

Short Communication

Teaching Strategies for English Language Learners; An Exploratory Look at Best Educational Practices

Dr. Joseph W. Chan

Abstract

19116 Bechard Avenue, Cerritos, CA
90703

E-mail: josephxchan@yahoo.com

The English language is considered to be a universal language. It is commonly used as the language of instruction in majority of the schools worldwide. However, English Language Learners, both in the United States and the other parts of the world, are having difficulties in learning due to language barrier. Hence, teaching strategies to improve English proficiency of students should be promoted. Through modification of learning environment, assessment of performance, and appropriate teaching methods, learning will be made possible.

Keywords: English, English as a second language, ESL, English Language Learner, Literacy, Education

INTRODUCTION

English language learners (ELL) refer to students who are learning the English language for the first time. These students commonly come from regions whose primary language is not English but generally require specialized instructions in English for their academic courses (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). It was observed that many international students in the United States cannot communicate in English fluently, which resulted in the decline of international student enrollment in institutions of higher education in the state from 2003 to 2006. The most significant decreases were observed at 2.4% from 2003 to 2004 and at 1.3% from 2004 to 2005 (Institute of International Education, 2007). In 2011, an estimate of 723,277 college students in the US were from foreign countries (Institute of International Education, 2011). Although enrollment trends are currently increasing, the institutions still need to compensate for the previous years of declining or flat enrollments.

Usually, English language learners do not have enough necessary English language capabilities to fully participate in a society or to recognize their full academic potential in learning environments where education is provided in English. In most cases, students are identified as "English language learner students" after completing a formal assessment of their literacy level in English

wherein the students are assessed in terms of their reading, writing, listening, and comprehension skills (Hallman, 2016). If the results indicate that students will have difficulty attending regular courses, they may enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. According to Bhandari and Chow (2007), one of the causes for the continuous teaching of English and persistence of students who are not able to fully communicate in English is economic reasons. It was noted that international students and their families contributed around \$14.5 billion dollars annually to the economy.

However, English language learners can also be students who already possess limited knowledge on the English language but have gained enough English language skills to participate in regular English language courses. Although the results of the evaluation may indicate that the students have reached a literacy level in English, which allows them to participate and flourish in learning environments exclusively in English (Strategies for English Language Learners, n.d.), they may still face difficulties with academic coursework. For this reason, the federal government requires schools and programs to receive federal funding for students to learn English. The result from a sample population of 2,400 international

students in the U.S. shows that majority of international students with English language problem are primarily Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) from the Asia and Pacific Islands.

Students with limited English proficiency refer to students of whom:

- Were not born in the United States or whose mother tongue is another language than English (Childcare Exchange, 2008);
- Are an American Indian and comes from an environment where language other than English has had a significant impact on their English language;
- Have the ability to comply with state competence assessments and can succeed in classrooms where the language of instruction is in English (Hammond, 2006);
- Are migratory, coming from a native language other than English and has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or comprehending the English language.

On the average, English language learners tend to underperform on standardized tests, drop out of school at significantly higher rates, and decline their pursuit of post-secondary education compared to their peers. In school, they may also be enrolled at significantly higher rates than their English-speaking peers in lower-level courses taught by instructors whose teaching style may not be suitable for the ELL students.

In most cases, ELL students are faced with the additional challenge of learning the academic content while trying to interpret the language. Traditionally, teachers have viewed language learning as a process by which words, structures, or rules are passed on to students (Włosowicz, 2016). This approach means that ELLs are not prepared to dwell with the complex texts and types of academic language required in various subjects. Hence, English Language Learners should have frequent and extensive opportunities to talk in small groups to practice and review their English proficiency.

Teaching Strategies for English Students

Environmental strategies

Create massive print environments through employment of bulletin boards with sports and physical activity articles, wherein imagination and participation is encouraged (Support Real Teachers, 2018).

Create Word Walls

Displays of commonly used words in alphabetical order to

familiarize the students.

Evaluate basic knowledge

Assess and review the students regarding what they have learned about the previous activity. In teaching and assessing students, it is necessary to give clear directions. This is for the students to have a general idea and understanding of what they should do. Thus, it will be easier for them to follow future instructions (Reyes and Vallone, 2008).

Instructional strategies

Remain at a slow pace when speaking and use shorter sentences in present tense. In addition, use synonyms, examples, gestures, and demonstrations to facilitate better learning.

- o Avoid expressions or idioms that are only common in the United States to prevent confusion.

- o Use as much forms of media as possible to convey information. This may be achieved through oral discussion, written paperwork, video presentation, teacher demonstration, or through student performance.

- o Address questions to pairs of students rather than individually asking the students. Also, do not forget to give students enough time to answer the question. This will allow the students to comprehend and practice the question in English.

- o Bilingual brochures and reference lists may also be used as guides for the ELL students

- o Use metaphors and images for signals.

The increasing number of ELL students in public schools, as well as the significant educational challenges that these students face, have led to many changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and preparation (Support Real Teachers, 2018). Hence, it is important to identify English Language Learners, integrate them into appropriate programs and measure their academic progress. Since English is now systematically introduced into regular academic courses, states and national organizations have developed standards to guide the ESL curriculum. Additionally, standardized assessments and tests have been adapted to provide more accurate measurement of the academic achievement of students learning English. Currently, majority of the states use the same large-scale assessment referred to as the consortium's ACCESS rating.

Teacher-preparation programs and certification requirements have also been modified to address relevant skills and training, wherein states and accrediting bodies now require formal training for ESL instruction (Bohon et al., 2017). In schools with significant population of English Language Learners, it is necessary for the instructor to possess relevant experience, credentials, and training to provide the best support possible for the students.

CONCLUSION

There are many strategies that teachers can incorporate into their classroom to effectively engage English Language Learners. It is critical to be understanding of the population, to meet students where they are at, and ensuring that instruction is easy to follow yet interesting for students. As the research has shown, it is imperative the students are exposed to various methods of instruction which addresses their auditory, verbal, and written communication skills of the English language. Students will feel at ease when their instructor is both engaging and competent in the course materials, as the instructor sets the foundation for their learning.

REFERENCES

- Bhandari R, Chow P (2007). Open doors: Report on the international educational exchange, New York: Institute of International Education.
- Bohon LL, McKelvey S, Rhodes JA, Robnolt VJ (2017). Training for content teachers of English Language Learners: using experiential learning to improve instruction. *Teacher Development*, 21(5), 609-634. doi:10.1080/13664530.2016.1277256
- Great Schools Partnership. (2013, August 29). English-Language Learner Definition [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/english-language-learner/>
- Hallman HL (2016). Learning to Teach English Language Learners Through English Language Arts Methods: Findings from a National Survey. *Teaching English Language Arts to English Language Learners*, 61-78. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-59858-5_4
- Hammond J (2006). High challenge, high support: Integrating language and content instruction for diverse learners in an English literature classroom. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(4), 269-283. doi: 10.1016/j.jeap.2006.08.006
- Institute of International Education (2011). "Top 25 places of origin of international students," Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange 2009/10-2010/11, 2011, <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>.
- Institute of International Education. (2007, November). Open doors 2007 fast facts <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=69692> (Retrieved:25 February 2018).
- Reyes SA, Vallone TL (2008). Constructivist strategies for teaching English language learners. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. *Strategies for English Language Learners* [Web log post]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.csun.edu/science/ref/language/teaching-ell.html>
- Support Real Teachers (2018). Teaching Strategies for English Language Learners [Web log post]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.supportrealteachers.org/strategies-for-english-language-learners.html>
- Wlosowicz TM (2016). Adult Learners' Expectations Concerning Foreign Language Teachers and the Teaching-Learning Process. *Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 267-285. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-32954-3_15
- Working with Children Whose Home Language is Other Than English. (n.d.). *Child Language Development*, 157-162. doi:10.1002/9780470699126.ch13