the diverse needs of ELs and create equitable learning opportunities for all students. However, further research is needed to more clearly categorize the negative impacts of ELPAC assessments and the development of positive contributions to future reclassified students.

Following an exhaustive investigation, multiple perspectives came to play based on impacts of reclassification of assessments tests of English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) upon the English Language Learners. The bilateral judgment of literature review, opens up for methods and procedures implemented to such a conclusion.

Methods & Procedures

At the outset of this semester, I entered with a preliminary capstone idea, recognizing the need to refine and narrow down my topic. Following the completion of my research prospectus paper (refer to the research prospectus section of the Capstone Binder) and discussions with Dr. Thao, I gained clarity and direction for my research. To address both primary and secondary research inquiries, I gathered a wealth of peer-reviewed scholarly articles and journal publications relevant to my study by engaging in extensive library research. I accessed contemporary literature pertinent to my research questions. While encountering minor obstacles in accessing information regarding the integration of English Language Proficiency Assessments of California into English Language Development classes. Prior to the recognition of ELPAC as a state measure for language proficiency, there was another test which was the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Eventually, I reached out to an English Language specialist at El Sausal Middle School, who guided me towards pertinent resources. In addition to

conducting research and expanding my knowledge base, I dedicated numerous hours to creating a survey for students in middle school and high schools found in (Appendix A). Throughout this process, I maintained regular communication with Mrs. Villalobos who is an English Learner specialist, and Mr. Gutierrez who is an ELD teacher at a local High School.

To find out more about the administration part of the ELPAC Tests I knew someone with knowledge on the topic had to be the person. So, as I was tutoring at a Middle School, my alma mater, I asked an English Teacher of the name Ms. Cortez if she knew someone with that kind of knowledge on the topic. Then, Ms. Cortez proceeded to send an email to Mrs. Villalobos. I found out that when I was a middle school student at the same school she was also a teacher, and now an EL Specialist. Mrs. Villalobos has been the specialist in English Language Learners for more than 7 years now, being the perfect candidate for my research. Once I emailed her, she responded promptly that she wasn't able to meet with me in a one on one interview. However, she was able to answer my questions if we were to do it online. So, it happened. An online interview was conducted on February 29th. The main questions I used were partly to guide a response to my research questions (Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for English Language Teachers). Initially, I wanted to create two separate interview questions for teachers and other one for administrators, but as soon as I interviewed Mrs. Villalobos, it became obvious that my initial multiple interview for teachers was not going to be as accurate as I wanted it to be.

My second interview was with Mr. Gutierrez. I had planned this interview for weeks, since Mr. Gutierrez had previously been my teacher at a local high school, but our availability was all over the place. On March 5th, an interview was conducted in person at the local high school. This interview gave me goosebumps since it was the first time I returned to my local high

school. Once I entered the room, I got to meet some of his new ELD students, who were conducting community service hours helping him decorate his classroom. As soon as they left I conducted the interview. My main focus was to target his emotion of conducting the ELPAC and questions that helped me to provide my answer to secondary research questions (Appendix A Interview Questions for English Language Teachers). Also, I got to ask if his students were able to participate in a survey for my Capstone project. He was happy to have asked him for that and agreed to let his students participate. I left his class with the thought that students should be able to speak with their own words. How would they think an assessment is impacting them? Also, I did not want it to be multiple choice without letting them actually write. So, I decided to include both, multiple choice answers and free response questions. On my directions for students, they were able to write in whatever language felt comfortable for them, just because I did not want a language to be a barrier when expressing themselves. On March 12, I was surprised that 66 students responded to my survey, which was a very good number of English Language Learners at a local high school (see Appendix B ~ Anonymous Survey for Middle and High School Students). Overall, I was very pleased to have contacted Mrs. Villalobos and Mr. Gutierrez, they are veterans and no one does the job that they have the same as them, I can still learn a lot from their educational perspective and philosophy.

Results & Discussions

Through my research, my results indicate that student testing of the English Language Proficiency assessments of California (ELPAC) are focused on the ELD students. After conducting the research, this Results, Findings, and Discussion section is structured around the research questions posed in the Introduction and Background section and data was analyzed and

synthesized to respond to the secondary or related research questions posed in the Introduction and Background section as discussed in the following subsequent paragraphs.

1. *What is the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) test? Why has the ELPAC assessment test been implemented only for English language learners? What do the state standards and/or Common Core standards say about the mandated ELPAC assessment test for local school districts?*

English Language Proficiency Assessments for California known as (ELPAC) assessment came in place back in 2017 to replace the pre-existing assessment called California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The main reason for its existence was to update the new measures of the English Proficiency skills. Anyone who spoke a different language other than English at home is “required by law” to take the assessment (California Department of Education, 2023). According to the Federal Department of Education, it was believed that testing their Oral & Written Language skills allowed education to become aware of the needs of the non-English speakers, and provide sufficient support to improve English speaking skills under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Besides CELDT being used for the reclassification of the students, it was used for federal district accountability purposes. This data is utilized to assess whether districts have achieved the two Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) regarding English language acquisition for English learners (ELs), as outlined by Linqanti & George (2007). These objectives, mandated for districts receiving Title III federal funds, serve as performance benchmarks. AMAO 1 evaluates the proportion of ELs demonstrating satisfactory progress on the CELDT, while AMAO 2 gauges the percentage of ELs who have attained

English proficiency. Districts that repeatedly fail to meet these objectives face increasingly severe sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002).

California then adopted Common Core State Standards aligned to CELDT to create a statewide accountability system and improve student achievement through higher class standards (California Department of Education, 2024). As I wanted to confirm, I asked Teacher A about the state standards that lead to her responding “The new state ELPAC Interim Assessments that was released this year show exactly what primary standards are supporting what domains in the ELPAC. For example, the “Listen to a Short Exchange” is aligned with collaborative standard 1, interpretive standard 5 and structuring cohesive texts standard 2” (Teacher A, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for English Language Teachers). At the school level, school administrators utilize CELDT data in various ways to monitor, improve, and report on programs. According to Williams, Hakuta-et al. (2007), ninety-five percent (95%) of the principals use CELDT data to evaluate student progress and communicate with parents. Nearly as many administrators 87% use it to identify struggling students and develop strategies to enhance their English-language proficiency, while 78% utilize it for this purpose. Moreover, a significant majority (71%) of principals utilize CELDT data to examine school-wide instructional practices, indicating a comprehensive approach to leveraging this information for improving educational outcomes. Therefore, CELDT and what is now ELPAC, has been very important and decisive when taking this kind of action into consideration.

2. What does research say about the impact of reclassification of the ELPAC on the English language learners?

According to research, recognizing students in need of assistance with English learning is crucial to ensure they receive the necessary support to thrive academically across all subjects.. Additionally, insights gleaned from the ELPAC aid teachers in delivering tailored support in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to students (California Department of Education, 2021). ELPAC Assessment covers important aspects of learning a new language- Oral & Written Language (Cummins, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2014). Therefore, the need to reclassify or keep them in ELD courses. Besides the research going slanted towards the positive impacts of the assessments for Ells, there are some impacts that the “EL” label can have on English Learners throughout their academics when students do not reclassify. EL labels can create a stigmatization for not only students, but teachers and parents that “English Learners” have lower expectations, lower achievement and slower academic growth, possibly contributing to achievement gaps and the rate at which they close over time (Lee & Soland, 2022).

3. How has the ELPAC assessment test impacted the English language learners according to teachers, principals, and students? If so, in what ways?

During the interview with Teacher B, he was asked what he is doing to accommodate the needs of each of his students and how is he preparing them for each of the sections of the assessment? His response was “I use Edpuzzle for the listening section, Flocabulary, ReadWorks.org, Newsela, and My On for the reading section. For speaking I use a variety of sources For Ex. One on one answering questions focusing on an image. For the writing section I use Goformative with guided practice” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for English Language Teachers). Also, Teacher B’s answer with the following “ELPAC at our site has been a highlight at our site. Teachers are able

to see student progress for each domain. Some Professional Learning Communities will use this data to drive their Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles. Others will use it to form seating charts. All staff have access to this information and continuously refer to it when planning their instruction. In the additional English class for English Learners, ELPAC results are used to share with students and to use for tiering support when practicing for the ELPAC. Students get access to their scores in this class and an opportunity to review what they did and how they can improve. Teachers use the data to reinforce the curriculum for the different domains” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers). Obtaining information for preparation for the test for teachers is linked to their abilities to create a reinforcement of their teaching strategies. However, ELPAC may not capture linguistic needs in a simple assessment that only has been taken once a year (Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Rivera & Stansfield, 2015). As I continued my interview with Mr. Gutierrez, I asked How is the test administered? He answered “Results are not available until the end of the year, which makes it harder for teachers to support students with ELPAC. Teachers might only get category scoring instead of the whole problem” (Teacher B, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers). Along with Teacher A, she “believes that it is almost impossible to offer support they need, since the test is administered in the spring, almost months to go out on vacation and results are revealed until next fiscal year” (Teacher A, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix A~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers). Delayed arrival of scores can lead to a wrong way of support since by that time students might have forgotten content specially if they do not speak the language they are practicing at home or increase of skills if practicing, leading to weak support of weak areas. Another impact for students who are Long Term English Language Learners is

they have to keep taking ELD classes until reclassified. According to a response of a student “In my opinion I think it's not helping us to achieve the goals we want to do I feel like it's stopping us to look at another class that can help us to do what we want” (A Student Respondent, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix B ~ Anonymous Survey for Middle and High School Students). This can lead to students hating the learning process and even interrupt the desire for them to take a class they actually want. According to Teacher B also has seen that students might be affected in taking an extra year to graduate and even lose the opportunity to apply to University since ALL or ELD do not fall under A-G categories (Teacher B, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See appendix A ~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers).

4. *So, what are the criteria for reclassification ELPAC? To what extent, does the ELPAC assessment test measure a student's progress in learning the English language and to identify the student's level of ELP?*

ELPAC measures four categories that are listening, speaking, writing, and reading. These four categories become two sections for the overall score, obtaining a 50 % in Oral and 50% in written language. This is only for grades one through twelve. As for kindergarteners 70% and 30%. With the scores being 1150-1499 for level one, 1374-1554 for level two, 1422-1614 for level three, and 1474-1950 for level four (California Department of Education, 2022). Students who are able to get an overall score of 4. They are just one step closer to be re-designated, the other criteria have been adopted by every district. Teacher B mentions that the current criteria is getting a letter grade of a C+ or better in their ELD class, passing the Star reading with a level grade equivalent. For example, 9-10 Grade should be 5.0 level Equivalent, Grade 11-12 should be 5.5 for local district (Teacher B, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix A ~

Interview Questions for English Language Teachers). This makes it very difficult for students to obtain a reclassification, and might discourage them from succeeding academically. On the other hand, newcomers answer differently “I think yes because it helps me how write little bit of better” and “yes, it will it will teach me how to know English proper” (Appendix B ~ Anonymous Survey for Middle and High School Students). It is very important for them to gain the language even since they might get frustrated when living around a different country with a different language. That’s why ELD students feel like ELPAC is providing them with enough preparation.

5. *Lastly, What could the future hold for the ELPAC assessment test according to principals and teachers?*

According to Teacher A, certain changes will be made to the ELPAC assessment for improvement in their assessment effectiveness. For example, understanding ELPAC scores for students. Students will be able to understand their scores with a full video on how to calculate their ELPAC scores from a range of 1-4 (Teacher A, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers). This is important, as students always worry about their scores. This way, students will be able to see their scores and how they are calculated into a 1-4 range. According to Teacher B, ELPAC will be implemented for a long time, as ELPAC assessment serves as a measurement of their minority groups as are migrants or ELL’s (Teacher B, personal communication, March 5, 2024) (Appendix A ~ Interview Questions for the English Language Teachers). As I asked the same questions to Teachers, it seems clear that they have multiple beliefs, based on their experience with ELPAC assessments. adds up to problems or limitations. Therefore, in the

past ELPAC replaced the CELDT, if not proven to support language learning, will there be more changes to it?

After seeing the responses of the guiding questions, it is almost impossible to be able to deduce the solutions. Therefore, my problems and limitations will be a part of my conclusion.

Problems & Limitations

One of many limitations I encounter while conducting my research is that everyone has a limited time frame to participate in a research project. If conducting interviews with professionals, their time is very limited. Therefore, a few other teachers opt out participating, along with the principal and parents.

Recommendations

Based on my study, I am confident that ELD (Newcomers) students are benefiting from ELPAC Testing, due to teacher detailed instruction based covering listening, speaking, reading and writing showing improvement in their oral & speaking skills. However, assessments are once a year which eliminates the teacher's ability of support to pass the test. This might also affect the ELD (Long Term Learners) ability to freely partake in any course of their choice, and affect their career goals.

Conclusion

This senior capstone research project examines the research question, “How does the

reclassification of the assessments tests English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) impact English language learners? It is noted that long Term ELD students (ALLs) are aware of the importance of passing the ELPAC and the impact it has on their school transcript. This ELPAC assessment test does not count towards graduation requirements. It removes the opportunity to take a class they actually like, it could be related to what they want to be when growing up.

Through the use of literature review, interviews with teachers, and surveys with middle and high school students, data were analyzed and synthesized. The result findings indicated that the majority of the students knows ELPAC saw it as a barrier, or as one student stated, I quote, “Only one chance or you have to do it. Next year ELD students (Newcomers) are not aware of the importance of passing the ELPAC and the impact it has on their school transcript. This class does not count towards graduation requirements or University A-G requirements. It removes the opportunity to take a class they actually like. It could be related to what they want to be when growing up. Or they can take an extra senior year until graduation requirements are completed. However, they need the language which forces them to put in more effort, which is a factor for learning a new language” (A Student Respondent, personal communication, April 19, 2024) (See Appendix B ~ Anonymous Survey for Middle and High School Students).

The majority of the students knows ELPAC as an opportunity to grow, as teachers will scaffold test related questions, improving listening, writing, speaking, and reading skills. Sometimes teachers and administrators undervalue themselves that we cannot do any more to help the students, so I have to ask the following, ELPAC Assessments’ purpose is to identify English Language Proficient students. So, Are the ELPAC Assessments too difficult? or Are students not able to be considered English Proficient since they can’t pass the test?

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview Questions for English Language Teachers

1. What is the primary purpose of the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California?
2. What are the different components of the ELPAC test?
3. What grade is the ELPAC test currently being administered ? How does it adapt to every grade level?
4. Do you believe that students are impacted by English Language California Proficiency Assessments? If so, How?
5. How is the ELPAC aligned with the English Language Development standards in California?
6. In what ways does the test reflect the language proficiency expectations for different grade levels?
7. How often is the ELPAC test administered to English learners?
8. What mechanisms are in place for continuous improvement of the ELPAC?
9. How do the results of the ELPAC influence classroom instruction for English learners?
10. In what ways does the test help identify areas of strength and areas for improvement?
11. What could the future hold for ELPAC assessments?

Appendix B

Anonymous Survey for Middle and High School Students

English Class Title _____ Grade _____

1. How important is it for you to pass the ELPAC?
2. In your opinion, describe the difficulty of the ELPAC.
3. Do you believe ELPAC is helping you achieve your future goals? Yes/No Elaborate.
4. If there was something you can change from ELPAC what would it be? Why?