

The Impact of English as an Additional Language on Young Pupils'

Reading Skills: A Case Study of Oak Tree Primary School

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Abstract:

The study aimed at exploring the impact of English as an additional language on EAL pupils' reading skills at Key Stage 2 at Oak Tree Primary School (Birmingham, Britain) with a view to identifying whether English as an additional language presents a barrier to the development of EAL young pupils' reading skills, the strategies used to support EAL young pupils to develop their reading skills, and how effective these strategies are in this regard. The study, which employed the qualitative approach, involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews with the EAL pupils' class teacher and the ESL mentor, observation of three Arab EAL young pupils at Key Stage 2, and documentary analysis of the school's EAL policy. The study revealed that the EAL young pupils could make some progress in reading through one-to-one support from staff and by being provided with well-developed resources. In spite of this, EAL pupils still underperform in comparison with their native English-speaking counterparts. The findings rationalized providing EAL pupils with bilingual support to help them overcome their reading difficulties.

Keywords: EAL, EAL pupils, Key Stage 2, reading skills.

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تأثير اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية على مهارات القراءة لتلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية:
دراسة حالة على مدرسة أوك تري الابتدائية (برمنجهام-بريطانيا)

الملخص:

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف مدى تأثير اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية على مهارات القراءة لتلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية (من عمر 7-11 سنة) الذين ليست اللغة الإنجليزية لغتهم الأولى، وطُبِّقَت هذه الدراسة على تلاميذ مدرسة أوك تري (برمنجهام، بريطانيا) بهدف تحديد فيما إذا كانت اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية تشكل عائقاً أمام تطوير مهارات القراءة لديهم، ومعرفة فعالية الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة لدعم تطوير مهاراتهم في القراءة. وقد قامت الدراسة، التي اعتمدت المنهج النوعي، بجمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة مع معلم صف التلاميذ الذين يتحدثون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية، ومع مستشار تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، وتم الأخذ بملاحظة ثلاثة من التلاميذ الذين ينحدرون من أصول عربية ويتحدثون اللغة الإنجليزية في فصولهم، كما تم تحليل وثائق سياسة المدرسة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية.

وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن الطلبة الذين يتحدثون لغة إضافية يمكنهم تحقيق تقدم في القراءة من خلال الدعم الفردي من قبل المرشدين، ومن خلال توفير مواد مساعدة تسهم في تطوير قدراتهم. وعلى الرغم من ذلك، يظل أداء الطلبة الذين يتحدثون لغة إضافية ضعيفاً بالمقارنة مع أقرانهم أو نظرائهم الذين يتحدثون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغتهم الأم. وأكدت نتائج هذه الدراسة على ضرورة تقديم دعم خاص (مدرس ثنائي اللغة) للطلبة الذين يتحدثون لغة إضافية لمساعدتهم في التغلب على صعوبات القراءة لديهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: EAL، EAL، التلاميذ، المرحلة الأساسية ٢، مهارات القراءة.

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1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Second language acquisition (SLA) is defined as acquiring a language subsequent to the learner's first language (L1) (Gass & Selinker, 2008). However, crucial to this acquisition is how such an acquisition takes place, what techniques, methods, or strategies are involved and how effective they are in such a process. There are two types of factors influencing SLA process, viz, contributing to its success or failure. The first type is related to linguistic factors, the most prominent of which are the effect or impact of such a learned/acquired language on the learner's performance in L2 and that of L1 on L2 (Gass & Selinker, 2008). The second type is related to non-linguistic factors, such as the setting, techniques, strategies, methods, etc. involved in the teaching-learning process (Griffiths, 2003). The former influence is called intralingual, whereas the latter is called interlingual transfer or L1 interference.

As far as reading is concerned, it is vital for young children in order to develop their basic speech skills to improve their communication skills and support them to grasp the fundamentals of language (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011). Randerson (2008) claimed that reading gives children a head start at school and stimulates their language development. Similarly, Jackson (2016) stated that students who do not attain reading proficiency at least by the end of 3rd grade are at risk of academic failure in high school. According to Gregory (2008), if children are not able to participate actively in reading tasks, they are categorized as being mentally "less able" than their peers (p. 20). This can have a huge impact on their personal circumstances and social mobility.

Similarly, Lee (2010) found out that lack of English skills is a problem for immigrant ESL students. Their inability to understand the meaning of English words and to follow the instructions for any given task means that they are unable to complete their work properly. This can have detrimental impact on ESL students, making them consistently underperform and unable to integrate fully into their homeland as Lee (2010) indicated. Likewise, Demie and Hau (2016), Chalmers (2018), Smith (2019), and Department of Education (2020) indicated that English language proficiency is a major factor influencing the achievement and attainment of pupils of English as an additional language (EAL). This suggests that fluency in English is vital for EAL pupils to fully access the curriculum (Demie, 2017b).

In the early stages of learning a second language, learners go through a silent period, which is common and quite normal, and gradually gain linguistic confidence (Hutchinson et al., 2003). On the evidence

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presented by Rosowsky (2001), EAL learners take about five years to catch up on oral fluency with their monolingual peers and this is important before learning to read. ESL overseas students need different kinds of support to access the school curriculum and to meet their daily language needs. In fact, learning a new language with completely different script and distinct instructions is not an easy task. Therefore, EAL learners in the primary years underachieve in English literacy due to their low levels of English language fluency, which indicates their lack for the language skills necessary to have full access to the curriculum (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

The current study was conducted to investigate the impact of English as an additional language on EAL young pupils' reading skills and to identify the reading strategies followed when teaching reading skills to immigrant children learning EAL, children who are first generation immigrant, born outside the United Kingdom and learn EAL. The study took place at Oak Tree Primary School (Birmingham, Britain). There are two main reasons for investigating this phenomenon. On a personal level, one of the researchers of this study arrived in the UK from Yemen at the age of 13, with very few key English words. The transition into secondary school was very difficult and for the first year, the researcher struggled with the language, the curriculum, and the culture, receiving no support from a specialist. A consequence of the researcher's educational experience was that it took longer to access the educational curriculum, and questions remained whether earlier interventions more suited to an EAL learner would have improved the researcher's educational experience.

The second reason is that the researchers are interested in identifying how EAL young learners can improve their English in an educational setting. Many EAL pupils underachieve in English literacy in their primary years, which is attributed to their limited fluency in English when joining education (Hutchinson et al., 2003). The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted] (2002) noted the underachievement of EAL pupils and suggested that the reason behind that could be the lack of professional teachers with enough understanding of how to develop literacy skills of EAL learners. Therefore, at a professional level, one of the aims of this research is to identify the effective interventions that can be used when working with overseas EAL children.

Aim & Questions

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The current study aims at investigating the impact of English as an additional language on EAL young pupils' reading skills at Oak Tree Primary School (Birmingham, Britain). The study also seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Does English as an additional language present a barrier to the development of reading skills of EAL pupils at Key Stage 2?
2. What are the strategies used to support EAL pupils to develop their reading skills?
3. How effective the strategies used to support EAL pupils are in developing their reading skills?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is reflected in investigating the impact of EAL on developing the reading skills of EAL young pupils. The study provides insight into the support that EAL pupils in the UK receive to address their English language needs — which differ significantly from those of their native peers — with a view to determining whether this support can help EAL pupils improve their performance in English in general and their English reading skills in particular as without having good reading skills in English, EAL pupils can face many challenges in their future. The study also contributes to the growing body of literature on learning English as an additional language by young learners. It highlights the significance of responding to the different needs of EAL pupils to help them access the curriculum and develop their language skills. Besides, the study highlights the effective role that a bilingual teacher who shares the same language with the EAL learners can play in helping them learn English, which can encourage schools with EAL pupils to hire more bilingual staff with a view to supporting them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explores key themes in the education of first generation EAL pupils in Britain with an emphasis on English language reading. It first explores the historical context of EAL student achievement, EAL education policy in the UK, benefits of a bilingual approach, challenges of reading for EAL pupils, the importance of reading for EAL pupils, and potential barriers for EAL pupils in reading.

1.1. Historical Context of EAL Pupils Achievement

In the 1960's, "language prejudice was seen vividly" and teachers, schools and local authorities were advised to use English only with the newly arrived children (Mills & Mills, 2002, p. 2). Many reports

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indicated that newcomer children to the UK were referred to as “having no language,” but in practice, this meant no English language, and incoming children were pushed to speak English only. The terms “verbal deficit” and “first language interference” were common at that time (Mills & Mills, 2002, p. 3).

In the 1980s, multiculturalism was incorporated into the education program. Besides, teaching English to EAL students in the UK switched from receiving language support in separate programs to receiving it in mainstream settings (Trzebiatowski, 2015). Additionally, the specific problems encountered by EAL pupils have been given more attention and steady progress in their performance in national tests has been noticed. In 2000, the English monolingual students scored 74% on reading comprehension tests, whereas EAL pupils scored only 55% (Rosowsky, 2001). In contrast, in 2003 in national tests, 67%, 65%, 77% of EAL pupils achieved the expected level 4 or above compared to 76%, 73%, 88% of their monolingual peers in English, mathematics, and sciences respectively at Key Stage 2 (KS2) (Strand & Demie, 2005). In 2011, 70% of EAL pupils achieved level 4 or above in both English and mathematics compared with 75% for all pupils (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum [NALDIC], 2012). In 2012, 72% of EAL pupils at KS2 achieved level 4 or above in both English and mathematics, whereas 93% of native English pupils achieved level 4 or above in English and mathematics tests (Department for Education, 2012). In 2013, 72% of EAL and bilingual pupils at the end of KS2 achieved level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics, compared to 76% of native English pupils (NALDIC, 2013). In 2014, 71% of EAL pupils at KS2 achieved level 4 plus or above in reading, writing and mathematics compared to 75% of their monolingual peers (Demie, 2017a).

A study of reading attainment conducted by Cummins (2001) revealed that reading achievement of EAL learners was lower than for pupils whose first language was English at each stage of education. Similarly, Hutchinson et al. (2003) found that many EAL students underachieve in English literacy in their primary years. Hutchinson et al. also stated that EAL students struggle with English language due to their limited fluency in English when joining school. This suggests the failure of the current education to meet the literacy requirements of EAL children. A study conducted by Cain and Oakhill (2006) found that if a child at the age of eight has poor reading comprehension, the child will continue to experience the same problem with reading comprehension at the age of

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11, leading to lower SAT results in English, maths and sciences subjects. In the same vein, Burgoyne et al. (2011) suggested that EAL children experience great difficulty in reading comprehension compared to their monolingual peers. In fact, the low levels of vocabulary represent a potential barrier to EAL learners' comprehension of texts (Burgoyne et al., 2011), which urges helping EAL learners develop their vocabulary at the primary stage of education.

The need to improve outcomes for newly arrived immigrant children has started to take a lot of concern as their numbers steadily increase. In 2004, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) worked in partnership with Primary National Strategy (PNS) to progress a pilot program in twelve local authorities to raise the confidence and skill of mainstream primary teachers to fulfil the requirements of ESL children and to close the success gap between EAL students and native English speakers. The staff in the pilot schools stated that the pilot program had stimulated the bilingual students to participate more in classroom and encouraged them to use their home language in school (DfES, 2006a). A report by Ofsted (2013) concluded that there were more resources available and more one-to-one support for EAL children.

1.2. EAL Education Policy in the UK

The number of EAL pupils in primary and secondary schools in the UK has increased dramatically from 499,000 in 1997 to 1,171,101 in 2015 (Demie, 2017b). To provide a much better quality of learning, NALDIC (2015b) called for employing more bilingual teachers to provide overseas EAL students with a stimulating environment. Furthermore, NALDIC stressed that different support is needed for children at different stages of acquiring English in order to access the curriculum and to improve their language, but it may not be individualised sufficiently (South, 2012). In fact, a variety of bilingual staff was required so that all the different languages spoken by EAL children could be met.

EAL pupils in the UK are generally taught in the same classes alongside their monolingual peers (NALDIC, 2012). Besides, there is no specific curriculum for EAL pupils. However, the policy towards the EAL pupils since the mid-1980s has emphasized that EAL pupils should have equal access to the National Curriculum, which has been considered as a good model for learning English as a first as well as an additional language (NALDIC, 2015a). The policy also emphasized providing EAL pupils with the appropriate support and learning recourses in light of their proficiency in English (Bell Foundation, 2017). The government policy

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stressed that schools should give newly arrived EAL pupils additional support to learn English by specialist teachers or by bilingual classroom assistants. To ensure addressing the needs of EAL pupils, classroom teachers in collaboration with EAL teachers or advisers work to prepare lessons and learning materials for this sake (NALDIC, 2012; South, 2012).

The Department of Education and Training [DET] (2015) stressed that the learning programs of EAL learners should provide optimal conditions for learning English. It also stressed the significance of formulating and implementing the learning program of EAL learners in all learning areas in light of the language learning needs of all students with an emphasis on building student language acquisition across all three modes of speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing. These programs should be reviewed on regular basis to ensure that they still meet the learners' needs as the DET (2015) stated. In the same vein, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] (2000) suggested that head teachers, the governing body, the school's senior management, and class teachers all have an important role to play in supporting, monitoring and evaluating the progress of ESL pupils in order to raise their achievement. Despite such a structure, there are - due to the lack of central government policy in the UK - still some problems for overseas students to learn English (Datta, 2007).

Regarding students at KS2 in the UK, the Department for Education (2011) stated that all students at KS2 should be able to read accurately and fluently and use different grammatical structures appropriately. Furthermore, all KS2 students should be offered learning that is challenging and that helps promote pupil's diverse learning requirements as well as accessing the curriculum. The different strategies outlined by the Department for Education could help to reflect pupils learning and to promote their culture and identity.

1.3. Bilingual Education & Bilingual Teachers

The increase number of immigrant young students who speak non-English languages to countries such as the UK and the USA resulted in the appearance of bilingual education. Bilingual education is defined as education that aims to promote bilingual competence by using the mother tongue and another language as media of instruction for significant portions of the academic curriculum (Genesee, 2008). It is based on the notion that L1 can play an important role in the learning and acquisition of children for additional languages. According to Tomlinson (2010), the main aim of bilingual education is to ensure that a child who is proficient

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in his native language acquires the same level of knowledge and skills in the second language. The bilingual education programs can keep EAL students need engaged in their schools, making them feel secure and ease to learn English as Tomlinson (2010) argued.

It has been recognised that employing bilingual staff is highly beneficial for EAL learners as they can draw on their own previous knowledge and personal experiences brought from EAL students' homes to address their needs and to support their learning (Cable, 2004; NALDIC, 2011; South, 2012). According to Cable (2004), a bilingual teacher can also enhance the social integration and self-esteem of the EAL pupils. Similarly, Cummins (2001) argued that teachers with intercultural experience are capable to teach bilingual pupils to learn actively as they can promote their pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage. This can have a positive impact on the identity of the EAL pupils, which is fundamental to their educational success.

To Strangman and Hall (2004), a bilingual teacher can provide EAL young pupils with an idea about the text before reading through asking questions. This can encourage them to access their previous knowledge and support them to make connection with their previous knowledge, which can result in improving their reading comprehension, leading to a better performance. Likewise, NALDIC (2011) and South (2012) believed that bilingual teaching assistants have specific expertise in terms of sharing a language and cultural heritage with EAL pupils, which can enable them to build on forms of knowledge and cultural experience of the EAL pupils, and hence activating their prior knowledge and enhancing their access to the curriculum. At school level, the bilingual teachers can serve as collaborators helping general education teachers meet their EAL pupils' needs (Samson & Collins, 2012). Ofsted (2014) stressed the importance of providing newly arrived EAL pupils with specialist EAL support from qualified teachers or teaching assistants having experience in this regard. This research suggests that the specialist support should be bilingual.

1.4. The Challenges of Reading for EAL Pupils

Reading can be seen as a way of understanding meaning, and a word without meaning can be referred to as an empty sound (Vygotsky, 1962 as cited in Gregory, 2008). Therefore, it can be suggested that learning to read is vital to develop English language skills. Rosowsky (2001) argued that EAL pupils read texts without considering the meaning, whereas native pupils use strategies to elicit meaning from texts. This can be one of the reasons behind the underachievement of EAL pupils in reading.

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Actually, meaning of words is a key factor in reading, and reading a text without considering its meaning or depending on syntactic cues leads to reading underachievement (Rosowsky, 2001). To Gregory (2008), meaning and decoding are inextricably linked and both are essential components in fluent reading. Both researchers and teachers of the bottom-up and top-down theories agree that all children beginning to read should have some systematic phonics training at the beginning of any reading programs.

A study by Burgoyne et al. (2009) suggested that EAL pupils experience high levels of difficulties in comprehending English texts. Burgoyne et al. attributed these difficulties to low level of vocabulary knowledge rather than specific decoding problems. Similarly, Alqahtani (2015) believed that it is vital to understand the meaning of words when reading, indicating that ESL learners depend mainly on vocabulary knowledge to understand text and that a lack of vocabulary knowledge can be an obstacle to language learning and reading in a new language. Likewise, Oakhill et al. (2003) indicated that effective reading requires more than decoding printed words and the main purpose of reading is to understand texts, and therefore successful reading highly depends on the development of comprehension skills and on single-word decoding as well. Therefore, it is difficult to make sense of what is read without bringing the text to the knowledge of the world. The text itself has no "inherent immutable meaning" as meaning is different to individual readers depending on their knowledge and experience (Rosowsky, 2001, p. 57).

1.5. The Importance of Reading for EAL Pupils

Developing the reading skill is very crucial due to its importance to develop our minds. Reading is experience and experience always results in learning. It involves the acquisition of information, which can help to make decisions and to reduce uncertainty as Smith (2011) argued. According to the Department for Education (2013), through reading, students can acquire knowledge and develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially.

In EAL context, through reading, EAL pupils can build their English language and literacy. To Rini (2013), reading is a gateway to the development of EAL pupil's language as it can play an important role in their vocabulary growth, which in turn helps them learn English. Besides, reading comprehension is an essential factor facilitating curriculum access. Likewise, Datta (2007) suggested that in terms of literacy,

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reading can be viewed as a form of 'cultural capital', and the lack of this capital can thus disadvantage EAL pupils throughout their lives.

The process of learning to read can be analysed at three levels: the sociocultural learning, which refers to learning that puts culture in the middle (i.e., the external culture context in which the learner lives); the interpersonal learning, which refers to learning with other learners and teachers; and the intrapersonal learning, which refers to learner's understanding and intellectual ability in the mind (Gregory, 2008). The focus of this study is on the inter- and intra- personal levels of learning to read, but we must briefly acknowledge the profound impact that reading has on the sociocultural life of a newly immigrated child. Norton (2000) claimed that the term "identity" could suggest how a person may understand his/her relationship to the world, and then how that relationship is interpreted across space and time, resulting in how the individual understands opportunities for the future. Lave and Wenger (1991/2008) concurred that participating in social interaction has a direct impact on learning and identity. The significance of this for EAL learners is highlighted by Whitaker (2010), who stated that the better immigrant children are able to use English, the better they can integrate into the host community. Therefore, learning to read in English can offer learners the foundation for intercultural learning.

1.6. Potential Barriers to the Achievement of EAL Pupils

There are many potential barriers to the learning and achievement of EAL children in school. For Gillborn and Gipps (1996), the potential barriers to children learning include educational level of parents and their attitudes and experiences towards education. To the PACER Centre (2007), parents can play a vital role in developing the literacy skills of their children. Through talking, reading, and singing to their children, parents can provide the foundation that their children may need to develop language and reading skills. However, EAL young pupils, especially those whose parents have a low educational level, may not enjoy this vital experience (Solomon, 2020), which puts them at further disadvantage to their English-speaking peers, highlighting the need to develop sound reading strategies at school. According to Pont et al. (2008) and Chung (2012), the educational background of parents has a significant impact on the achievement of their children in school.

To Demie and Hau (2016) and Demie (2017b), language barriers are the most vital factor affecting the achievement and attainment of EAL pupils in English schools. To Hammersley-Fletcher et al. (2006), there are three major ways of communication: on-verbal communication,

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speaking and listening, and reading and writing. Thus, the challenge for EAL pupils is that without being able to speak and understand English, they will not be able to read fluently or to reflect critically on what they have read. This can have serious consequences on their social development as a lack of communication can also affect the child's social development.

Additionally, lack of access to comprehensive learning materials and teachers who are well trained to address the needs of the EAL pupils can be barriers to the achievement of EAL pupils. Moreover, the economic status of the parents can be a barrier to the achievement of the EAL pupils (Henderson, 2019), as this may prevent them from accessing extra activities after school to enhance their reading abilities. Furthermore, the negative attitude and lack of motivation of EAL pupils can be a barrier to English learning, which highlights the importance of providing positive attitudes and creating motivation among EAL pupils to encourage them to learn English (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011).

Overall, the literature indicated that reading skills are essential for EAL pupils to integrate into the new society and to succeed in their education. However, there are some barriers to the EAL pupils' good performance that should be addressed to help them improve their reading in English. Despite the fact that EAL pupils have different needs from those of their monolingual peers, they should be taught in the mainstream classrooms alongside their monolingual peers as newly arrived EAL pupils need to hear fluent and competent English to improve their language. This requires providing them with the support they need in terms of teaching strategies and resources. In the UK, the needs of EAL pupils are now considered by school systems and policies. They can get more resources and even one-to-one support to help them access the curriculum and reach the same level of language development as their monolingual peers. Yet, more resources and support, including bilingual support, are required to help EAL pupils overcome their language needs.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of the study, a qualitative approach was employed, specifically utilising a case study, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis in order to investigate the impact of English as an additional language on EAL young pupils' reading skills. The case study was adopted in this research as such a method can provide a very rich, deep, heavy and stimulating understanding of child development (Mukherji & Albon, 2018), which can help to understand the EAL children's development to read. Such a mixed-methods design

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was adopted to collect data with a view to obtaining a full picture of EAL young pupils in a primary school setting and producing results that are more compelling. Together they can provide a more complete approach to finding answers to the study questions than single method studies.

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were three Arab EAL children (2 girls and 1 boy aged 7-11) in their first year of primary school in the UK. Their mother tongue is Arabic; they learned to read simple texts in Arabic before they came to the UK. They also started to read and write basic texts in English and to speak very limited English with their teachers and peers. The class teacher and the ESL mentor of the EAL young pupils were also participants of the study.

3.2. Instruments

To answer the study questions, both primary and secondary data were collected through three instruments. The first instrument involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the EAL children's class teacher and the ESL mentor, using five open-ended questions developed in light of literature review. The interviews took place at Oak Tree Primary School located in the West Midlands in January 2019. The main aim of the interviews was to explore the teachers' experiences in terms of teaching EAL young pupils. The second instrument was participant observation, which was guided by two more open-ended questions to assess the development of the reading skill of the EAL young pupils. It helped to gain a full picture of the everyday performance of the EAL children in reading. Data were also collected through making a documentary analysis of the school's EAL policy to support the current investigation in terms of identifying how school addresses the needs of EAL pupils.

3.3. Procedures

In light of literature review, five open-ended questions were prepared to be used in the semi-structured interviews and more two open-ended questions to be used to guide the observation of the EAL pupils. A copy of the interview and observation transcripts was made available for inspection and verification by the school and the participants. Besides, the participants (EAL pupils and teachers) were informed about the purpose and the nature of the study. Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were provided for them. Regarding the EAL pupils, they gave their oral consent to their parents and teachers before participating in the study and they were told they had the right to withdraw from it at any time, and that they would remain anonymous. The school's EAL policy

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was examined based on the guidelines for authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning of MacDonald (2008). Finally, the data collected via the semi-structured interviews, the observation, and analysis of the school's EAL policy were investigated to answer the study questions.

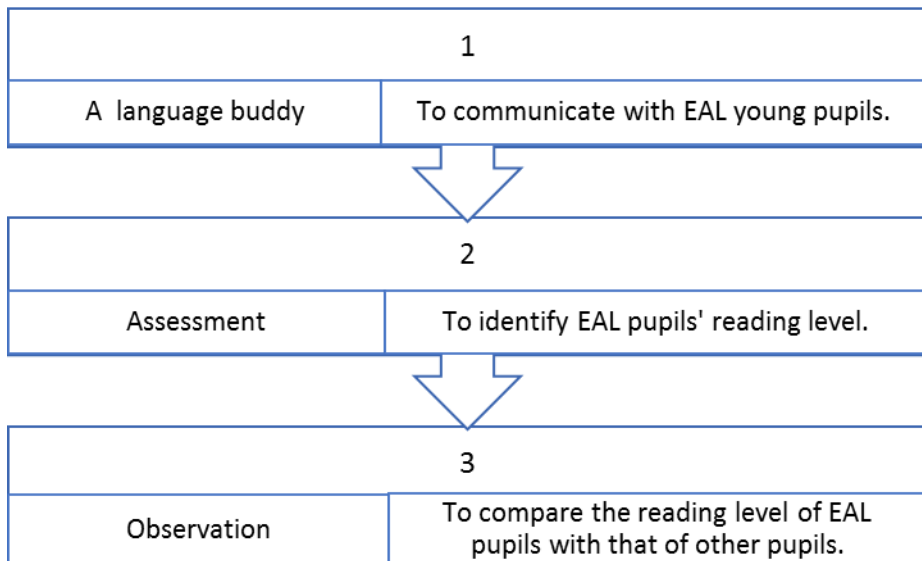
4. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The data collected via the different sources were analysed qualitatively to answer the study questions:

A. *Semi-structured Interviews*

The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to explore the experiences of the teacher and the mentor in relation to teaching EAL pupils. Five open-ended questions were used in the interview. The first question intended to identify the procedures used by the school to evaluate new EAL pupils. The responses to this question indicated that new EAL pupils have to pass through different stages of evaluation, which are represented in Figure (1).

Figure 1: Oak Tree Primary School Procedures to Evaluate New EAL Pupils



As Figure (1) shows, the progress of EAL pupils is monitored and evaluated through different stages. First, on their arrival, new EAL pupils are paired with a buddy, given time to settle in, meet the class and get used to moving around school to build their self-confidence. EAL pupils usually find their buddy useful to introduce them to the new environment. After four to six weeks in school, the new pupils begin to adjust to the school and their social English begins to develop. Then, the

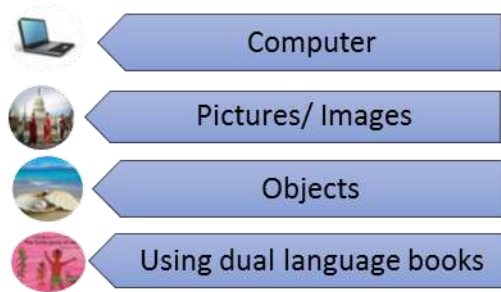
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new EAL pupils are assessed to identify their level in order to provide them with the appropriate support according to their needs. After that, the staff observe the EAL pupils' progress in comparison with the range of the class to assess if they are on average or under it. Furthermore, EAL pupils' progress is tracked against specific targets, and finally their progress is monitored again to see if they have met their targets. Through the assessment and observation, the staff can identify the pupils who are struggling and adjust their teaching approach accordingly. The staff also planned different learning objectives matched to EAL pupils' needs, such as *All by Myself Readers* and *Out of Sight* books to support their reading skills.

The second question aimed at identifying the learning resources used to help EAL pupils improve their reading skills in English. The responses indicated that Oak Tree Primary School utilises some ESL resources in a hierarchical manner at this stage of child development as shown in Figure (2).

Figure 2: Learning Resources Available in the Classroom



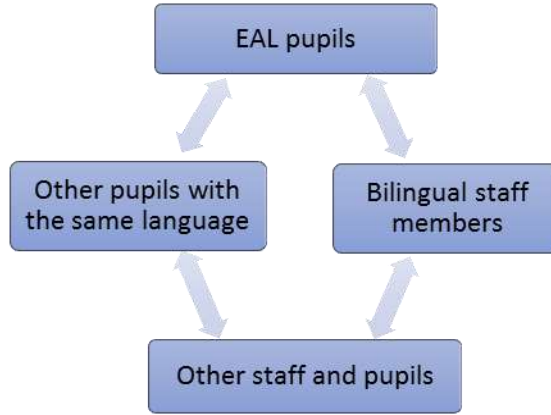
As shown in Figure (2), Oak Tree Primary School uses different resources to help EAL pupils to access the school curriculum and improve their reading skills. For example, using items such as a bucket, sand, towel and flip flops in the classroom allows the teacher to talk about the beach and give the child an idea of context. According to Cummins (2001), it is essential to use a variety of learning resources at different stages of acquiring English to promote literacy and achievement among EAL learners.

The responses to the third question (i.e., How do staff communicate with EAL pupils?) revealed that there is a cycle of communication with new EAL pupils as depicted in Figure (3).

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Figure 3: Cycle of New EAL Pupils' Communication at Oak Tree Primary School



During the first few weeks, newly arrived EAL pupils communicate with the bilingual staff and other pupils who speak the same home language. Actually, it is beneficial for new arrival EAL pupils to be with a buddy or a peer mentor who shares them the same language (Gravelle, 2009) as separating them from their native peers can limit their social interactions, which can affect their language acquisition seriously (Gonzalez-Herrera, 2017). The bilingual peers are fluent in English and are able to communicate, translate and explain the meaning of words to the EAL pupils. Besides, they can act as an interpreter for EAL pupils. In fact, the language peers can play a significant role in helping EAL young children learn new language through play (Gregory, 2008). The Oak Tree Primary School makes use of this strategy and if a language buddy is not available in the new EAL pupil's own classroom, then another one can be taken from different classroom to provide special support to the new EAL pupil during school hours.

Furthermore, the Oak Tree Primary School has started employing bilingual teachers to assist EAL pupils in all aspects of their school experience. However, the school is still experiencing some difficulties meeting the needs of all EAL pupils as there are no bilingual teachers who share the same mother tongue of some EAL pupils who speak some of the less common languages. This urges the need for more bilingual staff as the mentor claimed.

The fourth question was asked to identify how well EAL pupils do in English tests. The teacher and the mentor indicated that the performance of the EAL pupils is getting better year by year. This claim is in line with the statistics reported in some studies or reports (e.g., Rosowsky, 2001;

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Strand & Demie, 2005; NALDIC, 2012; Department for Education, 2012; NALDIC, 2013; Demie, 2017a) regarding the achievement of EAL pupils at KS2 in the UK in the national tests in English, which indicated an improvement in the performance of EAL pupils year by year.

However, it should be noted that EAL pupils obtained these results with support from their teacher and bilingual staff. The teachers usually read the questions to the EAL pupils and sometimes they explain what the questions mean, whereas native students do not receive this support and they still achieve higher marks than EAL pupils do. In fact, the Oak Tree Primary School utilises some systematic phonics but not enough and this could be one of the reasons for EAL pupils' underachievement. It is also possible that the staff have low expectations for EAL pupils, labelling them as less likely to achieve top marks.

The last question was asked to find out the possible reasons behind the underachievement of the EAL pupils in primary school. The class teacher and the mentor identified the educational level and economic status of parents as barriers that have a negative impact on EAL pupils' educational achievement, including reading skills. This result is consistent with what Henderson (2019) claimed that the economic status of the parents can be a barrier to EAL pupils' achievement, because this may prevent them from accessing extra activities after school, which could enhance their reading abilities. This result is also in line with Gillborn and Gipps (1996) and PACER Centre (2007), which identified the educational level of parents as a barrier to the achievement of ESL learners. For example, if parents are literate, they can read stories to their children, which can have a positive impact on their language development. Besides, parents' lack of fluency in English can affect the educational achievement of their children who need to be fluent in English in order to communicate and participate in the class. In the long term, this will have an effect on their children as all English language skills, including reading skill, can contribute to the integration of immigrant children into their new community homeland (Whitaker, 2010). Besides, fluency in English is essential in order for EAL students to succeed in their education (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2013).

B. Document Analysis

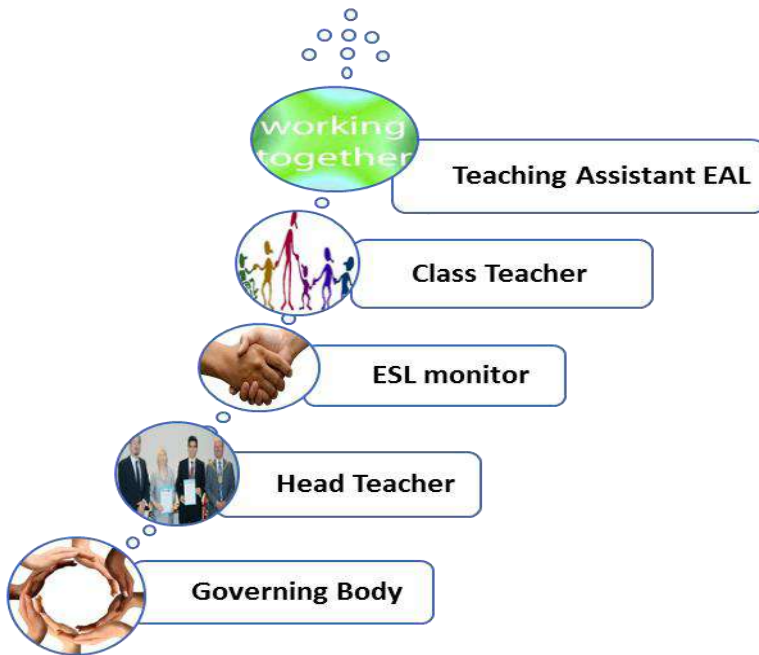
The EAL policy of Oak Tree Primary School was produced for the school's own use as part of its commitment to addressing pupils' diverse learning needs and providing equal opportunities for all pupils, including EAL pupils. Its analysis, along with the data collected through the semi-

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structured interviews and observation, helped to obtain the whole picture about how the Oak Tree Primary School addresses the needs of EAL pupils. The school's EAL policy was examined based on the guidelines for authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning of MacDonald (2008). Besides, the policy was investigated within the framework of Ofsted (2012), which requires schools to narrow the gap between the different groups of learners. In light of school policy analysis, it was found that the head teacher, the class teacher, the governing body and the teaching assistant are working as a team to support EAL pupils and to monitor their progress. Figure (4), developed in light of information obtained from the school policy, shows how the school staff work together to support EAL pupils.

Figure 4: School Staff Working together to Support EAL Pupils



The school's EAL policy follows the recommendations of the QCA (2000) that all staff have an important role to play in supporting, monitoring and evaluating the progress of EAL pupils. The teacher and the teaching assistant mainly focus on a specific group of pupils during the main part of the lesson in order to raise their achievement and to provide preparatory teaching to help them better access the lesson. The role of the one-one assistance is to provide individual support to EAL

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pupils either before or during the main lesson, especially when specific difficulties and misconceptions arise. The head teacher, along with the governing body, monitors the implementation of the school's EAL policy during meetings, which take place every 2 weeks.

Such a strategy has proved to be effective, allowing the staff in meetings to identify issues, which need to be addressed. For example, they noted that the lack of basic reading resources in the classroom and then agreed to design their own reading books to teach useful simple words, such as "the," "you," and "my". Then, the school developed the books, *All by Myself Readers* and *Out of Sight* books and began using them in the classroom. These books had positive impact on the EAL young pupils' learning; for example, the teachers reported that the repetition of these words in the books has met some of the students' language needs and enhanced their understanding and use of the words. The effectiveness of this approach is also apparent in the consistent improvement in the performance of the EAL pupils in English tests as stated earlier. Although they remain behind their native British peers, their steady improvement is remarkable.

C. Participant Observation

Three first generation immigrant pupils who speak EAL at KS2 at Oak Tree Primary School were observed. The observation was carried out in the whole class, with a focus on the EAL pupils while the class teacher was teaching normally. The observation focused on the influence of the limited English of the three Arab EAL pupils on their participation and responses to questions asked by the teacher. Two main questions were used to direct the observation:

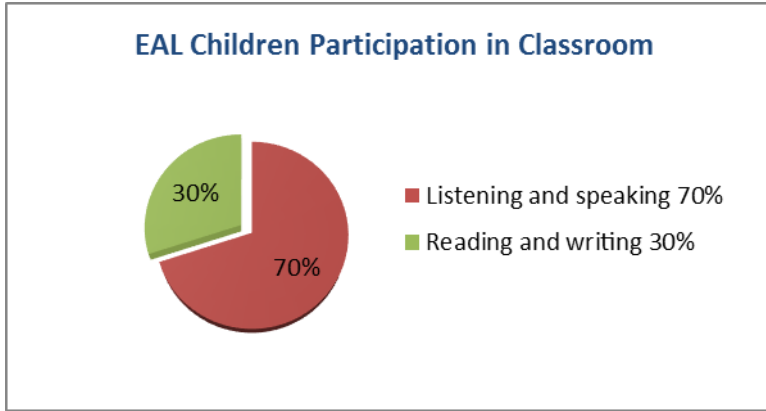
1. How do the EAL pupils participate in lessons?
2. How are EAL pupils encouraged to read?

Based on the observation of the three newly arrived EAL pupils and the comments of their teacher, it can be stated that they spend more time listening and speaking rather than reading and writing as shown in Figure (5).

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Figure 5: *Estimated Percentage of Classroom Activities in Which EAL Pupils are Engaged*



As shown in Figure (5), it was roughly estimated that 70% of the EAL pupils' time was spent listening and speaking, suggesting that they enjoy verbal and auditory activities more than reading and writing activities. The EAL pupils might spend less time on reading as they find reading more difficult due to their limited vocabulary, which can have a negative influence on their comprehension ability. The reason behind the fact that the EAL pupils spend more time listening and speaking was due to the effective role of the bilingual teacher who kept on providing them with regular opportunities to communicate and to engage in activities with different levels of language challenges in learning settings.

Listening, speaking, and comprehension are essential aspects of learning any language. Newly arrived pupils need to hear proficient English speakers, which can help them to acquire new vocabulary in context, acquire correct pronunciation of words, and identify patterns of language in meaningful contexts (DfES, 2006b). In the context of this study, it was observed that the newly arrived EAL pupils pick up English words rapidly and start to communicate and participate in the classroom, yet the exam results showed they still struggle with their reading and writing skills. These results are consistent with national figures, which showed that pupils with English as a first language perform better than EAL pupils at all stages of education (NALDIC, 2012).

Regarding how the newly arrived EAL pupils at Oak Tree Primary School are encouraged to read, the observation revealed that some strategies, activities, and resources are used to support the newly arrived EAL pupils read in English.

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Table 1: *Strategies Used at Oak Tree Primary School to Support EAL Pupils in Reading*

Reading strategy	Support offered	Activities	Resources
Familiarizing newly arrived EAL pupils with new words.	One-to-one support	Teaching the basic and common words, such as the, was, is, he, etc.	<i>All by Myself Readers</i>
Repeating words and highlighting the key words.	Teachers, one-to-one support and parents	Phonics games to practise pronouncing words such as "c-a-r" for "car".	<i>Out of Sight</i>
Building up the pupils’ vocabulary	Teachers, one-to-one support and parents	This exercise involves using flashcards: A question is written on front side of the card and an answer overleaf.	Flash cards

Table (1) shows that familiarizing the newly arrived EAL pupils with new words, repeating words and highlighting the key words, and building up their vocabulary are the basic reading strategies utilized by the school to encourage the newly arrived EAL pupils at KS2 in the early stages to read. Table (1) also shows that activities, such as phonics games to practice pronouncing words were used to support the newly arrived EAL children to develop their reading skills and to build their vocabulary. Using the phonics games, the teacher could provide the EAL pupils with opportunities to learn basic letter sounds and to practise pronouncing words, encouraging them to read and to build up their self-esteem. The school found that this process supports EAL pupils to gradually learn to read themselves.

It must be recalled here that these pupils were at KS2, and therefore their skills were far behind the National Curriculum goals for their age. It was observed that reading was difficult for these pupils, who were still struggling with very simple words such as “the”, “is”, “was”. Nevertheless, it was also observed that the bilingual staff were making a difference by explaining the words in the pupils’ mother tongue, helping each EAL pupil individually.

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As Table (1) shows, different types of support is given to the the newly arrived EAL pupils, including one-to-one support. It was noted that the one-to-one support by the bilingual staff was helpful for the EAL pupils. The schools's ESL mentor stated that she found that such an approach more effective than the monlingual approach. The EAL pupils also stated that they found the bilingual staff highly beneficial as they can draw on their own experience being bilingual learners themselves. To Ofsted (2013), EAL pupils need different support at different stages of their acquisition of English language.

In the sessions observed, the bilingual teacher started the reading activity by asking the EAL pupils several questions to give them an idea about the context before reading. This interaction encouraged them to access their previous knowledge and to make connection with what they already know, an approach recommended by Strangman and Hall (2004). According to Cummins (2001), activating background knowledge through question answering technique can prevent EAL pupils from feeling low about their prior experience of life and education, which can have a positive impact on their identity, which is fundamental to their educational success. In fact, the process of obtaining language and socio-cultural skills are closely interrelated. To Schieffelin and Ochs (1998), the process of obtaining language and the process of formation of socio-cultural competence are closely connected (as cited in Gregory, 2008).

Regarding the confidence of the newly arrived EAL pupils, it was observed that they were confident to interact with the bilingual teacher; they were able to take part in reading activities, whereas with non-bilingual teacher they can only rely on syntactic cues because they are unclear about the meaning of the words (Rosowsky, 2001). For Gregory (2008), meaning and personal interaction are fundamental for new language learners to adapt to the language.

In light of the data collected from the interviews, observation, and the analysis of the school policy documents, the three study questions were answered:

RQ #1: Does English as an additional language present a barrier to the development of reading skills of EAL pupils at Key Stage 2?

There is still a gap in performance between EAL pupils and their native English classmates in the UK. At KS2, pupils whose first language is English achieve better than EAL pupils in all subject areas, including reading and writing (Demie, 2017a; Department for Education, 2012). The results at Oak Tree Primary School are similar to national achievement rates; EAL pupils still underperform in English tests in

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comparison to their native counterparts and therefore require more support, including bilingual support, to meet their individual needs.

During observation, it was noticed that the EAL pupils spend more time listening and speaking and less time on reading as they find reading more difficult due to their limited vocabulary. This can have a negative influence on their comprehension ability and reading skills. In light of this, it can be concluded that English reading skills of EAL young pupils can be affected negatively by their lack of enough skills in English.

RQ #2: What are the strategies used to support EAL pupils to develop their reading skills?

The Oak Tree Primary School staff use a variety of strategies to help EAL pupils to develop their reading skills. They pair the EAL pupils with a buddy on their arrival to school to build up their self-esteem. The bilingual peers are fluent in English and are able to communicate, translate and explain the meaning of words to the EAL pupils, which can help them develop their English. The bilingual peers can also act as an interpreter for the EAL pupils.

Staff continually monitor and assess the EAL pupils to identify their progress and level compared to their classmates and any difficulties they face and adjust their approach accordingly. The staff also develop various learning objectives based on the EAL pupils' needs and use materials, such as *All by Myself Readers* and *Out of Sight* books to support their reading skills. Besides, various learning resources at different stages are used to promote EAL pupils' literacy skills and to help them acquire English. Moreover, the school benefit from the bilingual teachers who are best placed to assist the EAL pupils in all aspects of their school experience, including building their English vocabulary, which can contribute to their development in reading. Furthermore, in reading lessons, the bilingual teacher can ask the EAL pupils some questions before reading to give them an idea about the context through activating their previous knowledge and to make connection with what they already know, which can enhance their comprehension and hence their reading skills.

RQ #3: How effective the strategies used to support EAL pupils are in developing their reading skills?

This study indicates that the Oak Tree Primary School adopts some strategies to develop English reading skills of EAL young pupils. The school also provides the EAL pupils with one-to-one support from teachers and well-developed resources to create an interactive learning environment that can encourage them to participate more in reading and

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writing activities and hence to develop their reading skills. Such a strategy could help EAL young pupils to make some progress in reading.

However, it was noted that the majority of the EAL pupils participate more in listening and speaking and that their participation in reading and writing is less than their native pupils because they find reading and comprehending texts in English difficult due to their limited vocabulary, which can affect their reading skills. As Smith (2011) argued, understanding the meaning of texts is the root of reading and learning to read. Besides, the data collected indicated that the EAL pupils at Oak Tree Primary School underperform in English tests compared to their native English-speaking counterparts, which can be partially attributed to their limited English reading skills when they join school in the UK. In this, the study is in line with Burgoyne et al. (2011), who suggested that EAL children experience great difficulty in reading comprehension compared to their monolingual peers and that the low level of vocabulary represents a potential barrier to EAL learners' comprehension of texts.

Schools, therefore, should work on developing the reading skills of EAL pupils to ensure that they have access to curriculum and other materials developed to meet their specific needs, which will enable them to acquire higher levels of proficiency in English. During the participant observation, it was noted that many EAL pupils benefitted from the bilingual approach. It is noteworthy that the three EAL pupils observed in this study did not have access to bilingual support, as they were Arab EAL pupils. They were aware of the absence of bilingual support and wished that they a bilingual support. Therefore, it can be concluded that English-only strategies are not sufficient to help those with severely limited English to develop solid reading skills.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the impact of English as an additional language on newly arrived EAL young pupils' English reading skills. The data collected through the semi-structured interviews with the teacher and the mentor, the observation of three EAL children, and the documentary analysis of the Oak Tree Primary School's EAL policy revealed that it pays attention to the needs of the EAL pupils. The ongoing assessment, monitoring, and needs tracking with a view to identifying the needs of the EAL pupils and measuring their progress and then using teaching strategies and materials to help them develop their reading skills had a positive impact on the EAL pupils' reading skills. Nonetheless, it was noted that EAL pupils face some difficulties while learning to read in English due to their limited English vocabularies and

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that EAL pupils' results still lag behind their native English-speaking counterparts even when they reach secondary school level (Department for Education, 2012). Thus, it can be concluded that EAL pupils need more time and more support and resources to acquire English language skills so that they can succeed in their education. This raises crucial questions about what further measures the Oak Tree Primary School needs to undertake to bring parity in the results between EAL pupils and their English first language peers.

Besides, the results of the study indicated that the Oak Tree Primary School use different methods of communication with EAL pupils, such as bilingual staff or a buddy who are best placed to provide language support for the EAL pupils to succeed in their education and social life and to build up their self-esteem. Cummins (2001) agreed that teachers can make a difference in student's reading success and motivation to read, and therefore each EAL pupils deserve outstanding reading teachers and this research suggests these teachers to be bilingual. Additionally, the data gathered showed that the overall number of EAL pupils is increasing in UK primary schools, which suggests that more resources and more bilingual staff will be needed to meet the growing numbers of EAL pupils and to help them overcome the language barrier.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This qualitative research is a small-scale research with a small sample size. Its findings were identified through interviewing a teacher and an ESL mentor, observing just three newly arrived EAL pupils, and a documentary analysis of one school's EAL policy. Therefore, caution should be considered when making generalizations from the findings to other contexts. However, such limitations give directions for further research.

Actually, the difficulties that EAL learners face are multifaceted, thus it is important to conduct a range of studies to determine the most effective ways to promote their overall learning and achievement. Besides, it would be advantageous to conduct a large-scale research study examining the best practices and approaches for enhancing the reading skills of EAL learners. Researchers can also investigate the impact of using some resources, such as the electronic dictionary, books with pictures and sound, talking books, ChatGPT, etc. on improving the reading skills of EAL pupils. As the results of this study, which investigated the theoretical underpinning of the bilingual approach, led to the belief that this approach is effective in educating newly arrived EAL pupils, it is suggested to conduct an experimental research to investigate

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the impact of the bilingual approach on the development of EAL pupils' reading skills.

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