



# English Language Learners: Issues and Responses from General Practitioners of Early Childhood Research

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## Abstract

*For in-service teachers in the general education context, the rising proportion of English Language Learners (ELLs) in early childhood classrooms has presented difficulties. A curriculum that concentrates on second language teaching and learning is typically absent from traditional teacher preparation programmes. This essay examines the difficulties teachers have when attempting to instruct ELLs using research-based best practises. Additionally, a rigorous analysis of the literature has produced fundamental answers for practitioners. These solutions cover pedagogy in the classroom, teacher preparation, and programmatic (classroom) elements. The writers have come to the conclusion that more research is required to establish particular tactics and procedures for instructing non-native language learners in today's classrooms based on the current body of knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *in-service teachers, English language learners (ELLs), problems, early childhood.*

## Introduction:

English Language Learners (ELLs) are becoming more and more prevalent in young children's classrooms (NCELA, 2011). Over the next five years, it is predicted by the national census that about 20% of the population of children between the ages of 5 and 17 will come from families where a language other than English will be spoken (U.S. Census, 2011). Nearly 40% of these kids will be enrolled in our early childhood classrooms (Russakoff, 2011). Even if there are more ELLs, it might be difficult for teachers and educational systems to accommodate them. Teachers are not adequately prepared or trained to work with pupils who are second-language learners (Bell, 2010; Futrell et al., 2003). For more than 10 years, organisations that accredit teacher preparation programmes have required exposure to a variety of student populations (NAEYC, 2009). However, there are few concentrated preparation strategies created especially to guarantee excellent instruction of young ELLs (Bell, 2010; Pica, 2000). Early childhood educators only have a very basic introduction to working with various groups. In conclusion, the research literature shows

that there is a lack of knowledge regarding successful instructional techniques with ELLs, particularly young ELLs.

The goal of this essay is to critically analyse the problems and straightforward fixes for instructing ELLs in early childhood settings. The difficulties are first examined in the following order: teacher, social, and educational. The solutions offered are taken from evidence-based best practises to assist early childhood general education teachers in implementing second language teaching techniques. The areas of programme quality, teacher personalities, and classroom procedures will all be covered in the solutions. Young ELLs already face difficulties in their formative stage. They struggle with the common problems that young kids do (Bell, 2010). These problems include being literal, having limited logic understanding, having egocentricity, and having tangible learning styles (Piaget, 1962). Along with the difficulties associated with learning a new language, young ELLs face all of the same obstacles as other young children. In addition, they are misunderstood when it comes to their requirements and the language used in their preschool's training. Lastly, when first language sounds are similar to English sounds but are used in different contexts, ELLs may become confused (Young, 1996). Teaching ELLs can be difficult because of the huge variation in language mastery. Learning English involves more than just learning words and grammar (Cummins, 1979,1980,1981; Snow, 1992). Even more difficult for ELLs than linguistic components of language use can be the social context. Children need to learn when and how to utilise idioms and slang, as well as specific language. These elements of language acquisition can be highly perplexing. Children who are learning a second language also face a hurdle to communication skills (Cummins, 1979). The youngsters are unsure of the new language's purposes and when certain language usage is suitable (Xu & Drame, 2008). This difficulty leads to stress and dissatisfaction in the youngster and decreases their desire to engage in community activities; this is known as the affective filter (Dulay & Burt, 1974).

### **ELL Challenges:**

According to the research, the rise in ELLs will have an effect on our curricula and recommendations for teachers (Han and Bridglall, 2009). For classroom teachers, the demographic shift and its educational repercussions pose new difficulties. This section outlines the specific concerns that the research identified, which will cover issues on the academic, social, teacher preparation, and school level. Being placed in a programme where everyone speaks just one language can provide difficulties for young children who are learning a new language (Fernandez, 2000). The children frequently do not get the individualised care and interactions they require in their primary language (Rodriguez, Diaz, Duran, & Espinosa, 1995). The cultural difference between the learner and the classroom procedures or curricular content presents another difficulty (Meyer, 2000). The youngsters must overcome sociolinguistic obstacles in addition to linguistic ones (Gillanders, 2007). Furthermore, studies have shown that ELLs are vulnerable to academic failure in reading and math at the K–12 level (Halle, Hair, Wandner, Ncnamara, & Chien, 2012), and these findings suggest that the infrastructure for ELL support is not set up for success.

Teachers are becoming aware of the connections between the academic and social facets of language learning (Genishi, 1981). The children sometimes don't have an equal playing field with the kids who speak English as their first language (Fassler, 1998). Unfortunately, in order to be accepted by English-speaking

peers, ELLs must demonstrate their usefulness as a playmate. To foster relationships, the instructor must actively scaffold both the ELLs and the English-speaking students. Lack of peer relationships can hinder play-based learning and development and reduce opportunities for help when learning English (Hester, 1984). These social challenges that ELLs experience may make it challenging for them to acquire the language (Snow, 1992). Other social challenges that young ELLs deal with concern their sense of self and cultural identification (Snow, 1992). Sometimes there is a lack of cultural identification and an unfavourable sense of ethnic pride. The English language student can easily form these unfavourable associations. As the ELL's level of English proficiency rises, this might occur. The ELL will frequently decide to abandon his or her native qualities in public and adopt Anglo-American language and culture (Nero, 2005). The young child starts to feel alienated from his or her family, home, and culture (Papatheodorou, 2007). When youngsters interact and play with classmates and adults from the same background, these harmful connections can occasionally be mitigated (Meyer, Klein, & Genishi, 1994).

Connecting and identifying with others from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds helps to develop native cultural identification and promotes more favourable judgments (Nero, 2005). The deep and rich levels of play required for early learning for young children can take a lot longer to acquire when children from similar backgrounds are not readily available (Meyer, Klein, & Genishi, 1994). Teachers must make an effort to put methods into place that will aid students in understanding and upholding their genuine identities, which go beyond language and academic competence (Hunter, 1997). Due to the fact that language is acquired through culture, this dilemma causes issues on both the social and linguistic levels (Garcia & Flores, 1986). In addition to the issues mentioned above, Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden (2003) pointed out that teachers acknowledged they were underprepared for the challenges of the classroom and integrating skills for ELL student learning in the self-appraisal study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics. Teachers who lack the essential abilities may also mistakenly label ELL pupils as being fluent in English if they can function in social situations (Cummins, 1980). The evidence is clear that teachers must be able to learn new techniques for teaching ELLs, comprehend how students think about education, and use these techniques to assist their students succeed academically across a range of subject areas (Renner, 2011).

This is significant since the number of ELL students has increased dramatically, particularly in several of the eastern states of the United States (NCELA, 2011; Renner, 2011). According to the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, there is now a shortage of educators who can work effectively with the ELL population (2003). The school setting itself was mentioned by Han and Bridglall (2009) as an issue for ELLs. They pointed out that schools with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient educational resources, and a receptive learning environment may unintentionally contribute to the failure of children from minority subgroups. In retrospect, each state is required to adhere to federal criteria for the identification and instruction of English language learners (ELLs), but the states are given flexibility in their application and methods (Benavides, Midobuche, & Kostina-Ritchey, 2012). Services provided by state and local education authorities differ as a result of that process. The literature research also revealed that the service delivery approaches may be problematic for

ELLs. English as a Second Language (ESL) pull-out, Transitional Bilingual, and Dual Language are the three prevalent ELL methods employed in the United States for service delivery.

The ESL pull-out model is the most popular programme. This model will be looked at since it is the most costly and least efficient (Benavides et al., 2012). The pull-out approach mandates that additional resource teachers with ESL credentials take kids out of their general education classes and meet for at least 30 to 45 minutes each day. The general education class's daily subject-specific instruction for the children will be missed, and the ESL instructor will have little opportunity to meet with the general education teacher for planning and individualised instruction. The model also lacks a section that emphasises subject integration and instruction in ELL learning. The Transitional Bilingual model gives ELLs education in both English as a second language and their native language across all subject areas. The goal is to integrate ELL students and support their transition to English-language instruction. The model is presented using a time span of two to three years, which is insufficient for academic purposes (Benavides et al., 2012). The framework of the curriculum gives the impression that it is a remedial and segregated programme. The dual language concept is made to let students interact with both their mother tongue and the English language in a welcoming setting. To improve their application and use of the target language, the students are given a curriculum in both languages. The dynamics of the classroom are adjusted to reflect collaborative learning, where ELLs assist native English speakers in understanding the curriculum and native English speakers assist ELLs in understanding the curriculum through English. The Dual Language approach is reasonably priced and has a consistent rate of success.

The results of the service delivery models have an impact on ELL academic learning since they are still vulnerable to administrative decisions that could be problematic if done incorrectly regarding delivery, time, language, and population serviced (Pica, 2000). ELLs experience a variety of difficulties that could make it difficult for them to learn in a general education setting. Teaching strategies are significantly impacted by the difficulties associated with educating ELLs at the academic, social, teacher training, and school levels. Teachers must deal with a variety of learner demands that necessitate specific training and proven applications. Unfortunately, an inexperienced teacher can easily get overburdened and contribute to the mismatch between pedagogy and learner demands. Based on individual student needs, research has found fundamental solutions to support teaching practises that are diversified in nature and shift pedagogy from homogenous to heterogenous.

### **Basic Solutions:**

In general, researchers have been effective in figuring out how to teach the ELL population better. The answers provided here include curriculum-based, educator-based, and research-based classroom techniques. The discovered solutions may be utilised to scaffold the learning of young ELLs and have an impact on how particular methods are taught inside activities. First, utilising high quality early care and education programmes is helpful in promoting school achievement for ELLs from the outset. (2012) Halle et al. The belief is frequently held that the children's English will get better once they start school through immersion and engagement. It has been determined that relying on this method is ineffective for students (Kaplan & Leckie, 2009). Research has shown that enrolling young ELLs in high-quality early learning

programmes significantly increases their likelihood of succeeding in school (NCELA, 2011). Before starting school, putting the young ELL in a high-quality early learning programme will give them the opportunity to use the new language in context and be exposed to more English (Yesil-Dagli, 2010). While utilising a top-notch early learning programme is a fundamental approach to encouraging ELLs' success in reading in school, those early learning programmes must employ research-based best practises. This emphasis on what programmes and instructors can do will be the foundation for the remaining solutions we consider.

### **Programmatic Solutions:**

The ambience, curriculum, daily schedule, and classroom habits are all considered to be parts of the programming environment. Ten programming indicators of high quality that have an influence on young ELLs should be implemented to assist their academic progress (Castro et al as cited in Halle et al, 2012).

These elements are:

1. A structured and encouraging environment. Environments of high quality are orderly, supportive, and tidy. By putting labels throughout the classroom in the child's local tongue in addition to English, teachers can project a supportive attitude (Zehler, 1994). Additionally, making the surroundings and routines predictable helps ELLs comprehend how tasks are to be completed and how to move around the space. Learners feel safe and can devote their cognitive attention to processing information and language rather than worrying about the environment when the setting is encouraging and predictable.
2. Effective teacher-student interactions. High-quality programming encourages and exemplifies constructive dialogue and educational opportunities. While working with all children, teachers maintain a positive attitude. Because there is no stress or pressure involved in the learning process, ELLs can feel emotionally secure and enjoy it. Additionally, while keeping an eye on education, interactions between teachers and students show concern and respect. When there is a significant language barrier, teachers can convey these signals by smiling and speaking in a soothing voice.
3. a rise in the possibilities for peer engagement. Peer scaffolding has proven to be quite effective in assisting ELLs. The usage of peer interactions is supported by high quality programmes that provide the time and learning opportunities. Cooperative learning and Think-Pair-Share techniques maximise the chances for structured peer interactions.
4. Effective usage of the child's native tongue. Supporting and maintaining the young ELLs' native tongue helps them learn English (NAEYC, 1995). Teachers in high-quality programmes look for opportunities to respect students by using their native tongue while also providing scaffolding to improve first language skills. As a result, the children are more willing to participate in the learning process and the native language can act as a frame of reference for the second language.
5. Teaching explicit vocabulary. The development of young ELLs' academic performance is positively correlated with deliberate vocabulary instruction (Yesil-Dagli, 2011). Programs of the highest calibre plan to teach language in a clear and deliberate manner. Vocabulary instruction improves reading comprehension and academic performance.

6. assessment of the child's first language, second language, and other developmental domains on a regular basis. Because the instructor is aware of the success of instruction, ELLs benefit from a robust evaluation programme and appropriate assessment techniques. In order to ensure that ELLs receive effective education, high quality programmes support these strategies (NAEYC, 2005). In order to understand the child's present level of skill in both their native language and their second language, teachers employ appropriate assessment tools. Additionally, the teacher uses both formal and informal methods to gather information in both academic and developmental domains.
7. Instruction in small groups and one-on-one. The teacher can concentrate on the needs and skill levels of each ELL with the help of small group and one-on-one instruction. Through the use of group time activities and centres, high quality programmes offer numerous chances for this form of education. This personalised instruction provides a way to differentiate instruction as needed.
8. programme organisation. The arrangement of programme delivery is referred to as the programme structure. The structure of high-quality programmes is appropriate for the learner in terms of how language teaching is provided. Examples include push-in or pull-out English language teaching that is dual or bilingual. High-quality programmes and best practises promote bilingual education as the most successful paradigm for educating young ELLs (Zehler, 1994).
9. Qualified educators. Teachers with specialised training and preparation in working with ELLs are hired and used by high quality programmes. The teachers are equipped to support the special educational requirements of ELLs. Teachers also receive continual training to develop the skills necessary for working with this demographic (NAEYC, 1995).
10. Family participation. High-quality programmes work very hard to honour, engage, and instruct the families of young ELLs (NAEYC, 1995; Zehler, 1994). Higher learning outcomes might be anticipated when the family feels engaged in the programme. Furthermore, children are more likely to participate and be driven to study when they believe their family is appreciated.

### Teacher Solutions:

It is necessary to examine the instructor in general before exploring what might occur in the classroom. Teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to meet the requirements of the children with linguistically different needs is one of the difficulties in dealing with ELLs (Renner, 2011). Offering staff development to early childhood educators is the fundamental solution to this particular problem. There are few opportunities for young ELL teachers to receive training (Bell, 2010). Teachers of young ELLs can get more confidence and learn theories and skills that will help them in their work when they undergo training in working with linguistically diverse kids (Renner, 2011). Unfortunately, the majority of teachers are not prepared to effectively interact with this group, and the bulk of ELLs are found in mainstream classrooms (Cho, 2011). With this knowledge in mind, instructors should obtain professional development and training in working with young ELLs, which is the fundamental answer that is frequently suggested in the literature. The teacher must comprehend the stages of language acquisition, the sociocultural factors of learning a second language, the technical components of language and language development, as well as the developmental process of learning a new language (Cummins, 1979,1980, 1981; Hakuta, 1986).

Most of the ELL research that is currently available points to the necessity of teacher preparation. The kinds of training the instructor needs, however, are not well studied. According to Cho (2011), teachers need to receive training in subject matter that is specific to working with young ELLs.

### **Classroom practices:**

The majority of young ELL students' time is spent in regular classrooms. This implies that it is the obligation of general education teachers to ensure that students can understand the material. The ELL is helped by the classroom's ability grouping. It offers the chance to use the right materials with the kids to better meet their needs. Ability categorization also enhances the possibility of positive relationships and greater participation (Cho, 2011). Targeting language skill development in the classroom is another factor to take into account. These skills may be highlighted through the activities and techniques employed. The three skills to focus on most with young ELLs are letter naming, phonological awareness, and vocabulary (Yesil-Dagli, 2010). These variables work together to identify the ELLs' top oral reading fluency predictions. Cho (2011) suggested that the children require time spent engaging in high quality instructional methodologies, the availability of an aide, and experienced teachers in order for these abilities to be scaffolded effectively. Higher oral language proficiency results in fluent reading, according to study (Yesil-Dagli, 2010).

Finally, it is important to take home language preservation into account while planning lessons. Young ELLs frequently undergo native language extinction as a result of early exposure to English (Fillmore, 1991). This problem not only has detrimental societal effects but also harms academics and English literacy. The evidence is clear that young ELLs perform better academically when their native language is taught in the classroom alongside English (Burchinal et al., 2011). The best results are exhibited when teaching in English only if the child arrives with limited literacy skills in both languages, although it is also recommended that keeping the native tongue be encouraged.

### **Conclusion:**

When they concentrate on specific understandings and tactics to support the young ELL in the early childhood programme and classroom, teacher preparation programmes are beneficial to new and emerging instructors. On two levels, the programme and the classroom, there must be a fit between the practises and the students (Bell, 2010). Administrators of early childhood programmes must assess their ELL population to select the optimal bilingual programme strategy for their pupils (Baker, 2000). ESL pull-out, Transitional Bilingual, and Dual Language are their options. The administrator and staff must decide what home language assistance will be implemented if the primary language of instruction is to remain English in order to preserve the young child's identity and linguistic diversity. Maintaining one's native tongue is crucial for the aforementioned sociolinguistic issues. Additionally, it avoids the language extinction and family separation that are typical of young ELLs as they grow and mature (Fillmore, 1991). The teachers in each classroom must adapt their teaching methods to the demands of the young ELLs by drawing on specialised knowledge they have acquired through training and teacher preparation programmes (Samson & Collins, 2012). The interaction and teaching that can be used to scaffold English and the material being shared with the young ELL can be maximised when these matches are created. Young ELLs can get more successful

teaching when teachers are appropriately trained with specific research-based ways for aligning understandings of ELL theories and strategies to the learning styles of their pupils (Daniel & Friedman, 2005; Samson & Collins, 2012). More investigation is required to: 1) identify the precise methods and approaches that work best with young ELLs; and 2) enhance teacher preparation programmes to include a focused emphasis on educating general practitioners in ELL practises.

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