The Efficacy of Administration Accommodations in Removing Performance Barriers for Limited English Proficient Students on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)

John J. Meyer
Lynn University

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THE EFFICACY OF ADMINISTRATION ACCOMMODATIONS IN REMOVING PERFORMANCE BARRIERS FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS ON THE FLORIDA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TEST

A dissertation submitted

by

JOHN J. MEYER

to

LYNN UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
Abstract

THE EFFICACY OF ADMINISTRATION ACCOMMODATIONS IN REMOVING PERFORMANCE BARRIERS FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS ON THE FLORIDA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TEST

By John J. Meyer

The education of persons with limited English proficiency is and has been the concern of American educators, policymakers and the courts for the past three decades. The rising concern is exacerbated as the number of these students entering American schools is sharply increasing. One question of paramount importance in the realm of educational programming for limited English proficient (LEP) students is participation in large-scale assessment programs, especially in states where high-stakes testing programs determine receipt of a standard high school diploma. LEP student participation includes consideration of special testing conditions, enabling them to be assessed on an equal plane with other standard curriculum students without a heritage language limitation.

The research question addressed by this study was to determine if the year 2000 reported scores of Grade 10 LEP students on the Reading section of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), administered with accommodations as prescribed in the published administration manual, were equal to or significantly different from the scores reported for other standard curriculum students, for whom the FCAT was administered without accommodations. Study samples included 100 non-LEP standard curriculum students and 100 LEP standard curriculum students. The LEP student group consisted of students receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services for more than two years and currently enrolled in ESOL classes designed to meet their linguistic needs. As the subject district classifies LEP students
according to demonstrated language abilities, to control for the level of English language development, only students classified in the highest two levels were included in this study.

Study findings indicate that there was a significant difference between the mean scale scores of the two groups of students. Reviewing the data, the results further indicate that use of the specified test administration accommodations is not adequately addressing the needs of this special population in the realm of equal opportunity, that is the removal of performance barriers, in the mandated state assessment process. The question arises, therefore, as to whether or not the test results as reported indicate a student's accurate ability or if the English language limitation is posing a true barrier to performance as determined by the selected assessment tool.

Accommodations are vehicles designed for the expressed purpose of enabling students to access in English an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of specified skills. It is intended that this research study will both add to the existing body of knowledge of the assessment of LEP students and serve as a factor to consider in the ongoing development of performance evaluation at all levels in the American education system. As accurate and appropriate assessment of limited English proficient students is indeed complex, this researcher recommends additional research in the area of related language minority student literacy issues, cultural influences, as well as assessment format and presentation elements, and the implementation of alternative assessment methodologies for high-stakes evaluation. Further research in this area might improve the quality of assessment for all students.
THE EFFICACY OF ADMINISTRATION ACCOMMODATIONS IN REMOVING PERFORMANCE BARRIERS FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS ON THE FLORIDA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TEST

John J. Meyer, Ph.D.
Lynn University, 2001

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A sincere expression of appreciation is presented to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Cheryl Serrano, Chair, Dr. William Leary, and Dr. Maria Ligas for supporting me with their extensive knowledge, educational expertise, and genuine concern. They have been exemplary role models for me as I worked toward this highest of academic pursuits.

I also express a heart-felt thanks to my close friends, who are in fact my family, for their continued love and support.
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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

The past two or three decades have been deluged by a plethora of, what their proponents would claim to be, innovative pedagogical constructs. Each carries with it a promise of providing a methodology to better impart academic knowledge to a populace that finds itself caught up in a veritable tornado of information. At a time when the volume of available information is growing exponentially, educators are faced with the seemingly impossible task of enabling youth to not only integrate the material they need to be productive members of our global community, but also the processes by which they can use it to best advantage for themselves and society as a whole. The issuance of a standard high school diploma is one traditional manner by which one demonstrates that he or she has mastered the basic skills necessary to be a functioning member of our society. To secure a standard diploma in the state of Florida, a student must pass a series of course requirements, maintain a specified grade point average and successfully pass both the mathematics and reading sections of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). One goal of this research project is to evaluate some of the factors that may or may not significantly impact a special needs group as they attempt to reach the goal of attaining a standard high school diploma. This special needs group is made up of language minority students, that is students from language backgrounds other than English enrolled in Florida schools.

Regardless of the educational program format, a major concern in addressing the needs of limited English proficient (LEP) students exists with respect to assessment. LEP student assessment presents several pressing issues: participation, the validity of the results and the use of appropriate
accommodations. Participation guidelines vary from one state to another and even within each state from one district to another. With the concept of accountability at the forefront of many school district performance records, which is many times tied to funding, there seems to be a liberal view of exemption policies in place to exclude student participation for those who might lower school or district score reports. In light of the need for implementation of federal government directives for the inclusion of all students in large-scale assessments, efforts must be made to enable LEP students, as well as other students with limitations, to take part in test administrations. One question of paramount importance when viewing assessment policies and practices for LEP students is what kind of special testing conditions are, not only permitted, but provided, enabling them to be assessed on an equal plane with other standard curriculum students without a heritage language limitation. Research indicates that there are a variety of accommodations in place for LEP students in school districts across the nation (Bond, Braskamp & Roeber, 1996). These accommodations are, for the most part, extensions of the accommodations provided for that population identified as students with disabilities, that is students identified as handicapped and currently in any special education program. With regard to this proposed study, the accommodations will be those as specified in the published administration manual for the FCAT.

The education of persons with limited English proficiency is and has been the concern of American educators, policymakers and the courts for the past three decades. The rising concern is exacerbated as the number of these students entering American schools is sharply increasing. According to the United States Census Bureau, from the year 2000 to 2015, the total minority school-age student
population is projected to increase in all but two states, Arkansas and Mississippi (Olson, 2000).

Table 1 reports the K-12 enrollment trends for LEP students in the U.S. and Florida for the past decade as reported by the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE, 2000).

Table 1
Trends of Enrollment for United States and Florida for LEP Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. LEP Enrollment</th>
<th>Florida LEP Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>2,030,451</td>
<td>61,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>2,198,778</td>
<td>80,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>2,429,815</td>
<td>97,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>2,620,747</td>
<td>130,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>3,037,922</td>
<td>144,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>3,184,696</td>
<td>150,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>3,228,799</td>
<td>189,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>3,452,073</td>
<td>288,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>3,725,586</td>
<td>243,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>3,937,291</td>
<td>237,120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 demonstrates the K-12 enrollment trends in the subject district for LEP students over the past decade (Broward District Enrollment, 2000).

Table 2

Subject District LEP Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District LEP Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>4,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>5,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>5,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>10,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>12,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>13,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>15,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>17,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>17,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>20,091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The environmental context for this study is a large, urban, Florida school district. The subject district is currently one of the largest school districts in the nation with an enrollment of just over 253,000 for students in grades Pre-K through 12. The LEP population numbers approximately 34,820, representing 13.76% of the total enrollment (Broward District Enrollment Membership, 2000).
The language minority student population in the subject district is quite diverse. Enrolled students for the 1999-2000 school year represent 152 different countries and speak 52 different languages (Broward County Public Schools, 2000).

Table 3 presents the countries contributing more than one percent of the total LEP student population. Students from these countries comprise 86% of the district's LEP population.

Table 3
Major Countries of National Origin of Subject District LEP Students, 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of National Origin</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percent of Total LEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>12,698</td>
<td>42.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>12.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1,939</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>5.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>4.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1,268</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>1.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>1.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 indicates the native languages spoken by more than one percent of the total LEP student population. Students speaking these languages comprise 90% of the district’s LEP population.

Table 4

Major Native Languages of Subject District LEP Students, 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percent of Total LEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>16,643</td>
<td>55.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitian-Creole</td>
<td>7,724</td>
<td>25.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>5.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese, Zhongwen</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEP students in the state of Florida are classified according to five categories:

**LY** = LEP students enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students

**LN** = LEP students not enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students

**LP** = Grade 4-12 LEP students for whom the reading/writing test is pending

**LF** = Former LEP students who exited the program within the last two years
LZ = Former LEP students who exited the program more than two years ago

For the purpose of this study, reported student scores will only be presented for LEP students classified as LY. Implication of study findings may be noteworthy as the LY classification of LEP students statewide numbers approximately 171,860 (Florida Department of Education, 2000).

As this special needs population is growing at a significant rate and as the emphasis on inclusive accountability is the focus of contemporary American education, the need to equitably and appropriately assess LEP student academic progress is critical. The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacy of test administration accommodations in removing performance barriers for LEP students on the State of Florida mandated FCAT assessment program (Florida Department of Education, 1996).

The research question addressed by this project is to determine if the reported scores of Grade 10 LEP students receiving ESOL services for more than 2 years on the 2000 FCAT Reading section administered with accommodations as prescribed in the published administration manual are equal to or significantly different from the scores reported for other standard curriculum students for whom the FCAT was administered without accommodations. It is intended that this study will add to the body of knowledge in the area of valid and equitable assessment practices for LEP students.

The scope of research possibilities in the area of testing accommodations as they relate to LEP students is broad. Validity studies can and should be conducted on each of the accommodation frameworks offered in relation to expected outcomes on assessment programs currently in place within the
educational arena. Research on the variables intrinsic to cultural dynamics within this population, including efficacy of bilingual programming and length of participation in ESOL services, have been and continue to be necessary to add to the body of knowledge in the field. This researcher, however, elected to narrow the focus of the study to the generic effectiveness of the specific series of accommodations implemented on a particular assessment instrument in an attempt to determine if, in fact, their intended purpose is valid and appropriate.

For this project, data was gathered electronically. Reporting of FCAT scores is presented on a data tape prepared by the Florida DOE and stored in the subject district data warehouse. The software to retrieve the information is the BrioQuery Explorer, a program developed by Brio Technology, Incorporated, Palo Alto, California. This researcher designed a Brio query to retrieve information with the specific data requirements. One group of data included the 2000 FCAT reading scores of 100 randomly selected Grade 10 standard curriculum students and the other group of data included the scores reported for 100 randomly selected Grade 10 LEP students, for whom the FCAT was administered with the specified accommodations.

In order to determine significance of the effect of administration accommodations on the achievement level of the LEP students, an independent-sample t test was used to analyze the data. Review of the findings will determine if the prescribed accommodations adequately address the special needs of the LEP population in the realm of equal opportunity in the mandated state assessment process. Should the findings indicate a significant difference,
further research will be recommended to identify additional variables not accounted for in the current accommodation format.
The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) has made the designation that students from language backgrounds other than English are language minority students. This designation pertains to students from a home where a language other than English is the predominant language and where these students have the opportunity to develop proficiency in a language other than English. A language minority student whose English proficiency has not yet developed enough for him or her to participate in an English-only learning environment is referred to as limited English proficient. The achievement levels of these students are typically low. LEP students score below acceptable levels on high stakes tests, such as those required for graduation criteria, are usually at a greater risk of dropping out of school, are less likely to continue on to higher education than their English proficient peers, are over represented in remedial programs and under represented in college bound courses. Data submitted by thirty-three state education agencies throughout the nation indicate that 27% of LEP students in those states scored below the state norms on standardized tests in reading, mathematics, science and social studies (Feinberg & Morencia, 1998).

The assessment of persons with limited English proficiency is of rising concern to American educators, as the number of LEP students entering American schools is sharply increasing (Olson & Goldstein, 1996). As of October 1995, there were over 6.3 million school age children in the United States with a home language other than English. Spanish is the home language for over five million school-aged students. These figures demonstrate an increase of 38% over the numbers only a decade ago (Feinberg & Morencia, 1998). OBEMLA
publishes an annual summary of the information submitted by state education agencies regarding LEP students. According to their 1998 summary, the total number of LEP students comprises 7.4% of the reported public school enrollment in grades K through 12. and 1.2% of the reported non-public school K-12 enrollment. Based on 1997 census data, the fastest growing segment of the United States child population includes 3 million foreign-born children under 18 and more than 10 million United States born children under 18 living with at least one foreign-born parent or a total of 20% of all children in America (Rumbaut, 1998). Although the concern is great, the amount of direct research on language related influences on the test performance is limited and there are relatively few mechanisms in place for large-scale assessments that ensure accurate data about LEP student achievement levels (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2000).

According to federal law and the laws of many individual states, if LEP status poses an obstacle for students to have meaningful and equitable participation in an English-only school environment, special services must be provided. Historically, parents who felt that their children were not receiving an equal educational opportunity have often taken their cases to court. Judges have consistently referred to three documents to assist in making their decisions. These documents are the United States (US) Constitution, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 1703 of the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974. Interpretation of these documents, as evidenced in case law helps clarify and focus the issues.

The issue of affording equal education for LEP students has been a national issue faced by the American judicial system for the past thirty years. In a
landmark case in 1974, **Lau v. Nichols**, a California court ruled that LEP students had a right to specialized educational opportunities. Many cases presented to the courts since 1974 have resulted in similar decisions. The Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), Section 1703 states: “no state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin.” In 1982, this was amended by adding section (f) which requires an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” (20 U.S.C., 1982). This act has been cited in many cases including **Morales v. Shannon** (1975), where the judgement determined that it was unlawful in educational practice to fail to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers.

It is important to note that “appropriate action” is not explicitly defined by the EEOA. This is further clarified in **Castaneda v. Pickard** (1981). Results in the Castaneda case indicated that Congress intended to leave individual state and educational systems a substantial amount of latitude in determining the programs and procedures they would use to meet their obligations under the EEOA.

The EEOA did not include specific mandates regarding the manner in which educational programs are presented, but it required educational institutions to appropriately meet the linguistic needs of enrolled students. Further clarification of the requirement to meet the needs of these students came in the Bilingual Education Act of 1967 (BEA), which became an addition to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968. The BEA has gone through five

In 1990, eight plaintiff organizations filed suit against the Florida State Board of Education to secure implementation of services for LEP students in the state. The Florida Commissioner of Education at the time, Betty Castor and the Multicultural Educational Training Advocacy, Inc. (META) entered into an agreement for programs in the state pertaining to LEP students. The agreement became a Consent Decree entered with the United States District Court for the Southern Florida Region. That same year, the Florida State Legislature voted into law a series of statutes enforcing the implementation of the Consent Decree requirements. Throughout the state of Florida, school districts set in place programs for LEP students to meet the requirements of the Florida Statutes, State Board of Education Rules, and the Consent Decree (Florida Department of Education Office of Multicultural Language Education, 1995).

Nationwide, these services to provide appropriate action vary greatly. Program models range from substantial instruction in the heritage language to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs with no direct instruction through minority language (Olson & Goldstein, 1998).

Regardless of the format of the program of instruction, little direct research has been done on language related influence on test performance. In a paper, Addressing Students with Disabilities and Limited English Proficiency (Houser, 1995), several concerns in this regard were presented as they related to issues of data validity, assessment modifications, and the inclusion of LEP students in large-scale assessments. Those issues included:
Since students may not always be literate in their heritage language and some languages may be only spoken and not written, testing as it is ordinarily done in this country may be totally inappropriate.

Since many languages may have several dialects, heritage language assistance as an accommodation may be difficult, if not impossible.

Even if testing was provided in the native language, some psychometricians believe that assessments conducted in different languages are not psychometrically equivalent.

In the 1994 document, For All Students: Limited English Proficient Students and Goals 2000, August and Hakuta, educators with expertise on the education of LEP students, developed a consensus paper with recommendations regarding state level assessments. Their recommendations included:

If LEP students are not assessed then no one can really be held accountable for what these students know and are able to do in important content areas. Therefore, states need to develop performance assessments that are appropriate for LEP students.

LEP students who are instructed in their native language should be assessed in that language. The native language assessments should parallel content assessments and performance standards in English.

Modifications in assessments and assessment procedures should be encouraged to enable LEP students to take content assessments in English. These modifications might entail: altering the procedures used to administer the assessments, modifying the assessment itself so it is more comprehensible to LEP students, using alternative assessments, and employing computer-assisted
assessments that are tailored to the language needs and content knowledge of LEP students.

Until the psychometric issues underlying these new assessments have been addressed, and until mechanisms to ensure opportunities to learn have been implemented, these assessments should not be used in high stakes situations.

Thus, even though LEP students possess the skills and content knowledge a particular test is designed to measure, the language of presentation may significantly limit performance. In the paper, Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests published by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, every assessment is an assessment of language. Given this notion, it is difficult if not impossible, to determine whether or not LEP students lack skill or knowledge related to the content of instrument, or if a language barrier is limiting their performance (August, Hakuta & Pompa, 1994).

As it currently stands, states and individual school districts vary widely in determining the methodology of testing students (Cheung, Clements & Miu, 1994). A key factor in this regard is the divergence of opinion in clearly defining the issues. This factor has a direct impact on the inclusion of LEP students in large-scale assessments. Differing opinions include the following (August, Hakuta & Pompa, 1994):

A lack of clear and consistent definitions of LEP at the national and state levels.

Guidelines that exclude students who have been in bilingual education programs, even when they have been in English-speaking schools for more than two years.
The varying degrees of English proficiency that students in bilingual programs have.

Guidelines that allow local decisions to be made about the participation of LEP students.

The differential implementation of guidelines.

The failure to monitor the extent to which the intent of the guidelines are followed.

The lack of accommodation in assessment materials and procedures that would enable LEP students to participate.

A desire not to require LEP students to take an assessment they cannot understand because of limited English proficiency.

Hopstock and Bucaro (1993) found that there is a large variability across states and districts in the way assessments are used with LEP students. They indicated that many states provide overall guidance to individual districts on procedures for testing LEP students, but allow considerable flexibility in their choice of assessment instruments and methodology. It was noted that a practice increasingly being recommended is the use of a combination of assessments to obtain several sources of information on the criteria related to LEP student achievement.

The National Academy of Education (NAE) has carried out several studies as part of their evaluation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Program, focusing on issues related to inclusion and accommodation procedures for LEP students. In a study of participation rates, (Spencer, 1994), a review was made of the exclusion of LEP students from the assessment. The author found that for LEP students, a cost benefit analysis had to be examined,
since the decision to exclude them from testing might have been based on the difficulties in assessing them.

Another NAE study (Stancavage, 1996) focused on the types of accommodations that would be needed for inclusion of LEP students in future administrations of assessments from which, to that point, they had been excluded. The study involved an analysis of questionnaire data on all LEP students excluded from the 1994 Trial State Assessment issued by NAEP. It also included teacher interviews. Results indicated that the percentage of time per week spent in an ESOL class and the exclusion of these students from state, district, or other grade-level standardized tests were positively related to exclusion from NAEP assessment. As a result of these studies, a panel from the National Academy of Education suggested that efforts continue to be made to identify appropriate adaptations and accommodations for LEP students and that these be directed at permitting the inclusion of larger proportions of LEP students in large-scale assessments.

Bond, Braskamp and Roeber (1996) conducted a survey entitled The Status Report of Assessment Programs in the United States. According to the results of the survey, 36 states allowed for the exclusion of LEP students from their statewide testing programs. They determined that many states allowed schools to exclude students from testing if the assessment was judged inappropriate for them, for example if the LEP student did not know enough English to complete the test successfully. It was noted that very few of the participating states collected data on the number of LEP students excluded and, fewer yet, could determine what percentage of the total population of LEP students were excluded from testing programs. The level of English proficiency and/or the
number of years an LEP student had been receiving ESOL services were the determining factors used for participation. It was also found that many states eliminated the test results of LEP students from state, district, and individual school summary reports.

This survey also indicated that even when LEP students were included in the statewide testing programs, the use of modifications and procedural accommodations varied greatly. Seven of the states included LEP students in the testing administration without any accommodations and twenty-five included them with some form of accommodations. Of the twenty-five states that allowed accommodations, only seventeen specifically indicated the kind of testing accommodations they permitted. The types of modifications included: flexible setting, flexible scheduling, the use of heritage-language dictionaries and the use of heritage language to be used with the students during the test administration.

The state of Florida, in which is located the subject district, has in place an accountability system to include LEP students in the state mandated assessment programs. Florida also has a procedure allowing exemption of LEP students who have been receiving services in a state approved ESOL program for more than two years. For LEP students who have been receiving ESOL services two years or less, a school-based LEP committee may make the decision to exempt the student from a particular assessment administration. In terms of school and/or district accountability for the Florida A+ School Grading Program, score results for LEP students in approved ESOL programs less than two years are disaggregated. The scores of those students are, however, reported in the annual total inventory report of published by the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2001).
In a resource guide published by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in December 2000, a list is presented of those accommodations afforded to LEP students in large-scale assessments throughout the U.S. Indication is made that the list is neither exhaustive nor are any of the accommodations specifically endorsed by the USDOE. This researcher is including that list so that those accommodations allowed by the state of Florida on the FCAT may be viewed in a national context (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1999).

Presentation Format

- Translation of directions into native language
- Translation of test into native language
- Bilingual version of test (English and native language)
- Further explanation of directions
- Plain language editing
- Use of work lists/dictionaries
- Large print

Administration Format

- Oral reading in English
- Oral reading in native language
- Person familiar to students administers test
- Clarification of directions
- Use of technology
- Alone, in study carrel
- Separate room
- With small group
Extended testing time
More breaks
Extending sessions over multiple days

Response Format
Allow student to respond in writing in native language
Allow student to orally respond in native language
Allow student to orally respond in English

Use of technology

The accommodations provided by the state of Florida include:
Flexible setting
Flexible scheduling
Extended time
Directions in heritage language
Use of a heritage language-English or English-heritage language non-contextual dictionary

The ESOL teacher serving as test administrator or proctor

Viewed in an historical perspective, LEP students have been, for the most part, excluded from assessment programs at state and national levels (Rivera, Hafner, Vincent, & LaCelle-Peterson, 1996). Such exclusion from participation leaves wide gaps in the determination of achievement levels for this group of students.

As previously indicated, there is a scarcity of research in the specific area of testing conditions on the achievement level of limited English proficient students on standardized assessments. In addition, this researcher found no contrary opinion studies or research indicating that use of accommodations or special
testing conditions would adversely effect the performance level of LEP students on large-scale assessments.

In light of the emphasis on accountability in the realm of education and the critical need to understand the current practice in the assessment of LEP students' achievement levels, nationally, as well as on state and district level, this researcher determines that further study on the testing conditions for this special needs population is both timely and appropriate. Cognizant of the fact that there are additional variables involved when assessing LEP students, for example, the cultural dynamics of the students involved, the possible lack of prior formal education in their home countries, and the possible lack of educational support systems in the family, this researcher suggests that additional studies with regard to those factors be conducted to determine any additional relevant elements that may be involved in the evaluation of language-minority students. The purpose of this study is to determine the significance of accommodations as directly related to the aforementioned evaluation of this special needs group.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Instrument

For the purposes of this study, the achievement level was measured by the administration of the FCAT reading assessment. The FCAT is a performance-based test designed to measure the reading frameworks outlined in the Florida Sunshine State Standards, which articulate the content that students are expected to know and be able to do. The FCAT was developed by the Assessment and Evaluation Services Section of the Florida Department of Education (DOE) in conjunction with CTB/McGraw Hill, Inc. Harcourt Educational Measurement is now the vendor for development. National Computer Systems is the year 2000 vendor for scoring.

According to the FCAT Owner's Manual compiled by the Florida Department of Education, the FCAT reading component for Grade 10 contains passages taken from magazines, books, and other publications that students at that grade level are expected to be able to read. The length of the passages at that level averages approximately 900 words. Certain passages at that level may be twice as long.

The format of the assessment includes multiple-choice questions and both long-answer and short-answer performance tasks. The performance tasks are designed to enable the student to demonstrate in his/her own words their understanding of the content of the passages. Performance tasks in this component require students to read and understand the question; develop an answer by rereading and thinking about the content; and then plan and write their answer in their own words.
The reading portion of the FCAT is designed to assess approximately nine benchmarks at the Grade 10 level in the Florida Sunshine State Standards Language Arts, Reading and Literature strands. The reading passages are presented in two categories: literature and information.

Scores for the FCAT reading component are obtained from a combination of both machine and hand-scoring. Via a process identified as “imaging,” the answer document is photographed electronically. The multiple-choice and gridded responses are machine scored and trained test evaluators score the students’ handwritten responses.

The machine-scored results are combined with the hand-scored results. The total score for each student is entered on a scale using a computer-based process. The scale score is then reported. The range of possible scores is from a low of 100 to a high of 500.

The Florida State Board of Education has set forth five achievement levels for the FCAT score results. The levels are used as a basis for reporting student achievement. The levels are identified as Level 1 (lowest) to Level 5 (highest). A student achieves one of five possible levels based on the Total Score. The following list provides definitions for each of the five FCAT achievement levels as set forth by the DOE:

Level 5: Performance at this level indicates that the student has success with most challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards. A Level 5 student answers most of the test questions correctly, including the most challenging questions.

Level 4: Performance at this level indicates that the student has success with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards. A level 4 student
answers most of the questions correctly, but may have only some success with
questions that reflect the most challenging content.

Level 3: Performance at this level indicates that the student has partial success
with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards, but performance
is inconsistent. A level 3 student answers many of the questions correctly, but
is generally less successful with questions that are most challenging.

Level 2: Performance at this level indicates that the student has limited success
with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards.

Level 1: Performance at this level indicates that the student has little success
with the challenging content of the Florida Sunshine State Standards.

The following table presents the range of FCAT scale scores for each of the
achievement levels indicated above.

Table 5

FCAT Scale Scores to Define Achievement Levels for Grade 10 Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Level</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale-Score Range</td>
<td>100-286</td>
<td>287-326</td>
<td>327-354</td>
<td>355-371</td>
<td>372-500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The graduation criterion referencing an FCAT scale score requires students
enrolled in Grade 10 since the fall of 2000 to earn a total reading test scale score
of 327. That score, in combination with a total mathematics scale score of 315,
meets partial requirement for the receipt of a standard Florida high school
diploma.
The concept of test validity refers to a determination of how adequately the
instrument measures what it is intended to measure. According to the
Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing of the American
Psychological Association (1985):

Validity is the most important consideration in test evaluation. The
concept refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of
the specific inferences made from the test scores. Test validation is the
process for accumulating evidence to support any particular inference.
Validity, however, is a unitary concept. Although evidence may be
accumulated in many ways, validity always refers to the degree to which
that evidence supports the inferences that are made from the scores. (p. 9)

To establish the reliability of the FCAT, the internal consistency of the
instrument was established through use of a Chronbach's Alpha coefficient. The
Chronbach Alpha coefficient is based on the average inter-item correlation.
Florida DOE staff reports that the alpha value for Grade 10 Reading assessment
is \( r = 0.88 \) (Fisher, 2001). As alpha values may range from 0.0 to 1.0, an alpha
value of 0.88 indicates a high level of reliability.

To establish the concurrent validity of the FCAT, DOE staff conducted a
correlation analysis between the Sunshine State Standards criterion-referenced
FCAT and the norm-referenced FCAT. The correlation between the Grade 10
Reading FCAT-SSS and the FCAT-NRT for Grade 10 was 0.71, demonstrating a
moderate degree of concurrent validity (Fisher, 2001).

In general, the results of achievement tests, such as the FCAT, are used in
demonstrating student performance. The purpose of the FCAT is to determine
student performance as it relates to the Florida Sunshine State Standards (SSS).
For the purpose of verifying content validity, it is essential that the content of the test be directly matched to the skills to be evaluated. The validity of the FCAT was established by determining the extent to which test construction and procedures could ensure validity. As specified by the Florida Department of Education in the Technical Report: 1999 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, procedures for FCAT development included:

The Sunshine State Standards were developed with the involvement of instructional specialists.

The standards and skills were deemed acceptable. Educators and citizens were involved in this process.

Item specifications were written for each SSS.

Test items were written according to the guidelines provided by the item specifications.

The draft items were reviewed by instructional specialists and practicing teachers. Revisions were made when necessary.

The test items were subjected to final editing, as necessary. (p. 9)

Sample

Subjects included two randomly selected groups of Grade 10 students. Group A was a randomly selected group of limited English proficient (LEP) students currently enrolled in a program of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These students were identified as LEP as a result of a “home language survey” completed upon registration for school and as a result of a language classification test administered at the time of school registration. Each student in the group has been receiving ESOL services for more than two years and is, according to state eligibility criteria, eligible for participation in statewide
assessment testing. Group A was comprised of 100 students, 50 males and 50 females. Group B was a randomly selected group of students currently enrolled in a standard curriculum program, none of whom were or had been classified LEP. Group B was comprised of 100 students, 50 male and 50 female. Students in both Group A and Group B are currently enrolled in large public schools in an urban Florida setting.

LEP students in the state of Florida are classified according to five categories:

- **LY** = LEP students enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students
- **LN** = LEP students not enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students
- **LP** = Grade 4-12 LEP students for whom the reading/writing test is pending
- **LF** = Former LEP students who exited the program within the last two years
- **LZ** = Former LEP students who exited the program more than two years ago

For the purpose of this study, reported student scores will only be presented for LEP students classified as LY, that is, LEP students currently enrolled in classes designed to meet their linguistic needs.

Within the state LEP classification LY, LEP students currently enrolled in subject district schools are further classified according to demonstrated language levels. These levels are:
A1 - Non English speaker or minimal knowledge of English; demonstrates very little understanding; cannot communicate meaning orally and is unable to participate in regular classroom instruction

A2 - Limited English speaker; demonstrates limited understanding; communicates orally in English with one or two word responses

B1 - Intermediate English speaker; communicates orally in English, mostly with simple phrases and/or sentence responses; makes significant grammatical errors, which interfere with understanding

B2 - Intermediate English speaker; communicates in English about everyday situations with little difficulty, but lacks the academic language terminology; experiences some difficulty in following grade level subject matter assignments

C1 - Advanced English speaker; understands and speaks English fairly well; makes occasional grammatical error; may read and write English with variant degrees of proficiency

C2 - Full English speaker; understands and speaks English with near fluency; reads and writes English at a comparable level with native English-speaking counterparts; may read and write the native language with variant degrees of proficiency

The FCAT score results for those students with a language level classifications below C would understandably be significantly lower than those of their standard curriculum peers regardless of the accommodations provided. To control for the level of English language development, only LY students classified C1 or C2 were included in this study.

The mean age of the LEP student population included in the study was 15.90 at the time of the test administration, with a standard deviation of 0.78. The
mean age of the standard curriculum student population was 15.65 at the time of the test administration, with a standard deviation of 0.83. This researcher deemed this data important to report as, oftentimes, LEP students are retained in school and age as related to the time of formal education, may have been a factor in the achievement level demonstrated on the reported test scores. As the mean age of both sample groups was not significantly different, that factor has been controlled.

**Procedure**

The standard curriculum students were administered the Grade 10 Reading portion of the FCAT according to the directions provided in the published administration manual.

The LEP students were administered the Grade 10 Reading portion of the FCAT with test accommodations as permitted by Florida State Board Rule 6A-1.0943, FAC. The determination of appropriate accommodations in this assessment process was based on the individual needs of each student. Decision on accommodations was made by the LEP committee at the school.

Guidelines for this decision will include:

- Accommodations should facilitate an accurate demonstration of what the student knows and can do.
- Accommodations should not provide the student with an unfair advantage or interfere with the validity of the test.
- Accommodations must be the same or nearly the same adaptations used by the students in completing classroom instruction and assessment activities.
Accommodations must be necessary for enabling the student to demonstrate knowledge, ability, skill or mastery.

The permitted accommodations include:

Flexible Setting – LEP students may be offered the opportunity to be tested in a separate room with the ESOL or heritage language teacher acting as test administrator.

Flexible Scheduling – LEP students may take part or session of the test during several brief periods within one school day; however, a session of the test must be completed within one school day.

Flexible Timing – LEP students may be provided additional time; however, a session must be completed within one school day.

Assistance in the Heritage Language – For the Reading test, The ESOL or heritage language teacher may answer student questions about the general test directions in a way that the student would not be unmistakable led to infer the correct answer to any of the questions. The teacher is prohibited from reading words to the student from the passages, test items, and performance tasks and from answering student questions about the passages, test items, and performance tasks.

Dictionary – LEP students may have access to an English-to heritage language translation dictionary and/or heritage language-to-English translation dictionary, such as those made available to LEP students in an instructional setting. However, a dictionary providing definitions written exclusively in the heritage language or in English may not be provided.
All of the LEP students in this study were tested with benefit of the five allowable accommodations. Size of the small group settings, however, varied at each of the sites.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The research question addressed by this study is to determine if the reported scores of LEP students on the 2000 FCAT Reading section administered with accommodations as prescribed in the published administration manual are equal to or significantly different from the scores reported for standard curriculum students for whom the FCAT was administered without accommodations. Both groups of students in the study were randomly selected from the tenth grade population enrolled at subject district public high schools. Each group was comprised of 100 students, 50 male and 50 female. The mean age of the standard curriculum group was 15.65 years at the time of the test administration. The mean age of the LEP students was 15.90 years at the time of the test administration. The LEP students were classified as LY according to state of Florida categories, indicating that they were LEP students enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students. The LEP students were further classified according to their subject district language classification. To control for the level of English language development in the study, the LEP students were classified C1 or C2. These classifications indicate that the LEP students were considered either advanced English speakers or full English speakers, by subject district definition.

In order to answer this question, a t-test for independent samples was used for analyzing the data. One of the assumptions of the independent sample t-test is that population variances are equal across the sample groups. In this case, an F-Test Two Sample for Variances indicated that the assumption of equal
variances was verified. Therefore, the independent sample t-test with equal variances assumed was used.

Results indicate that the mean of the FCAT scale scores for the standard curriculum students was 301.36 with a standard deviation of 36.37 and the mean of the FCAT scale scores for accommodated LEP students was 262.08 with a standard deviation of 37.69. The scale score range for the standard curriculum students was 217-392. The scale score range for the LEP student was 155-352.

Table 6 below presents the mean scale scores, standard deviations and \( t \) value of the FCAT scale scores for the two groups of students in the study.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>( t )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEP with accommodations</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>262.08</td>
<td>37.68</td>
<td>-7.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Curriculum</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>301.36</td>
<td>36.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p < .001 \)

As indicated in Table 6, there was a significant difference between the mean scale scores (39.28) of the two groups of students. This also suggests that there was a significant difference in the performance of LEP students with accommodations and the standard curriculum students tested without accommodations. The standard deviation values for each of the groups, which indicates the average
Amount that the scores differ from their mean, is relatively close, further suggesting a significant difference for all of the sample members in each group.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The education of students with limited English proficiency is an issue of paramount concern to American educators, policy makers and the myriad of stakeholders in the future of this country. At this point in American history, approximately 65 percent of school-age children are non-Hispanic whites. Demographers estimate that that figure will decrease to 56 percent by 2020 and to less than half by the year 2040 (Olson, 2001).

This reality presents many challenges to American society as a whole, and in a critical way to the field of education. The tapestry of our culture is woven with many and varied threads, colored and textured by the multicultural and multiethnic diversity that is America. Throughout our relatively short history, educational leaders in this country have addressed the needs of the ever-changing face of America by attempting to provide appropriate and consistent educational programming enabling youth to become productive members of our global community. Receipt of a standard high school diploma is an essential way for an individual to demonstrate mastery of the skills necessary for a functioning member of society, yet criteria necessary for earning a standard diploma varies widely throughout the United States.

The subject of this research study was to address the conditions under which language minority students, in the state of Florida, meet the assessment criterion in obtaining the standard high school diploma. To obtain a standard diploma in the state of Florida, students must successfully complete a series of required courses, maintain a specified grade point average and pass both the Mathematics and Reading components of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (Florida Department of Education, 2001). The focus of this study was the validity
of the conditions under which LEP students participate in the state mandated FCAT Reading assessment.

The Florida State Department of Education has a series of accommodations in place for implementation with LEP students. The purpose of these accommodations is to remove score distortion on the state assessment program by LEP students when tested with standard curriculum students during a given administration. Reviewing the data of this research study, the results indicate that the use of the prescribed accommodations is not adequately addressing the needs of this special needs population in the realm of equal opportunity in the mandated state assessment process.

It appears that although an LEP student may possess the skills and content knowledge the Sunshine State Standard portion of the FCAT were designed to measure, the language in which the material is presented may significantly influence the student’s ability to demonstrate those skills and knowledge. Referencing the Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests published by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education in 1985, every assessment is an assessment of language.

The question arises, therefore, as to whether or not the test results as reported indicate a student’s accurate ability or if the English language limitation is posing a true barrier to his/her performance as determined by the selected assessment tool. Literature on second language acquisition indicates that it takes a second language learner quite an appreciable period of time to attain cognitive and/or academic language proficiency for demonstrable achievement on a standardized assessment, than to achieve basic interpersonal proficiency communication skills.
in that language (Rivera, Vincent, Hafner, & LaCell-Peterson, 1997). According to Cummins (1984) and Hakuta (1987), if a student has weak first-language skills, acquisition of a second language will take a longer period of time. In a longitudinal study by Thomas and Collier of immigrants to the United States, it was noted that children under the age of 12, having had a minimum of two years formal education in their native language, took from five to seven years to attain the 50th percentile level on assessments including reading, language, science and social studies. Students arriving in this country at age six or seven took from seven to ten years to attain the 50th percentile. It was further noted that students coming to the United States at age 12 to 16 took a relatively long time to attain an average level of academic performance as indicated by standardized tests (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Assessment of LEP students prior to the duration of times referenced above could, therefore, result in an inaccurate evaluation of student capability (Munoz-Sandoval, 1998). LEP students in this study have been receiving ESOL services for an average of 4.3 years, less time than research indicates necessary for attainment of average academic performance in English.

According to Valdez Pierce and O'Malley (1992), the assessment of reading performance for LEP students should focus on reading comprehension rather than on specified reading skills as referenced in many standardized achievement tests. The FCAT was designed to evaluate student performance in light of the Florida Sunshine State Standards. The achievement levels of the FCAT specify level of mastery of progress toward these prescribed content standards.

The Sunshine State Standard Benchmarks identified in the Reading Grades 9-10 Test Item and Performance Task Specifications published by the Florida
Department of Education, for the FCAT Grade 10 Reading assessment include the following:

Selects and uses strategies to understand words and text, and to make and confirm inferences from what is read, including interpreting diagrams, graphs and statistical illustrations.

Recognizes the use of comparison and contrast.

Determines the main idea and identifies relevant details, methods of development, and their effectiveness in a variety of types of written material.

Determines the author’s purpose and point of view and their effects on the text. Identifies devices of persuasion and methods of appeal and their effectiveness.

Locates, gather, analyzes, and evaluates written information for a variety of purposes, including research projects, real-world tasks, and self-improvement.

Selects and uses appropriate study and research skills and tools according to the type of information being gathered of organized, including almanacs, government publications, microfiche, news sources, and information services.

Analyzes the validity and reliability of primary source information and uses the information appropriately.

Synthesizes information from multiple sources to draw conclusions.

Recognizes cause-and-effect relationships in literary tests. (Applies to fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama.)

Analyzes the effectiveness of complex elements of plot, such as setting, major events, problems, conflicts and resolutions, (p.1-B)

Referencing LEP students, the format of the FCAT is limited to text performance, thereby, curtailing an LEP student’s ability to demonstrate his or
her actual mastery of the specified content. Results of this study indicate that via the FCAT, LEP students are not being given the opportunity to demonstrate an accurate indication of their standing in reference to the Sunshine State Standards. Assessment of a student’s literacy in their heritage language must be part of the evaluation process. If a student is literate in his or her home language, it may be assumed that he or she is able to transfer those skills to English. The next logical step would be to be able to determine what the student knows and is able to do when lack of proficiency in English is not a barrier (Law & Eckes, 1995).

For this researcher, use of the FCAT to measure where an LEP student places in reaching the specified, yet linguistically complex, benchmarks of the Sunshine State Standards, raises a number of issues.

Is the use of this single assessment appropriate, adequate, or even valid as a graduation criterion for LEP students in Florida? The policy of using the results of a single assessment to determine eligibility for graduation, currently in effect in 26 states, is under serious consideration throughout the nation. Education experts, as well as policymakers, are reviewing and debating the nuances of this concept in light of the fact that in most situations, students have multiple opportunities to take the assessment. Do multiple opportunities constitute multiple measures (Olson, 2001)? The answer to this dilemma is not clear.

According to a 1999 report issued by the National Research Council, recommendation was made that several elements be factored into the graduation requirement, including specific information about the student’s knowledge and skills, academic grades, faculty recommendations, and extenuating circumstances (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). The concept of utilizing one assessment tool, even when that instrument is part of a requirement component
consisting of specified academic grades and designated courses, is most critical when evaluation special needs groups such as LEP students.

In Florida, the FCAT is replacing the High School Competency Test (HSCT), which has been in place as the assessment criterion for a standard diploma since 1996. Students were provided a minimum of five opportunities to take the assessment prior to graduation. The published accommodations for LEP students were the same for the HSCT as for the FCAT. The Florida DOE has indicated that with the phase in of the FCAT, students will also have multiple opportunities to take the test (Florida Department of Education, 2000). As of this writing, Florida DOE staff have not indicated the specifications of multiple test administrations.

The assessment of LEP students must be viewed on a continuum involving many steps. Single assessment criterion as part of demonstrating mastery of skills required for graduation from high school, even with the prescribed accommodations, sets up a gatekeeper notion. In light of the needs of this special group of students, such a notion calls into question both access equity and assessment validity issues.

As the results of this research study indicate that the use of administration accommodations do not necessarily remove performance barriers for LEP students on the FCAT, this researcher is recommending further research in several related areas. Additional research is necessary in the realm of language minority student literacy issues, cultural influences, as well as assessment format and presentation elements, and the implementation of alternative assessment methodologies for high-stakes evaluation. Research in this area might help develop improved quality of assessments for all students.
Accommodations are vehicles designed enabling students to access in English an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of specified skills. It is intended that this research study will add to the existing body of knowledge of the assessment of LEP students and serve as a factor to consider in the ongoing development of performance evaluation of America’s growing language minority population.
References


Castaneda v. Pickard 648 F. 2d 989, 1009 (5th Cir. 1981).


Morales v. Shannon 516 F. 2d 411 (5th Cir. 1975).


