

# Compulsory EAL Training for Teachers in England

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## Overview

English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in the English classroom is the new norm, as nearly 21% of primary and 17% of secondary students in England have English language needs at varying levels (The Bell Foundation, 2017).

Furthermore, a recent report stated that of England's primary and secondary schools, over 8% have a student population that is majority EAL, with half of those being in London (Strand, Malmberg and Hall, 2015). However, nearly a quarter of these majority-EAL schools are located in the Northwest and West Midlands, areas often associated with low academic performance particularly among ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups (Strand, Malmberg and Hall, 2015; Hutchinson, et. Al., 2018). The recent EU expansion and migration across Europe is changing the dynamics of the English classroom, and teachers must adjust the way they teach and accommodate for such a diverse body of students (Conteh, 2015). Unfortunately, most teachers in England are never trained before or during their teaching jobs to adequately support their EAL students, and reports show they feel unprepared, overwhelmed, and unknowledgeable when

it comes to ensuring every student, no matter their cultural background or native language, has equal and fair access to the English education to which they're entitled (Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Costley, 2014; Foley, Sangster and Anderson, 2013).

Every child attending school in England holds the right to an education to secure their wellbeing and future participation and inclusion in British society.

Teachers play a vital, fundamental role in providing equal access to education to their pupils, and therefore should be sufficiently trained to do so for their EAL students, particularly in regions with large numbers of EAL learners outside of the capital that might lack in sufficient EAL funding and access to support staff. In order to support the millions of EAL students nationwide, the Department for Education should provide teachers and teacher-trainees with in-depth training to prepare, plan and adjust for their many EAL learners through their Local Authorities. Furthermore, this training should be a requirement for teachers pursuing careers in primary or secondary education to ensure they are equipped to offer a non-discriminatory education for all children in the English school system.

## Context

While over 300 languages are spoken amongst primary and secondary students in London alone, the National Curriculum and Department for Education gives little attention to English as an Additional Language policy (Leung, 2016). A mere 94 words were used in the 2013 National Curriculum to describe requirements and expectations of teachers to support their EAL learners (Leung, 2016; Costley, 2014). Even though vast amounts of

research now exists describing new and effective ways teachers and schools can better help their EAL students, teachers aren't being trained to do so, whether in their PGCE/PGDE programmes, or as continued training on the job (Conteh, 2015; Costley; 2014). Last year, people immigrating to the UK was over a quarter of a million more than those leaving the country (Office for National Statistics, 2019). England will continue to be an international hub and one of the world's super-diverse countries, and this will continue to have an impact on its primary and secondary schools (Conteh, 2015).

Researchers in education already know that teaching for language needs requires a different know-how and skillset than mainstream teaching, even though having EAL students in class is now as commonplace as those with special educational needs (Conteh, 2015; Hamilton and Moore, 2004; Afitska and Clegg, 2016). If teachers aren't trained to teach every student in their classroom, we are failing the English education system and its students.

## Current Approaches to EAL Teacher Training

Currently, it is not compulsory, and often not available, for teachers to complete any sort of EAL training, and the DfE does not yet recognize EAL as a special subject in the National Curriculum (Costley, 2014; Foley, Sangster and Anderson, 2013). The National Curriculum states that teachers should understand the meaning of EAL and diversity but does not require any specific knowledge on the subject (Costley, 2014; Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). Although Local Authorities may have the responsibility to

provide and ensure teacher training, EAL provision nationwide is incredibly inconsistent and overlooked (Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). When asked, teachers countrywide reported a total unawareness of EAL policies and provision; many others resorted to other, more experienced, yet untrained, teachers for help (Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). External organisations like the Bell Foundation and NALDIC have stepped up in place of governmental support to provide teachers and schools with resources and guidance, but English teachers need more consistent, in-depth training when it comes to EAL.

## Proposed Policy Action

What's needed here is simple. Teachers must be properly trained to accommodate for all their students in the mainstream classroom. Apart from acknowledgement in the National Curriculum as being a specialist subject, all Initial Teacher Training programmes in England should comprise of a compulsory EAL component of no less than 50 hours of EAL training and/or practice. Therefore, the Department for Education must modify teaching requirements in England to include EAL training, just as teachers are required to obtain Qualified Teacher Status. Accordingly, the DfE should amend the Teacher's Standards (DfE, 2011) to include this mandatory training, implicating Local Authorities to provide it for already qualified teachers as a requirement to continue pursuing their teaching careers. Parts one and two of the Teachers' Standards emphasise the expectations of teachers to address the needs of *all* students while being "tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE, 2011, pp. 14). However, mention of

EAL student inclusion and language diversity is completely lacking, despite how common the EAL learner is today. Therefore, the DfE must draw more attention to EAL as a specialist subject and obligate teachers to be prepared and trained to adapt for the needs of all their students, not just those with English as a native language.

## Resources

Afitska, O. And Clegg, J. (2016) Supporting Teachers in EAL Classrooms: Working Towards the Centralised Provision of Subject-Specific, EAL-Tailored Resources for Primary Classrooms, *The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL* [online], pp. 95-108. Available from: Academic One File [accessed 01 April 2019].

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Database [online]. University of Oxford:  
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[https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/23323/EAL\\_and\\_educational\\_achievement2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/23323/EAL_and_educational_achievement2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [accessed 6 June 2019].