

Developing a strategy for English as an additional language and English language learners: A research review and bibliography

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This article presents an initial review of research (published in English) on the impact, internationally, of English as an additional language (EAL) provision in the school sector. The impact is on English language learners (ELL): children and young people for whom English is an additional language and who are thought to need extra help with English to succeed in the school system. The review looks not only at the impact on children and young people, but also at the nature and efficacy of the teacher workforce, concluding that there are several gaps in provision and in research in the field.

Key Words: English as an additional language (EAL), English language learners (ELL), bilingual, plurilingual, teacher workforce, research

I. Introduction

As part of a project on developing a strategy on English as an Additional Language (EAL) for the teaching workforce in the UK, a scoping study was undertaken to see what research was available on the topic. A scoping study (see Torgerson, 2003, pp. 27-8) *maps* the research that is published. It does not review it in depth. The value of a scoping study is that it can map the existing research territory to be covered and, crucially, identify gaps in the field. This particular study goes further than a scoping study, however, in discussing some of the key articles published in the last decade, with a view to providing a foundation for further research in the field, as well as to inform policy and practice.

The research questions that drove the review were as follows:

‘what research has been undertaken [in English] on the impact of EAL provision in the school sector in the UK and elsewhere?’, ‘what research is there on the nature and/or efficacy of the teacher workforce in EAL in the UK and elsewhere?’ and ‘what gaps are there in terms of research and provision?’. In short, the review focuses first on the impact on learners, then on the nature and efficacy of the teaching workforce; and then identifies gaps in the field.

II. Background

A more coherent strategy for the EAL teaching workforce in the UK was the major aim of a project undertaken by the Institute of Education and Learning Skills Council on behalf of the UK government’s Training and Development Agency between 2008 and 2010. Provision for EAL in the UK had been patchy up to this point, with a number of limited-life projects, each of which attempted to address the question of English as an additional language, largely from a remedial perspective. Many of these projects were successful in their own terms, but did not address the nature of the teaching workforce. The TDA project provided a strategy for a more coherent approach, specifically with regard to the preparation and development of the teaching workforce as a whole: teachers, classroom assistants, second language specialists, special educational needs teachers, and others. The scale of the issue to be addressed is large: the government department responsible for education, the Department for Education, presented figures for January 2009 that showed that 12.8% of the school population overall has a first language other than English. This figure does not mean that all those students required EAL assistance; many of them may have been fluently bilingual.

But it goes without saying that the acquisition and use of English in the school system is essential to understanding, involvement and progress – not only in the subject English, but across the curriculum.

Although the research has focused primarily on the situation in the UK (and more specifically, England), the search strategy looked at sources of research to identify relevant practice internationally.

However, a key search term has been English as an Additional Language (EAL) or its equivalent term in the USA, English language learners (ELL), rather than the broader and different categories and fields of English Language Teaching (ELT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL) or English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The focus of the review, then, is on the politically-informed notion of English as an Additional Language as taught in schools in the UK, but with light shed upon it from international perspectives. The term English as an *additional* language recognizes that students may have more than one language other than English:

Many new arrivals from overseas have English as an additional language (EAL) needs. They may speak, understand or be literate in more than one language and may have some experience of English but will require support to acquire fluency in English and to access the curriculum (QCDA, 2009).

The present study focussed not just on new arrivals, but on all students who are identified as in need of English language support.

III. Methodological approach

1. The search strategy

The methodological approach, falling between a scoping study and an ‘expert’ review undertaken by a single person, has limitations. It is not a systematic review, which would require a small team to provide cross-checking and moderating activities. However, as the bibliographies show, the searching was extensive and an informal team advised on identifying sources. The following sources were examined: The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC); PsycINFO; the Campbell Collaboration Social, Psychological, Educational Criminological Trials Register (C2SPECTR); the British Education Index; and other electronic databases. All searches were for the period 2000-2009 inclusive. A hand search was also conducted, based on the expertise and advice

of those within the project team and within the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC).

More detail is provided here for transparency and in case readers would like to replicate the search. In order to identify relevant literature, the following academic electronic databases were searched:

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Contains over one million bibliographic records of journals articles, books and book chapters, research reports, conference papers, theses and other education-related materials from 1996 onwards. Includes online thesaurus.

PsycINFO

Contains citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters, books, and technical reports in the field of psychology and psychological aspects of related disciplines, including educational studies. Journal coverage includes international material selected from more than 1,900 periodicals. Current chapter and book coverage includes worldwide English-language material published from 1987-present.

British Education Index (BEI)

Indexes over 300 education and training journals published in the British Isles from 1976 to date. Also contains reports and conference literature.

Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)

Indexes more than 1,725 journals across 50 social sciences disciplines, and indexes individually selected, relevant items from over 3,300 of the world's leading scientific and technical journals.

Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)

Indexes around 650 English language social science journals. Subject coverage includes social services, health, employment, ethnic studies, education, criminology, and related areas.

The Campbell Library and C2-SPECTR

A database of trials and systematic reviews in the areas of education, criminal justice and social welfare.

Keywords and search terms for the electronic searches were developed. These were used in combination as follows:

1. teach* within 3 (method* or strategy*) **or** (teacher or instructional) effectiveness **or** teacher role
2. English within 3 (additional language) **or** EAL **or** English language learners **or** ELL
3. (bilingual or multilingual or plurilingual) within 3 (student* or pupil* or child* or adolescent* or learner*) **or** bilingual education
4. 2 or 3
5. 1 and 4

All of the search terms were used in free text searching. The searches were limited to journal articles, books and book chapters, research reports and conference papers published in English between 2000 and 2009. In addition to searches of electronic resources, a hand search was also conducted, based on the expertise and advice of those within the project team and within NALDIC. The journal *Language and Education* was hand-searched for articles published since 2000. Furthermore, the search portals (www.eep.ac.uk, www.ceruk.ac.uk and www.ttrb.ac.uk) were used to double-check that little or no research had been missed.

2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Research was sought that:

1. had been published since 2000.
2. was in the English language, and about the teaching of English.
3. used any research methodology and method, including descriptive case study accounts and systematic reviews.
4. looked at the impact of EAL and ELL provision.

5. looked at the nature and/or efficacy of the teacher workforce (teaching assistants, teachers, managers).
6. was concerned with the school sector (i.e. 3-18).

Exclusion criteria largely reflect the inclusion criteria. They are useful in identifying and selecting research more precisely. Specifically, research was excluded that:

1. was published before 2000.
2. was in languages other than English; or was about the teaching of languages other than English, except in bilingual or multilingual contexts alongside English.
3. was identified as ELT, ESL, ESOL or EFL.
4. dealt with provision outside the 3-18 age range.
5. did not address the teacher workforce.
6. was not research, i.e. did not contribute to new knowledge and did not give an account of its methodology and/or methods.

It is important to note that the inclusion and exclusion criteria were fairly broad, especially in their focus on any research methodology and method. This was not a study that sought to limit itself to randomized controlled trials or, more generally, to intervention studies. There are weaknesses in such an approach, as the narrow measurement of ‘effectiveness’ would be compromised; but the strengths are that at the mapping stage, research that was relevant to the questions being asked would be identified and would help to map the field more thoroughly. On the other hand, the research review was delimited by excluding research into English Language Teaching (ELT), English as a Second Language (ESL), English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – all overlapping and broadly relevant fields in themselves, but not specifically focussed on the immediate political context in which we were working. Furthermore, the focus was clearly on *research* rather than on policy papers or untheorized accounts of practice.

3. Data collection, analysis and synthesis

The initial searching was by title and abstract. A screening exercise of titles and abstracts was undertaken, erring on the side of inclusion. A bibliography of included and excluded studies has been composed and is attached as part of the references. Following screening, a map of the field was drawn up and gaps in the literature were identified.

The map did, in fact, reveal a large number of studies for inclusion. The rest of the present article gives an account of the map by synthesizing the results of the individual studies. The synthesis followed the simple process of grid or matrix analysis, where key words identified in the search strategy were used to extract data from the summaries of each of the studies. This approach is not unlike the use of grid analysis for the synthesis and distillation of interview (and other types of qualitative) data.

IV. What are the results?

Fifty-five studies were identified in the period from 2000 to 2009 that begin to provide a research basis for the future development of English as an Additional Language for the school workforce. The full annotated list (map) is available as an appendix in Andrews (2009).

The indications from the research to date are that there are ten major areas that need to be addressed:

1. *A policy framework that sets out curricular and assessment standards and requirements for EAL development* (Butcher et al., 2007; Christensen & Stanat, 2007; Murakami, 2008; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006). This area is probably the most important for forging a coherent national policy for the support of EAL teaching in any country. Where there is no such curricular document, provision tends to be patchy; and where a curriculum document exists, but is not supported by an assessment framework (see 10, below), it is likely to be honoured more in the breach than the observance. The

existence of a national framework indicates that EAL policy is a priority for a country/nation.

2. *A knowledge base for teachers that includes cultural, linguistic and cognitive dimensions* (Christensen & Stanat, 2007; Dresser, 2007; Flynn, 2007; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Leung & Creese, 2008) including:
 - a. *Language proficiency*. Paneque and Barbeta (2006), for example, in examining the efficacy of special education teachers of English language learners, found that no significant differences were found for teacher preparation, years of service or socio-economic status of students; but language capability in students correlated with teacher perceptions of self-efficacy, where teachers also spoke those languages.
 - b. *An understanding that many of the language strategies used for EAL teaching are good for English as a mother tongue learners too* (Facella et al., 2005; Leung & Slavin, 2005; Yoon, 2007). Leung and Slavin's report is itself a research review of the effectiveness of reading programmes for second language learners. Its conclusions are very close to those of the current article, with the exception that (methodologically) it calls for more randomised controlled trials in the field.
 - c. *Training in the distinctions between EAL and EAL with special needs*, (Layton et al., 2002). All too often, the two categories have been conflated, resulting in capable and/or bright English language learners being categorized institutionally as having learning difficulties when what they need is fast-track English language support.
3. *Bridging of the divide between schools and the community* (Conteh et al., 2007; Guo & Mohan, 2008; Karabenick & Noda, 2004) so that:
 - a. *There is a move away from a deficit model of EAL* (Conteh et al., 2007; Parke et al., 2002) towards high expectations (Olson & Land, 2007).

There is a persistent deficit model applied to the EAL/ELL field which, related to point 2c above, has a holding-back effect on learners for whom English is an additional language.

- b. *The full range of linguistic and cultural competence is taken into account in designing literacy interventions in classrooms* (Wallace, 2005). Wallace studied the developing understanding of literacy in four bilingual year 5 children in London within the context of the government's 'literacy hour' initiative, and found that the literacy hour only reflected a small part of the students' experience of, influence on and interest in language.
 - c. *There is recognition that national policy needs to be interpreted locally* (Creese, 2003; Leung & Creese, 2008). This is a point that needs to be taken into account in the formation and implementation of national policy: those local circumstances are often distinctive, and that flexibility must operate in order to maximize potential for English language learners and teachers.
4. *Bilingualism needs to be encouraged from an early age* (Kenner, 2004), where possible, and *the fact that bilingual pupils are better at some aspects of English than others needs to be recognized and built upon* (Cameron & Besser, 2004; Robertson, 2006; Wiese, 2004). Cameron and Besser's paper, for example, is an extensive report, reviewing research in a policy context. It focuses on 'advanced learners' of English as an additional language, i.e. those who have been in the country for more than 5 years. Scripts of 264 pupils were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify features of writing that pupils learning EAL handle less well than native speakers/writers. The results show that EAL pupils handle a variety of genres, prepositions and the composition of short, fixed phrases less well than English as a mother tongue students. Other features are handled less well by lower achieving EAL pupils.

However, use of metaphor in the higher achieving EAL pupils was better handled than by English as a mother tongue students, contrary to many assumptions.

5. *There needs to be a move towards a plurilinguism in policy and practice* (Mehmedbegovic, 2007). The paper by Mehmedbegovic is itself a policy and data review on language diversity in London schools, suggesting a move toward the concept of plurilinguistic profiles for all learners. Such profiles detail what all learners know in terms of different languages, and to what extent they have competence and fluency – and need development. The conceptual shift is important in that it no longer sees ‘English as an additional language’ as a deficit position for learners (see 3a above).
6. *Mainstreaming of EAL pupils must be retained as a principle* (Hite & Evans, 2006) with high expectations and sufficient language support (Chen, 2007).
7. *Models of partnership between EAL specialists and curriculum content specialists need to be developed*, moving from support through transmitter/explainer and interpreter modes to a full partnership model (Creese, 2004, 2006; Gardner, 2006).
8. *The importance of oral communication must be recognized, in more than one language* (Conteh, 2007; Estrada, 2005; Fumoto et al., 2007).
9. *The importance of developing academic registers specific to academic success for EAL pupils must be recognized* (Kotler et al., 2001).
10. *Assessment frameworks for EAL development and achievement are needed* (Rea-Dickins, 2001) with:
 - a. distinctions between summative and formative assessment clearly made (Leung & Rea-Dickins, 2007).
 - b. more sensitivity to context (Teasdale & Leung, 2000; Walters, 2007).
 - c. awareness of the potential for learning of assessment models and encounters (Rea-Dickins, 2006).

- d. distinctions between language learning needs, special educational needs and curriculum content needs made (Rea-Dickins, 2001).
- e. lessons learnt from successful models in the USA and Australia (Scott & Erduran, 2004).

V. What are the gaps?

There are a number of gaps in the research that has been published since 2000. These can be identified as follows:

1. Although there is plenty of policy analysis, there is little research that addresses pedagogic practices in EAL teaching. Most classroom based research is small-scale, based on teacher perceptions, and/or anecdotal. While there is a place for such research, there is a distinct lack of:
 - a. larger-scale studies
 - b. longitudinal studies
 - c. studies with a balance of qualitative and quantitative data
 - d. comparative studies
2. As a reflection of (1), there are few accounts of learning¹, other than individual case studies. Again, with regard to learning, there is a distinct lack of:
 - a. larger-scale studies
 - b. longitudinal studies
 - c. studies with a balance of qualitative and quantitative data
 - d. comparative studies
3. Most of the research appears to be focussed on the early years and on primary education. There is a gap in studies that focus on the 11-18 age group.
4. There is little or no research or analysis on routes into EAL teaching, or on the continuing professional

1) Learning, *per se*, fell outside the remit of the present review if it did not imply the involvement of teaching and teachers.

development needs of teachers in this respect.

5. Because it is a relatively new field, there is little research on plurilingualism and its practices and/or policies.

VI. Conclusion

There are inevitably limitations to a research review that is undertaken individually, even with expert advice and support. There are possibilities of bias. However, every effort was taken to minimize bias in the present study, and the comprehensiveness of the review will be an advantage. More importantly, it seems worth offering the report for publication at this stage, as further studies might be identified that would strengthen it further; and clear gaps have already been noted that need to be filled by future research in the field. There is also scope for similar reviews based on research in other languages, e.g. Korean, Chinese, Spanish. The results show a dearth of longitudinal studies; of large scale studies; of mixed methods studies; and of comparative studies. There is little research on the secondary years of schooling, on the analysis of routes into teaching English as an additional language in the school system; or on the concept of plurilingualism.

As national policy is reviewed and developed on the needs of English language learners and of the teaching of English as an additional language, it is important to have a research foundation on which to build. It is hoped the present study and its bibliography may inform not just policy-making in England and the UK, but also more widely in the USA and Canada (where much of the reviewed research originates) and elsewhere in world where matters of curriculum design, teacher expertise and provision for second language learners are of concern.

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Instead of a conventional set of references, a bibliography is provided to aid further research and for policy and practice use. It is divided into five sections: 1) studies included in the map because they met the inclusion criteria and were thus deemed to be highly relevant to answering the research questions; 2) studies that were sourced, read and screened (i.e. they were read quickly to determine their relevance to the questions in hand – these articles were relevant to the field but not to the particular research questions); 3) full texts obtained but where there was not enough time in the confines of the project to read them – these may be of relevance to the research questions; 4) full texts that were sought but were not obtained during the timescale of the review – again, these may be of significance; and 5) further references for contextual use.

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