
by

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Abstract

Policy guidelines of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) state that accommodations and participation decisions on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) do not threaten validity. However, these issues are contentious in American large-scale testing. New approaches integrate test access, administration, accommodation and participation within a unified fairness and validity construct. The current study, based on demographic and outcome data for the entire population of OSSLT-eligible students from 2006 to 2009, demonstrates changing patterns in accommodations and participation decisions across schools and years. In particular, English language learners are found to be considerably underrepresented among students receiving special needs accommodations. This has implications for the valid interpretation and fair use of test scores. Recommendations are proposed for improving fairness, consistency, and validity in administering accommodations and participation.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Rationale for Research

1.1.1 Social Context and Significance

In Canada, there is a pressing need for research and policy on the accommodation and participation of English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD) on large-scale tests. Questions of how to accommodate students’ unique needs and abilities, and questions of whether it is appropriate to exclude certain students from testing, are becoming more urgent due to the confluence of demographic developments and educational reforms. The population of culturally and linguistically diverse students is large and growing: an estimated 230,000 school age children migrated to Canada between 1996 and 1998 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). In Ontario, 23.7% reported that their mother tongue was a language other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2001). The number of students with special education needs is also increasing in Ontario. In the 2004/05 school year, 290,000 students were formally identified as exceptional pupils, while an additional 99,000 students received special education services without a formal exceptionality designation (Ontario Ministry of Education (OME), 2009). Meanwhile, provincial and territorial governments across Canada have mandated large-scale tests (Volante, 2007) as part of a North American educational reform movement that seeks to ensure quality and accountability through standardized assessments (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009). This reform movement coincides with other reforms that emphasize greater inclusion and participation for students with disabilities (Hutchinson, 2007; Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Proponents of standardized testing often present the participation of both SWDs and ELLs as a matter of equity in large scale assessment. These converging contexts of demographic development, accountability reforms, and inclusion reforms set the stage for and necessitate research and policy on the inclusion and accommodation of ELLs and SWDs on standardized tests.
1.1.2 Research Context

Although this study’s focus, the accommodation and participation of ELLs and SWDs in large scale testing, intersects with and informs several areas of active research, the topic has not been adequately researched in the Canadian context and in the specific context of the OSSLT. The EQAO’s technical reports (2009a) and published guidelines for accommodations, special provisions, deferrals, and exemptions on the OSSLT (2009b) do not attempt to demonstrate a research basis for policy on accommodations, special provisions, deferrals and exemptions. Little consideration is given to the possibility that accommodations, special provisions, and exclusion from testing might affect validity and fairness. An external evaluation of EQAO’s processes (Wolfe, Childs, & Elgie, 2003) similarly did not address accommodation and exclusion. While researchers have debated the validity and usefulness of the OSSLT, practices of accommodation and inclusion have been largely overlooked. This is surprising, considering the research and contention surrounding these issues in the United States (Abedi, Courtney, & Leon, 2003; Government Accountability Office, 2006; Wolf, Kao, Herman et al., 2008).

Accommodations and inclusion of ELLs and SWDs in large scale testing intersects with several active research areas. The validity of using large scale tests for public accountability, quality control, and gate-keeping has been extensively researched and has generated much controversy (Jang & Ryan, 2003; Kohn, 2000; Linn, 2001; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Phelps, 2005; Solórzano, 2008). There is a growing body of research on test accommodations for ELLs (Acosta, Rivera, & Willner, 2008; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter & Baker, 2000; Abedi, Courtney & Leon, 2003; Wolf, Kao, Herman et al., 2008) and students with special needs (Bolt & Ysseldyke, 2008; Hansen et al., 2005; Thompson, Blount, & Thurlow, 2002). There is research into underlying questions of how to define and understand the diversity of ELLs (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005) and how special education needs are defined and identified (Gallego, Durán, & Reyes, 2006; Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006; MacMillan & Siperstein, 2001; Ysseldyke, 2005).

This study will inform several important areas research and controversy. First, there is the question of disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education. In the United States, there is evidence that culturally diverse students (e.g. African Americans, Hispanic Americans, First Nations Peoples) are over-represented in special
education programs (Fierros & Conroy, 2002; MacMillian & Reschly, 1998; National Research Council, 2002). However, U.S. evidence suggests that, when only first language is considered, students who speak English as a second language (EL2s) are in fact under-represented in special education (Zehler et al., 2003). In the Canadian context, and Limbos and Geva (2001) show evidence that teachers, without training and support, are not likely to be sensitive to cases where EL2s require special education, and that EL2s are likely underrepresented in special education. Gersten and Geva (2003) discuss the influence of Cummins’ (1984) research and critical analysis of bilingualism and special education in Canada, suggesting that this work may have led educators to delay assessing EL2s for disabilities even when those students were having considerable difficulties in reading. The current study will provide statistical data on the percentages of EL2 Ontario secondary school students who have an IEP and receive accommodations on the OSSLT relative to the percentage of first language English students (EL1s) who receive these designations and services. This will provide much needed data on the proportional representation of EL2 students receiving special education services in Canada’s largest province, based on accurate and reliable demographic information for the entire population of OSSLT-eligible secondary school students in Canada over four years of test administration.

Related to this, the current study will inform a second debate on early versus deferred assessment of EL2s for special education needs. Cummins (1984) raises concerns about the potentially stigmatizing and marginalizing effects of designating culturally and linguistically diverse students as having learning disabilities. Many educators have cited Cummins’ (1981) model of basic interactional communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), when arguing that special education assessment should be delayed for language minority students until they have had several years to establish academic proficiency in English. However, several Canadian studies, reviewed below, demonstrate the possibility of identifying learning disabilities in EL2 students, even when they are still developing their English language proficiency (Geva, 2000; Geva & Wang; 2001; Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Schuster, 2000; Lipka, Siegel, & Vukovic, 2005; MacCoubrey, Wade-Woolley, Klinger, & Kirby, 2004). Since accommodations have been shown to lower the disparity in scores and success rates between EL1s and EL2s (Kopriva, Emick, Hipolito-Delgado, & Cameron, 2007), it
is important to research whether EL2 students receive equitable access to accommodations intended for students with special needs designations.

A third research contribution will be to initiate discussion on the validity evidence for using accommodations and the consistency of administering these accommodations across schools and school districts. While U.S. based studies have examined how accommodations are interpreted and implemented in different schools or jurisdictions (Rivera, Stansfield, Scialdone, & Sharkey, 2000; Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Robey; 2002), there is a lack of Canadian research in this area.

A fourth area that this study will inform is inquiry on the appropriate inclusion or exclusion of ELLs and SWDs on standardized tests. While most proponents of standardized testing urge that ELLs and SWDs should not be left out of the accountability loop in standardized testing, they often acknowledge some cases where excluding a student is appropriate (Wolf, Herman, Bachman et al., 2008). In the United States, there are numerous studies that attempt to describe and estimate the effects of exclusion and non-participation of students on standardized tests (Grissmer, 2007; Haertel, 2003; McGrew, Thurlow, & Spiegel, 1993). Before such questions can be properly addressed in Ontario, in the context of the OSSLT, it is important to establish factual information about the rates of participation across schools, subgroups of students, and years of test administration. Although this study cannot explain the reasons for consistency or inconsistency in practices of excluding students, this study can show how these factors may vary in different contexts. This study may also show the interaction, at the school level, of practices of deferral and exemption with the OSSLT performance data for those schools.

The statistical findings of the current study are relevant to the immediate context of administering the OSSLT, understanding its results, and making appropriate interpretations of these results. It is hoped that the data, analysis, and recommendations will be useful to Ontario educators and policy makers in administering and interpreting the OSSLT more fairly and consistently, especially with regards to the accommodation and participation of ELLs and students with special needs. This study, however, can also inform the areas of research and controversy described above by providing demographic and correlational data that are relevant to the social and educational implications of research based policy questions, such as early versus
late assessment and inclusion versus exclusion of certain groups of students from standardized tests.

This study aims to evaluate policies and practices of accommodation and inclusion of students with special needs and English language learners on the OSSLT. It examines whether accommodations, special provisions, and participation decisions are administered fairly, consistently, and according to policy across schools, subgroups of students, and successive years of test administration. In light of this, the validity of possible uses and interpretations of OSSLT results will be discussed, especially as they pertain to students with special needs, ELL students, and the schools that serve these students.

Kunnan’s (2004, 2008) Test Fairness Framework is the theoretical lens used to evaluate validity and fairness of accommodation and inclusion practices in this study. Kunnan’s framework integrates traditional validity concepts (e.g., content, construct, and criterion-related validity) with considerations of: absence of bias, access, administration, and social consequences. Access and administration are particularly relevant to the current study. Access is a consideration of the ability of students with special needs to receive appropriate accommodations. Administration is a consideration of the uniformity and consistency in testing practices. The current study considers equality in access to accommodations for students in different schools and from different subgroups. This study also considers the consistency in administration of accommodations, special provisions, participation decisions.

appropriate but warns against using standardized norms in these conditions. The Standards (1999) define fairness of tests based on four characterizations “absence of bias”, “equitable treatment for all examines”, “equality of testing outcomes”, and “equity in opportunity to learn” (p. 74). The current study will consider practices in administering the OSSLT in relation to these established standards.

1.2 The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

1.2.1 Background, Purpose, and Overview of the OSSLT

The current study analyzes demographic and outcome data from four years OSSLT administration. The OSSLT is one of a series of standardized tests administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The EQAO was created in 1996 in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission on Learning (RCL) (OME, 1994) that an agency independent of the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) should be created with the responsibility of “construction, administration, scoring, and reporting” of standardized assessments. The OSSLT was developed based on RCL’s recommendation that “a literacy test be given to students, which they must pass before receiving their secondary school diploma” (OME, 1994). The EQAO and its mandate for accountability testing has received support from all three major political parties in Ontario from its inception under the government of the New Democratic Party to its continuing support by the Progressive Conservatives and most recently the Liberal Party (Volante, 2007). The primary purpose of the OSSLT is to ensure that “students have the literacy (reading and writing) skills needed to meet the literacy requirement of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)” (EQAO, 2007, p. 5). This is part of a broader EQAO mandate to promote and maintain the “quality and effectiveness” of education in Ontario (EQAO, 2004, p. 2).

The OSSLT itself consists of two booklets. There is an operational reading section comprised of five reading selections, 31 multiple-choice questions, and four open-response items. The operational writing section consists of two short open-response writing tasks, two long open response writing tasks, and eight multiple choice writing related items. The OSSLT also administers field test questions that are not counted towards the students’ score.
1.2.2 Accommodations and Special Provisions on the OSSLT

To ensure that students with special needs and English language learners can participate and fully demonstrate their abilities on the OSSLT, the EQAO permits a range of special provisions and accommodations. The policies and procedures governing special provisions and accommodations are outlined in the EQAO’s *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals, and Exemptions: Support for Students with Special Education Needs and English Language Learners* (“Guide”, EQAO, 2009b). Note that the guide is updated yearly and there are sometimes minor changes in policy and procedures. The EQAO distinguishes between “special provisions”, which are for ESL/ELD students, and “accommodations”, which are for students with special needs. However, in the broader research literature, only the term “accommodations” is used, regardless of whether the recipients are ELLs or SWDs.

To receive a special provision, the student must be an “English language learner” as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (OME) *English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (2007). The OME (2007, p. 8) defines English language learners as follows: “[S]tudents in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English”. The special provisions available are changes in setting (“an individual or small group setting or and individual study carrel”) or timing (“additional time, to a maximum of double the allotted time” or “periodic supervised breaks”) (EQAO, 2009b, p. 9).

To receive an accommodation, the student must have “an IEP that outlines the accommodations that are necessary for and consistent with regular classroom practices used for the students. The student must normally receive these accommodations for all forms of assessment, including summative assessment work, not only for provincial tests” (EQAO, 2009b, p. 2). There are a range of specific accommodations available, and a qualifying student may receive one or more of these. The four types of accommodation include: setting, timing, presentation format, and response format.
1.2.3 Deferrals, Exemptions, and the OSSLC

Deferral is the practice of delaying a student’s participation in the OSSLT until the next test administration. Deferrals can be provided only in certain circumstances (EQAO, 2009b, p. 10):

- The student is an English language learner and has not yet acquired a level of proficiency in English sufficient to participate in the test
- The student has been identified as exceptional by an identification, Placement, and Review Committee and would not yet be able to participate in the test even if all permitted accommodations were provided.
- The student has not yet acquired the reading and writing skills appropriate for Grade 9.
- The student has a temporary condition or is new to the school and appropriate accommodations cannot be provided.

Exemption means that the student does not participate in the OSSLT. Exemptions are only permitted in cases where the student has an IEP that indicates they are not working towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

An alternative to writing the OSSLT is participating in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). This course was developed by the OME in 2003 and is considered equivalent to completion of the OSSLT. In the 2003/04 school year, students were allowed to take the OSSLC if they had previously had two opportunities to write the OSSLT. As of June 2004, this policy was changed to give school principals the discretion to allow students to enroll in OSSLC even if they had only once attempted the OSSLT.

1.3 Classifications of Students

This study analyses pre-existing data, compiled by the EQAO in the administration of the OSSLT. As such, the classifications of students and field definitions of variables and their values are determined in advance. Classifications relevant to this study, such as “English language learners” or “exceptional students”, are determined by policy of the Ontario Ministry of
Education (OME) and implemented at the school and school board level. The EQAO’s field definitions are based on these classifications. In this section, the OME’s classifications and definitions are provided. Also, there is a discussion of how the pre-existing categories are used and interpreted in this study.

1.3.1 Ministry of Education Definitions

The Ontario Ministry of Education has several policy documents that are relevant to the definition of terms of reference in the current study: English language learners, English as a Second Language (ESL), English Literacy Development (ELD), students with special needs, individual education plans (IEP), and accommodations. English Language Learners: ESL Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (OME, 2007) provides a definition of “English language learners” and of “ESL/ELD” programs. The definitions of ESL and ELD are as follows:

**English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs are intended for students whose first language is a language other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs have age-appropriate first-language literacy skills and educational backgrounds.

**English Literacy Development (ELD)** programs are intended for students whose first language is a language other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are most often from countries in which their access to education has been limited, so that they have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. Schooling in their countries of origin has been inconsistent, disrupted, or even completely unavailable throughout the years that these children would otherwise have been in school. As a result, they arrive in Ontario secondary schools with significant gaps in their education.
OME (2007, p. 8) defines English language learners as: “[S]tudents in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English.” The document goes on to explain that there are both ELLs who are born in Canada and ELLs from other countries. ELLs born in Canada may include, for example, students from Aboriginal families who speak an aboriginal language or students from immigrant families who have maintained their L1 as the primary language of use in home and community.

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127 (OME, PPM-127, 2004) provides a definition of students with special needs and of accommodations in specific reference to the OSSLT and the alternative Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). According to PPM-127:

Students with special education needs” are students with an IEP who may or may not have been identified as “exceptional pupils” through the identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process, and who are receiving special education programs and services.

PPM-127 defines accommodations as follows:

An “accommodation” is a support given to a student to assist him or her in achieving the learning expectations set out in the Ontario Curriculum. Accommodations change only the way in which the OSSLT is administered or the OSSLC is taught, or the way in which the student responds to the components of the test or the course. They do not alter the content of the test or the course or affect the validity or reliability of the test or the evaluation of the student learning in the course.

Individual Education Plans: Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation (OME, 2000) defines “Individual Education Plans” and the process for developing them. IEP is defined as,
[A] written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. It identifies learning expectations that are modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject of the course, and/or any accommodations and special education services needed to assist the student in achieving his or her learning expectations. (p. 3)

An IEP must be created for every student who has been identified as “exceptional”, and may also be developed for students who have not been identified by an IPRC. Strengths and needs must also be clearly outlined in an IEP.

*The Education Act, Regulation 181/98*, defines “exceptional pupil”, i.e. “students with special needs”. An exceptional pupil is defined as “a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program…” (Quoted in OME, 2009). The current categories of exceptionality used by IPRCs are: Behaviour, autism, deaf and hard-of-hearing, language impairment, speech impairment, learning disability, giftedness, mild intellectual disability, developmental disability, physical disability, blind and low vision, and multiple exceptionalities.

1.3.2 Terminology and Operational Definitions in this Study

Because this study is an analysis of extant data, it relies largely on the definitions and categorizations of the EQAO, which themselves are based on the Ontario Ministry of Education definitions described above. However, new categorizations are also created in this study to examine more specific subgroups of students based on merging variables within the OSSLT data file.

In this study the term “ELL” is used consistent with its use in the broader research literature, not necessarily with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s specific definition. The term “ESL/ELD student” is used to refer to students served by Ontario schools in these specific
programs. When “ELL” is used in MOE and EQAO sources it tends to mean refer specifically to ESL/ELD students.

The term “EL1” is used to describe students who in the broader literature might also be referred to as “English monolinguals”. Operationally, in this study, EL1s are students who indicated that English was their first language on the student survey part of the OSSLT administration.

The term “EL2” is used to describe students who speak English as a second language. Operationally, these are students who indicated that English was not their first language on the OSSLT student survey. This is not to be confounded with ESL/ELD students. Some EL2s are also served in ESL/ELD programs. However, many EL2s are not in ESL/ELD for a variety of possible reasons, including: high English language proficiency, lack of ESL/ELD programming, acceleration into mainstream, and lack of initial identification as requiring ESL/ELD. The term “covert bilinguals” (Taaffe & Pringle, 1988) may be used to describe EL2s who are not in ESL/ELD and who are not otherwise designated and tracked.

The terms “ESL” and “ELD” are used to describe specific Ministry of Education programs in accordance with the policy definitions listed above. The term “IEP student” designates students whose file in the OSSLT data indicates that they have an IEP. The term “student with special needs” is used in a way consistent with broader research literature.

1.4 Research Questions

This study addresses the following three research questions.

1. What patterns and changes are evident in the administration of accommodations, special provisions, deferrals, and exemptions across schools and years of testing?

2. Are first language English (EL1) and second language English (EL2) students represented proportionally among students who have individual education plans (IEP) and receive accommodations on the OSSLT?

3. Does receiving accommodation and special provision correlate with higher success rates on the OSSLT?
1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter one outlines the social significance, research context, theoretical framework, research questions, a brief description of the OSSLT, and the terminology used in this study. Chapter two reviews the literature pertaining to standardized testing, accommodations, fairness in testing accommodations, special needs assessment and instruction of ELLs, and the diversity of English language learners. Chapter three covers methodology, providing a detailed explanation of the OSSLT data sources, and a description of how research questions are addressed using specific statistical methods.
Chapter 2
Review of Literature

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Standardized Testing in North America

Standardized testing has long history in North America (Resnick, 1982). The earliest beginnings of this movement lie in Horace Mann’s 1845 “common test”, Alfred Binet’s test of “feeblemindedness”, the introduction of the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence for use in educational contexts, the adaptation of the Army Alpha test for use in education, and the 1925 College Entrance Examination board (Gallagher, 2003; Linn, 2001; Walsh & Betz, 1995). Gallagher (2003) describes standardized testing as evolving from the “dual traditions of democratic school reform and scientific measurement” (p. 83). However, other authors have emphasized that exclusion and selecting out the “unfit” have been driving forces behind standardized testing (Brantlinger, 1997; Gould, 1996). Linn (2001) describes a “pendulum swing” in which mass testing has alternately gained and lost popularity over the last century.

It seems that the main motivational force behind this pendulum swing is not research findings, but social and political forces. Currently, the use of standardized testing has reached unprecedented levels with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the United States and large scale tests implemented in almost every Canadian province and territory (Volante, 2007), but there are very few researchers who publicly support the practice (Wang, Beckett, & Brown, 2006). Therefore, this section describes the positions of proponents and critics of the movement.

2.1.1 Proponents

Although academic discourse on standardized testing has been largely negative (Cizek, 2001), the earliest proponents of large scale tests saw them as a way of promoting social equality and meritocracy. Thorndike (1913) argued that standardized tests, “help society by providing it not with better men [sic] but with the knowledge of which men are good” (quoted in Gallagher, 2003, p.86).
More recently, proponent’s arguments have shifted away from individual meritocracy and towards social equality and inclusion. Proponents suggest that standardized tests can make teachers and schools more accountable, not only to the public as a whole, but also to minority communities and students that would otherwise have been allowed to slip through the cracks (Bush & Bloomberg, 2006). Such arguments are based on real concerns of parents and the public that schools are “failing” or “at risk” (see Shanker, 1995; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Ysseldyke et al. (2004) suggested that by including more students with disabilities on large scale tests, schools and boards could get more government funding and support. Standardized tests have been shown to create greater participation among students with disabilities (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001), which, in turn, may lead to raised expectations and better outcomes (Nelson, 2002).

Proponents have also argued that standardized testing helps provide structure in classroom instruction (Braden, 2002). The often decried “teaching to the test” can be useful in cases where tests are appropriately matched to curriculum content (Crocker, 2005). Phelps (2000), in a study of large-scale testing outside the United States, gathered evidence to suggest that, when large-scale testing was stopped, the result was lower expectations, lower performance, and decreased coherence in curricula and teaching practices.

Three Canadian studies provide evidence of benefits of standardized testing. Bishop (1994) found that the introduction of large-scale tests was correlated with substantial increases in student preparedness. Bishop also found that schools were more likely to employ specialist teachers and provide extra hours of instruction in the test areas. A study on standardized testing in Canadian provinces by the U.S. Government Accounting Office (US-GAO, 1993) found that large-scale exams helped teachers to develop a better understanding of the curriculum. Anderson et al. (1990) performed a survey study of 12th grade students in the province of British Columbia. Students reported that participation in large-scale testing encouraged them to apply more effort.

The usefulness and appropriateness of standardized testing must be considered in relation to possible alternatives – and not in relation to an unrealized ideal (Phelps, 2003, 2005). The standards (AERA et al., 1999) emphasize this in relation to gate-keeping tests, such as college entrance examinations. Although a standardized test may not be found to be perfectly fair in all
circumstances, it must be evaluated in relation to other possible procedures that serve the same purposes.

2.1.2 Critics

Controversy over standardized testing is as old as the practice itself, and large-scale tests have come in and out of educational vogue since their inception. To illustrate this, Linn (2001) quotes a summary of objections described by Odell (1928, pp. 10-11), almost a century ago:

1. Examinations are injurious to the health of those taking them;
2. The content covered by examination questions does not agree with the recognized objectives of education;
3. Examinations too often become objectives in themselves;
4. Examinations encourage bluffing and cheating;
5. Examinations develop habits of careless use of English and poor handwriting;
6. The time devoted to examinations can be more profitably used otherwise;
7. The results of instruction in the field of education are intangible and cannot be measured as can production in industry […];
8. Examinations are unnecessary.

These criticisms are still relevant and widely circulated. Today, however, there is much more attention to social and political consequences, not only individual consequences, test features, and scholastic considerations. Most important, perhaps, is the critique that tests are biased, discriminatory, and unfair to students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from socially oppressed minority groups. Using Odell’s (1928) summary of criticism as a structure, and appending the more recent critique of social inequality, the arguments against standardized testing are described below.

The argument that examinations are harmful to health is apparent in recent literature on test anxiety (McDonald, 2001; Zeidner, 1988). Although not all anxiety is negative (Cizek &
Burg, 2006), tests can cause debilitating stress and can lower test performance (Hill & Wigfield, 1984). Still, research on test anxiety and foreign language anxiety emphasizes the potential negative impacts on test performance itself, not on students overall health.

The criticisms that test content does not match curriculum standards and that examinations often supplant other educational objectives is very much an issue today. Biggs (1995) used the term “backwash” to describe how standardized testing is reshaping curriculum, teaching and learning practices. Anderson et al. (1990) demonstrated that Canadian teachers reported narrowing their instruction to topics they expected would be covered on the test. Jones et al. (1999) found that some teachers reported devoting as much as 60% of instruction time to test preparation activities. This has been termed teaching to the test (Neil, 2003; Volante, 2004).

Concerns about cheating and bluffing on the level of the individual student are not often raised as objections to standardized testing today. However, there are accusations in the literature of schools and state governments using inappropriate strategies to boost the appearance of increased performance on standardized tests. Haney (2008) argued that the purported increase in performance of minority students in the State of Florida on NAEP grade four mathematics assessments was due only to the fact that a larger than usual number of students were failed and kept in grade three to prevent them from writing the test. Similarly, until national legislation mandated including students with disabilities into large scale testing, there was a concern that school administrators may move more students into special education programs, thereby taking them out of the pool of students that would be used to determine the ratings of their schools (Heubert, 2000).

Odell’s (1923) concern that multiple-choice examinations encourage poor penmanship may be obsolete in today’s discourse, but similar concerns about the atrophy of other abilities are still very current. Students who show yearly improvements on standardized tests are not necessarily improving in other measures of ability (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009). Answering a reduced range of multiple choice questions, and focusing on developing test wiseness (Bachman, 1990), might actually detract from creative and higher order thinking (Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000).

Finally, arguments that true educational outcomes are intangible underlay much current educational discourse. In the case of literacy, attempts to make literacy into a measurable tangible construct in standardized testing can be contrasted with broadened definitions of literacy
that include social identity negotiation (Cummins, 2001), and multiple modalities (New London Group, 1996). For the OSSLT, Cheng, Klinger and Zheng (2007) make a distinction between literacy (the academic content of the test) and English proficiency (which is the medium of the test). Although literacy may include reading and writing ability, literacy is a much broader concept that includes the ability to “understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute” in a given language (UNESCO, 2004). Cummins, Brown, and Sayers (2007) develop the concept of multiliteracies and argue that identity and affect are important in understanding literacy. Luce-Kapler and Klinger (2005) found that students taking the OSSLT had a very narrow view of the test as pertaining only to English proficiency, and not the cross curricular literacy that the test is intended to assess.

The major front in controversy over standardized testing today, however, is social equity and fairness (see Cummins, 1997; Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Heubert, 2002; Klinger et al., 2006; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Studies have shown evidence of test bias using differential item functioning (DIF) methods to highlight how subgroups of students perform differently on specific test items (see Elder, 1997; Willingham & Cole, 1997). As for the sources of bias, Solano-Flores (2008) argues that the communication style, dialect, and academic register used in large scale tests, although held to be “universal”, are not equally accessible across ethnic, linguistic, and SES backgrounds. Also, when tests are normed, the norming sample often does not include students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). This may result in test bias against culturally and linguistically diverse students. Even if samples are superficially diverse, test developers may overlook factors such as students’ acculturation and experiential background (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

Ironically, critics of standardized testing often face the dilemma of not supporting large-scale testing, on one hand, but not wanting to advocate that culturally and linguistically diverse students or students with special needs be excluded from the large testing process, on the other hand. This confluence of standardized testing with social inclusion is, perhaps, what sets the larger context for research into testing accommodations for students who would otherwise not be able to participate fairly in large scale tests.
2.2 Accommodations as a Validity Issue in Standardized Testing

The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) make a categorical distinction between modifications and accommodations, and state that accommodations have no bearing on the validity of the OSSLT and other provincial tests:

Accommodations change only the way in which the assessment is administered or the way in which the student responds to components of the assessment. It is expected that accommodations will not alter the content of the assessment or affect the validity or reliability. On the other hand, “modifications,” which are not allowed, are changes to content and to performance criteria. Modifications are not permitted, because they would affect they would affect the validity and reliability of the assessment results. (EQAO, 2009a, p. 10; Ontario Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127, italics added)

With this dichotomy between modifications and accommodations, the potential for validity issues of accommodations is dismissed. However, in the context of U.S. based research, this dichotomy is not so clear, and accommodations, including the types used in administering the OSSLT, are subject to significant controversy and scientific research. For example, Abedi et al. (2000) came to the very different conclusion that several accommodations lacked validity because they did not specifically address students’ learning needs. Also, several accommodations were found to universally benefit students, regardless of their special needs, suggesting that the accommodation did not “level the playing field” but simply provided an unfair boost. Moreover, Abedi et al. (2000) found that simplifying of test language, which would most commonly be described as a “modification”, actually increased validity by narrowing the performance gap between target groups and the rest of the student population without merely giving a universal advantage to any student that received the modification.

To highlight the need for accommodations research on the OSSLT, a brief review of the methodology, findings, and limitations of American accommodation research are described
below. Research on the accessibility and fair administration of accommodations is identified as an insufficiently studied topic in the literature on accommodations validity.

The methodology used in accommodation validity research tends to fall into three categories, according to Sireci, Han, and Wells (2008): (1) factor analysis; (2) differential item functioning (DIF); and (3) quasi-experimental studies based on the interaction hypothesis. A fourth category may be research designs that focus on criterion validity by comparing the accommodated performance of students on a particular test to some other measure of performance.

Factor analysis attempts to determine whether the underlying latent ability structure is comparable between accommodated and non-accommodated administrations of the test. *Factor analysis* was used by Hyunh, Meyer, and Grant (2004) to discover whether there were any structure differences between regular and oral administrations of a high stakes math test. Hyunh et al. demonstrated that the factor structure was stable across both accommodated and non-accommodated versions of the test and for both disabled and non-disabled students. Therefore, administering the test orally did not change what was being tested.

DIF analysis, another common statistical approach, is often used to determine whether specific test items function differently for different subgroups of students who are matched in ability. If groups of students are matched in ability but a particular item is shown to have greater difficulty for only one group, then that item can be flagged and reviewed. DIF is used, also, to show whether specific items function differently when specific accommodations are used. Finch, Barton, and Meyer (2009) used DIF to study accommodated and non-accommodated students with disabilities who were matched in ability. They found that DIF could favor students receiving accommodations, especially if they were in higher grades. However, in lower grades and for certain test items, accommodations were found to be detrimental.

Quasi-experimental studies based on the interaction hypothesis are very common in accommodation research. For example, in this design, ELLs and non-ELLs or IEP and non-IEP are tested in two conditions: with accommodations and with no-accommodations. For an accommodation to be deemed effective and valid, according to the interaction hypothesis, that accommodation should increase the scores of the target group (ELLs or IEP students), but have no significant effect on the scores of the non-target group. Lewandowski, Lovett, and Rogers
applied this logic in a design that examined whether an extended time accommodation was effective and valid for secondary school students with learning disability (LD). They found that students with LD benefited significantly more from the accommodation than their non-LD peers. This suggests that, by allowing students with LD to have more time, they can show their abilities and attempt more questions.

Designs based on criterion validity, although not included in Sireci, Han, and Wells’ (2008) framework, have been used to assess the validity of accommodations by examining the extent to which an accommodated performance score predicts performance on another criterion. Zurcher and Bryant (2001) tested the validity of accommodated entrance examination scores with later grade point averages (GPA) of students with LD in university, and found that the accommodated scores might predict higher GPA than students would actually obtain.

The findings of accommodation research tend to be highly inconsistent and even contradictory as demonstrated in major reviews literature on the effectiveness and validity of accommodations for ELLs (Abedi, Courtney, & Leon, 2003; Wolf, Kao, Herman et al., 2008) and students with special needs (Sireci, Scarpati, & Li, 2005; Thompson, Blount & Thurlow, 2002). For example, Abedi (2008) presented contradictory results on the effectiveness and validity of test breaks and extended time, two very common accommodations that are available to both ELLs and students with special needs on the OSSLT. While Dicerbo, Stanley, Roberts and Blanchard (2001) demonstrated that breaks boosted scores, especially for low- and middle-ability readers; Walz, Albus, Thompson, and Thurlow (2000) showed that breaks had no effect for students with disabilities, but increased the scores of non-disabled students, which is the opposite of what they are intended to do (see Abedi, 2008).

Accommodation validity research has three main challenges. First, although there is a general recognition that all tests are, to some extent, tests of language proficiency (Standards, 1999), there is much less agreement about how this problem can be addressed. Some researchers suggest the linguistic difficulty of a test can be simplified without fundamentally altering the contract (Abedi et al., 2000). More controversial, however, is translating the test into the students’ L1 because students do not necessarily have reading and writing proficiency in their L1 and are not likely to have learned the material through their L1 (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Also, typological differences in the orthographies of a students’ L1 and L2 and the possibility of
students having distinct abilities associated with each typology (Geva, 2006) may lead to difficulties in test translation as an accommodation. The second challenge is that accommodations will be interpreted and implemented very differently in different schools or jurisdictions, and many jurisdictions do not provide adequate validity evidence on their use of accommodations (Rivera, Stansfield, Scialdone, & Sharkey, 2000; Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Robey; 2002). US-GAO (2006, p. 4) reported that 25 of 38 states were cited for “not providing sufficient evidence on the validity or reliability of results for students with limited English proficiency.”

The third, and perhaps most difficult, challenge for research into accommodations is the contradiction between the “quest for a one-size-fits-all” accommodation, on one hand, and the diversity of ELLs, students with special needs and school contexts, on the other hand (Solano-Flores, 2008). Kopriva et al. (2007) suggest that this tension may be the cause of widely diverging and contradictory results in studies on the validity of accommodations. There are so many possible combinations of types of disabilities, EL2 profiles, testing contexts, and types of accommodations that any experimental research may be too specific to generalize.

There are also important practical considerations that challenge test administrators in applying accommodations. Most accommodations were originally developed for students with special needs and may be extended to ELLs using a “common sense” approach that is not based on research findings (Abedi, 2008). Also, accommodations may be seen as ways of “retrofitting” a test that was not designed with consideration to ELLs or students with special needs (Gottlieb, 2003, p. 31).

Most accommodations research to date deals with traditional validity issues and the comparability of performance measures (Abedi et al., 2000, Abedi, Courtney, & Leon, 2003; Bolt & Ysseldyke, 2008; Thompson, Blount, & Thurlow, 2002). Recently, it has been recognized that it is not the test itself that requires validation, but the interpretations and applications of the test (Messick, 1994; Wolf, Kao, Herman et al., 2008). The Standards (1999, p.9) defines validity as “the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests.” This broadens the concept of validity to include “social consequences”. In accommodations research, “social consequences” have been addressed (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Solano-Flores, 2008) but rarely researched empirically. When the discussion of accommodations validity is broadened further, to include considerations of access,
administration, and fairness (Kunnan, 2000), it seems that no empirical studies have examined
fairness and access as a validity issue in test accommodations.

2.3 Special Needs Assessment and Interventions for ELLs

2.3.1 Disproportionate Representation: The United States and Canada

In the United States, the disproportionate representation of culturally diverse students in
special education has been demonstrated clearly in state and national studies (Parrish, 2002;
National Research Council, 2002). For example, as summarized in Rhodes et al. (2005), African
American students were found to be 135% more likely to be classified as having intellectual
disability (or “mental retardation” (MR) in the terminology of the study), and 59% more likely to
be classified as emotionally disturbed (ED). First Nations students have a 31% greater
probability of MR classification and 24% higher chance of ED classification (National Research
Council, 2002). At the same time, minority students have been found to be under-represented in
special programming for gifted students (Ford, 1998). Fierros and Conroy (2002) found that
minority students were more likely to be placed in more restrictive interventions, whereas non-
minority students were more likely to be integrated. Disability categories that have a more clear
biological aetiology, such as visual impairment, often have very proportional rates of culturally
and linguistically diverse students, while categories based on more subjective interpretations
often have higher rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cummins, 1984;
MacMillian & Reschly, 1998). The controversy centers, not on the accuracy of the numbers, but
on the causes and possible solutions to this problem. Rhodes et al. (2005) suggest several
possible factors that influence this disproportion: a deficit view of diverse cultures and
languages, socio-demographic factors, systemic bias in the education system, factors relating to
teaching, referral, assessment practices, ambiguous special needs categories, and lack of
accountability and adherence to state/federal guidelines.
However, if only the English language proficiency of the student is considered, then it may be that so-called “limited English proficient” (LEP) students in the US are underrepresented in special needs programming (Zehler et al., 2003). Perhaps the practice of referring to minority students as “culturally and linguistically diverse” gives the impression that there is a disproportionately high representation of both culturally diverse students (minorities) and linguistically diverse students (ELLs) in special education. Zehler et al. (2003) found that only 9% of LEP students were eligible for special education services compared to 13.5% of students in the general population. However, for Hispanic ELL students, 17% were identified as having learning disabilities (Zehler et al., 2003). This picture becomes more complex when ELL status is compared to specific disability categories. Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (2005) found an overrepresentation of ELLs in categories of mental retardation, learning disabilities, and impairments of speech or language. However, Artiles et al.’s (2005) was limited to 11 urban school districts in a single State, California, and therefore is likely not representative of the entire US school system. This distinction between culturally diverse students and ELLs is crucial: over-representation is an issue of race and ethnicity – but it is not the case the ELLs are over-represented in special education.

Limbos and Geva (2001) examined the accuracy of teacher’s screening and referrals ELLs for special needs. Specifically, Limbos and Geva (2001) considered the sensitivity and specificity of various teacher assessment methods compared to an objective screening measure of reading disability. The researchers found that, when teachers used a rating scale and were asked in an interview to nominate students who may have reading disabilities, their sensitivity was quite high. However, there was considerable inaccuracy in teacher’s spontaneously expressed concern for the possibility of reading difficulty in students. Also, the researchers found that teachers over-rely on oral-proficiency when determining that a student may be at-risk for having a reading disability, and that English oral language proficiency might bias their assessment of who are the children who, in addition to being ELL, might also be at risk of having a reading disability. Limbos and Geva (2001) suggest that reliance on teacher’s spontaneous expression of concern, combined with the demonstrated tendency to be biased by oral-proficiency, may prevent EL2 students from being referred and tested for reading disabilities. This, in turn, could lead to an under-representation of ELLs in special education, and barrier to these students’ receiving necessary services.
Canadian studies on the proportionate representation of ELLs in special education are urgently needed and would provide an objective basis for decisions about assessment practices and funding for interventions. There is perhaps a pervasive assumption among Canadian educators that the greatest risk to ELLs is a false positive designation of disability and that testing for learning disabilities must be deferred until students have developed a high level of English oral proficiency (Geva, 2006; Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Schuster, 2000). However, if ELLs are shown to be under-represented in special education, then the deferred assessment may need to be rethought. In the context of the OSSLT and high stakes testing in Ontario, there are many assessment accommodations that are only available to students if they are classified as having special learning needs. If special needs assessments for ELLs are delayed, and if ELLs are in fact under-represented in disability categories, then this group can be said systematically disadvantaged with regards to test accommodations. This, in turn, may have implications for the fairness and validity of large scale tests.

2.3.2 Identification of LD for ELLs

Several Canadian studies point towards the possibility of identifying learning disabilities in EL2 students, even when they are still developing their English language proficiency. These studies are based on measuring underlying cognitive processes in reading that can be assessed either in an L1 or in English (even when the student is still developing English language proficiency). These studies are highly relevant because they suggest that it is viable to provide early assessment for ELLs, which, among other benefits, would allow decision makers on standardized tests to assign accommodation and make participation decisions based on a more complete understanding of students’ individual abilities. However, many of these studies involve young learners who are entering the Canadian school system in kindergarten and grade one. More Canadian research is necessary to validate this approach for use with adolescent ELLs, and for ELLs who have entered the school system at different ages and with diverse L1 abilities and profiles. A criticism of much research on phonological awareness and reading is that it does not consider pre-existing reading and spelling skills (Castles & Coltheart, 2004), skills that may be present in an L1 as well as English. Also, while measures of underlying cognitive processes in reading have been shown consistently to predict early reading ability and spelling, other researchers emphasize that a wide range of reading skills, as well as oral language and
vocabulary, play an important role in reading comprehension beyond these early stages (Ouellette, 2006).

Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, and Schuster (2000) found that EL1 and EL2 students, despite differing in language proficiency, had very similar trajectories in the development of word recognition skills. Furthermore, performance on basic cognitive processes that underlie word reading skills such as rapid automatized naming (RAN) and phonological awareness tasks predicted word recognition for both groups. This suggests that these measures can be used to predict learning disabilities in ELLs, even when their English language proficiency is still developing.

Geva (2000) showed that EL2s can match EL1s in learning phonological awareness skills, suggesting that this can be a valid indicator of future reading development even in the early stages of learning English. A review of research evidence by Geva and Wang (2001) showed that first language phonological awareness is a good predictor of phonological awareness in English, regardless of the orthographic transparency of their L1, and in students with very different L1s including Chinese, Hebrew, Spanish, French, Punjabi and Farsi. Again, this suggests that educators do not have to delay assessment or reading difficulties until students’ oral language proficiency to develops.

MacCoubrey et al. (2004) considered the case of EL1 students in French immersion programs. Although these students were not ELLs, the study is relevant here because it involves the prediction reading ability in an L2 based on measures administered in an L1. The predictors in this study were: phonological awareness, measured through sound isolation and blending tasks, and speed of lexical access, measured through RAN. The study found that reading achievement in French at the end of grades 1 and 2 could be predicted by the phoneme blending, sound isolation, and RAN tests administered in English at the beginning of grade 1. Students at risk for low achievement in French might therefore be identified before they had extensive exposure to the new language.

The validity of cognitive measures, especially phonological awareness measures, to predict L2 reading difficulties has been demonstrated extensively in the Canadian context. Also, major reviews of literature in reading disabilities in English language learners have demonstrated similar findings from a wide range of studies across North America (e.g. Geva, 2006; Shore &
Sabatini, 2009). More research is required that examines the particular assessment and intervention needs of ELLs who enter Canada and begin to acquire English in adolescence, and who may have learning disabilities. If these students have unrecognized disabilities, and educators delay referral and testing, then these students’ schooling may very well end before they are ever assessed. Also, they may not receive accommodations on standardized tests. To date, most research is based on younger learners entering the school system in Kindergarten and grade 1. However, evidence from research on EL1 adolescent and adults with reading disabilities suggest that deficits in phonological awareness persist in adolescence and adulthood, even when their level of word recognition is very high (Bruck, 1992, Fawcett & Nicolson, 1995; Swanson & Hsieh, 2009). These measures, therefore, should be evaluated for their possible use in identifying adolescent ELLs who may require special education support. Future research on identification of adolescent ELLs may also need to incorporate closer consideration of pre-existing literacy abilities (in both L1 and English), along with a wider range of reading skills and language abilities that are relevant to comprehension and higher order reading abilities.

2.4 Diversity: English Language Learners and Bilingual Programming

Although the diversity of English language learners (ELLs) is often acknowledged in research literature, experienced by teachers, and even reflected in official definitions (OME, 2007, pp. 8-10), ELLs nonetheless tend to be treated as a homogeneous group in research designs on accommodations (Solano-Flores, 2008). There so many aspects in which ELLs differ that finding the common thread tying the category together is difficult.

The most obvious difference among ELLs, perhaps, is their first language (L1). Kindler (2002) reported that over 400 languages are spoken by ELLs across that United States. Approximately 80% of these students are Spanish speakers (GAO, 2006). Although this high prevalence of Spanish speakers gives the impression of some uniformity, there are in fact several dialects of Spanish that differ according to factors such as the family’s place of origin, SES, and area of residence in the United States. In Canada, where the two official languages are English and French, 20.1% of the population in the 2006 census were found to be “allophones”, i.e. people whose L1 is neither English nor French (Statistics Canada, 2006). More than one million people, or 3.3% of the population, reported a Chinese language as their L1 (ibid.). Over 200
mother tongues were reported in Canada (ibid.). For each of these languages, there will be
dialects that are shaped by regional origin, SES, and other factors. In Ontario, a province with
about 12,000,000 residents, 1,811,620 residents reported speaking a non-official language most
often at home. 3,134,045 residents reported that English and French were not their mother
tongue. 482,570 Ontarians reported speaking Chinese as their L1. After Chinese, the languages
with the most mother-tongue speakers in Ontario were: Italian (282,750), Spanish (160,275),
German (158,000), Portuguese (155,310), Polish (140,890), Punjabi (152,645), Tagalog
(117,365), and Arabic (114,730) (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Ability in the L1 and in English will also vary greatly, ranging perhaps from students
who have lost the ability to understand all but a few words in their L1 to students whose
command of their mother tongue has been well maintained; and from students whose grasp of
English is minimal to those who have learned it well beyond grade level. Rhodes, Ochoa, and
Ortiz (2005) present bilingualism as a continuum: the bilingual learner can have widely varying
proficiency in both their L1 and L2 (Valdés & Figueroa, 1996) and varying skills for speaking,
listening, reading and writing in both languages (Hamayan & Damico, 1991). Hamayan and
Damico (1991) further classify bilinguals as “non-balanced bilinguals”, i.e. being relatively
stronger across skill areas of their L1; “mixed bilinguals”, with varying relative strengths in both
languages; and “balanced bilinguals”, having similar strengths across domains in both languages.
Valdés and Figueroa (1996) distinguish between sequential and simultaneous bilingualism.
Sequential bilingualism occurs when a student learns their L1 first and then must subsequently
learn the L2. Simultaneous bilingualism occurs when the student has been exposed to both L1
and L2 at the same time from an early age. They also distinguish between elective bilingualism,
by choice, and circumstantial bilingualism, prompted many by circumstances such as
immigration to a new country (ibid). Cummins’ (1981) concept of BICS and CALP is also
relevant here. A student might be very fluent in conversation in their L1 or English (BICS), but
may not have corresponding command of academic language in their L1 or English. All of these
considerations are relevant to the assessment and accommodation of ELLs, especially when
consideration is given to testing in the L1, or when there is a risk of determining a students needs
based on oral fluency rather than a more thorough evaluation of the students’ diverse language
abilities.
ELLs are also diverse in their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and are at risk of encountering systemic social oppression and reduced opportunities. In large scale assessments, groups that have historically experienced colonization, slavery, and forced displacement are found to perform below average (Cummins, 1984). Although these lower standardized test performance levels are rooted in social marginalization, the causes are complex and difficult to address. In standardized testing, the most commonly proposed way of addressing the problem is “norming” the test using a sample that includes proportional numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Rhodes, Ochoa & Ortiz, 2005). However, even if norming samples are superficially diverse, factors such as students’ acculturation and experiential background (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991) may have been overlooked so that the sample is not truly representative of diversity across regions, SES, immigration status, parental education, and other factors.

The category ELL itself is very fluid because new students are always entering the subgroup, while more advanced students are always exiting (DeVoe, 2007). This makes it difficult to measure improvements in ELL education in a meaningful way. To illustrate this, Abedi and Deitel (2004) cite a study of 14,000 ELLs in which it was shown that, when more advanced ELLs were “exited” (i.e. no longer classified as ELLs), the performance scores of the remaining ELLs appeared to drop drastically. Of course, this is only the result of advanced ELLs becoming mainstream learners, and lower English proficient new arrivals constantly entering the ELL category. According to Fairbairn and Fox (2009), many ELLs go unrecognized as bilinguals in the education system, perhaps due to their relatively higher performance in spoken English or perhaps due to the unavailability of programs. Also, Canadian ELLs may sometimes be “accelerated” into mainstream programming (Watt & Roessingh, 2001), making them no longer “ELLs” for purposes of administration and accountability. Since “ELL” is a way of categorizing and conceptualizing students, rather than a static identity, some bilingual students who require language support will inevitably not fall into the category for a variety of possible reasons. Here, the concept of “hidden” bilinguals is relevant (Sawyer, 1977; Taaffe & Pringle, 1988).

An often overlooked source of diversity among bilinguals is the educational opportunities available to help them develop their L1 and English. Rhodes et al. (2005) distinguish between “subtractive” and “additive” bilingual education programs. Subtractive programs are those that aim to make English the dominant language without maintaining and often at the expense of the
L1. ESL programs, including those widely available in Canada, are considered subtractive for this reason. “Additive” bilingual programs are those that attempt to maintain and develop the student’s L1 alongside English. Meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of bilingual programs (Greene, 1998) and long-term studies (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) showed that students in additive bilingual programs outperform students in subtractive programs in both their L1 and English. Pull-out ESL and sheltered content ESL fared the worse in these studies.

These sources of diversity, taken together, show the practical difficulty in assigning the appropriate accommodations to ELLs on large-scale tests, and deciding when to exclude ELLs from participation. For research purposes, this diversity raises the question of whether findings for one group of ELLs in a specific testing context are generalizeable outside of that group and that context.

2.5 Summary

Research on accommodations and participation decisions for ELLs and students with special needs is advancing. However, as seen in this review, several crucial areas remain neglected. First, there is an almost complete absence of Canadian and OSSLT-specific research in this area. Second, studies are necessary to determine whether consistent criteria are being applied in accommodation and participation decisions from school to school, and across years of testing. U.S. studies currently report widely varying practices and inconsistent criteria. Third, given the under-representation of ELLs in special education, it is important to consider whether ELLs might be overlooked for special needs accommodations. These issues impact the validity and fairness considerations of access and administration (Kunnan 2004, 2008). Failure to ensure consistent criteria for access to ELLs and students with special needs, and failure to maintain consistent administration practices for accommodations and participation decisions, can compromise the validity and fairness of the test. The current study will examine patterns and changes in the administration of accommodations and participation decisions across schools and years of testing. It will demonstrate whether EL1 and EL2 students are proportionally represented among students who have and individual education plan (IEP) and receive special
needs accommodations on the OSSLT. Finally, this study will consider how accommodations and special provisions might impact success rates on the OSSLT.
Chapter 3  
Methods

3 Methods

This chapter describes data sources, research questions, and the statistical methods used to address these questions. Also, there is a discussion of the methodological strengths and limitations of this research project and how this impacts the validity of possible findings.

3.1 Description of Data Sources and Data Preparation

3.1.1 Data Sources

In administering the OSSLT, EQAO collects several sources of data through different means. First, there is information from the individual student report, which includes student identification code, school code, the language in which the student wrote the test (French or English), the students’ outcome, the students’ scale score, and several comments that the student receives with their results. For this analysis, data for all students who wrote the test in French has been deleted. Comments that students receive in their results were not relevant to this study and were removed from the data set. Although any identifying information on student, school, and school board has been coded by the EQAO to protect the identities of students, the codes are maintained to facilitate distinguishing different schools and boards in the data analysis, even if the names of these schools remains suppressed.

The second source of OSSLT data comes from a student information form, which is generated from school records. There are numerous variables in this category. However, only the following variables were considered for analysis in the present study: gender, first time eligible status, level of study (e.g. academic, applied, ESL/ELD, locally developed), previous eligibility,
date of first eligibility, non-participation status, ESL/ELD status, special provision(s) received (3 variables), IEP status, specific IPRC identification (12 variables), accommodation(s) received (21 variables), special permission from the principal for accommodations (2 variables).

The third OSSLT data source was the student questionnaire, which students completed before writing the test. Variables from the questionnaire that were retained and analyzed in this study were: first language and languages used at home. Other variables in this questionnaire that pertain to reading and writing activities outside of school were not relevant to the current study.

The fourth source of OSSLT data is students’ correct/incorrect responses to individual multiple choice items, and their scores on specific writing or short response tasks. This data, however, was not relevant to the current study and was not analyzed.

The EQAO divided the data into two categories: data for “First Time Eligible” (FTE) students (i.e. students who are eligible to write the test for the first time) and “Previously Eligible” (PE) students (i.e. students who may have been unsuccessful, absent, deferred, or exempted from a previous administration of the test). In the current study, data for FTE and PE were merged for each year into a single data set. The data for 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 was then further merged into a single data file with 857,331 cases layered by year and FTE versus PE status.

3.1.2 Data Preparation

Data were prepared for analysis by removing incomplete information and data and creating new combined or aggregated variables that would simplify the analysis or allow consideration of more specifically defined subgroups within the population of OSSLT test-takers. In preparing the data to be analyzed, the following steps were taken.

1) Delete all cases of students who wrote the French version of OSSLT;
2) Copy to another file all cases where data on IEP status and/or ESLELD status is missing. Analyze the missing IEP and ESLELD data to ensure that deleting it will not compromise
the validity of the analysis of the original data sets. Delete all missing and IEP and ESLELD data from the main data file;

3) Merge the data sets provided by the EQAO for First Time Eligible (FTE) students and Previously Eligible (PE) students so that a data set for a single year would include all the students who are eligible to write the OSSLT in that year. However, maintain a variable to distinguish FTE and PE because some research questions will require looking at both categories separately;

4) Merge all data for the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 in to a single data file. The distinction between years will be maintained with the variable “Admin_Year” and the distinction between FTE and PE will be maintained in the variable “FTEorPE”;

5) Create a variable for IEP status that does not include gifted. This variable is necessary because the current study is concerned with the participation and accommodation of students with disabilities. Although gifted is a “special need”, it is not a disability and does not provide a basis for granting accommodations and considering whether or not a student should participate in the test.

To analyze the data at the school level, a new data set was created with SchoolID as the break variable. First, however, all of the variables that have relevant data were recoded into binary variables so that information could be properly aggregated in the new data set. For example, OSSLTOutcome contained the following categories: [1] successful; [2] unsuccessful; [3] absent; [4] OSSLC bound; [5] deferred; [6] exempted; [10] withheld by EQAO. Each of the first six groups must be recoded into its own single binary variable. OSSLT_Successful, therefore, would be a binary variable with “1” for successful and “0” for anything else. In this way, when the data is aggregated with schools becoming the new cases, the sum OSSLT_Successful can represent the number of successful students at each school.
3.2 Research Questions

The three major research questions in this study are:

1. What patterns and changes are evident in the administration of special provisions, accommodations, deferrals, and exemptions across schools and years of testing?

2. Are first language English (EL1) and second language English (EL2) students represented proportionally among students who have individual education plans (IEP) and receive accommodations on the OSSLT?

3. Does receiving accommodation and special provision correlate with higher success rates on the OSSLT?

3.3 Statistical Methods to Address Specific Questions

In this section, the statistical methods used to address each research question are described in detail. Because this study analyses the entire population of OSSLT eligible students, only descriptive methods were used. Several classifications of students must be acknowledged in order to ensure the valid interpretation of results. First, students with disabilities are those who have an individual education plan (IEP) and who may also have a specific disability designation, such as learning disability. Although gifted students have IEPs, they are not included in the special needs category unless they also have a specific disability. Second, ESL/ELD students only include students who have this designation in school records. It is possible that there are many EL2 students who require ESL/ELD services, but do not receive them. Also, students can be classified as either “first time eligible” (who are writing the test at the first time they are eligible) or “previously eligible” (who were previously unsuccessful, deferred, or absent). In many cases, it was necessary to report results for these two groups separately. A description of OSSLT test-takers is reported in order to provide demographic data on each of these groups.
3.3.1 First Research Question

What patterns and changes are evident in the administration of special provisions, accommodations deferrals, and exemptions across schools and years of testing?

Special Provisions

First, the yearly rates of ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions were calculated by dividing the number of ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions by the total number of participating ESL/ELD students for each year of test administration. The results are presented in a table that shows the percentage of participating ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions on the OSSLT in each year.

Second, variables for the three available special provisions (extra time, supervised breaks, and change of setting) were combined into a single variable with a value for every possible combination of special provisions that a student might receive. For example, one student might receive only extra time, while another receives extra time with change of setting and yet another receives all three special provisions. The percentages of participating ESL/ELD students receiving each of these possible combinations of special provisions was calculated for each year of test administration using the crosstabs analysis. The results are displayed in a bar-graph that facilitates an overall look at the trends of special provisions in Ontario.

Finally, using the school aggregate data file, the rate of special provisions received by eligible ESL/ELD students was calculated for every school. This was done by dividing the number of participating ESL/ELD students who receive special provision(s) by the total number of participating ESL/ELD students at each school. Schools with less than 10 participating ESL/ELD students were excluded from the analysis. To summarize the data, the scale variable for rate of special provisions was transformed into an ordinal variable with 10 ranges, i.e. 0 to 10%, 10 to 20%, and up to 90 to 100%. A graph was created, paneled by year, to show the number of schools that fall within each of the 10 percentage ranges.

Accommodations

First, the yearly rates of students with IEPs receiving accommodations were calculated by dividing the number of IEP students who received accommodations by the total number of
participating IEP students for each year of testing. A chart was created to summarize the yearly changes in the rate of IEP students who received accommodations.

Second, the 21 available accommodations were classified as “time”, “setting”, “response” and “presentation” type accommodations. The percentages of participating IEP students receiving these types of accommodations was calculated for each year of test administration, and presented in a table.

Finally, using the school aggregate data file, the rate of accommodation was calculated for every school: dividing the number of IEP students who receive accommodations by the total number of participating IEP students. To summarize the data, the scale variable for rate of accommodations was transformed into an ordinal variable with 5 ranges, i.e. 0 to 20%, and up to 80% to 100%. A graph was created, paneled by year, to show the number of schools that fall within each of the 10 percentage ranges. Only schools with 10 participating IEP students were included in these reports.

**Participation Rates**

To summarize and compare changes in participation rates and corresponding rates of absence, deferral, OSSLC, and exemption by year, a crosstabs analysis was used to calculate the percentages of ESL/ELD students who were deferred, OSSLC bound, exempted, or absent in each of the four administration years (2006-2009). The percentages and counts are presented in tables. The same procedure was repeated for IEP students and for the entire student population.

In order to compare schools, the overall participation rate for each school was calculated by dividing the number of participating students into the total number of eligible students in each school, (e.g. the total number of participating ESL/ELD students by the total number of eligible ESL/ELD students). Results are presented in a table that shows 5 percentage ranges of student participation, from 0 to 20% participation to 80 to 100% participation. The number of schools, by year, falling into each of these ranges is provided in the table.
3.3.2 Second Research Question

Are first language English (EL1) and second language English (EL2) students represented proportionally among students who have individual education plans (IEP) and receive accommodations on the OSSLT?

IEP Status

A crosstabs analysis of BlglType_FourGroups by IEP_ExcludingGifted generated the percentages of EL1 students and EL2 students who have individual education plans. The variable BlglType_FourGroups contains four categories of students: EL1 students, EL2 students who speak only or mostly English at home, EL2 students who speak another language or languages as often as English at home, and EL2 students who speak only or mostly other languages at home. A bar graph was prepared to provide a visual representation of these percentages. A second crosstabs analysis of first language by IEP status was performed, this time controlling for ESL/ELD status. This was done to assess whether participation in ESL/ELD might account for why EL2 students are less likely to have IEPs.

Specific IPRC Designations

For each specific IPRC designation, the percentages EL1s was compared to the percentages of EL2s with the designation. Crosstabulation was used to generate these results. The percentages of students who have IEPs with no IPRC designation was also be calculated. Selecting only students with IEPs, the percentage of EL1 students with IEPs but no specific IPRC designation was compared to EL2 students with IEPs but no specific IPRC designation.

EL1 and EL2 Students Receiving Accommodations

First, the overall percentages of EL1 and EL2 students who received accommodations were calculated using crosstabs. Next, the same analysis was repeated, this time controlling for ESL/ELD status. Finally, the analysis was repeated again, selecting only IEP students. The variable AccANY is used because it includes all possible accommodations, all possible special provisions, and all principal permissions. This ensures that, if EL2 IEP students are shown to be
less likely to receive accommodations, it was not simply because they were receiving special provisions instead.

3.3.3 Third Research Question

Does receiving accommodation and special provision correlate with higher success rates on the OSSLT?

To examine the possible correlation between special provisions and achievement, or accommodations and achievement, the percentages of successful students in each category students were compared. The success rate of ESL/ELD students who received special provisions was compared to the success rate of ESL/ELD students who did not receive special provisions. The success rate of IEP students who received accommodations was compared to the success rate of IEP students with no special provisions. However, this analysis is not presented in the current study for two reasons. First, the EQAO already reports achievement data for ESL/ELD and IEP students receiving or not receiving special provisions and accommodations. Second, there is no valid basis for comparing student achievement in this way. Students are not randomly assigned to groups. In fact, we can reasonably expect that the ESL/ELD with greater needs and lower overall academic performance would be more likely to receive special provisions. IEP students whose disability impairs their overall academic performance would be more likely to receive accommodations. The consequence is that students with special provisions and accommodations appear to have lower success rates. Moreover, accommodations are provided on a very individual basis, with reference to the specific contents of each student’s IEP. Since we do not have an independent measure of students’ abilities, there is no way of assessing whether receiving a special provision or accommodation had any impact on achievement.

In this study, however, one method of comparing special provisions to achievement was attempted. Only ESL/ELD students who receive special provisions were considered. These students were considered to be very similar because they all belonged to the ESL/ELD category and they all participated in the test with special provisions. Achievement was then compared based on the type or combinations of special provisions received. For example, students
receiving only extra time were compared to students receiving extra time with breaks and change of setting. Although this comparison also has many limitations, most importantly the lack of random assignment, it may provide some insights. To accomplish this, participating ESL/ELD students who received special provisions in 2009 were compared on the basis of which special provisions they received. The results are presented in a clustered bar graph that shows the percentages of successful and unsuccessful students in each category of receiving special provisions.
Chapter 4

Results

4 Results

Chapter four provides detailed results relevant to the three research questions of this study. First, demographic data for the entire population of OSSLT eligible students from 2006 to 2009 is provided. Next, results are organized by the research question to which they pertain.

4.1 Description of OSSLT Eligible Students

This section provides demographic data for the entire population of OSSLT eligible students in Ontario. Below, the term “eligible” refers to all students who are eligible to write the OSSLT, i.e. all Ontario secondary school students who have completed Grade 9 English and who have not yet successfully completed the literacy requirement or received an exemption from the test. The term “eligible”, therefore, subsumes both FTE and PE. The term “participating” refers to students who wrote the test in a given year, and who were not therefore absent, exempted, deferred, or assigned to fulfill the literacy requirement through OSSLC.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the number and proportion of ESL/ELD students in each year. Only these students may receive special provisions on the OSSLT. The proportion of FTE ESL/ELD students remains quite consistent from 2006 to 2009, but the proportion of PE ESL/ELD increases from 10.6% to 13.4%.
Table 1

*All Eligible ESL/ELD Students by Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eligible ESL/ELD Students</td>
<td>12,976</td>
<td>13,118</td>
<td>12,620</td>
<td>13,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Eligible Students</td>
<td>220,167</td>
<td>218,179</td>
<td>209,886</td>
<td>209,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

First-Time-Eligible ESL/ELD Students by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FTE ESL/ELD Students</td>
<td>7,698</td>
<td>6,737</td>
<td>6,153</td>
<td>6,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FTE Students</td>
<td>170,515</td>
<td>167,235</td>
<td>157,886</td>
<td>154,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Previously-Eligible ESL/ELD Students by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE ESL/ELD students</td>
<td>5,278</td>
<td>6,381</td>
<td>6,467</td>
<td>7,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49,652</td>
<td>50,944</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>54,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the number and proportion of participating students who speak English as a first language (EL1) and those whose first language is not English (EL2). In a pre-test survey, students are asked to report “Is English the first language you learned at home?” and have the option to respond “yes” or “no”. In this study, cases with missing or ambiguous responses were removed.
Table 4
First Language of Participating Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is English the first language you learned at home?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>139,578</td>
<td>138,791</td>
<td>132,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>49,913</td>
<td>46,240</td>
<td>41,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of participating students</td>
<td>189,642</td>
<td>185,146</td>
<td>173,331</td>
<td>170,576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. FTE and PE data is merged.

The pre-test survey also asked students about their home language use. Participating students were asked, “What languages do you speak at home?” They were given the options to answer: “only or mostly English”, “another language or (languages) as often as English”, or “only or mostly another language (or other languages)”. Cases with ambiguous answers on this multiple choice item were removed from the study. Table 5 summarizes student responses on home language use.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What languages do you speak at home?</th>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only or mostly English</td>
<td></td>
<td>136,647</td>
<td>135,238</td>
<td>129,007</td>
<td>126,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another language or (languages) as often as English</td>
<td>31,962</td>
<td>30,860</td>
<td>29,077</td>
<td>29,653</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only or mostly another language (or other languages)</td>
<td>20,050</td>
<td>18,018</td>
<td>14,271</td>
<td>13,950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>926</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of participating students 189,642 185,146 173,331 170,576

*Note. FTE and PE data is merged.*
It is important to note that the majority of EL2 students are not ESL/ELD students and are therefore not tracked as “English language learners”. Table 6 shows the number and proportion of participating EL2 students who either have or do not have an ESL/ELD classification.
Table 6

*Participating EL2 students in ESL/ELD programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EL2 Students ESL/ELD</td>
<td>8,436</td>
<td>7,710</td>
<td>7,248</td>
<td>7,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ESL/ELD</td>
<td>41,477</td>
<td>38,530</td>
<td>33,800</td>
<td>33,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49,913</td>
<td>46,240</td>
<td>41,048</td>
<td>40,906</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number and proportion of FTE students with IEPs are reported in table 7, while PE results are reported in table 8. Note that although gifted students also have an IEP and are considered to have “special learning needs”, giftedness is not a disability and gifted students do not typically receive test accommodations. Since the current study is concerned with students with disabilities who receive accommodations, gifted students are removed from any calculations involving students with IEPs. Table 7 shows that the proportion of FTE students with IEP increases slightly every year from 2006 to 2009. Table 8 shows the proportion of PE students with IEPs is also increasing, from 30% in 2006 to 36% in 2009.
Table 7
First-Time-Eligible Students with IEPs (not Including Gifted) by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FTE Students with IEP</td>
<td>24,399</td>
<td>24,913</td>
<td>24,912</td>
<td>25,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FTE Students</td>
<td>170,515</td>
<td>167,235</td>
<td>157,886</td>
<td>154,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

_Previously-Eligible Students with IEP (not Including Gifted) by Year_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE Students with IEP</td>
<td>15,035</td>
<td>16,922</td>
<td>17,771</td>
<td>19,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49,652</td>
<td>50,944</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>54,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many students with IEPs are considered to have special needs, but do not have a specific disability designation. If students have a specific disability designation, it may include one or more of the following: Behaviour, Autism, Deaf or hard of hearing, Blind or low vision, Mild intellectual disability, Developmental disability, Multiple exceptionalities, Physical disability, Speech impairment, Language impairment, and Learning disability. Table 9 reports the number and proportion of FTE students with specific disability designations in 2009.
Table 9
*Number and Proportion of Students with Specific Disabilities among FTE Students in 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of All Eligible Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Students with IEPs (not Including Gifted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP with No Specific Disability Designation</td>
<td>7,879</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>10,428</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>2,502</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Exceptionalities</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Impairment</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Disability</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf or Hard of Hearing</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind or Low Vision</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Impairment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 shows the overall number and proportion of FTE compared to PE students. The relative proportion of PE students increases yearly.
Table 10

*Number and proportion of FTE and PE students by year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Time Eligible</td>
<td>170,515</td>
<td>167,235</td>
<td>157,886</td>
<td>154,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously Eligible</td>
<td>49,652</td>
<td>50,944</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>54,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220,167</td>
<td>218,179</td>
<td>209,886</td>
<td>209,099</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, these demographic findings must be carefully considered when interpreting results. Although the percentage of eligible ESL/ELD students remains relatively similar at about 6% of all students, more and more of these students are writing the test as “previously eligible”. By year, first language and home language use of students remains relatively stable. The majority of EL2 students are not in ESL/ELD programs. While most of these EL2s likely do not require ESL/ELD support, the current data does not make it possible to determine whether some of these students are under-served. There is an overall increase in the percentage of Ontario students who have IEPs. This is reflected in higher percentages of both FTE and PE students with IEPs. However, as with ESL/ELD students, it appears that more and more IEP students are writing the test as “previously eligible”. Among IEP students, 31% have no specific disability designation, while learning disability (41%), mild intellectual disability (10%), and behaviour (4%) make up the largest categorizations of specific disability.
4.2 Results for First Research Question: Patterns and Changes in Administrations

The first research question concerns patterns and changes in the administration of accommodations, special provisions, deferrals, and exemptions across schools and years of testing. Across four years of testing administration, the overall use of special provisions for ESL/ELD students decreases, while accommodation for students with IEPs increases. There are changing patterns in the specific types of special provisions received that suggest a move towards giving multiple special provisions. There is a changing pattern in the specific types of accommodations received that shows both an increased use of multiple accommodations and increased use of accommodations involving computer technology. Exclusion of both ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs increases. School level decisions about accommodation, special provision, and exclusion are shown to be consistent with policy, but nonetheless varying considerably from school to school. Detailed results are provided below.

4.2.1 Consistency in Special Provisions and Accommodations by Year

Table 11 shows the decreasing use of special provisions for ESL/ELD students. Among fully participating ESL/ELD students, the percentage of students receiving special provisions dropped from 77% in 2006 to 70.3% in 2009.
Table 11

*Decreasing Special Provisions for Participating ESL/ELD Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the ESL/ELD student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receive special provision(s)?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2,123</td>
<td>2,032</td>
<td>2,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7,099</td>
<td>6,358</td>
<td>5,369</td>
<td>5,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Participating ESL/ELD Students</td>
<td>9,222</td>
<td>8,390</td>
<td>7,937</td>
<td>8,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes both FTE and PE students

For ESL/ELD students who do receive special provisions, there is an increased trend in providing all three available special provisions together (extra time, supervised breaks, and change of setting) and a decreasing trend in offering only extra time. This is illustrated below in Figure 1. In Figure 1, marginal combinations of special provisions, i.e. received by less than 1% of ESL/ELD students, are not illustrated.
Specific types and combinations of special provisions received by ESL/ELD students are shown in greater detail in Table 12. The exclusive use of extra time has decreased from 44.5% in 2006 to 23.8% in 2009, while the combination of extra time, breaks, and a change of setting has increased from 30.3% in 2006 to 55.8% in 2009.
Table 12

Percentages of Participating ESL/ELD Students Receiving Types and Combinations of Special Provisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Accommodations</th>
<th>OSSLT Administration by Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaks Only</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Time Only</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Time and Breaks</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Setting Only</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Setting and Breaks</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Time and Change of Setting</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Time and Change of Setting and Breaks</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total # of participating ESL/ELD students with special provisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,099</td>
<td>6,358</td>
<td>5,369</td>
<td>5,937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Includes both FTE and PE students.

In Table 13 the increasing use of accommodations for participating students with IEPs is shown. There is an increase in accommodations from 84.1% of students in 2006 to 90.4% in 2009. The largest increase is in 2007 when accommodation jumps to 89%. Although gifted students are categorized as having distinct learning needs, they do not typically receive accommodations and will not be included in the calculations below.
For students with IEPs, there are 21 specific accommodations that they might receive on the OSSLT. These 21 accommodations can be categorized into four basic types: Timing, Setting, Presentation and Response. Table 14 compares the prevalence of these types in 2006 and 2009. Note that students with IEPs often receive multiple accommodations, so receiving one type does not preclude receiving another. While all types of accommodation increased, the most considerable jump was in response accommodations.
Table 14

Types of Accommodations Received by Participating Students with IEPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation Type by OSSLT Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Participating Students with IEP</td>
<td>29,981</td>
<td>30,647</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Includes both FTE and PE students

Table 15 focuses on the five specific response accommodations. The considerable increase in response accommodations is based on increases in assistive technology and computers.
Table 15
Specific Response Accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Accommodations by OSSLT Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistive Technology</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Recorded Response</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Recorded Response</td>
<td>&lt;0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribing</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes both FTE and PE students

4.2.2 Consistency in Participation Decisions by Year

The participation of ESL/ELD students in the OSSLT is increasing as shown in tables 16, 17, and 18, which show results for all eligible, first-time eligible, and previously eligible ESL/ELD students respectively. Absence and exemption fluctuate but remain relatively low. Exclusion due to deferral and OSSLC increase considerably.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESL/ELD Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>9,222</td>
<td>8,390</td>
<td>7,937</td>
<td>8,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>3,048</td>
<td>3,741</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>3,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes both FTE and PE students.
### Table 17

**Participation of First-Time-Eligible ESL/ELD Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Time Eligible ESL/ELD students</th>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>5,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>2,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,698</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18

*Participation of Previously Eligible ESL/ELD Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previously Eligible ESL/ELD Students</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>4,039</td>
<td>4,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>1,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,278</td>
<td>6,381</td>
<td>6,467</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 19, 20, and 21 show that the participation of students with IEPs is also decreasing considerably, with corresponding increases in deferral and OSSLC. Again, absence and exemption remain relatively low and stable. There is a marked increase in deferral and OSSLC. This pattern holds for both FTE and PE.
Table 19

*Participation of all eligible students with IEP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>29,981</td>
<td>30,340</td>
<td>29,750</td>
<td>30,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>2,177</td>
<td>2,037</td>
<td>2,658</td>
<td>2,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>3,378</td>
<td>3,310</td>
<td>4,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>2,951</td>
<td>3,892</td>
<td>4,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>3,147</td>
<td>3,129</td>
<td>3,073</td>
<td>3,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of IEP students</td>
<td>39,434</td>
<td>41,835</td>
<td>42,683</td>
<td>45,084</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Not including gifted

*Note.* Includes both FTE and PE students
**Table 20**  
*Participation of First-Time-Eligible Students with IEP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>Participating</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-time eligible students with IEP</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>20,794</td>
<td>20,647</td>
<td>20,239</td>
<td>20,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
<td>921</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deferred</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>2,157</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exempted</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td>1,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,399</td>
<td>24,913</td>
<td>24,912</td>
<td>25,622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Not including gifted
Table 21

Participation of Previously Eligible Students with IEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previously Eligible ESL/ELD Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>9,187</td>
<td>9,693</td>
<td>9,511</td>
<td>9,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>1,235</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>1,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>3,378</td>
<td>3,310</td>
<td>4,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>1,117</td>
<td>1,735</td>
<td>1,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>1,797</td>
<td>1,499</td>
<td>1,479</td>
<td>1,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15,035</td>
<td>16,922</td>
<td>17,771</td>
<td>19,462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Not including gifted

To facilitate comparison based on a more tightly defined category than IEP, only students with learning disabilities (and no additional disability designation) were selected. Tables 22, 23, and 24 compare the participation of students with LD by year. Although the participation of students with LD is slightly higher than that of the entire population of students with disabilities, the same trends of decreasing participation and increasing deferrals and OSSLC apply to
students with LD. Note that students with LD account for 41% of the entire population of students who have IEPs.
Table 22

Participation of Students with LD by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students with IPRC Designation of Learning Disability</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>13,529</td>
<td>13,554</td>
<td>12,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>1,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>1,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,096</td>
<td>16,785</td>
<td>16,215</td>
<td>17,270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes both FTE and PE students
Table 23

*Participation of First-Time-Eligible Students with LD by Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Time Eligible Students with IPRC Designation of Learning Disability Participating</td>
<td>9,662</td>
<td>9,602</td>
<td>8,914</td>
<td>9,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deferred</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exempted</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,440</td>
<td>10,570</td>
<td>9,939</td>
<td>10,427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 24

Participation of Previously Eligible Students with LD by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of OSSLT Administration</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previously Eligible Students with IPRC Designation of Learning Disability</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>3,867</td>
<td>3,952</td>
<td>3,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSSLC</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>1,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exempted</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,656</td>
<td>6,215</td>
<td>6,276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 Consistency in Special Provisions, Accommodations, and Participation by School

Although all ESL/ELD are eligible to receive special provisions according to EQAO policy, schools have widely differing rates of providing special provisions to eligible students. Table 25 provides the percentage ranges of ESL/ELD students who receive special provisions at different schools. For each successive year, the number of schools providing special provisions within each percentage range is shown. For example, in 2006, 158 schools provided 90-100% of their ESL/ELD students with special provisions. Table 25 shows that the majority of schools provided special provisions to all or almost all participating ESL/ELD students. However, a considerable minority of schools provided special provisions to none or almost none of their participating ESL/ELD students.
Table 25

*Percentage Ranges of ESL/ELD Students who Receive Special Provisions 2006 to 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range of ESL/ELD Students who Receive Special Provisions</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 10%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 30%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 50%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 60%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 70%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 80%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 90%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 to 100%</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total # of schools 243 251 228 249

*Note.* Schools with less than 10 OSSLT-eligible ESL/ELD students are excluded.

*Note.* Both FTE and PE students are included.
Students with special needs receive accommodations on the OSSLT based on recommendations in their IEPs. If the IEP states that accommodations are to be used in regular classroom assessment, then similar accommodations can be assigned on the OSSLT. Table 26 shows the percentage ranges of IEP students who received accommodations. From the 2006 to 2009, the majority of schools provided accommodations to all or almost all (80% +) of their IEP students. A minority of schools provided accommodations to none or almost none of their IEP students (less than 20%). However, while 56 schools provide low accommodations in 2006, only 19 schools provided low accommodations in 2009. There appears to be a growing trend towards schools accommodating all students with IEPs who participate in the test.
Table 26  
*Percentage Ranges of Participating Students with IEPs (not Including Gifted) who Receive Accommodations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range of Participating Students with IEPs who Receive Accommodations</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 20%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 40%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 60%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 80%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 100%</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>676</strong></td>
<td><strong>687</strong></td>
<td><strong>674</strong></td>
<td><strong>678</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Schools with less than 10 participating OSSLT-eligible IEP students are excluded.

*Note.* Both FTE and PE students are included.

### 4.2.4 Consistency in Participation Rates by School

Table 27 shows the percentage ranges of eligible ESL/ELD students participating in the OSSLT across schools. The number of schools where more than 80% of ESL/ELD students participated has dropped considerably from 126 in 2006 to 74 in 2009.
### Table 27

*Percentage Ranges of ESL/ELD Students Participating in the OSSLT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Ranges of ESL/ELD Students Participating in the OSSLT</th>
<th>Number of Schools in Administration Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 20%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 40%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 60%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 80%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 100%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Schools with less than 10 OSSLT-eligible ESL/ELD students are excluded.

*Note.* Both FTE and PE students are included.

In Table 28, the number schools that have high participation of IEP students (over 80% of eligible IEP students) is shown to decrease from 319 schools in 2006 to 164 schools in 2009. Increasing numbers of schools have participation that ranges between 40% and 80%.
Table 28

*Percentage Ranges of IEP Students Participating in the OSSLT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Ranges of IEP Students Participating in the OSSLT</th>
<th>Number of Schools in Administration Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 20%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 40%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 60%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 80%</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 100%</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Schools with less than 10 OSSLT-eligible IEP students are excluded. Both FTE and PE students are included.

4.2.5 **Adherence to Policy**

The OSSLT gives schools considerable discretion in deciding what ELLs and students with special needs will receive special provisions or accommodations respectively. The only firm policy with respect to special provisions is that they are only available to ESL/ELD students. Accommodations can only be received by students with an IEP (except in very exceptional cases where a special permission is granted). Table 29 shows that there very small numbers of cases where these policies are not followed.
Table 29

Adherence to Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of Non-ESL/ELD Students Receiving Special Provisions</th>
<th># of Non-IEP Students (with No Special Permission) Receiving Accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>53 (less than 0.001%)</td>
<td>318 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>42 (less than 0.001%)</td>
<td>595 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>282 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>391 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. FTE and PE data are merged.

4.2.6 Summary of Findings for First Research Question

In summary, there are several notable trends in the administration of special provisions, accommodations, and exclusion decisions for English language learners and students with special needs. From 2006 to 2009, the overall use of special provisions for ESL/ELD students decreases yearly, while accommodation for students with IEPs increases. There are changing patterns in the specific types of special provisions received that suggest a move towards giving multiple special provisions and a move away from using extra time only. There is a changing pattern in the specific types of accommodations received that shows both an increased use of multiple accommodations and increased use of accommodations involving computer technology. Non-participation, mainly through deferral, of both ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs increases. School level decisions about accommodation, special provision, and exclusion are shown to be consistent with policy, but nonetheless varying considerably from school to school.
4.3 Results for the Second Research Question: Comparison of Accommodations between EL1 and EL2

The second research question concerns whether students who speak English as a first language (EL1) and students who speak English as a second language (EL2) are proportionally represented among students who have an IEP and received special needs accommodations on the OSSLT. Results indicate that EL2 students are considerably less likely to have an IEP. Even when EL2 students have an IEP, they are less likely to receive special needs testing accommodations.

Table 30 compares the percentages of FTE EL1 students with IEPs to FTE EL2 students with IEPs in four years of test administration. A considerably higher percentage of EL1 students have IEPs and this percentage increases from 2006 to 2009. Table 31 separates FTE EL2 students in to two groups: those who are not in ESL/ELD and those who are in ESL/ELD. EL2 students in ESL/ELD are very unlikely to have an IEP. For example, in 2009, 16.2% of EL1 students had IEPs compared to 3.9% of EL2 students in ESL/ELD programs. Notably, there is a yearly increase in IEPs for both EL1 students and EL2 students who are not in ESL/ELD. However, for EL2 students who are in ESL/ELD, the rate of IEPs decreases from 2006 to 2009.
Table 30

*Percentages of First-Time-Eligible EL1 and EL2 Students with IEPs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of EL1 Students with IEP</th>
<th>Percentage of EL2 Students with IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 31

*Percentages of First-Time-Eligible EL1, EL2, and EL2 in ESL/ELD*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of EL1 Students with IEP</th>
<th>Percentage of EL2 Students with IEP</th>
<th>Percentage of EL2 Students in ESL/ELD with IEP (Not in ESL/ELD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32 shows that FTE EL2s are underrepresented in specific disability categories in 2009. EL2s are under-represented among students who have an IEP but do not have a specific disability designation. EL2s are also underrepresented in the four most common disability categories. In gifted, however, there is a proportional representation of EL1 and EL2 students, with slightly more EL2 students.
Table 32
First-Time-Eligible EL1 and EL2 students with specific disability designations in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEP, but no</th>
<th>Learning Disability</th>
<th>Mild Intellectual Disability</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Multiple Exceptionalities</th>
<th>Gifted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EL1</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL2</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even when participating EL2 students had an IEP, they were less likely to receive an accommodation. EL2 students who speak only or mostly English at home were more likely to receive accommodations than EL2 IEP students who speak only or mostly other language(s) at home. This is illustrated in graph 2, which aggregates all four years of test administration from 2006 to 2009. Exact yearly numbers and proportions are listed in tables 33 and 34 below.
Table 33 provides the exact numbers and percentages of participating EL1 and EL2 IEP students who received accommodations in each year of test administration. EL2 IEP students are separated according to their home language use. In this table, students are considered to have received an accommodation if they received any kind of accommodation, including special provisions. The purpose of this is to account for the possibility that an EL2 IEP student did not receive an accommodation because they received an equivalent special provision.
### Table 33

*EL1 and EL2 IEP Students who Received Accommodations by Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>EL1</th>
<th>EL2 who Speaks Only at Home</th>
<th>EL2 who Speaks Other Language(s) as Often as English at Home</th>
<th>EL2 who Speaks Only Other Language(s) at Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>20174 / 23343</td>
<td>787 / 926</td>
<td>1861 / 2349</td>
<td>1071 /1442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>22712 / 25276</td>
<td>804 / 889</td>
<td>1985 / 2316</td>
<td>1161 / 1441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>22329 / 25071</td>
<td>772 / 897</td>
<td>1798 / 2149</td>
<td>793 / 967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>23611 / 25853</td>
<td>814 / 910</td>
<td>1932 / 2263</td>
<td>873 / 1026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* FTE and PE data are merged.

Table 34 is very similar to the above table, but special provisions are not considered to substitute for accommodations. The pattern and numbers are very similar to the above table, with the notable exception of EL2 students in 2006. In 2006, 59% of EL2 IEP students who speak only or mostly a language other than English at home received special needs accommodations compared to 86% of EL1 IEP students.
Table 34

*EL1 and EL2 IEP Students who Received Accommodations by Year of Test Administration – Not Including Special Provisions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students with IEP</th>
<th>EL2 who Speaks Other Language(s) as Often as English at Home</th>
<th>EL2 who Speaks Only or Mostly Other Language(s) at Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EL1</td>
<td>EL2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number and Percentage of IEP Students Receiving Accommodations (Not Including Special Provisions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. FTE and PE data are merged.*

4.3.1 Summary of Findings for Second Research Question

In summary, EL2 students are significantly less likely to have an IEP than their EL1 peers. This is especially evident when EL2 students are in ESL/ELD programs, but it also applies to EL2 students who are not in ESL/ELD programs. Notably, the percentage of students with IEPs is increasing for both EL1 and EL2 students who are not in ESL/ELD. However, in the case of EL2 students who are in ESL/ELD, the percentage has dropped from 8% in 2006 to 4% in 2009. Also of note is the finding that, even when EL2 students have IEPs, they are much less likely to receive accommodations.
4.4 Results for the Third Research Question: Relationship between Accommodations and Test Results

The third research question concerns the relationship between receiving accommodations or special provisions and success on the OSSLT. The current study can demonstrate correlations between special provisions and ESL/ELD student success, and between accommodations and IEP student success. However, these results may be very misleading. Students are not randomly assigned. In fact, it might be expected that students with weaker literacy skills and test taking abilities will be more likely to receive special provisions or accommodations. Students with disabilities are very diverse, and even specific disability categories (e.g. learning disability) have students with wide ranging abilities and needs. For these students, accommodations are determined by very individualized considerations in their IEPs, and the process is by no means random.

Comparing the success rates of students in ESL/ELD who received one or more special provisions may provide some insight into the effectiveness of those special provisions. By focusing only on ESL/ELD students who received special provisions, and then correlating success with specific special provisions received, it may be possible to gain some insight into the efficacy of the special provisions. Still, the problem remains that there is no random assignment to special provisions. Graph 3 shows ESL/ELD students in the 2009. Those who receive only extra time as a special provision were less successful than those who received other special provisions in combination with extra time. However, the impact of special provisions on performance can only be demonstrated in an experimental or quasi-experimental study.
4.5 Summary of Findings

This Chapter has provided demographic data and results relevant to this study’s three research questions. First, the most notable trends are the decreasing use of special provisions for ELLs contrasted to the increasing use of accommodations for IEP students. There seems to be a move towards multiple special provisions and accommodations in combination. Also, the use of accommodations that involve technology has increased. Non-participation has also increased for both ELLs and students with IEPs. More and more of these students are writing the test as “previously eligible” and are therefore reported separately in EQAO publications. Considerable variation is evident among schools in special provisions, accommodation, and non-participation decisions. However, it is evident that schools are adhering to stated policies in that they are only
providing these resources within the appropriate categories. Second, EL2 students are shown to be much less likely to have an IEP. Even when EL2 students have IEPs, they are less likely to receive accommodations. EL2 students who are in ESL/ELD programs are the least likely of all students both to have IEPs and to receive special needs accommodations. Third, this study provided some evidence of a relationship between the type of special provision received by ESL/ELD students and their success rates on the test, but causal interpretations are not warranted by this association. Chapter 5 will consider the interpretation and implications of these results.
Chapter 5
Discussion

5 Discussion

This chapter highlights and summarizes the current study’s major findings on the administration of OSSLT accommodations, special provisions, and exclusion decisions. The implications of these results for the evaluating the validity and fairness of OSSLT administration and reporting are discussed. A critical evaluation of the EQAO’s current guidelines and quality assurance procedures is provided. Directions for future research are explored, and recommendations are offered for improving policies and implementation procedures for accommodations, special provisions, and exclusions.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Consistency in Assigning Accommodations and Special Provisions

This study shows a lack of consistency in assigning accommodations and special provisions both across years of test administration and among individual schools. From 2006 to 2009, accommodations for students with special needs have increased (+ 6%), while special provisions for ESL/ELD students have decreased (- 7%). There is a yearly trend towards providing multiple accommodations for students with special needs, and an increase in the use of technological accommodations. There is a yearly trend towards offering all three special provisions (time, breaks, and setting) in combination for ESL/ELD students. Among schools, there is considerable discrepancy in the percentages of ESL/ELD students who receive special provisions and IEP students who receive accommodations. The majority of schools give special provisions to all or almost all participating ESL/ELD students, but many schools do not provide any special provisions to eligible ESL/ELD students. A considerable majority of schools provide accommodations to all or almost all of their participating IEP students. Some schools do not
provide accommodations to any of their participating IEP students, but the number of such schools is declining yearly.

5.1.2 Consistency in Participation and Exclusions

This study showed that, from 2006 to 2009, participation has decreased for both ESL/ELD students (-8.5%) and students with special needs (-8%). For ESL/ELD students, deferral climbed from 23.5% in 2006 to 29.2% in 2009. The percentage of ESL/ELD students taking the alternative course (the OSSLC) more than tripled from 1.4% in 2006 to 4.7% in 2009. For students with IEPs, deferral rose from 4.7% in 2006 to 9.6% in 2009, while OSSLC increased from 5.8% to 9.2%.

Across schools, the percentages of ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs who participate in the OSSLT vary considerably. At some schools, more than 80% of students from special populations participate. At a minority of schools, less than 20% of students from special populations participate. No data is currently gathered that might explain the reasons for these very discrepant participation rates.

5.1.3 English Language Learners, Special Education, and Accommodations

Students who speak English as a second language (EL2) are less likely to have individual education plans (IEPs) that make them eligible for special education programs and for accommodations on the OSSLT. For FTE students in 2009, 16.2% of EL1 students had IEPs, compared to only 9.5% of EL2 students. In the case of EL2 students in ESL/ELD programs, only 3.9% had IEPs. EL2s who speak another language more often than English at home (suggesting that they are often among the newer arrivals to Canada) are the least likely to have IEPs and receive accommodations. Even when EL2 students have IEPs, they actually receive accommodations at a lower rate than EL1 students with IEPs.
5.2 Implications for Validity and Fairness

5.2.1 Administrative Consistency and its Impact on Validity and Fairness

The current study shows considerable discrepancies in the administration of accommodations, special provisions, and participation across schools and years of testing. This has implications for the valid comparison of school and board-level accountability data, the use of results in improvement planning, and the fairness of using the OSSLT as a graduation requirement. Of course, as will be discussed below, consistency alone cannot be used as an indicator of validity. Variation among schools and across years of test administration is to be expected due to different demographics, local considerations, and the improvement over time of testing procedures. However, when very large discrepancies are noted, it is necessary to flag and follow-up specific instances, and to review the guidelines, quality assurances, and reporting procedures that are intended to provide uniformity in testing conditions.

Inconsistency in special provisions, accommodations, and participation decisions pose a major problem for the comparability of test results across schools and years of administration. The EQAO provides the public with yearly reports on student achievement at the school, board, and provincial level; and these reports are intended to be comparable. However, if one school provides special provisions to all of their ESL/ELD students while another similar school does not provide special provisions to ESL/ELD students, then it is very difficult to judge the comparability of scores. If one school has a very high participation rate of ELLs and IEP students, while another school has very low participation of these same categories of students, the meaning of scores is very difficult to interpret. This problem is magnified by the fact that no contextual information is provided in school reports, and schools are not required to support and report the reasons for their decisions. Of course, confidential information and the basis for individual case decisions should never be reported to the public. However, a stronger system of internal accountability reports, combined with requiring schools to provide contextual
information relevant to accommodation and participation decisions, may help to improve consistency and provide a basis for more appropriate comparison.

EQAO results are also intended to be used for school and board improvement planning. If higher rates of ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs are excluded from the test, then there is a danger of these students’ progress and needs being misjudged. For example, the EQAO reports yearly improvements in the achievement of English language learners in an improvement planning report, the Summary of Results and Strategies for Teachers (EQAO, Summary, 2010, p. 1): “The success rate for English language learners has increased by 12 percentage points, from 51% in 2006 to 63% in 2010.” Such reports are misleading if they do not consider the decrease in yearly participation of ESL/ELD students. According to the current study, ESL/ELD participation dropped 8.5% from 2006 to 2009. The overall rate of successful completion of the OSSLT requirement may not in fact be improving for ESL/ELD students. This may cause improvement needs to be overlooked or misjudged.

The OSSLT is not only designed for accountability and improvement planning. Its primary purpose, perhaps, is to serve as a high-school graduation requirement. This gate-keeping function necessitates further considerations of fairness in the administration of the test. Students with similar need and ability profiles should have access to appropriate special provisions and accommodations regardless of where they attend school. Individual needs and abilities should also determine participation decisions.

As mentioned above, consistency alone cannot be an indicator of validity. After all, schools serve students with disabilities who have very wide ranging needs. One school may focus on serving students with lower-incidence disabilities and greater support requirements, while another school’s special needs program may cater to students with lower needs for support. English language learners are also very diverse and also have wide ranging abilities and needs. Because schools serve students from the same districts, each school will have unique groups of English language learners. Moreover, it is also reasonable to expect yearly changes in accommodations, special provisions, and exclusions because the large-scale test administration is relatively new and the system needs time to establish procedures and resources to implement policies. Therefore, statistical inconsistencies do not necessarily entail that decisions are inappropriate, invalid, or unfair. However, because this study has noted very considerable
discrepancies, it is necessary to flag and follow-up specific instances, and to review the guidelines, quality assurances, and reporting procedures that are intended to provide uniformity in testing conditions.

5.2.2 Under-representation and Fairness for EL2 Students

This study demonstrated that EL2 students are under-represented among students who have IEPs and receive accommodations on the OSSLT. Even when EL2 students have IEPs, they are less likely to receive accommodations. The problem of under-representation is systemic to Ontario education and does not originate in EQAO testing procedures. Nonetheless, under-representation presents a problem for the valid interpretation of test scores, and for fair decision making. It also prevents adequate resource allocation and staff training for English language learners who may require special needs interventions (Geva, 2006). If there are EL2 students who have special needs but have not been identified, then there are at least three consequences for the validity of standardized testing. First, these students may not be receiving adequate opportunity to learn prior to the test. If a specific impairment is unaddressed then it may compromise a students’ ability to learn in other domains as well. Second, these students may not be considered for deferral or OSSLC because they are considered mainstream students. Third, these students cannot be provided accommodations to reduce construct irrelevant barriers because their needs have gone unnoticed.

5.3 Critical Evaluation of Validity and Fairness Framework

5.3.1 Validity and Fairness as Determined by Test Uses

A major challenge for ensuring the validity and fairness of the OSSLT is the fact that the test has several intended uses. Validity and fairness must be determined based on these proposed
uses (Kunnan, 2004, 2006; Messick, 1980). The standards state that each intended use requires specific validation (AERA et al., 1999, p. 139): “The evidence needed for the technical quality of one purpose … will differ from the evidence needed for another purpose.” The EQAO identifies two uses that apply to all of its large scale assessments: (1) “to provide comparable year-to-year data to give the public information on students achievement”; and (2) “to provide reliable, objective and high-quality data that can inform school boards’ improvement planning and target setting” (EQAO, Framework, 2007, p.4). A third use, specific to the OSSLT, is also identified: “to determine whether the student has the literacy (reading and writing) skills required to meet the standard for understanding reading selections and communicating in a variety of writing forms expected by The Ontario Curriculum across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9” (EQAO, Framework, 2007, p.6). Therefore, the OSSLT serves purposes of public accountability, improvement planning, and gate-keeping. However, in the EQAO’s OSSLT Framework (2007) and Technical Report (2009), the specific relationship between test uses and validation procedures is often not established.

5.3.2 Accommodations and Special Provisions: No Threat to Validity?

The EQAO asserts that accommodations and special provisions do not threaten the validity and reliability of the test (EQAO, Technical Report, p. 10). This assertion is supported by the OME’s “Policy/Program Memorandum 127”, which states: “It is expected that accommodations will not alter the content of the assessment or affect the validity or reliability”. There is no research basis provided for this position. Several problems arise from this. First, validity is a central concern in accommodation research (Abedi, 2008; Acosta et al., 2008; Wolf, Herman, Bachman et al., 2008). If the EQAO and OME do not acknowledge this, specific argumentation and research evidence is necessary to support their position. Second, there are many accommodations that involve slight changes to test content (i.e. providing dictionaries, glossaries, or L1 translations), which are currently dismissed as “modifications”. Again, mainstream accommodation research often supports the use of such accommodations that are specifically geared to the language needs of ELLs (Acosta et al., 2008), and this research evidence cannot be put aside lightly. Third, even if accommodations and special provisions do
not threaten the validity and reliability when administered appropriately, the possible consequences of inconsistent administration cannot be ignored.

5.3.3 Participation Decisions: Impact on Validity and Fairness

The EQAO provides guidelines for the administration of accommodations, special provisions, and participation decisions (EQAO, Guidelines, 2009b), and devotes a short chapter of their Technical Report (EQAO, 2009a, p. 9-11) to “Administration and participation”. However, current policy and procedures in this area have several limitations. First, there is no explicit discussion of how consistency in participation might impact the validity of results, and the fairness in how these results are interpreted and acted upon. The purposes behind the guidelines are not clarified. Second, the criteria for participation decisions are only strict in determining what categories of students (i.e. ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs) might be excluded from a test administration. Within these categories, schools have discretion in deferring students and assigning them to complete the literacy requirement through OSSLC. Third, schools are not required to report the reasons for their participation decisions. Such reporting would allow greater accountability, comparability, and opportunities to refine decision making criteria. Finally, current guidelines for the administration of participation decisions lead to several difficulties and dilemmas in the reporting of school results (see below for detailed discussion of reporting).

5.3.4 Specific Quality Assurance Procedures

The EQAO’s position is that accommodations and special provisions do not affect validity and reliability. The EQAO does not discuss the potential impact of participation decisions on validity, reliability, or fairness. Despite this, the EQAO recognizes a need for “quality assurance procedures” related to the administration of accommodations, special provision, and participation decisions. There are three quality assurance procedures that the
EQAO has established to “ensure that its assessments are administered consistently and fairly across the province, and that data produced is valid and reliable” (EQAO, 2009a, *Technical Report*, p. 11):

- **Quality assurance monitors**: EQAO contracts quality assurance monitors to visit and observe the administration of the assessments (in a random sample of schools), to determine the extent to which EQAO guidelines are being followed.

- **Database analyses**: EQAO conducts two types of statistical analyses of student response data. The first analysis identifies student response patterns that suggest the possibility of collusion between two or more students. The second examines overall patterns of school results (for open-response items) and data on the proportion of students performing at or above the provincial standard (Level 3) over time. In the case of the OSSLT, the data are analyzed for unusual changes in the passing rate of a school.

- **Examination of test materials**: EQAO looks for evidence of possible irregularities in the administration of assessments in schools, following each assessment. This is done through an examination of test materials from a random sample of schools prior to scoring.

Of these three measures, only the use of *quality assurance monitors* would allow for a direct observation of a school’s conformity to guidelines on accommodations, special provisions, and exclusions. The use of *database analyses* seems to be focused on unexpected changes in achievement, not necessarily on the consistency of practices of accommodation and participation. Even if this consistency is examined, it is not clear how the EQAO would identify or address lack of consistency. Finally, it is not clear how the *examination of test materials* is relevant to the consistency of accommodations, special provisions, and exclusions for English language learners and students with special needs. There is a contradiction between the EQAO’s unwillingness to acknowledge threats to validity, reliability, and fairness, on one hand, and their implementation of these quality assurance procedures, on the other hand. If the EQAO accepts that these threats exist, they may be able to address them more effectively.
5.3.5 Reporting Accommodation, Participation and Student Achievement

The EQAO reports school, board, and provincial reports on student achievement. In these reports, information is provided on accommodations, special provisions, and participation. Results are reported separately for FTE and PE students. Participation and achievement results for all students are fore-grounded, but specific information on participation and achievement of ESL/ELD students and students with IEP is also available. Specific achievement information is also provided for students receiving special provisions and accommodations. The EQAO must address several challenges when reporting student participation, accommodation, and achievement and data.

First, there is the problem of categorization and diversity. Categorizations such as “English language learner” and “students with special needs” might give the impression of relatively homogenous and comparable groups of students. In fact, there is great diversity within these categories (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005; Solano-Flores, 2008). Current reports are not sensitive to this diversity within categories.

Second, the separation in results for FTE and PE students, and the foregrounding of FTE results, may create an impression that participation and achievement is better than it really is. For example, in the EQAO’s Highlights of Provincial Results for 2006, 2007, and 2008 only the achievement of FTE students is reported. If FTE and PE results were merged to represent the success rate of all students who wrote the test in a given year, then achievement would appear to be lower. In the 2009 Highlights, the participation and achievement of PE students is also discussed but remains separate from and less prominent than FTE results. In the EQAO’s (2008) 113-page Ontario Student Achievement report, more detailed results are only provided for FTE students. Results by students’ status (ELL students and students with IEPs) are not provided for PE students. Since a large proportion of ELL and IEP students are in the PE category, it is fair to say that provincial accountability reporting for these students is seriously compromised.

Third, achievement results are provided specifically for students who received special provisions or accommodations. Such results, if not carefully contextualized, may lead the public to incorrect conclusions about the efficacy of special provisions and accommodations. It might
create the impression of a causal link between accommodation and achievement that is not warranted.

Fourth, students are not considered eligible for the OSSLT until they have completed the Grade 9 English. There is a danger that this may become an informal way of deferring students from participating in the OSSLT. Such practices are uncommon but have been reported in other standardized testing contexts (Haney, 2008). More importantly, students who fit this description are not tracked as being eligible for the OSSLT, and not calculated in school reports.

Finally, schools are not required to report the reasons for their participation decisions. Although the EQAO reports attempt to provide the public with some guidance in interpreting results, these suggestions are very open-ended and the public is not provided adequate contextual information to assess why students are excluded from the test and how it impacts results.

5.4 Limitations of the current study

The overarching purpose of this research project is to assess whether accommodations, special provisions, and participation decisions might affect the fairness and validity of the OSSLT as a graduation requirement, improvement planning tool, and measure of quality and accountability in Ontario’s education system. The study explores whether there are inconsistencies or disparities in the administration of these special procedures across schools, subgroups of students, and years of test administration that cannot be easily accounted for and explained by other factors. If such disparities are found, then it would suggest that the validity of the testing procedures is compromised by inconsistent practices. Further investigation would be required to determine possible causes and appropriate remedies. Given this overarching purpose, analyzing the current data with the methods described in Chapter 3 has both strengths and limitations.

The main strength associated with using the EQAO’s pre-existing data is the availability of demographic and outcome information for the entire population of OSSLT-eligible students. Although identifying information has been removed, the data can be explored on the level of students, subgroups of students, schools, and years of test administration. This eliminates the
need for inferential statistical analyses (involving sampling and significance testing) and allows confidence in the statistical accuracy of results. However, there are also important limitations to using this extant population data. First, having accurate statistical results in no way guarantees the accuracy of interpretations of these results. While “statistical significance” might be obviated by having data for the entire population, the meaning and implications of results are still subject to interpretation. Second, the data was not collected with the specific research goals in mind. Therefore, there is much demographic information that would have been useful, but is not available, e.g. citizenship status, country of origin, specific languages spoken at home, length of time in Canada, specific level of ESL/ELD. Third, the data set only provides information for students who are eligible to write the OSSLT in a given year of test administration. There is a possibility that schools could influence students’ eligibility status in a variety of ways, perhaps by not allowing weaker students to pass grade nine English. Because the current study critically examines practices of excluding students from the OSSLT, this is a blind spot in the analysis caused by the way that the EQAO’s dataset was defined.

The strength of the statistical methods used, i.e. comparing percentages, is simplicity of presentation and accessibility. These methods are very similar to the EQAO’s reporting methods, and they allow specific questions to be studied in sharper focus. Readers of the study can examine the percentages and trends across schools, subgroups of students, and years of test administration, without knowledge of complex statistical procedures, and can evaluate the possible implications of these trends. However, qualifications on the interpretation of results are necessary, and the simplicity of methodology should not suggest that appropriate interpretations are also straightforward. First, the study is correlational and cannot be used to make causal interpretations. For example, if the percentage of participating OSSLT-eligible students at a school decreases, and the percentage of successful students at that school increases, then it would be tempting to interpret that the school boosted its success rates by excluding more students from the test. However, this causal relationship cannot be demonstrated using the correlational methods of this study. If there are large disparities in the percentages of students who receive accommodations, special provisions, deferrals, and exemptions across schools, subgroups, or years of test administration, then further research will be necessary to determine why these disparities exist. Second, the study relies on classifications and categories of students that are very broad and not sensitive to student diversity. For example, the ESL/ELD students or the IEP
students served at one school may be very different from those served at other schools. Third, students are designated as IEP students or ESL/ELD students based on how they are identified and the program that they are assigned to by their schools. There are possibly many students with disabilities that have not been identified as IEP students, and many students who require support to learn English that are not identified as ESL/ELD students. While the current study problematizes how students are identified and assigned to categories, it is also itself limited by how the school system classifies students.

Despite these limitations, the current study can make several important contributions. First, more detailed provincial data on the participation and accommodation of previously eligible students is made available. From 2006 to 2009, no provincial reports were produced that looked at the participation and accommodation of ESL/ELD students and students with IEPs in the previously eligible category. Since many ESL/ELD and IEP students do not complete the OSSLT in their first round of eligibility, the public loses track of them when they write the test in subsequent years as previously eligible. This study provides a better picture of the participation and accommodation of all ESL/ELD and IEP students. Second, although the EQAO produces reports for individual schools, the issue of consistency among schools is not addressed at a higher level. Currently, the public can access EQAO data for a specific school and compare it to the averages for the school board and province. The current study, although not examining individual schools, allows an examination of the “big picture” of consistency. Third, and perhaps most importantly, comparisons are provided for EL1 and EL2 students. This will allows a consideration of whether EL2 students are proportionally represented among students receiving special education services in Ontario. While the proportional representation of EL2s is a major issue of research and controversy in the United States, it has been largely neglected in Canada. There is perhaps a widespread assumption that EL2s are over-represented, countered by the concerns of a few researchers that they are in fact under-represented. Also, comparing EL1 and EL2 accommodations allows a crucial issue of equity and consistency to be addressed, one that has not been studied elsewhere.
5.5 Directions for Future Research

5.5.1 Validity and Effectiveness of Accommodations

Currently, the EQAO assumes that accommodations for students with special needs do not affect validity, which is surprising, considering extensive efforts in the United States to assess the validity and effectiveness of accommodations (Abedi, 2008; Wolf, Kao, Griffin, et al., 2008). The current EQAO practice of basing accommodation decisions on the IEP of each student is consistent with guidelines for best practices discussed in Sato et al. (2007). However, this practice alone does not ensure the validity of the accommodation. First, the OSSLT may be very different from regular classroom assessments, making different accommodations necessary. Second, classroom accommodations outlined in the IEP may or may not be consistent with research and recommendations for best practices. Third, accommodations in the IEP may be largely determined by availability of resources and other school-level factors external to the individual student.

Validity and effectiveness studies based on the interaction hypothesis and utilizing a quasi-experimental design (see Sireci, Scarpati, & Li, 2005) should be used to test existing accommodations as well as new ones. These accommodations should be validated with Ontario high school students using authentic OSSLT test materials, and include items from every section of the test. It cannot be assumed that accommodations will narrow the achievement gap and remove construct irrelevant barriers for students with disabilities: In several studies, accommodations such as time, breaks, and change of setting, and many others have been shown not to affect student scores or to have unexpected and uneven affects (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001). Data from validity and effectiveness studies cannot dictate decisions for individual students, but it may provide educators with important insights.

Since consistency in assigning accommodations is also very important for the valid comparison of results and fair decision making, research could be undertaken with the broad aim of improving consistency. Consistency cannot be improved with a “top-down” approach because local educators should continue to provide accommodations based on procedures for regular
classroom assessment outlined in each student’s IEP. Consistency research should provide “bottom-up” opportunities to bring together teachers in a process of sharing and refining knowledge, strategies, and decision making processes. Currently, only one study (Brackenreed, 2006) examines teacher perceptions and beliefs about OSSLT accommodations through the use of a survey.

5.5.2 Validity and Effectiveness of Special Provisions

It is unclear whether the current special provisions (extra-time, supervised breaks, and change of setting) are valid and effective for all ELLs. Acosta, Rivera, and Willner (2008) suggest that accommodations for English language learners must remove construct-irrelevant barriers and specifically address students’ language difference. The EQAO does not make explicit how their ELL special provisions remove construct irrelevant barriers, and none of the special provisions address linguistic needs specifically. Acosta et al. also suggest that ELL accommodations should be mapped to the level and specific student profiles of students. Currently, the EQAO does not provide guidelines for mapping special provisions, and only allows or disallows them based on the students ESL/ELD status.

As with accommodation research, only a quasi-experimental design can demonstrate the effectiveness and validity of specific special provisions for ESL/ELD students on the OSSLT. Also, research into improving the consistent administration of special provisions is necessary to ensure validity and fairness. The EQAO might flag schools where no ESL/ELD students are provided with special provisions, or where the rate of special provisions has fluctuated drastically from year to year, and follow up with these schools to assess the reasons for this.
5.5.3 Considering New Accommodations and Special Provisions

The research basis for allowing certain accommodations for students with special needs is not made explicit in EQAO publications. It can be assumed the current list was designed with consideration given to research, practices in other large-scale testing contexts, and the data on the needs of Ontario students. The EQAO does have a procedure for considering accommodations that are in a student’s IEP but not on the official list, but these procedures are seldom used. It may be that the current list is comprehensive enough to provide for the needs of all students with IEPs in Ontario. However, there is a danger that students who require accommodations that are not listed will simply be deferred, assigned to OSSLC, or exempted. A focus group study, bringing together teachers who work with students with disabilities, might generate qualitative insights and generate ideas for new accommodation strategies.

5.5.4 School-Level Decision Making and Interpretation of Guidelines

Every year the EQAO publishes new guidelines for accommodations, special provisions, and participation decisions (EQAO, *Guidelines*, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). Each new publication identifies any changes and attempts to clarify procedures. Currently, there is no formal research that examines how local educators interpret and implement the guidelines. For example, it is important to know how educators decide between participation, accommodated participation, and exclusion for students with IEPs and ELLs. If an IEP student has needs that are very complex and requires accommodations that are difficult to provide, will educators be more likely to include this student or provide an exemption? For ESL/ELD students, at what level do educators determine that a student is ready to participate? How do they choose from the combinations of special provisions that they might make available? Such questions might be addressed through survey research, case studies, and qualitative interviews with local educators.
5.5.5 Under-representation of EL2 Students in Special Education

This study provides confirming evidence that EL2 students are underrepresented among students receiving special education support. The evidence supports concerns expressed by researchers (Limbos & Geva, 2001) that English language learners with disabilities are often not receiving needed services. Further research is necessary to explore the extent, causes, and remedies for this issue. To explore the extent of the issue, it will be necessary to obtain data for all students in Ontario high schools, not only those who are eligible to participate in the OSSLT. While the OSSLT data set provides data on the entire population of OSSLT eligible students, it does not provide a full picture of students in every grade level. Also, there are additional variables, such as country of origin and length of time in Canada, which would be very useful in obtaining a clear picture of the under-representation issue, but that are not available in the current OSSLT data. To further explore the extent of the issue, data could be obtained for primary school students as well. Currently, an application is being made to information and privacy coordinator of the Ontario Ministry of Education to obtain data relevant to this issue from the Ontario Student Information System (OnSIS).

To investigate the causes of under-representation, it would be necessary to directly interview decision makers: teachers, principals, and members of IPRC committees. Currently, the most likely explanation is that educators are reluctant to test ELLs for special needs until they have had time to develop academic English proficiency (Limbos & Geva, 2001). The length of time involved in the IPRC process may also be a barrier, especially for newcomers who arrive when they are of secondary school age. Other causal considerations might include cultural differences in the willingness of parents and students to be tested for special needs and demographic factors in specific communities of newcomers that might influence the prevalence and identification of special needs (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

There are already research-supported approaches to the early testing of special needs in English language learners, such as letter naming fluency and phonological skills (Gersten & Geva, 2003). Research on remedies should consider what proposals are most viable and valid in the Ontario context. Research might also suggest how such early identification testing procedures could be implemented, and how services could be delivered to students with
identified needs. Concerns about inappropriately diagnosing culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities, and the negative consequences of this for stigmatization and inappropriate pedagogy (Cummins, 1984), remain very important today. Even if EL2 students are underrepresented as a group, there is still and danger of misidentifying individual students. Implementation research on early testing should focus primarily on getting students the specific assistance that they require, perhaps even outside the special education program. Perhaps the official diagnosis of disability could continue to be delayed, if students were able to receive necessary intervention on the basis early testing.

5.6 Recommendations

In this section, recommendations are offered to improve the administration of special provisions, accommodations and exclusions. These recommendations focus on clarifying administrative categories, refining decision making criteria, implementing test-specific research, training local test administrators, and providing necessary supports. Although many of these recommendations refer to testing procedures that are within the purview of the EQAO, some recommendations refer to the need for broader systemic reforms.

*Improving special provisions*

**Clarify the operational definition of English language learner as a basis for assigning special provisions and ensure that principals and decision makers have a common definition.** Currently, special provisions are only available to *English language learners* as defined by OME (2007). The OME discusses ELLs in very broad and inclusive terms, but also seems to suggest a student will only be tracked as an ELL if they receive specific ESL/ELD programming. Local practices for identifying students as ELLs may vary greatly
across schools and districts and depend largely on the availability of funding for ESL/ELD programming.

Provide training and support for implementing special provisions. EQAO provides a Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals, and Exemptions (2009), which outlines policies on special provisions, but leaves unanswered many practical questions about the how to implement these procedures. Training and additional support in the form of funding and staff may be necessary for all schools to administer these procedures in a consistent and uniform manner.

Initiate efficacy and validity studies in Ontario to determine whether the current special provisions of extra time, supervised breaks, and change of setting are in fact serving their intended purpose. It is unclear whether these accommodations are effective at closing the achievement gap between ELLs and the general student population. In the United States, research conducted in various large scale assessment contexts has yielded contradictory results, with some studies supporting efficacy of time and setting accommodations and other studies finding no evidence of efficacy (Abedi, 2008). Research specific to the OSSLT is necessary.

Research the viability, efficacy, and validity of introducing the use dictionaries or glossaries as an accommodation on the OSSLT. Although the use of dictionaries and glossaries might be considered a modification under current policy, mainstream American research treats dictionaries and glossaries as accommodations. The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) and Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) must clarify their definition of modifications versus accommodations, and consider whether dictionaries and glossaries in fact alter the construct of the test. Currently, no special provision for ELLs specifically addresses the language barrier. Perhaps it is assumed that extra time, breaks, and change of setting will give ELLs more opportunity to process and focus on challenging linguistic features of the test. However, there is no local research to validate this assumption.
Improving accommodations

Continue to assign accommodations based on classroom assessment practices described in the individual education plan (IEP). Accommodations should be provided on the basis of individual needs, not disability category (Sato et al., 2007; USED, 2004). Accommodations research with students with specific disabilities (e.g. learning disability) is necessary to validate accommodations on a large scale and provide general insights, but decisions must continue to be made on an individual basis. Developing the IEP involves several professionals and stake-holders who have detailed knowledge of the learner’s needs. The process of IEP development is well established and accountable. Therefore, it continues to be the best available criteria for assigning accommodations on the OSSLT.

Train teachers and principals to identify cases where “special permission” might be necessary for an ELL newcomer to receive accommodations, even if that student does not have an IEP. Make this process more accessible, clearly defined, and relevant for working with newcomer students. This study provides confirming evidence for the observation that students who speak English as a second language are underrepresented among students who have IEPs and receive special education programming (Geva, 2006; Limbos & Geva, 2001). This being the case, they are also ineligible to receive accommodations. Currently, the EQAO does allow special permission for accommodations in very exceptional cases, but there are very few cases where Ontario students actually receive this permission. The process for identifying special cases and receiving special permission must become more established, transparent, and effective. Although it is outside the mandate and control of the EQAO, discussion is also necessary at the provincial level to improve identification and intervention for ELLs with special learning needs.

Make extra time and change of setting available options in any situation where a student is receiving accommodations, regardless of whether or not these are specifically mentioned in the IEP. Accommodations involve procedures that require more time to implement and administer. Also, it is often necessary to separate students receiving accommodations because the accommodation might be disruptive to other students. If extra time
and change of setting are introduced for practical reasons, then they should not be treated as accommodations in and of themselves.

**Provide training, support and resources for teachers and school staff to implement accommodation practices in their classrooms and on large-scale tests.** The EQAO’s *Guide* (2009) provides the specific accommodations that should be made available to students with special needs on the basis of practices outlined in the IEP. However, many of these accommodations require special training, equipment, and funding that may not be accessible to all schools. Centralized training and support is necessary to ensure that all Ontario students can participate with access to appropriate accommodations.

**Conduct research in Ontario schools to determine the efficacy and validity of accommodations for learners with diverse abilities and special needs.** Large scale testing contexts share many similarities, and findings on the efficacy and validity of accommodations on one test can often provide insights into other testing situations. However, large-scale testing in Ontario could benefit greatly from testing accommodations locally based on actual OSSLT test items. It is not a given that accommodations will help to reduce the achievement gap and eliminate construct irrelevant barriers on the OSSLT. In order gain insights and improve accommodation practices, specific accommodations must be tested.

*Improving participation decisions:*

**Continue to base deferral decisions on the needs of individual students, but require schools to report the specific reasons for deferrals.** Under current guidelines, students can be deferred if they have an IEP, if they are ESL/ELD students, and in some other exceptional cases where health or temporary injury issues prevent a student from participating. Within these broad categories, however, there is no reporting as to the reasons that some students are deferred and others are not. The EQAO encourages principals to compare their school’s deferral rates to other similar schools, but there are no procedures in place to report the specific criteria for deferral decisions across schools.
**Provide training, support and supervision for deferral decisions.** The EQAO’s Guide (2009) provides only broad policy on the categories of students that can be deferred. If guidelines cannot be made more specific, then perhaps centralized training and support could provide greater consistency and uniformity.

**Track students who have completed one year of secondary school, but who are not participating in the OSSLT because they did not successfully complete grade 9 English.** These students should be tracked as “deferred” and the specific reason for their deferral should be noted. Currently, a student may be effectively deferred from the OSSLT if they are held back in grade 9 English. Because such students are not considered eligible to write the OSSLT, they are not tracked.

**Require schools to report specific reasons for allowing individual students to fulfill the literacy requirement through OSSLC.** Work towards provincial criteria that provide more specific guidelines for these decisions. Currently, a student can fulfill the literacy requirement through alternative Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) if they were either unsuccessful or deferred one time on the OSSLT. From the point of view of fairness to the individual student, this is appropriate because some students may simply not be able to demonstrate their abilities through a single standardized test. From the point of view of accountability and the valid reporting of school data, however, the OSSLC must be viewed essentially as an exemption. It is very important, therefore, to ensure that there is a fair and consistent criteria across schools for allowing students to take the coursework alternative.

**Continue to allow exemptions only for students who have an IEP stating that they are not working towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).** Develop different standards to ensure quality and accountability for this group of students. Although these students will be exempt from the OSSLT/OSSLC requirement, they should not fall complete outside of the quality and accountability evaluation. Other evaluations should be developed for this category of students.

**Provide opportunities for principals to meet at district and provincial levels to review all exclusion decision procedures and develop criteria for these decisions.** The process of “peer-review” has been recommended in the American context to help states harmonize their accommodation policies (Sato et al., 2007). Similar practices might be
developed for exclusion decisions in Ontario. Even without the development of firm criteria, consistency might be enhanced if principals have a formal opportunity to discuss exclusions with their colleagues.

*Additional data necessary to better understand student diversity*

In addition to data currently collected from student records and student surveys, the EQAO should gather additional data on: Country of origin, specific first language, immigration/citizenship status, length of residency in Canada, SES, specific type of ESL/ELD programming received, ESL/ELD level, previous attendance, and history of schooling opportunities. This data is necessary to better understand the underrepresentation of EL2s among students with IEPs, i.e. whether there are specific subgroups of EL2s who are underrepresented among IEP students. It might also help to address discrepancies in student achievement among special populations of students, and help policy makers focus attention on groups that may be under-performing due to social disadvantage.

*Standardizing identification procedures for English Language Learners*

The Ontario Ministry of Education should develop standard testing procedures to identify students as English language learners. Currently, identification procedures vary across schools and school districts (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009). Although this reform is beyond the mandate of the EQAO, the issue itself is a major concern for validity and fairness in EQAO testing and reporting.

The Ontario Ministry of Education should guarantee the availability of ESL/ELD programs accessible to students in all school districts. Standardized identification procedures
would entail standardizing service delivery for reasons of equality. If students at different schools have uneven access to ESL/ELD programs, their performance on standardized tests will likely be impacted. Again, although this reform is beyond EQAO’s mandate, it has clear implications for the validity and fairness of the test.

*Identifying special education and accommodation needs for newcomers*

The Ontario Ministry of Education should develop procedures for the early identification of disabilities in English language learners and newcomers. When newcomers are of secondary school age, there is little time for them to develop their academic language proficiency before they are ready for post-secondary studies. If attempts are not made to identify special needs early, these needs may go unrecognized. Although Limbos and Geva (2001) have suggested possibilities for early identification of dyslexia, there has been very little research in the Ontario context about how this might be implemented. Also, there are concerns about the possible consequences of stigmatizing and inappropriate diagnosis of disabilities (Cummins, 1984). The OME should develop a standardized approach to assessing newcomers, aimed at identifying specific needs and courses of remediation and pedagogy. For lower-incidence disabilities, official diagnosis might continue to be deferred, provided that specific needs are identified and addressed.
References


Walz, L., Albus, D., Thompson, S., and Thurlow, (2000). Effect of a multiple day test accommodation on the performance of special education students (Minnesota Report 34), University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes, Minneapolis, MN.


Annexure

University of Toronto
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 24868

January 21, 2010

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Dear Dr. Jang and Mr. Black-Allen:

Re: Your research protocol entitled “Validity and fairness in assigning accommodations, special provisions, deferrals, and exemptions on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: January 21, 2010
Expiry Date: January 20, 2011
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s delegated review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Gyewu
Research Ethics Coordinator

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