

# Empowering Educators to Utilise Teacher Agency to Develop EAL Reading Provision within Schools

## Introduction

This first-class dissertation study addressed a gap in research by comparing the approaches adopted by teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) with reading. Four teachers and four teaching assistants from two different primary schools were interviewed utilising semi-structured interviews, exploring the educators' awareness of effective strategies and EAL organisations, the strategies implemented, the influences on the implementation and development of provision, and how educators feel towards supporting EAL pupils with their reading development.

A key finding of the research indicated that **teacher agency** – the capability of educators to develop their professional selves and contribute towards the development of improved educational practice (Guoyuan, 2020) – was an influential factor on the development of EAL reading provision amongst educators. Therefore, this poster demonstrates how teacher agency was utilised by educators to develop EAL reading provision.

## Key Findings

The role of an EAL coordinator, along with educators' beliefs, can be influential in the development of utilising EAL-specific resources and an EAL pupil's first language within EAL reading provision – coinciding with an 'important factor' in achieving teacher agency being 'in the beliefs, values, and attributes that teachers mobilise' (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p.191). For instance, one participant expressed how their EAL coordinator's implementation of EAL reading trackers made them actively consider all levels of English proficiency amongst their EAL pupils:

*"I think it's very, very easy for us to almost lose sight of an EAL child that might have a very functional, even confident level of English reading and writing."*

Furthermore, educators also demonstrated how their personal values regarding the use of an EAL pupil's first language to support reading led to the development of EAL reading provision:

*"I started a erm like boosting maybe using of mother tongue here so they can speak mother tongue freely cause they can feel proud of it."*

(Educator discussing creation of first-language reading clubs)

*"What I've wanted to do is for her to just start her own like dictionary where she would write down the word in Polish and the English translations."*

These accounts by the educators demonstrate the influence their personal beliefs surrounding first-language use had on the development of EAL reading provision. As such, utilisation of teacher agency amongst these educators led to the implementation of EAL reading trackers, first-language reading clubs, and the use of a bilingual dictionary.

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## Implications

The significance of these findings is that they indicate that the beliefs and values of educators are a key influence on the development, and therefore implementation, of provision utilising an EAL pupil's first language. Whilst the beliefs highlighted are on an individual level, research indicates that professional discourse can have an influential role on the formation of these beliefs (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015), with educational discourses surrounding effective language learning practice preventing the development of pedagogy involving the use of other languages (Bourne, 2001). Therefore, consideration of professional discourse within schools, and the personal beliefs of educators, could be key factors in empowering educators to utilise teacher agency to develop EAL reading provision. Further research into how personal beliefs influence the development of EAL reading provision is therefore recommended.

## References

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