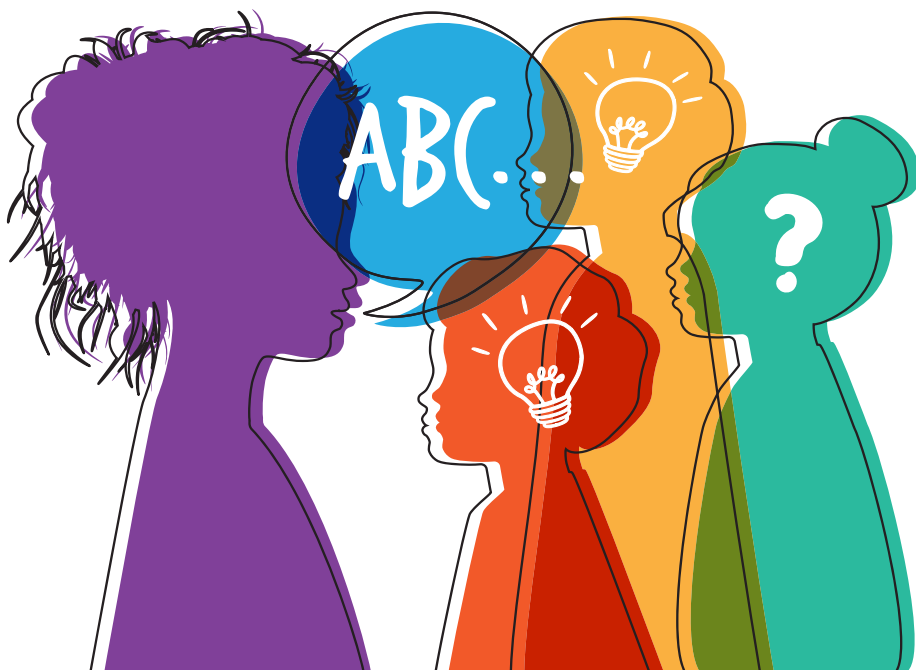


Dual Language Learners Experience Fewer Conversational Turns in Early Childhood



Research shows that learning multiple languages is an asset. Children are wired from birth to learn more than one language at the same time.¹ However, data analysis from LENA shows that dual language learners (DLLs) typically experience fewer teacher-child interactions in early childhood classrooms compared with their monolingual peers. And when they miss out on those interactions, DLL children miss critical opportunities during the most important years for brain development.

The gap in interactions for DLLs means the early childhood system is not giving DLL children the support they deserve. The LENA Grow professional development program has been shown to close that gap.



LENA Grow is a data-driven professional development program for early childhood educators. The program focuses on improving language environments and increasing teacher-child conversational turns. Conversational turns, also known as serve-and-return interactions, have previously been linked to brain structure² and function,³ healthy social skills,⁴ higher IQ scores,⁵ literacy skills,⁶ and preschool vocabulary.⁷

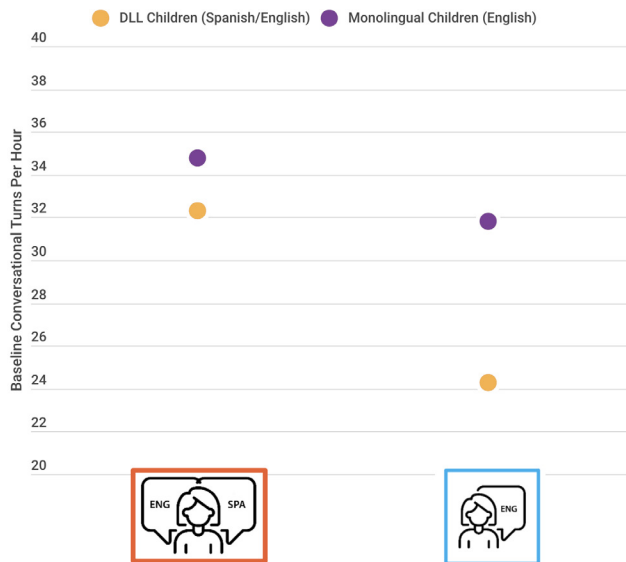
What LENA's Research Shows

LENA researchers studied 513 children across 64 classrooms in 17 states. The classrooms included 19 with bilingual teachers (Spanish and English) and 45 with only English-speaking teachers.

The Difference in Conversational Turns

- In classrooms with only English-speaking teachers, DLL children experienced **7.5 fewer conversational turns per hour** than their English-only peers.
- In classrooms with bilingual teachers, DLL children and monolingual children experienced about the same amount of interaction.

Monolingual Children and Children Who Are DLLs in Classrooms With and Without Bilingual Teachers



Toddlers Face the Biggest Gap

The difference was most significant for toddlers. In toddler classrooms without bilingual teachers, DLL children experienced **14.7 fewer conversational turns per hour** than their English-only peers.

This age range — especially 18 to 24 months — is critical. It's when conversational turns matter most for long-term success.

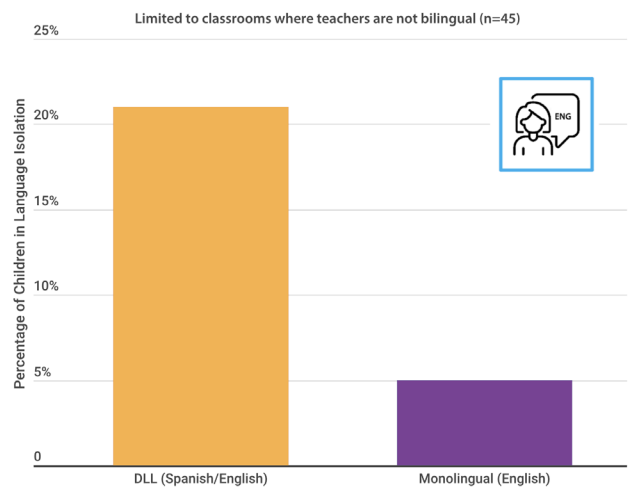
The Bigger Impact: Language Isolation

Too many children in child care experience what researchers call "language isolation." These children engage in fewer than five conversational turns per hour for almost the entire day.

DLL children face this isolation at alarming rates.

In classrooms without bilingual teachers, DLL children were four times more likely to experience language isolation than their monolingual peers.

Before LENA Grow, Children Who Are DLLs Are More Likely To Be In Language Isolation Than Their Monolingual Peers In Classrooms Without Bilingual Teachers



In classrooms without bilingual teachers, a significantly higher percentage of DLL children began in language isolation compared to their monolingual classroom peers: 21% compared to 5%.

What Works: LENA Grow Results

The good news? Focused professional development makes a real difference.

[LENA Grow](#) is a program that helps teachers increase interactions with every child in their classrooms. The results for DLL children are powerful:

- **Before LENA Grow**, 21% of DLL children experienced language isolation.
- **After LENA Grow**, the percentage of DLL children experiencing language isolation dropped to 4%.

Even better? Teachers increased conversational turns for everyone:

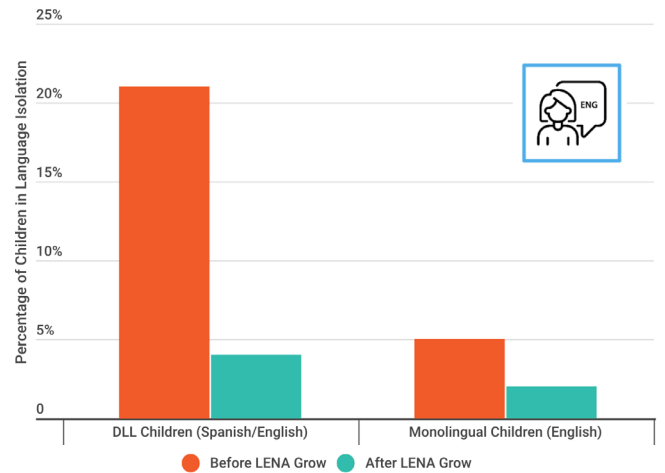
- Monolingual children: 16% increase
- DLL children: 22% increase

“What we observe for these rooms is rather remarkable, because the gains in interaction for one group does not mean the other children are experiencing less interaction,” said Dr. Jill Gilkerson, LENA’s Chief Research and Evaluation Officer. “Teachers were able to increase conversational turns for all children.”

One group’s gains didn’t mean another group lost out.

After LENA Grow, Very Few DLL and Monolingual Children Were Experiencing Language Isolation

Limited to classrooms where teachers are not bilingual (n=45)



The Path Forward

DLL children deserve the same brain-building interactions as every other child. Fixing the gap is possible. Here’s what we know works:

- **Hire and support bilingual teachers.** When teachers speak children’s heritage languages, DLL children thrive.
- **Provide specialized training.** Professional development programs like LENA Grow give teachers the tools to connect with every child.
- **Challenge harmful myths.** Bilingualism is a strength, not a deficit. One child’s multilingualism benefits everyone in the classroom.



By the Numbers

- Approximately **one-third of children** aged 0-5 nationwide live in homes where caregivers speak heritage languages.⁸
- In California, DLLs make up approximately **half of all children** in publicly funded early childhood programs.⁹
- Approximately **one-third of children** in Head Start programs nationwide are DLLs.¹⁰

Citations

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