

Who are English Language Learners?

Across the United Kingdom and beyond, the number of students growing up in linguistically diverse homes is on the rise. This trend holds enormous potential for these students, as the ability to speak more than one language is a significant asset in today's global economy.

In the UK, this population of students are often referred to as English Language Learners (ELL) or Students with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Although EAL students may share common characteristics, it is important to remember that no two are the same. Within the population of EAL learners, there lies vast diversity regarding language background and experience, as well as their own academic ability. To best support EAL students, educators must have a clear understanding of their backgrounds and focus on providing high-quality literacy teaching, with varying levels of support.

What do we know about reading development among EAL students?

Students with English as an Additional Language come to each and every classroom with enormous potential but they also face an ambitious challenge. These students must develop English language proficiency alongside other academic skills and knowledge. In terms of literacy support, the process for all students, including those with EAL, involves the development of several different skills. These literacy skills can be broken down into at least two main categories: skills related to decoding (e.g., sound-symbol knowledge, spelling rules), and skills related to deriving meaning from texts (e.g., vocabulary, conceptual knowledge).

Research indicates that when these students are provided with systematic and explicit support in phonics-focused skills, in the absence of specific learning difficulties, they reach similar levels of word-reading accuracy and efficiency to their English-only peers. Importantly, if EAL students do not also receive robust, comprehensive, and sustained support focused on the meaning-based side of reading, they are more likely to demonstrate reading comprehension difficulties when compared to those same English-only peers.



How does Lexia® PowerUp® Literacy promote literacy development for students with EAL?

The goal of Lexia PowerUp Literacy is to support educators as they provide differentiated literacy support primarily for students of all abilities in Key Stage 3, including students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the central design principles of PowerUp integrate effective practices for educating EAL students.

Here are the key ways in which PowerUp supports literacy development among this student population:

Teach key components of reading using a systematic and structured approach.

For students requiring literacy support, including those with EAL, systematic and explicit teaching focused on the key components of literacy is crucial: Word Study, Grammar and Comprehension. Lexia PowerUp Literacy provides sequenced and structured support in each of these key areas. An essential feature of this instructional experience for these students is the way in which the program creates personalised learning paths for each learner through an adaptive placement in each of the 3 strands and scaffolded, differentiated instruction throughout.

Develop foundational reading skills in students new to English

PowerUp provides an explicit focus on phonemic awareness and phonics while leveraging picture-based activities to build vocabulary. Building knowledge of the alphabetic and sound system of English is a critical skill set, especially when sounds are not part of a student's native language or when their native language does not share the same alphabet as English. PowerUp's Word Study strand provides explicit instruction in sound production through highly visual demonstrations and enables students to practice contrasting and discriminating similar phonemes and sounds. For those who are at the early stages of English language learning, focused activities that teach correspondences between sounds and letters provide phonics teaching in the form of age-appropriate content.

Capitalise on technology to represent content in multiple ways and languages

As EAL students develop their English proficiency and literacy skills simultaneously, it is crucial that instructional approaches represent content in multiple ways—through language, text, graphics, and multimedia presentations. Lexia PowerUp Literacy offers a platform for learning that strategically uses technology to enhance the learning experience. For example, users have the option to access audio support that plays directions in one of nine native languages. At the same time, they have access to the 'Listen Mode' feature which allows all program text to be read out loud in English, modelling pronunciation and fluency. Additional visual supports are woven throughout the program, including images to depict terms and concepts, graphic organisers, visually engaging previews of content, and dynamic highlighting of grammar and word structures.

Build academic language development in the context of meaningful content

EAL students have often had fewer opportunities to develop academic language and concepts in English. Therefore, teaching must be comprehensive and intentional on the “meaning” side of reading development. Lexia PowerUp Literacy works to meet this challenge with a focus on building knowledge of academic vocabulary and general academic terms, including transition words, multiple-meaning words, and domain-specific terms. Additionally, students are provided opportunities to explore and analyse text structures across genres while receiving explicit teaching into comprehension for both text understanding and higher-order thinking. Importantly, this teaching is contextualised in themes, texts, and visuals that aim to portray complex topics and various cultural identities. This content aspires to affirm the diverse experiences of our students while also providing windows into worlds and ideas beyond the familiar.

Provide resources for targeted support and extension of skills

While collecting data is the first step to reaching data-driven teaching for EAL students, it is how the data are used that makes a difference for learning outcomes. Lexia PowerUp Literacy uses students’ individual data to recommend specific resources for face-to-face support as well as materials for practice and extension of skills learned online.

For example, Lexia Lessons® are scripted resources for targeted, small-group teaching—a key strategy for supporting EAL literacy development. To further promote literacy and language development among this cohort, these lessons include specific strategies for oral language support that can be further adapted to connect key concepts with students’ unique prior knowledge and experiences.

Just as important as targeted support are opportunities for extended and enriching the application of skills. Lexia Skill Builders® offer paper-and-pencil tasks that extend online learning. Every Lexia Skill Builder includes a key feature that links to best practices when working with EAL students. These materials feature suggested activities that lend themselves to building listening, speaking, and writing skills, often in the form of peer-to-peer collaboration.

Offer real-time, embedded progress monitoring

Using data to guide teaching is the bedrock of quality teaching and learning. For students with EAL, it is particularly important that educators monitor development across the all the components of literacy, responding in a timely and efficient way when difficulties arise. When it comes to all the key components of literacy development, EAL students should be supported as readily as their English-only peers. Lexia’s Assessment Without Testing® technology provides teachers with real-time progress-monitoring data across these skills and competencies. This information is collected without a formal assessment event, saving time for what matters most: instruction that is guided by data.

The research-proven power of Lexia PowerUp Literacy for students with EAL

Lexia PowerUp Literacy provides an invaluable tool for supporting EAL students that meets the challenge of developing strong literacy skills by integrating teaching strategies known to be effective with this group of learners. The application of these principles translates into improved outcomes and the data specifically confirms the program's instructional power in classrooms serving these. As they engage with the rich content in this structured and data-driven program, they build the foundation critical for literacy proficiency and, ultimately, academic success.

[Click here to learn more about Lexia® PowerUp® Literacy.](#)

