

Title *An introductory look at the academic trajectories of ESL students*  
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Research Question: *How do the academic trajectories of ESL youth vary by ethno-cultural background and English language proficiency? What is the interaction between these two background factors?*

Importance: *In British Columbia, about \$60 000 000 a year is spent on supplemental funding to assist ESL students in achieving equitable academic outcomes, despite little knowledge of these funds' effects or most efficient applications. Canadian empirical research describing ESL academic trajectories is sparse, and somewhat contradictory. The current paper compares the graduation rates, and participation and performance in English 12 and Principles of Math 12, among the native English speakers and the subgroups of ESL students who compose BC's 1997 grade eight cohort (n=54 436).*

Research Findings: *Trajectories vary widely by ethno-cultural group. Chinese speakers consistently achieve higher than the native English speaker baseline. Speakers of Korean and Persian languages also tend to navigate favourable trajectories. Spanish, Vietnamese and speakers of Philippino and South Asian languages achieve well below the native English speaker baseline. Students at low levels of English proficiency upon entry to grade eight also navigate lower trajectories than their peers with higher English proficiency. However, the deleterious effects of low English proficiency vary widely by ethno-cultural group.*

Implications: *Data need to be disaggregated for decision making. The 'ESL' label masks salient differences in achievement and academic trajectories among subgroups, and the large number of high achieving Chinese speakers inflates the estimation of ESL achievement. Similarly, ESL students who require ESL service in high school do not achieve as highly as 'ESL ever' peers. Support should be directed to the subgroups most clearly in need, rather than adopting one-size-fits-all policies. More effective language and content learning may require any of the following: credit granting 'sheltered' ESL content classes taught by teachers with specialist ESL knowledge; more flexible scheduling of ESL human resources to support students within credit bearing mainstream classes; and, ongoing ESL support throughout the academic career. Finally, allowing extra time for ESL (and other) students to graduate appears to be an extremely important booster of achievement and equity among subgroups.*