

How to support language acquisition

Withdrawal or in-class support?

Should EAL learners be withdrawn from class and given English lessons? Research tells us that this is not the best way to learn a language. Language is acquired most effectively in **meaningful contexts** where the child feels a real need to understand and use language. In school, meaningful contexts are provided by the **curriculum** and the **classroom**.

When focusing on communication in a meaningful context, children learn grammatical rules and vocabulary subconsciously. This is language acquisition and is quite different from language learning. It is how children develop the ability to understand and speak fluently. For beginner EAL learners, the teaching of grammar rules tends to lack meaning. Time to look and listen is far more supportive at this stage. Explicit grammar teaching is most effective when it is used to fill in gaps that advanced EAL learners may have. It is most effectively used to support writing because writing provides sufficient time for learners to remember the rules and consider how they might be applied.

The classroom is really the best place for all your EAL learners, except for very specific, time limited intervention. Any intervention support for beginner learners of EAL should focus on 'survival language' and the language of the curriculum.

Making input accessible to EAL learners and supporting language acquisition

Here's a checklist of ways in which teachers can ensure that EAL learners in the classroom understand age appropriate curriculum content and acquire English:

Build upon prior learning

- Explicitly link lesson content to pupils' backgrounds and experiences.
- Explicitly link new learning to previous learning, including encouraging pupils to use their first language to support learning.

Make input comprehensible

- Use speech appropriate for students' proficiency level, e.g. slower rate, enunciation, repetition, and simple sentence structure.
- Use a variety of techniques to make meaning clear, e.g. modelling, visuals, hands on activities, demonstrations, gestures, body language
- Emphasize key vocabulary e.g., introduce, write, repeat, and highlight key words.

Other strategies

- Use scaffolding techniques (providing the right amount of support to move pupils from one level of understanding to a higher level) throughout lessons.
- Provide frequent opportunities for **interaction and discussion** between teacher/pupil and among pupils through talk partners and group activities.
 - Small group collaborative and practical activities involving speaking and listening will support children to attach meaning to language.
 - New arrivals will learn English more quickly if they work with a variety of other pupils, particularly those who offer good models of spoken English.
 - Involve pupils in discussions as much as possible, even if they are not able to respond.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to clarify key concepts in the first language as needed with an adult, peer, or first language text.
- Ensure that the pupil encounters the same language in a range of contexts/ activities.
- When differentiating, it is important to try to give pupils a meaningful task that is related to the lesson.