



## Learning an Additional Language in the Context of Language Disorder

### Position

It is the position of Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) that children with, or at risk of, language disorder should be provided with the support they need to become bilingual in home, childcare and school settings, including access to speech-language pathology services. Children with language disorder should not be counselled out of opportunities to initiate or continue their bilingual development.

### Background

Children who speak more than one language are at increased risk of delayed identification, under-identification and over-identification of language disorder (Paradis, Genesee & Crago, 2021). This is especially the case for children whose language exposure is sequential rather than simultaneous (Paradis, Schneider & Sorenson Duncan, 2013). A growing body of research evidence demonstrates that bilingual children with [language disorder](#) are able to acquire skills in each language that are equivalent, or nearly equivalent, to those of monolingual children with the same condition, provided they are afforded an adequate learning environment (Paradis et al., 2021). However, when developmental issues are suspected, families are often counselled against bilingualism (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). There is an absence of research supporting this practice (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016) and furthermore, there is evidence that strong first language (L1) skills support the development of a second language (L2), especially with respect to the language of schooling (August & Shanahan, 2006).

It is often recommended that children with, or at risk of, language disorder be exposed only to the societal language, especially when the home language is not the dominant societal language. Several adverse consequences may result from this, including:

1. language difficulties associated with suboptimal language models, as in the case of a primary caregiver who does not master the language of their child's schooling (Paradis, 2011; Place & Hoff, 2011);
2. language loss in L1 as a result of focusing exclusively on the L2, thereby dampening academic benefits related to L1 maintenance (Paradis, 2011; Place & Hoff, 2011);

3. limited proficiency in the home language, resulting in diminished communication and interaction with family members (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016) and
4. diminished quality of parenting (Bornstein, Bohr, & Hamel, 2020), compounded with the guilt and confusion that some families may experience as a result of being uncomfortable with or unable to follow through on the one-language recommendation, or receiving mixed messages (Howard, Gibson, & Katsos, 2021). For these reasons, exposure to two languages should be maintained or facilitated for all children whose families intend to raise them in a bilingual environment, as much as possible, regardless of the presence or risk of language disorder.

In addition, students with language difficulties who attend dual language French immersion programs attain the same language and academic outcomes as comparable students in monolingual programs with, or at risk of, language disorder, while also attaining higher levels of functional proficiency in French than their non-immersion peers (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2021). Therefore, students with, or at risk of, language disorder should not be systematically counselled out of immersion programs. Further, they should be able to fully access both special education supports and dual language learning opportunities in the school setting; they should not be obligated to choose one over the other (Pesco et al., 2016). Optimal supports include speech-language pathologists working with education professionals to help plan and implement evidence-based content and language integrated practices that address students' interrelated language and literacy skills and facilitate transfer of skills across languages (e.g., Genesee and Hamayan, 2016). Access to speech-language pathology services allows children with, or at risk of, language disorder to be provided with the support they need to become bilingual in home, childcare and school settings.

## References

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