

EAL STUDENT VOICES:
THEIR EXPERIENCES OF
MAINSTREAMING IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

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Aims of study

- to foreground EAL learners' own voices
- to discover how they represented their school experiences and their learning within an English-medium environment in their own terms
- to identify ways in which their perceptions could be used to improve their learning experiences within UK schooling.

In addition, as a secondary focus of attention, we investigated how teaching staff perceived the current situation and the needs of EAL learners and what they viewed as appropriate responses to these needs.

However, this presentation will focus on pupils' views

Research questions



- What are the perceptions of EAL learners of their language learning experiences?
- How do these perceptions differ from those of their teachers?

Background information

- In England there are currently over one million pupils in schools who are at different stages of learning and using English as an additional language (EAL)
- In Scotland numbers much smaller, but there has been a significant increase since 2007 from 741 to 32,509 in 2014
- In many areas of the UK 'ethnolinguistic diversity and EAL can now be fairly regarded as *ordinary* and *permanent* features of schooling education' (Leung, 2014)

Background information

- There is a variety of terms used to refer to EAL pupils and teachers
- EAL pupils are NOT a homogeneous group
- Distinction between learning English as an end in itself, but also learning English as a means to access subject content and specific literacies of range of school subjects.

Key bodies of literature used to frame the study

- EAL policy contexts in Scotland and England
- EAL Assessment frameworks in each country
- Migration
- Transitions
- Language diversity and literacies
- Languages and identities
- Translanguaging
- Language of school subjects
- BICS/CALP
- EAL and Teacher education

Method and methodological decisions

Research design

- 5 researchers, 3 from Edinburgh University and 2 from Reading University
- Case study approach, one secondary school in Scotland and one in England
- Interactive interviews, both individual and focus group, used to represent pupil voice:
 - four focus group interviews with EAL students: two groups aged 11-13, and two aged 14-16;
 - ten individual interviews with students;
 - an individual interview with an English teacher; and
 - interviews with an EAL teacher and with two teaching assistants.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- **No blank slates: backgrounds and prior learning experiences of the EAL students**
- **Diversity in migration experience, *global travellers*, transitions and family break-up**
- **Languages: some already bilingual learners who could switch between different languages**

Student: We just speak Slovakian but it depends ... speaking Slovakian but if you can find the word – say it in Hungarian, it's like switching between two languages.

Interviewer: Yeah, sure. Yeah, so, so when you were at primary school in Slovakia were you learning Slovakian and Hungarian?

Student: English!

Interviewer: And English, yeah, so Hungarian, just from your background Hungarian, not in school?

Student: Yeah. I think I learnt it when I was around five because I was at the nursery at that time and there are more Hungarian kids than Slovakian.... So I learnt it from nursery, also from cartoons.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- **Parents' facility in English**
- **Parents' positive views of learning English**

Interviewer: What about your parents, what do they think about education in England?

Student: Well, they said that 'cause English is the most popular language in everywhere, so not really everywhere, but so my Mum and my Dad decided that for my life because I wanted to be a computer man and going to make some computers and programs so my Mum and my Dad that we should learn English so he can have a better life, 'cause if I don't learn another language I might not go to that country and not speak that. So, as people say, when you are young you can learn more.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- Languages spoken at home
- Literacy in languages other than English: large differences in the extent to which literacy in their first language had been achieved

Interviewer: ... do you still get a chance to read things in Polish?

Student 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you actually have books in Polish and –

Student 1: Yeah, like books and leaflets and stuff. Yeah.

Student: I can't technically write or do that much, but I can write a few words like – I can write my name.

Interviewer: Yeah. Would you like to be able to write in Urdu, or does it not matter?

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ *Value attached to a first language: contrasting views*

Interviewer: So how do you feel about using Malayalam, how do you feel about using your other languages?

Student: It feels good, because it's your first language firstly and I was born there and I learnt it, it makes me really happy that I have another language. I could say to my friends I have another language, it's something nice.... It's something really nice.

Interviewer: Would you like to get reading in Nepalese going more, or do you feel it doesn't really matter now?

Student: It doesn't matter, I guess, because I'm now having to – English is just a world-renowned language. Everyone speaks English in every country; and Nepalese they only speak it in one or two countries, so I think there's no point at the moment learning how to speak it now.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- **Positive views of having more than one language: both intrinsic and extrinsic value – for future career, to support the acquisition of a third language and cognitive benefits**

Student: Learning languages it actually helps you to think, um – I don't know, I can't say.

Interviewer: Say a bit more about what's really good about being able to think in different languages?

Student: You can talk to more people – I've got more choices to do, more options, and your brain is trained.

Interviewer: Yeah, sure. Yeah.

Student: It's helping it to learn faster because they say if you know one or more languages then you can learn another one more, much faster. ... Than you learn the second one.

Sometimes if you think, for example, in another language then it could help you. For example, if you can make the sentences in English, then try and make it up in

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- Experience of learning English before arriving in the UK
- Views on preceding English teaching
- Learning the Language of the Street and Popular Culture: understanding local variants and accents of English
- Comparing Schooling in the UK with their preceding experience: differences in curricula, organisation, school discipline, relationships with teachers

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

- **Transitions – facing multiple transitions**
- **Linguistic and Social Isolation and their emotional impact**

Interviewer: So was there anything that was the nicest part or the hardest, or the scariest [in arrival in a UK school]?

Student: The scariest part was like saying “Excuse me”, “Thank you”. I didn’t know that ... “Excuse me” and stuff like that. So that was the scariest part.

Student: When I went to Glasgow I went to the school and it was a bit scary because I never knew English, so I just used to like stay in like one corner. People used to come up to me and say hello and all that, but I never knew what to say. I was like standing there.

Interviewer: So that was quite scary not knowing anybody?

Student: Yeah!

Interviewer: OK, anything else scary?

Student: Um, not really because in Glasgow they used to help me and all this, so they used to tell me where to go, so I would understand.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

Interviewer: Tell me what you remember about starting in **X school** especially because I imagine you couldn't speak any English at that point.

Student: Basically when I first came to England and went to school I was crying because my mum, I was going home and I was crying, so my mum came back to me and, yeah, she give me a hug and I went back.

Interviewer: It is quite traumatic, isn't it?

Student: Yeah.

Student 1: When I came here the first day it was quite scary because no one in my class, I didn't know anyone and everyone spoke English which was very hard for me to understand. I remember my friends talking about , it they asked me "How are you?" and I said "No." Because I didn't understand what they are talking about. But then I learnt English, like it was quite quick – in four months I learnt English. Words missing? Punctuation?

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ Teachers' recognition of the emotional challenges faced by EAL learners

Interviewer: So you have that perspective of being a learner of a different language.

TA1: Yes, it really helps.

Interviewer: In which way do you think it helps you?

TA2: It just makes you realise it is not easy to grasp the grammar. Because sometimes when I observe a German teacher teaching German they might not understand why the people can't grasp the grammatical differences, whereas I can because I have struggled learning it myself, I can see the difficulties. And when you do the course they make you do a little module in learning a completely different foreign language. I did Russian for a few weeks; and they completely immersed us in it. And I was completely lost and struggling to try to write things off the board in a different script and I just got all panicky inside because I didn't know how to write it down. And they were doing that in purpose to make us feel like that.

Interviewer: So what have you learned from that experience to bring to your classroom experience now?

TA 1: How scary it is, especially if you are, say Arabic, like you have had Arabic boys haven't you

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

Transitions – what helped?

□ Supportive Teacher Attitudes

Student 1: My experience was my teacher made me feel good so basically they were like welcoming and they were like giving a warm feeling; and they were quite helpful as well because they were helping me with catching up with stuff ... the teachers were quite good with me.

Student 2: Same here, the teachers made me feel good. They helped me in primary when I came, they were helpful. There was a Polish guy that helped me as well. Polish and Slovakian are a bit similar, so.

□ Buddy/supportive friend

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ Negative reactions from peers

Interviewer: So thinking about when you first arrived at school here and how you felt when you really couldn't understand people, tell me a bit about the difficulties you had, what were the problems?

Student: The problem was like they used to tease me like one, two, three but in my language they used to be like – like nine in my language is one so I used to think nine was one because I never knew, so I was struggling to know what number it was.

The bad points were, ehm, well, some people were quite bad to me because my, my English wasn't like very good and I couldn't make – I made a couple of friends on my first day, I'm still friends with them, the people; but some people were quite nasty to me, but I just never cared so it just kind of stopped, I guess.

Yeah, the only problem that's quite annoying in a way, I have to say because my brother's in S2 now, he gets bullied. Bullying is a problem.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

Supporting the Use of English

- Presence, or absence, of additional support
- Language-learning activities / specific support provided

Student: For example, we were doing an essay on *Romeo and Juliet* and we had to take down notes. I tried to take notes that I could – she was doing the same. At the end she gave me notes and they were much more in detail – so I had, so I could do the essay after. She helped with the context and notes so I could do the essay. ... Which was helpful.

Interviewer: So you both had the help from the notes but you also saw how she made the notes that might help you another time, I take it, yeah?

Student: Uh huh.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ EAL students' own efforts and initiative in language learning

Student: With the teachers' help I got better so maybe I'm stuck on like a word, they say, "I always helped you, try using the dictionary now, so you could move up"

...

Student: Maybe they say you have to find it by yourself and stuff like that but they're just trying to help you, if they always helped you like then that's like showing they're doing the work for you so you need to do some work. It's like if I pray to God, God can't do everything for me. I have to do half of the work, so he's helping me by learning stuff but I have to learn also. So the same like that, teachers can't do all the work, you have to do half of it so, uh – you have to do like team work, yeah.

Interviewer: ... anything you did, any strategies that helped you to understand what was happening?

Student: Like I would listen and try to figure out – because like they pointed as well –

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, so just from the actions to try and make sense of what was happening, yeah.

I let [my peers do] everything first so I can look at what they're doing, then I started doing it by myself, but the teachers and the other students would help it and the teacher tried to help me so the teacher

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

Perceptions of teachers' 'helpfulness' – a differentiated picture

Interviewer: But was there anything that you felt your teacher didn't help you to do? That you would have liked some help with?

Student 1: Not as far as I can remember. I think every teacher was very supportive and everything.

Student: Um, what's given me confidence is that obviously you can't tell when someone's confused about something but because the teachers are paying attention they – so every single pupil can understand they look around and everything and if I was confused always I could see the teacher coming to me and asking me, "Do you need help?" ...

Interviewer: And that's teachers in all the subject areas?

Student: Yeah.

Some teachers help me and some don't. English teacher and science [help] and some other teachers they just like tell everybody what to do, but they don't like help.

My teacher didn't help me to spell a word or like I don't know a word and like if I asked for the word they would just say another word that I don't know. I have to like get a dictionary.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

The Language of Secondary School Subjects

- Learning another language as a school subject: contrasting views

Interviewer: ... If you think about the different subjects ... were there any subjects that you found easier, others more difficult?

Student: Yeah, well I was doing French in Romania and I think I didn't like it because of my teacher but when I came here I picked Spanish and it's really similar to my language because it's – just because of the Latin roots. Yeah. Spanish is the easier subject for me.

Interviewer: And you found learning Spanish easier because you had already learnt English, you had done a bit of French?

Student: I can say, yeah.

Interviewer: Or was it the teaching, the teaching approach that was used?

Student: The teaching was good also and I think it's just because of the connection, like – they talk real similar like we Romanians do and real similar words, even though they're still different I can still understand them.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

Student: French it was quite hard for me. All I knew was how to say bonjour. [laughter] I think I just learnt that for the whole year. I just learnt bonjour, I guess because I didn't learn much from French because I was already bad in English when I first came – I wasn't that bad, but I was quite bad and like French, learning another language it was quite hard for me.

Interviewer: So are you doing more science subjects or -?

Student: I do, I'm doing like science, yeah, and mathematical stuff. I do Advanced Higher Physics and Advanced Higher Maths.

Interviewer: So that's kind of what interests you most, [assent], yeah.

Interviewer: What about you, how did you find learning French?

Student: It was harder because if I didn't know the words in English then I couldn't translate them into French and it was hard: I had a Slovak/French dictionary and then an English/Slovak dictionary.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ Engaging with textual practices in the English classroom

Interviewer: ... are there particular subjects that you find easier or harder, maybe for different reasons?

Student: Um, I find English quite a bit hard – it's not because of like I can't understand English it's because of like – because previously when I was in my country like the way they teach English is completely different because we used to have like a book and then read that throughout the year and give answers from the course; but here it's like you have to do like critical essays and like writing and that so it's completely different. I found that quite hard to catch up but now I'm catching up. But other subjects it's like, it's like similar so – I find maths quite a lot easier than back in my home country.

Student: The challenging bit was the reading. It was the close reading because – you've got techniques like similes, metaphors and that; and we never got taught that, we got taught grammar – and so, it was kind of hard to get used to those but once you get used to it – the teacher really helpful – they'll provide you with all the materials, give you extra support and you kind of like learn, learn it and then it's easier after a while; but in the beginning poetry was really challenging, I think.

Interviewer: So if I've got this right, it wasn't just maybe learning some new language but there's something in there about learning a particular way of *thinking* about language as well.

Student: Yes.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ More challenging aspects of English

Student: I think the hardest subjects are English because if you're writing essays then I always have to make up sentences in my mind and it's harder to make them up because when I've learn something it looks on a level of a P7. When I speak it's totally different.

Probably it's got a different level. As I said before it's got a level of S1 or P7 because it's different when you write and when you speak to someone.

Student: The hardest was writing and kind of listening. It's not, because I listen to something and I have to write it down 'cause I can't manage to spell them and I don't get it and I'm stuck in there and it keep on saying thing so I'm stuck on one point. So that is hard. And reading is not really hard because I just read it. Sometimes words not important so I just skip it and I will know the meaning later.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ 'Mental' Translation between L1 and L2: a complex picture

Student: When I came here, um, obviously when you learn a language you think in that language that you know; but when I came here I was thinking in Romanian but it was English around me, do you know what I mean? Two languages and, um, I was going slow with translations. I was like, I was just thinking how to translate words ... that was the hardest thing to do.

Student 2: Like basically during my first – I don't know like three to six months in the school I used to think about – in my head I used to use my first language; but after that I used to speak to like all people from our school in English so basically it was stuck in my head. Like even now, even when I'm at home with my parents I basically tend to use like, use English in my mind when I'm thinking so basically 99% of the time I'm basically speaking English rather than other languages.

Interviewer: Do you, do – when you're thinking about learning in the classroom, do you think in English, or do you think in Nepalese, or does it depend?

Student: Yeah, it depends.

Interviewer: What does it depend on?

Student: Like if it's a bit hard I think in Nepalese – if I'm not sure ... if I don't know it in English ...

Interviewer: You go back and try it in Nepalese and see if that helps.

Findings: EAL Learners' Perceptions

□ **Fitting In: being different vs being 'the same'**

I would say not only the language but what I have learnt in the UK is that you need to fit in by also what you wear. You can't, if you come from a Pakistani background, you can't wear Pakistani clothes because then people will look at you different – some people wouldn't but some people would. And so you need to know what to wear. I mean don't wear something to please someone, that's what I believe but still you do need to fit in as well as the language. So it is good being different but if people are going to bully you about it then I would rather not.

Student 1: When I came over, people asked me loads to questions about my country they said, "Oh I love your accent, I love that you are South African! They were so interested and sometimes I felt the attention was a bit too much like I wanted to get rid of it because it was too much, it was too overwhelming because I was new and I didn't know anyone. So it was a bit too much for me but eventually it calmed down a bit. But I mean they were all very nice at the same time. I would say it was quite hard when I first came over being different but now I have got used to it so it is a bit better.

Interviewer: ... what do you think? Do you want to be the same or do you want to be different?

recommendations:

Diversity in migration experience, languages and preceding schooling

Recommendations

- in line with recent literature on how best to conceptualise migration (e.g., Vertovec, 2007) there is a need for teachers, researchers and policy-makers to be alert to the diversity in EAL students' migration experience.
- as Arnot et. al., 2014, have observed, this entails schools gaining as full information as can be achieved on matters such as: pattern of migration, preceding schooling and exposure to English, current family circumstances and home language(s) etc.
- attention also needs to be given to mechanisms for recording and sharing, (with due regard to questions of confidentiality), this information.
- while the EAL literature has given considerable attention to the development of *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills*, more consideration can be given to assisting EAL students to gain 'survival' knowledge of the language

The emotional and social challenges of transition

Recommendations

- Our findings point up how helpful it was for EAL students to encounter strong support and encouragement from teachers in the initial phase of their UK schooling. Accordingly, it would seem important to alert teachers to how they can make a difference by displaying a warmly welcoming attitude to, and acting to include, EAL students.
- Some of our participants reported quite an extended period of considerable social isolation. It would be desirable to see a large-scale study explore the degree to which this is the case among the wider population of EAL students. Even allowing for the limitations of this study, this finding does at least suggest that one cannot readily assume that the emotional and social difficulties faced by EAL students will always resolve within a relatively short period of time.
- As preceding research has shown (Conteh and Meier, 2014), an effective school buddying system can be seen to be key to easing EAL students' integration into the social life of a school.

The use of L1

- **The EAL literature has tended to highlight the benefits that may be associated with using EAL students' first languages in schools. Less attention though has been paid to the question of EAL students' literacy in their first language. We would argue that more research on this topic is desirable: to gain a picture of what levels of literacy in L1 are being brought to the learning of English; and to investigate how differing levels of literacy in an L1 may impact on the learning of English. We acknowledge, however, that such research could pose considerable methodological challenges.**
- **This study, in common with others, has found limited use of L1 in schools. We suggest that remedying this situation requires, in part at least, a move in EAL development activities away from general exhortations to deploy L1 to providing teachers with strategies, activities, and exemplars of good practice that will allow them to make the use of L1 more of a reality.**
- **Although there may have been little 'overt' use of L1 in these two schools, our findings draw attention to the extensive use of L1 that happens 'beneath the surface' as EAL learners perform acts of 'mental translation' between their L1 and English. Teachers need to be alerted to the effortful nature of these 'translanguaging' acts of mental translation and the way in which they take up cognitive resources.**
- **Given how central acts of 'mental translation' are likely to be to the efforts of beginning EAL learners to make sense of English-medium instruction, there seems to be a clear need for research that examines these acts of translation more closely. In particular, as we have observed earlier, it would be desirable to take ahead studies that focus on how EAL students understand translation between their first language(s) and English and their conceptions of the nature of language and differences between languages.**

Identity and Fitting In

Recommendations

- In common with other investigations, this study has found that schools need to create an inclusive environment where mutual toleration is expected as a foundation for the integration of EAL students.
- We have noted earlier the value of further ethnographic studies of EAL students' sense of identity, and enactment of self within schools.

Linguistic challenges in the classroom and school: how to respond?

Recommendations

- The findings of this study point up the need to support each of the language modes of: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- To support students' development of these different modes within their secondary school education, they should be made aware of the specific genre features, and underlying structures, of the texts they will encounter across the curriculum.
- Teachers need to be alerted to the longer development trajectory of writing, compared to the other language

Curriculum and Assessment

Recommendations

- While the drive for ‘literacy across learning’ can act as a useful entry point to the exploration of the needs of EAL learners, it would be very desirable to see a more fully-developed consideration of EAL-related matters within this policy thrust.
- Given that current formal assessments are not well attuned to EAL learners, there is a need for continuing research on this matter – research which is likely to provide a basis for strong advocacy for a change to the status quo.
- Apply existing good practice in *differentiation* to fine-tune teaching, learning and assessment activities for EAL learners to give them access to the curriculum and integrate them into the life of the classroom

School policies, structures and processes

- To allow for good practice that is consistent across schools in the initial assessment of language and monitoring of progress, it is recommended that clear national guidance on tests and testing processes is provided.
- Policies need to be in place that: recognise the value of effective collaboration between class teachers and EAL specialists; and which establish structures that allow this collaboration to take place.
- Schools can give greater attention not only to 'sending out' information to the parents/guardians of EAL students, but also to 'drawing in' parents to school activities. Here there could be greater sharing of successful initiatives in gaining

Teacher Development

Recommendations

- At a time when teachers face pressure to develop their practice on a number of fronts, there is a need for strong advocacy for effective, well-targetted CPD for all teachers.
- Given that EAL-related CPD needs to cover a range of aspects of practice, it is best seen as requiring a sustained programme of development rather than a limited number of 'one-off' events.

Representations of EAL students

As a final observation, it is worth taking a hard look at how not only participants in a research study but also all of us explicitly, and more implicitly, represent EAL learners. On this theme, there would seem to be great value in the representation of EAL students put forward by one of our teacher participants who characterised them as a *resource for education* rather than simply as an *object of education*.

Questions

- What do you perceive as the key barriers that prevent the development of effective provision for EAL?
- What good practice have you observed/what recommendations could you make to improve the situation?

