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Abstract

This paper aims to examine English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils' English proficiency and its impact on attainment to improve our knowledge about EAL pupils and how they might be supported in the classroom. The study considers empirical evidence from an inner London Local Authority (LA). The data for EAL proficiency was collected from 17,571 EAL pupils. The sample for performance analysis consisted of 2,957 pupils who had completed Key Stage 2 (KS2) and 1,953 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The main findings of the KS2 attainment data using the new national EAL proficiency stages in England shows that no-one at stage A (New to English) achieved the expected standard of achievement compared to 12% at stage B (Early Acquisition), 56% at stage C (Developing Competency), 66% at stage D (Competent), 85% at stage E (Fluent in English) and English only (71%). Similar findings also emerged from the analysis of GCSE data at the end of secondary education. Overall the findings of the research confirm that there is a strong relationship between stage of proficiency in English and educational attainment. The results also suggest that the percentage of pupils attaining expected outcomes or above at KS2 and GCSE increased as stage of proficiency in English increased. Pupils in the early stages of English proficiency performed at low levels, while the achievement of EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English far outstripped that of pupils for whom English was their only language. The conclusion from the study is that the national EAL pupils' English proficiency stages is useful as a diagnostic tool to analyse needs for future teaching focus, tracking progress and to provide baseline information for statistical purposes. Policy and research implications are discussed in the final section.

Key Words: English as an Additional Languages, language proficiency, Attainment, Key Stage 2 and General Certificate of Secondary Education

1. Introduction

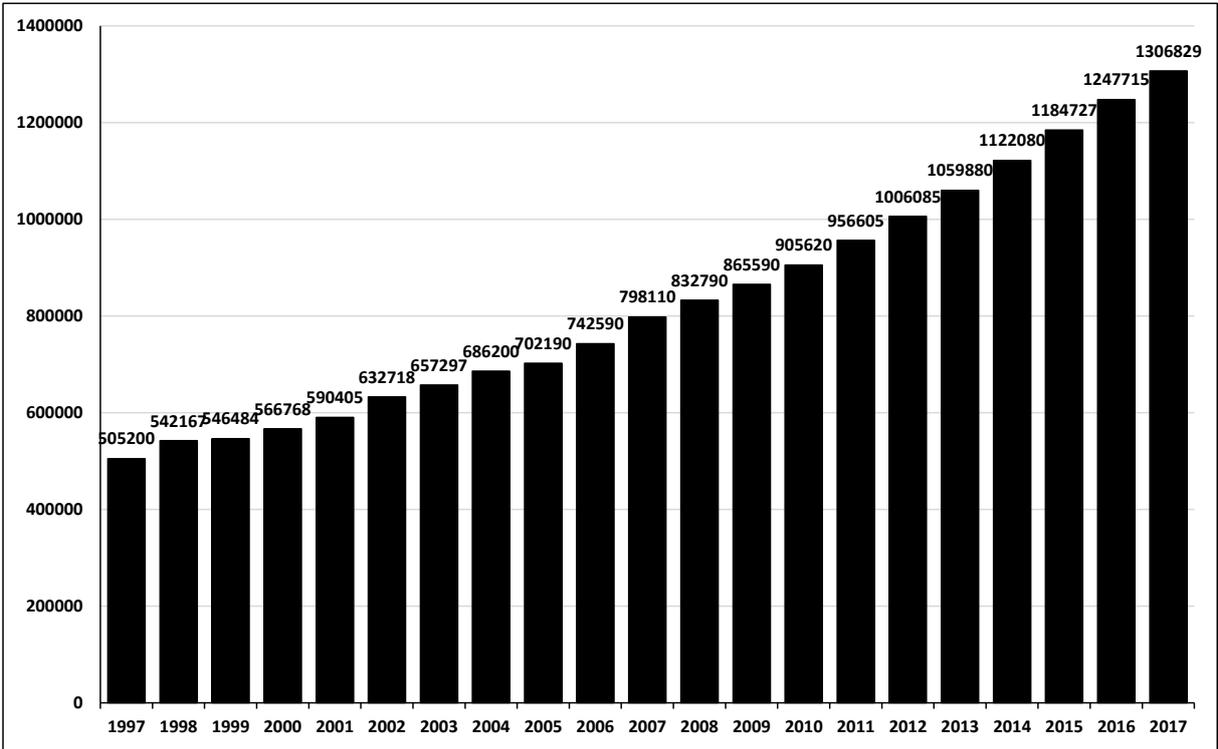
English language proficiency is the major factor influencing the performance of pupils with English as an additional language. With English being the language of instruction, for pupils to fully and effectively access the curriculum, it is clear that they need to be fluent in English. However, there are relatively few studies that have examined the English proficiency of pupils with EAL and the relationship between stages of English fluency and attainment. This issue is increasingly important given the growth in the EAL population in England over the last decade. A review of the literature suggests there is a wealth of research into the growth of the EAL population and attainment in schools. The number of pupils in England with English as an additional language has seen a dramatic increase over the years from 499,000 in 1997 to 1,306,829 in 2017 (Demie 2015; DfE 2017), an increase of 161%. There are now more than 1.3 million pupils between 5–18 years old in England schools speaking in excess of 360 languages between them, and who are at varying stages in their learning of EAL, from newcomers to English to those that are fluent. About 19% of the school population in England and Wales now speak English as an additional language.

Recent studies have examined the effect of stages of English proficiency on attainment at Key Stage 2 tests (KS2) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). For example, the analyses of the national KS2 test results and GCSE examination results for pupils in an inner London Local Authority (LA) by levels of English language proficiency show that EAL pupils at the early stages of

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developing fluency had significantly lower KS2 test scores in all subjects than their monolingual peers (see Demie 2013, 2016 and 2017; Strand and Demie 2005; Demie and Strand 2006). However, EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English achieved significantly higher scores in all KS2 tests and GCSE than their monolingual peers. The negative association with attainment for the early stages of proficiency remained significant after controls for a range of other pupil characteristics, including age, gender, free school meal entitlement, stage of special educational need and ethnic group, although these factors effectively explained the higher attainment of the 'fully fluent' group. The two studies conclude that there is a strong relationship between stage of proficiency in English and educational attainment, with the performance of EAL pupils increasing as measured stage of proficiency in English increases. Pupils in the early stages of proficiency perform at very low levels, while EAL pupils who are fully fluent in English perform better, on average, than English-only speakers (see Demie 2013, 2016 and 2017).

Figure 1. EAL Population in Primary, Secondary and Special Schools in England, 1997-2017



Source: DfE Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics (1997-2017)

The few studies that specifically looked at EAL attainment and language spoken, identified that there are significant differences in attainment when considering ethnic background, language spoken and stage of English proficiency (See Demie 2015 and 2017; Von Ahn 2011). Overall nationally, EAL pupils achieved less well in reading, writing and maths at KS2 than those with English as a first language. Furthermore, non fluent EAL pupils were underachieving compared with monolingual English speakers in English schools. However using EAL status alone from the National Pupil Database is not sufficiently accurate for studying EAL attainment as it comprises both those EAL pupils who are fully fluent in English as well as those who speak little or no English. Thus to get a better insight into EAL performance, there is a need for more detailed analysis which takes into account language spoken at home together with a measure of pupil proficiency in English.

Rea-Dickins (2001 and 2002) also carried out research focussing on how EAL pupils were assessed in the classroom at KS1. This research provided examples of how teachers used the information they gained from these assessments, and explored how this was used at different stages in the context of

the national curriculum. In addition she explored the nature of formative assessment, specifically in relation to the language support of EAL learners in inner city schools and how it could be used to address the problems of low achievement (Rea-Dickins and Gardner, 2000). However to our knowledge, the author has not carried out any research into EAL attainment using the stages of English proficiency in English schools.

Other studies of EAL attainment have taken into account other factors that could affect performance including social, emotional and behavioural issues. For example recent research in the UK by Whiteside et al (2017) reported that *'English language proficiency in children with EAL is predictive of concurrent academic attainment and social, emotional, and behavioural functioning, as well as academic attainment (2017, 88(3):825)*. Winsler et al (2014) supported these findings with a study of EAL Latino children in America. While study in USA by Umansky et al (2014) also found students whose home language was Spanish were considerably less likely to reach proficiency than any other groups and they took longer to learn English. These studies suggest that improving the English proficiency of EAL pupils would improve the social, emotional and behavioural characteristics of the pupils as well as narrowing the attainment gap with their monolingual peers.

A review of literature also suggests that with the rapid rate of globalization there has been a dramatic increase in interest in the study of bilingualism, particularly the Chinese language in the USA and many western countries (see Prevoo et al 2015; Padilla et al 2013; Umansky et al 2014; Murphy 2015). For example recent studies in the USA looked at language proficiency and academic achievement of students who completed a two-way Mandarin immersion programme. *'The results from this study show that students who are taught in Mandarin for much of the school day generally achieve at levels on California-mandated tests in English language arts, writing, math, and science that are as high as, or sometimes higher than, their non-immersion peers who attend the same school. These results are reassuring because they demonstrate that, when students receive instruction in two languages, they are not only developing as bilinguals but also do not fall behind their peers on the essential content.'* (Padilla et al 2013, 46(4):675)

However, a review of the literature suggests that there are relatively few studies that have examined the way we assess the English proficiency of EAL pupils in England. Overall the body of available literature suggests that most of the previous studies have focused on bilingualism (Murphy 2015; Conteh 2014; Umansky et al 2014, NALDIC 2014; Padilla et al 2013; Cummins 1992); first language use when supporting early EAL children (Michael et al 2016, Arnot et al 2014; Murphy 2015; Cummins 1979); and language diversity and EAL attainment (Demie et al 2017; Demie 2015 and Strand 2015; Tereshchenko & Archer 2014). All these studies again suggest that English language proficiency is an important factor in predicting how well children with EAL perform relative to monolingual peers in assessments at the end of primary and secondary school. There is a need for more research on the way we assess EAL pupils and on the relationship between stages of proficiency in English and attainment to improve our knowledge about EAL pupils and how they might be supported in the classroom. Stage of proficiency in English is therefore potentially a powerful predictor of differential attainment among EAL pupils at all key stages and an important factor in pupil achievement.

2. Research aims

This paper aims to examine EAL pupils' English proficiency and its impact on attainment to improve our knowledge about EAL pupils and how they might be supported in the classroom. Two overarching questions guided this research:

- What does the English language proficiency data tell us about EAL attainment in schools?
- What are the implications for policy, practice and any future research agenda?

The data

The study considers empirical evidence from an inner London LA as a case study. The case study LA is one of the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse boroughs in Britain. In common with many other inner London boroughs, the LA has a high proportion of pupils whose first language is not English. The LA school census showed that overall, 87% of pupils in schools belonged to ethnic minority communities. The diversity of the LA population was reflected by an exceptional number of languages spoken in addition to English. There were 150 different languages spoken by pupils in the LA. The current statistics also indicate that about 36,562 pupils attended the LA schools. Of these 48% of pupils were classed as EAL in the January 2017 school census (see Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of EAL Pupils by School Type in the LA's Schools

	EAL Pupils		English Monolingual speakers		Total Pupil Number	
Nursery	226	46.7%	258	53.3%	484	100.0%
Primary	11,821	49.4%	12,132	50.6%	23,953	100.0%
Secondary	5,388	46.7%	6,151	53.3%	11,539	100.0%
Special	123	26.9%	335	73.1%	458	100.0%
PRU	12	9.4%	115	90.6%	127	100.0%
LA	17,571	48.0%	18,991	52.0%	36,562	100.0%

The main empirical basis for this research was the data collected by the Spring 2017 School Census on proficiency in English and language spoken by 17,571 EAL pupils in the LA's schools. The return of the school census is a statutory requirement placed on all schools in England (DfE 2017b). The sample for performance analysis consisted of 2,957 pupils who had completed KS2 and 1,953 GCSE. In addition, a range of background information including details of pupil ethnic background was also collected for all nursery, primary, secondary, special schools and the pupil referral units. Each pupil in the sample had a unique pupil number, and this was used to match socio-economic information with KS2 and GCSE results.

Terminology and education acronyms used in this study

In this study, the term English as an Additional Language (EAL) is used to describe the learning of English in addition to the learner's first language. Pupils learning EAL are not a homogeneous group; they come from diverse linguistic, cultural, ethnic and educational backgrounds. They may also be at different stages of English language acquisition (from complete beginner to fully fluent) and may also already be fluent in several other languages or dialects. We need to be cautious about the definition of EAL used in the national school census data collection. The census data only reflect exposure to a language other than English at home or in the community. They give no indication of a student's proficiency in the English language.

In England the National Curriculum is followed, split into four key stages. In primary school, Key Stage 1 (KS1) comprises years 1 and 2 pupils, and Key Stage 2 (KS2) is for years 3 to 6. In secondary school, years 7 to 9 make up Key Stage 3 (KS3) and KS4 is years 9 to 11. Results are publically reported for schools at KS2, for reading, writing, maths individually as well as reading, writing and maths combined (RWM), while at KS4, results are reported based on the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE, including English and maths.

Methods

Measures for Assessing Stages of English Proficiency for EAL pupils

The EAL learning needs of pupils vary greatly from beginners to advanced learners (see Demie 2016 and 2013; Demie and Strand 2006). Stages of English have been widely used to describe the different stages of English through which pupils commonly progress (see for an example widely used throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Hester 1993; Demie 2016 and 2013; Demie and Strand 2006).

The Department for Education (DfE) have now adopted a national five stage EAL assessment and requires schools in England to report proficiency in stages of English language for all EAL pupils. These five stages range from 'New to English' to 'Fluent' and are described below (DfE 2017b:63-66). The schools assess the position of their EAL pupils at reading, writing and speaking and listening against a five stage of proficiency framework. They then make a 'best fit' judgement as to the proficiency stage that a pupil most closely corresponds to:

“Stage A (New to English). May use first language for learning and other purposes. May remain completely silent in the classroom. May be copying/repeating some words or phrases. May understand some everyday expressions in English but may have minimal or no literacy in English. Needs a **considerable amount of EAL support**.

Stage B (Early Acquisition). May follow day to day social communication in English and participate in learning activities with support. Beginning to use spoken English for social purposes. May understand simple instructions and can follow narrative/accounts with visual support. May have developed some skills in reading and writing. May have become familiar with some subject specific vocabulary. Still needs a **significant amount of EAL support** to access the curriculum.

Stage C (Developing Competence). May participate in learning activities with increasing independence. Able to express self orally in English, but structural inaccuracies are still apparent. Literacy will require ongoing support, particularly for understanding text and writing. May be able to follow abstract concepts and more complex written English. Requires **ongoing EAL support** to access the curriculum fully.

Stage D (Competent). Oral English will be developing well, enabling successful engagement in activities across the curriculum. Can read and understand a wide variety of texts. Written English may lack complexity and contain occasional evidence of errors in structure. Needs some support to access subtle nuances of meaning, to refine English usage, and to develop abstract vocabulary. Needs **some/occasional EAL support** to access complex curriculum material and tasks.

Stage E (Fluent). Can operate across the curriculum to a level of competence equivalent to that of a pupil who uses English as his/her first language. Operates **without EAL support** across the curriculum.”(DfE 2017:63-66)

For the purposes of this analysis, pupils at **Stages A-E** are classified as 'EAL'. **Stage A** are classified as 'beginners' in English and those at **Stage E** are classed as 'fully fluent.'

Pupils who only speak English and have no access to any other language are not assigned a Stage of English Proficiency and are classed as 'English only'.

The fluency stages provide detailed information to assess EAL learners' language development from Stage A to E and can be used by schools, LAs and central government as a diagnostic tool

to analyse needs for future teaching, tracking progress and to provide baseline information for statistical purposes. As argued by Brentnall (2016:26)

‘The highest stage (E) is equated with a level of competency equivalent to that of a pupil who used English as his/her first language. This means that only A-D are used to indicate development towards this level of proficiency.... Despite concerns, that learners may remain at one stage for longer than they do for others and the overall results may be skewed because of the potential time lag between current EAL assessment and the time of the national curriculum assessment, the five stages model is a distinct improvement over the current binary EAL English first language indicator. It provide detail information about the journey learners are taking to speak, read, and write in English and the amount of support pupils need to access the curriculum. It will offer a useful gauge for class and subject teachers planning lessons for classes with EAL learners.’

An important consideration that needs to be noted is that there are many local variations on the way EAL pupils have been assessed in the UK. While some schools use Hilary Hester stage descriptors, others use ‘The Northern Association of Support Services for Equality and Achievement EAL Assessment System descriptor’ (NASSEA 2001) and The Bell Foundation (2017) descriptors. Although NASSEA and Bell foundation stages are linked to the DfE’s five stages they tend to use different descriptors in addition to the DfE descriptors. We would argue this could raise statistical noise in the future. Furthermore, as far as we know NASSEA and Bell Foundation assessment systems have produced no baseline statistical information that may be used for research purpose at a national level and local level. It therefore important we continue using and improving the DfE stages descriptors to have reliable national statistical data.

EAL Pupils Stages of English Proficiency and Attainment in Schools in England

In this section we look at the stages of English proficiency by type of schools and the influence of proficiency in English on pupil performance at the end of primary and secondary schools. The case study LA, in common with many other inner London boroughs, has a high proportion of pupils whose first language is not English.

Stages of English Proficiency by School Type

Table 2: Numbers of EAL Pupils by English Proficiency Stage in the LA’s Schools 2017

Proficiency Stages	Nursery		Primary		Secondary		Special		PRU		LA	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Stage A	70	31.0%	1,216	10.3%	141	2.6%	40	32.5%	0	0.0%	1,467	8.3%
Stage B	59	26.1%	2,454	20.8%	291	5.4%	40	32.5%	0	0.1%	2,845	16.2%
Stage C	55	24.3%	3,318	28.1%	703	13.0%	24	19.5%	2	16.7%	4,102	23.3%
Stage D	23	10.2%	2,577	21.8%	1,445	26.8%	9	7.3%	3	25.0%	4,057	23.1%
Stage E	19	8.4%	2,256	19.1%	2,808	52.1%	10	8.1%	7	58.3%	5,100	29.0%
Total EAL	226	100.0%	11,821	100.0%	5,388	100.0%	123	100.0%	12	100.0%	17,571	100.0%

Table 2 shows the stages of English proficiency at each phase of education. There were significant difference when stage of proficiency data was analysed by type of schools in the case study LA. Of the 17,571 EAL pupils for whom English proficiency information was collected:

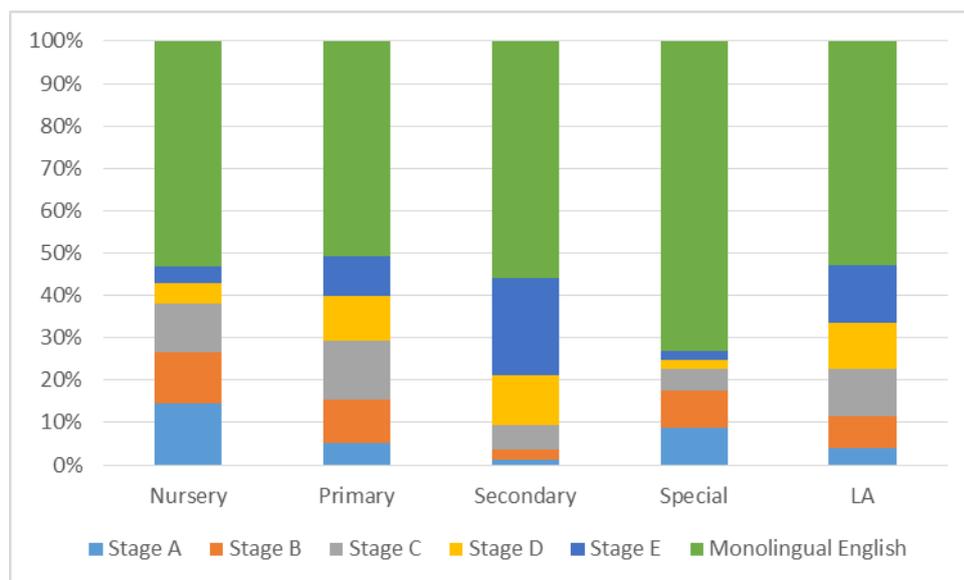
- In all schools, about 8.3% were on Stage A (New to English), 16.2% Stage B (Early Acquisition), 23.3% Stage C (Developing Competence), 23.2% Stage D (Competent), and

29.0% fully fluent in English. Furthermore 52% pupils in all LA schools were English only speakers.

- 226 pupils in nursery schools were EAL with just 8.4% being fully fluent in English. The largest English proficiency group was Stage A (31%) closely followed by Stage B (26%).
- 11,821 pupils in primary schools were EAL with 19.1% being fully fluent in English. The largest English proficiency group in primary schools was Stage C pupils (28.1%), but were closely followed by a significant number of Stage B (20.8%) and Stage D (21.8%) pupils.
- 5,388 pupils were EAL in secondary schools, with 52.2% being fully fluent in English. Stage E was by far the largest English proficiency group.
- 123 of pupils were EAL in special schools, with just 8.2% being fully fluent in English. Both Stage A and B recorded 32.5% EAL proficiency compared to 19.5% in Stage C and 7.3 % in Stage D. The largest English proficiency groups in Stage A and B.

Figure 2 also shows the proportion of children at the different stages as percentage of the total number of EAL learners and monolingual English.

Figure 2. English Proficiency by School Type



Previous research has shown that there are more Key Stage 1 EAL pupils at low levels of English proficiency than for later key stages. During Key Stage 2, more EAL pupils are at proficiency stages D and E, and by the time they reach secondary school the majority of EAL pupils are fully fluent in English (stage E) and there are far fewer pupils at the early stages of English proficiency (Demie 2013). This is further supported by the current study which suggests that the majority of EAL pupils are between stage C and E at KS2, and at the end of secondary education are at Stage D and E (see Table 2 and DfE 2017b). The data also shows that about a third of EAL pupils were assessed as fully fluent in English. This finding is supported by recently published EAL proficiency data at national level (DfE 2017b) which suggests that about a third of EAL pupils were assessed as fully fluent in English.

Stages of English proficiency and attainment at KS2 and GCSE

Table 3 also gives the average performance of EAL pupils at KS2 and GCSE. The empirical findings of the attainment data using the new national EAL proficiency stages in England shows that no-one at

stage A (New to English) achieved the expected standard of achievement compared to 12% at stage B (Early Acquisition), 56% at stage C (Developing Competency), 66% at stage D (Competent) and 85% at stage E (Fluent in English). The EAL pupils on Stage A-D are underachieving when compared to the 71% of English speakers only who met the expected standard in RWM.

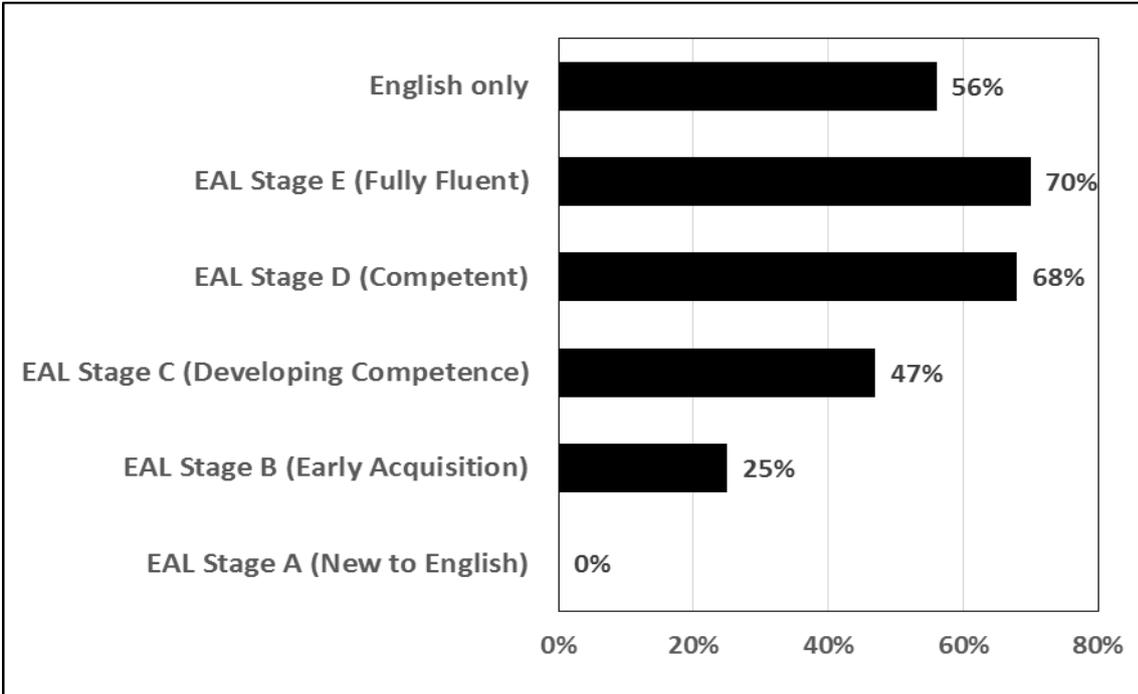
Table 3: Average KS2 and GCSE Performance by Proficiency in English 2017

EAL proficiency Stages	KS2 Pupil Number		KS2 Results*				GCSE Pupil Number		GCSE Results
	KS2 cohorts	%	Reading	Writing	Maths	RWM***	GCSE cohorts	%	5+A*-C
EAL Stage A (New to English)	34	1.1	0%	0%	12%**	0%	5	0.3	0%
EAL Stage B (Early Acquisition)	98	3.3	24%	20%	46%	12%	28	1.4	25%
EAL Stage C (Developing Competence)	389	13.2	65%	76%	81%	56%	106	5.4	47%
EAL Stage D (Competent)	440	14.9	75%	85%	82%	66%	217	11.1	68%
EAL Stage E (Fully Fluent)	487	16.5	89%	95%	95%	85%	505	25.9	70%
English only	1381	46.7	82%	82%	82%	71%	1076	55.1	56%
All pupils	2957	100.0	77%	81%	82%	69%	1953	100.0	59%

* KS2 is based on the percentage meeting the expected standard in each subject and GCSE is 5+A*-C passes including English and maths
 ** Includes 4 pupils who were identified as fully fluent in their home language and with special talent in maths.
 *** RWM is KS2 Reading, Writing and Maths combined

Overall the results of the KS2 analysis show that the percentage of pupils attaining expected outcomes in each subject at the end of primary education increases as the stage of proficiency in English increases. Across reading, writing and maths, those who were new to English or at early acquisition show very low attainment, but achievement improves as proficiency in English improves. The achievement of EAL pupils who are fully fluent in English (Stage E) continues to be high, with their 2017 RWM outcome being 14% above English only pupils and 16% above the overall test average for all pupils.

Figure 3. GCSE 5+A*-C including English and maths Performance by EAL Proficiency in English



What is noticeable from the data is that EAL pupils achieve better in maths than reading, and writing. We would argue EAL learners who are new to English and have had a good previous

education often find it easier to demonstrate their ability in maths than in other subjects. This is because at higher levels in topics such as number and algebra, mathematical 'language' is highly abstract and does not require words. In addition, in 2017, the arithmetic paper was one of 3 maths papers taken, and accounted for 40 of the 110 marks. There was no text on the arithmetic paper. Pupils were also allowed to have bilingual word lists if normally used in class. As a result 12 % (4 pupils) who were stage A managed to achieved the expected standard. It can be argued also these pupils may have progressed with their levels of proficiency in English to Stage B between the time assessed and the test. This is not unusual with EAL pupils who are already good in maths and fluent in their own home languages.

Similar findings also emerged from the analysis of GCSE data at the end of secondary education. Overall the data in Figure 3 and table 3 shows that no-one at stage A (New to English) achieved 5+A*-C including English and Maths, compared to 25% of pupils at stage B (Early Acquisition), 47% at stage C (Developing Competency), 68% at stage D (Competent) and 70% at stage E (Fluent in English). EAL pupils who are fully fluent in English performed better than English only speakers. About 76% of EAL pupils at stage E (fully fluent) achieved 5+A*-C including English and maths compared with 56% of monolingual English only speakers. There is a 20 percent achievement gap between fully fluent EAL pupils and monolingual English speakers. The LA GCSE data also confirms that there is a strong relationship between stages of proficiency in English and attainment. The percentage of pupils attaining 5+A*-C increased as stage of proficiency in English increased.

Overall, there were three key findings from the analysis of attainment of EAL pupils by stage of English proficiency at KS2 and GCSE.

Firstly, the empirical data revealed that 49% of pupils in primary schools and 47% in secondary schools were classed as EAL pupils in the case study LA. The empirical evidence shows that more Key Stage 1 EAL pupils are at low levels of English proficiency than for later key stages, but during Key Stage 2, more EAL pupils are at proficiency stages C, D and E. By the time they reach secondary school the majority of EAL pupils are fully fluent in English (stage E) and there are far fewer pupils at the early stages of English proficiency.

Secondly, the main findings of the attainment data using the new national EAL proficiency stages showed that EAL pupils in the early stages of English proficiency performed at low levels, while the achievement of EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English far outstripped that of pupils for whom English was their only language. Overall the findings of the research confirm that there is a strong relationship between stage of proficiency in English and educational attainment. The results suggest that the percentage of pupils attaining expected outcomes at KS2 and GCSE increased as stage of proficiency in English increased. This confirms the findings of previous research. EAL pupils who are fully fluent in English are also much more likely to get the expected standard when compared with English speakers (Demie 2017; Demie 2013).

Thirdly, the study suggests that using pupil home language in the census and monitoring stages of English acquisition would greatly improve our abilities to plan support services to enable pupils to achieve the proficiency they need to access the national curriculum effectively. Given the importance of such data for supporting EAL pupils at national level, it is essential that central government continues collecting EAL proficiency data as part of school census.

The results of this study have far reaching implications for policy and practice. The government uses the data on the English proficiency of EAL pupils to inform policy as stated below:

'The information will help the department understand how effective the education sector is for EAL pupils and will provide valuable statistical information on the characteristics of these

children and, together with their attainment, will allow us to measure whether the individual pupils, or the schools they attend, face additional educational challenges.’ (DfE, 2017:65)

The new national five stage assessment framework is similar to the four stage proficiency assessment model that the case study LA has successfully employed in their schools since 1990, which has helped to address the needs of EAL pupils by tracking EAL pupils’ progress in proficiency in English, targeting additional support where required and in past years, allocating funding to those pupils with lower levels of proficiency in English (Demie 2013). We would argue that if the data are to be useable in the long term, it is essential that schools and teachers are supported by effective training in EAL assessment and pupil progress tracking.” In addition there is a need of moderation of the stages of EAL proficiency assessment between schools and LAs by well qualified EAL teachers or EAL professionals.

There are also overall resourcing implications for national policy makers. In England the Government uses EAL as an additional factor to fund schools through the national schools funding formula. The national education policy guideline suggests that *‘EAL status increases costs for schools and that there is a strong relationship between a pupil’s fluency in English and their educational attainment. ...The Government believe that allocating funding to those pupils with EAL who entered the state education system at any point during the previous 3 years would target funding to schools likely to have pupils in need of targeted support to increase language proficiency.’*(DfE 2016, pp 27-28). However, research here and elsewhere (Demie 2013, Cummins 1992, and Collier 1987) confirms that EAL pupils take about 5–7 years on average to acquire academic English proficiency. The government is underfunding schools by supporting only EAL pupils who have entered state education during the last 3 years.

Discussion and implications for further research

This study aimed to examine EAL pupils’ English proficiency and its impact on attainment to improve our knowledge about EAL pupils and how they might be supported in the classroom. The study considered empirical evidence from an inner London LA. The main findings of the study confirmed that the percentage of pupils attaining expected outcomes at KS2 and GCSE increased as stage of proficiency in English increased. This study supports previous research (Demie 2016 and 2013, Demie et al 2006; Goldfeld et al 2014, Halle et al 2012, Prevoo et al 2015, Strand and Demie 2005) that suggest academic attainment of EAL pupils is dependent on English proficiency. It also highlights the need to be cautious about simply using an EAL/non EAL indicator to study attainment. As argued by Strand et al (2015) and Demie (2015 and 2017) EAL is not a precise measure of language proficiency. Pupils recorded as EAL may speak no English at all or they may be fully fluent in English.

The key question from this research is how useful is the new national EAL proficiency assessment to improve policy and practice in the classroom and at national level? The strength of this study is that it considers empirical evidence from an inner London LA with long years of experience of collecting and monitoring EAL pupils to track pupils progress and attainment and to provide baseline information for statistical purposes at school and local level (see Demie 2013, 2016 and 2017; Strand and Demie 2005; Demie and Strand 2006). The data was collected from 17,571 EAL pupils in the LA schools. Another strength of this study, is that it is the only currently known research in England to explore the attainment of EAL pupils using the new national DfE English proficiency stages. While we have noted from literature review there were few studies based on the local descriptors (Demie 2013; Demie and Strand 2006), there was no research that we know of using the new EAL assessment that was introduced in January 2017 to all England schools. This study also supports previous studies that show *“the stage of English Language Proficiency offer a complementary assessment to National Curriculum assessment. They can be used to highlight the broad needs of EAL learners, to inform pedagogical and administrative planning and to measure broad progress over time (Demie and Strand 2006: 227).”*

We would argue that the introduction of the national EAL proficiency stages for monitoring and tracking EAL performance in England by central government as a statutory requirement in the School Census in 2017 is a major step in the right direction in addressing the needs of EAL pupils. However, as with all new assessment systems, it has strengths and weaknesses. It may take a few years for the national EAL stages to become fully established in schools data returns. Some LAs, such as the case study LA, will be able to put more resources for training in the EAL assessment process in schools in their areas. Consultation with the case study LAs schools on using the new proficiency model has recognized the success it has in accurately capturing the stage of English development of EAL pupils in their schools and the benefit in helping target the needs of EAL pupils to access the curriculum effectively. In particular, by focusing on the separate elements of reading, writing and speaking and listening, a clear approach can be taken to assess and improve their aptitude in each of these areas.

Despite these positive messages from the case study LAs schools, we would argue that the speed of acquisition for pupils with English as an additional language and its implications for performance is a relatively under-researched field in England, but one of crucial importance to all involved in education. While this study represents a beginning into examining the relationship between English proficiency and attainment in England, it is our hope that it is a springboard for further research. We would argue that this study identifies some limitations, with several possible avenues and questions for future research including: Who should assess EAL pupils? Why are learners sometimes remaining at one stage for a longer time? What are the right times to assess EAL pupils? What are the implications of EAL assessment for training and moderation? How long do pupils stay in each stage of English?

The first research question of who should assess EAL pupils is of critical importance. There is an issue regarding whether or not a classroom teacher should assess a pupil's proficiency in English. Demie (2013) argued that the use of classroom teachers for assessment could introduce an element of statistical noise into the data. However, this issue is very minimal in the case study LA schools as the assessments are mainly done by qualified EAL teachers or well-trained EAL teaching assistants (TAs). School based specialist staffing in the case study LA is largely limited to schools with significant numbers of EAL or ethnic minority learners. Some schools finance additional specialist teachers and support staff including EAL consultants, EAL co-ordinators, EAL teachers, EAL teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants. In addition, others use specialist teachers, learning mentors and learning support staff as well as other staff who address the specific needs of pupils learning EAL. These staff may be located within a specialist team or within SEN, Inclusion or Pupil Support teams or departments. While this may show a positive picture in the case study LA, we would argue that in England there are not many trained EAL teachers or coordinators as a result of EAL budget cuts since 2010. Some schools may be using a classroom teacher or SEN specialist SENCOs to assess EAL pupils instead of trained EAL teachers or EAL teaching assistants. Many schools, particularly where there are few EAL learners, rely on general teaching or learning assistants with no specialist skills on knowledge in assessing EAL pupils. This remains a critical issue to improve the quality of assessment at national level and there is a need to do further research into who have the skills and knowledge to assess EAL pupils in schools.

The second research question should focus on the reliability of the stage of English proficiency assessments, and the impact of training and moderation in improving the quality of the data. In the case study LA extensive training of teachers in EAL assessment procedures and use of EAL data is followed by careful moderation of the whole assessment process across the authority's schools using EAL specialists to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the levels of assessment. It has been argued in previous studies in the authority that proficiency in English stages are sufficiently moderated across the LA backed by good training of EAL specialists and classroom teachers (Demie and Strand 2006) and *'have been found to be wholly accurate in all secondary schools'* (Gay,

2011,p3). As a result of good moderation it is possible to minimise the margin of error and improve the quality of assessment data and the way the stages of proficiency in English may be used to assess EAL pupils in schools. The importance of accuracy in assessment that is consistent across all schools in the LA and indeed the country and its implications for schools should be emphasized. Having skilled teachers in EAL and having this experience retained in the school is crucial and should be an integral part of teacher's CPD. Like for all significant data that is collected, a moderation exercise should be carried out to validate the assessment of English proficiency against factors such as a pupil's achievement and where necessary, re-aligning assessment practice in schools so that it is consistent across the LAs. In the case study LA, an audit is carried out by an EAL specialist commissioned by the LA once a year. As part of the moderation exercise, schools which submit inconsistent data are identified and school visits are arranged to assess a sample of EAL pupils in the school. Schools which have not been moderated in a period of time may also be subject to review. Overall the recommendation from this study is that there is a need for a national moderation strategy to check the understanding of EAL performance standards by visiting schools, talking to teachers, looking at class work and by talking to the pupils themselves. We also need to carry out further national research to evaluate effectiveness of the moderation procedure to determine whether it has helped to improve the quality of the EAL assessment data.

The third research question could look into an issue of whether the children taking KS2 should be assessed nearer the time they are taking test in May. Unfortunately it takes time to assess EAL children for their stage of English proficiency in schools. In the case study LA, the children were assessed between September and December to be ready for the Spring School Census in January. This could introduce more statistical noise into the data. Children who were assessed in September may quickly move from the beginner stage to early acquisition or between other stages of English proficiency. We think this to be minor but may be worth investigating its impact on overall attainment.

Another important consideration that needs to be noted for future research is how long it takes to acquire English proficiency for EAL pupils. Given the importance of proficiency in English for funding purposes, it would be useful to examine in the future the amount of time it takes for pupils to become fully fluent, especially those pupils working from a starting point of being New to English. With the absence of universal national assessment stages for English proficiency until now, very little empirical work has been done in this area in England.

Finally it is also important to note that our research data comes from one local authority with many years history of collecting language and English proficiency data. However, the socio-economic composition of the EAL population is not representative of the country as a whole, for example the proportion of EAL in our sample is about 47% compared to the England average of 14%. Such difference may mean that similar analyses carried out in a different LA's schools would show somewhat different patterns. Nevertheless the broad findings of our research are in line with other studies (see Demie 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017; Collier 1989; Cummins 1992; Demie and Strand 2006; Strand and Demie 2005) and there are no reasons to think that future studies would differ in anything other than some details. There is a need for further research to have a fuller picture on new national EAL proficiency stages and its impact on attainment in different Local Authorities in England and how long it takes to acquire English proficiency in schools. Despite these limitations, results from the present study do offer significant new insight and extend our existing knowledge in the area of EAL and attainment. The present findings also add to the body of research and wealth of empirical data relating to the new national EAL pupils' levels of proficiency in English and attainment that may be used as a baseline for subsequent studies. Based on the findings of this study, we would argue that there is a need to develop a national EAL policy and research strategy in England that better meets the needs of EAL learners.

The findings of this study have also implications for the collection and use of English Language proficiency data at national and international level. This study also suggests that stages of proficiency provide better insight about the achievement of EAL pupils in English schools than an EAL only marker which was used in England until recently. We would argue, as a matter of good practice, government and schools need an account of people's culture, ethnic and linguistic background in formulating national and local policy. This is the case in England. However the extent to which language proficiency data is collected varies from country to country. Policy makers tend to see bilingualism or language diversity as a threat to national unity. For example in countries, such as Russia, France and Turkey it is illegal to include ethnic and language data in official statistics as they follow a policy of assimilation (Demie 2015, 2017; Blum 2002; Gray 2009; Goldscheider 2002). In countries such as USA, Canada, UK and Australia pupils are also expected to learn only in English in schools. Overall, there is a lack of good quality language proficiency assessment data which prevents monitoring performance and measuring the effectiveness of government policies. We would, therefore, argue that language proficiency data such as the one collected in England provides evidence that can be used to design interventions that tackle the root cause of underachievement of different groups in schools.

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