

# How likely are English learners to graduate from high school? Study shows it depends on race, gender and income

May 6 2024

---



Credit: cottonbro studio from Pexels

English learners are, on average, less likely to graduate high school in four years than students who never needed to learn English in school.

But social identities like race and gender make a difference, and some groups of English learners are actually more likely to graduate, according to a new study by a team of education researchers at NYU and the University of Houston.

For instance, [young women](#) who ever learned English in school are more likely to graduate in four years than young men who did not. Similarly, Black English learners tend to have better four-year graduation rates than Black peers who never needed to learn English in school.

"Language learning doesn't happen in a vacuum, so students—both those who are currently learning English and students who have already become fluent in the language—have a whole host of social factors that influence their school trajectories in ways that might be really different from students who never had to learn English in school," says Michael Kieffer, an associate professor of literacy education at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and the senior author of the study, which appears in the journal *Educational Researcher*.

"This study highlights the very diverse outcomes of students who learn English in school and shows that this group is not a monolith," says Benjamin Le, a doctoral student at NYU Steinhardt and the lead author of the study. "We see that English learner classification does matter for high school graduation, but more importantly, the extent that it matters depends on other [social identities](#) of the student."

Le, Kieffer, and their co-authors analyzed data for 127,931 New York City [high school](#) students who began 9th grade in 2013 and 2014 to see whether students graduated on time, defined as graduating within four years. Their data included race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and English learner status.

They classified English learners based on whether students had ever

received federally mandated language services to become proficient in English ("ever-ELs") and compared them with students who never had to learn English in school ("never-ELs").

Overall, their findings showed that never-ELs were 4% more likely to graduate within four years than ever-ELs, consistent with previous research.

However, comparing English learner status with the added variable of gender revealed different outcomes: ever-EL young women were 4% more likely to graduate than never-EL young men. In addition, Black students were the only racial/ethnic group for which English learners were more likely to graduate in four years.

Latine English learners were found to be the least likely to graduate in four years, and Asian/Pacific Islander ever-ELs were substantially more likely to graduate than Latine and Black students, regardless of the latter groups' English learner status.

Differences in graduation between ever-ELs and never-ELs also depended on [socioeconomic status](#). Ever-ELs in [low-income neighborhoods](#) (where the median household income was below \$40,000) were equally likely to graduate compared to never-ELs in similar neighborhoods. But in middle- and high-income neighborhoods with household incomes above \$40,000, ever-ELs were less likely to graduate than never-ELs in similar neighborhoods.

**More information:** Ever English Learner 4-Year Graduation: Towards an Intersectional Approach, *Educational Researcher* (2024).

Provided by New York University

Citation: How likely are English learners to graduate from high school? Study shows it depends on race, gender and income (2024, May 6) retrieved 12 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-english-learners-high-school-gender.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.