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Classroom Support for the Newcomers to UK Mainstream Schools

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Abstract: *The quest of English language learners to attain proficiency in English has been a phenomenon that needs to be investigated, particularly in relation to changes in UK national educational policy and funding that has defused the needs of EAL learners within a more general emphasis on inclusion and raising the achievement of ethnic minority children. Qualitative methods are used to allow thirteen children from Libya (newcomers) along with their parents and teachers to talk about their experiences of classroom support available for EAL learners within UK mainstream schools. Data are analysed using thematic analysis. The results showed that there is a lack of provision to enable teachers meet the specific language needs of EAL children. In fact, Libyan children found themselves immersed in a new classroom without EAL support or clear instructions through their first language. It was simply up to them whether they sank or swam. The implications of this study suggest that there is a need for careful assessment of EAL children's academic background and level of primary language literacy. This should be derived from long-term procedures based on a structured national educational policy to respond to the newly-arrived EAL children and help them settle into mainstream schools.*

Keywords: *Classroom support; learners and teachers; qualitative research*

I. Introduction

There has been growing concerns with the specific educational needs of the newly arrived learners to UK mainstream schools are neglected, in fact, they continue to present teachers with real challenges during classroom activities (Wright, 1995). By the virtue of Educational Acts in the UK all children have needs and the education system should provide for them. Yet there is a lack of provision and effective quality TESOL for English language learners (Wright, 1995). In spite of the introduction of the National Curriculum in UK schools and the improved progression and continuity that it promised, it is still directed at the ethnic majority children. The specific educational needs of ethnic minorities children remain vaguely addressed in the National Curriculum. These problems are particularly acute in literacy as there seem to be unrealistic expectations of the second language learners, particularly those who are currently join UK mainstream schools, to perform and compete at the same level as native children. This, however, should not underestimate the ability of non-British children who newly arrive to the UK, but rather to highlight the language and cultural barriers which seem to be taken for granted by teachers and schools (Fechter and Korpela, 2006). Equal educational opportunity, in principle, however seems to have positive implications for second language learners. Yet, research is needed to investigate the effect of the notion of "equal education opportunity" on English language learners in real classroom day to day situation, and how mainstream teachers in the UK implement their versions of equality of educational opportunity when dealing with second language learners. Hence, it is time to look at the education of ethnic minorities children/second language learners with the interest in benefiting them. Given the current circumstances of globalisation, it is no longer realistic to

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think simply in terms of the interests of the British citizens alone or the tax-payers. It is true that the UK tax- payers pay a lot of money and therefore they expect their children to receive quality education that greatly benefits children from this country. By the same token, every child who lives in this country should also receive quality education and provided with equal education opportunities. In fact, the call for the equalization of educational opportunity is "for all learners" including those with limited English proficiency (see for example, Conteh and Meier, 2010). Children must not be denied education on the basis that their parents are not register as tax-payers. It is not the fault of children that their parents are not entitled to pay tax; nor that of the parents for failing to find decent jobs that can secure quality living for their family. Perhaps it is the role of education to put this right and address the misbalance in wealth distribution among people within this country. Likewise, the UK government needs to improve provision in mainstream schools which focus on the education of all children regardless of their background. This may suggest urgent alteration to the methods of assessment and approaches of teaching pupils who do not understand English. Equal education opportunity will not be achieved merely by providing the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; second language learners should be effectively involved for meaningful education to take place. Similarly there is an urgent need to change the current forms of school assessment/tests to ensure equal and more flexible access to school tests. It should be highlighted that as Libyan parents of second language learners we find the way in which our children are tested in mainstream schools bias as they do not consider the language and cultural barriers of children from ethnic minorities. As postgraduate students, Libyan parents like many other non-British or non-European students, do not have to pay any tax; however they pay more than three times in tuition fees compared with that of "home" students, which contribute to a large proportion of the sustainability of UK universities. Therefore, many Libyan parents (postgraduate students) feel strongly that their children should get equal access to education compared with British children, and that their specific linguistic needs should be addressed within their classrooms. Yet disappointments faced by children (new learners) in their mission to efficiently acquire second language become intensified when the linguistic support within classroom is incompetent and rather expose them to unnecessary pressure. However, Pica (1987) claimed that:

"Even with strong motivation, positive attitudes, or critical needs for learning another language, second-language learners have been known to fall short of their goals in the language classroom. Contrary to the inspired objectives and good intentions of teachers, textbooks, and instructional methods, not everyone who enters the classroom environment will leave with the skills needed to cope with the communication demands of the world outside. Despite the human potential for internalizing linguistic rules and patterns, success in second language acquisition is not an inevitable outcome of classroom experience." (Pica, 1987: p.3)

While Pica's argument is true in that we do not yet know precisely what it takes second language learners to master another language and experience classroom success, we have been involved in many incidents where Libyan children 'second language learners' are either misunderstood or misinterpreted in mainstream schools and hence fail to put their point of views across. While this can be easily explained by the fact that newly comers find it extremely hard to communicate at the beginning in second language with teachers and counterparts, the problem in my opinion is far beyond providing or obtaining information from learners; it is of how it feels when the second language learners can't understand the teacher or classroom participants; feel unequal or unable to exchange information due lack on knowledge of the subject and culture concerned. As argued above not many of us as international researchers living currently in the UK and concerned with educational practices in this country found the

National Curriculum flexible and meet the interests of the newcomers. Similarly Taylor (1982) claimed that second language learners are continue to work under pressure and faced with problems in communication both in and out school due to discouraging classroom environment for successful second language acquisition. In line with this, we have seen cases where schools fail outrageously to make the first experience of second language learners in classroom encouraging, and consequently it is not unfair to say that many of the newcomers to UK schools are left to "sink or swim". In explaining this problem, personal conversation with primary school teachers in England suggest that they are often finding it difficult to respond to the linguistic needs of newcomers because they lack knowledge and training in second language acquisition. As a result second language learners are very often failed to engage in meaningful social interaction within classrooms (see for example, Hatch, 1983; Krashen, 1982; Long, 1983). It could be argued that this problem is not constrained to factors within school alone but rather parents and children, with the school, should share a desire to interact with one another. This may indicate that parents and children should embrace the principles and values of the school in order for the children to discover the sociolinguistic rules necessary for second language comprehension. Unfortunately, over the years we have noted that not many of the Libyan parents share the same interests of that of the mainstream schools, nor parents' attitudes toward the English language and the English educational system in general are encouraging for children to acquire the second language.

Although over the last two decades or so primary schools across the UK have relied on government funding to respond to the language need of the newly-arrived EAL children and make their transition into the British education system successful, this support appears to be neglected and little provision was made (Conteh and Meier, 2010). As government funding has declined over the years, schools have been unable to provide the special second language instruction that they had previously been able to do (Edwards, 2004). Indeed, in the absence of funding and a clear framework within primary schools to support teachers in dealing effectively with EAL children, these children appear to be less motivated and less encouraged to participate fully in classroom activities (DCSF, 2007; Chen, 2009). Thus there is growing concern about teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the educational experience of EAL children, their cultural backgrounds, and the expectations and fears of such children and their parents (NALDIC, n.d.).

Certainly EAL children are often faced with new challenges as well as opportunities. This may indicate that the needs of EAL children are as diverse as the population as a whole, reflecting a wide range of social, educational and linguistic needs. In addition, children of international postgraduate students living in the United Kingdom (UK) temporarily may present special needs, different from those of children of ethnic minority citizens who are settled in the country. The quest for such a group of EAL children to attain proficiency in English is becoming a phenomenon that needs to be explored, particularly in relation to changes in national educational policy and funding that has defused the needs of EAL children within a more general emphasis on inclusion and raising the achievement of ethnic minority children.

Libyan children were selected for this study due the fact that we (researchers) share with them similar background, language and tradition. In fact, Libyan children represent a special group of non-British children in the UK. They are not children of Asian or Caribbean immigrants who may permanently reside here and whose economic circumstances dictate the necessity of learning English, nor have they had the pleasure to learn English before their arrival to the UK like children from African nations i.e. Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana for instance who already use English as a second language in their home land. Libyan children in

the UK are relatively homogeneous group: they are children of Libyan men and women who are university research students aiming for their masters and doctoral degrees; their parents are sponsored by the Libyan government and each receive the same monthly allowance every month. Hence, it seems appropriate to explore the experiences of Libyan children alongside those of their parents and teachers in relation to the nature of classroom support for newcomers learning English language. In order to do that we needed to select proper methods that will enable the voice of these children to be heard and counted.

II. Research Methods

In order to construct a rich picture of classroom support available for EAL learners within mainstream schools, qualitative research methods in the form of participant observation and semi-structure interviews were used with Libyan children. This was with the aim to explore their opinions and that of their parents and teachers toward English language and the support available for EAL learners in UK mainstream schools. It is hoped that the selected methods would enable us understand how children acquire English language and how they are supported within the mainstream classrooms.

Four primary schools in Sheffield were chosen for this study because of the number of Libyan children in these schools. Schools were visited and each headteacher was asked to help as much as possible to arrange times and dates to conduct the observations and the interviews with children and teachers. In total there were thirteen children, whose ages range from eight to eleven years, along with their parents and teachers involved in this research. All children were observed in their classes (at least three times in different lessons) then later interviewed in this study. The lengths of residence for these children varied from six months to two years. All children's classroom teachers and teaching assistants were interviewed except for one teacher who withdrew from the interview due to a family commitment. This left a total of twelve teachers in all. In a similar way, all children's parents (eleven mothers and eight fathers) were interviewed except for two families who could not be traced as they returned to Libya; apparently they could not settle in the UK. In only three cases were both parents interviewed. In the remaining cases, interviews were conducted mainly with mothers or fathers alone.

III. Results and Discussion

Discussing the findings related to the nature of support in the classroom

The results of the interviews with children showed that they are not afraid to talk openly about their lack of English language skills and their difficulties in adjusting to mainstream English schools. It appears from the interviews with the children that there is a strong relation between school adjustment and the nature of the support provided. The lack of the English language appears to present a real barrier to effective participation and school adjustment for most of the newly-arrived EAL children in this study. The majority of children (10 out of 13) said that they felt that teachers do not offer them enough support. The following illustrate this:

…all she does to help me (teacher) is asking me to sit near Montaser (classmate) to learn from him …. I really don't like it. (AsmaY5)

…they (teachers) only helped me at the beginning…., now she says (teacher) it is up to me to work hard. (Hana Y2)

When these children were asked to give a reason as to why they are not receiving enough support from teachers, the most common response reported that teachers were very busy (due to a large class size) to be of much help; however in situations when support was given by class teachers it was always criticised by children as being not enough to enable them to learn English faster. It was evident from the classroom observation that most of the children (9 out of 13) found it extremely difficult to settle and communicate easily because of a lack of confidence. They said they were unable to contribute to the discussion taking place in the classroom. As in the case of Asma Y5, she was withdrawn from the classroom discussion because of her lack of self-confidence which made her feel uncomfortable talking in a large group. In the interview with her, she attributed her lack of confidence to lack of additional support in the classroom. In line with Asma's account, her parents too felt that she was left to her own devices, and that she was struggling for attention and support.

Asma is a very clever girl but she always complains to us (parents) that she finds it very difficult to participate in the class because of her lack of the English language, she usually ends up sitting hopelessly without any support. (Asma's parents)

The story of Mohammed is a good illustration of how those children are supported and what can happen in a classroom where there is not enough EAL support. Mohammed is from Saudi Arabia and has been a resident in the UK for more than four years. His English is now at a high enough level to be useful to the teacher who sometimes finds herself without trained help. In situations where a newly-arrived Arabic-speaking child cannot understand what is happening, she (teacher) will call on him to interpret. However, there are glaring problems with this solution. During my observation in the classroom where Mohammed was helping Montaser Y3 (a pupil from Libya who joined the class recently), I noticed that the former was really struggling to translate the words from English into Arabic himself and often misinterpreted what was said in the situation. What Montaser learned from Mohammed were various words which were poorly translated and did not convey the real meaning of what was actually said. This led Montaser to be indifferent and as frustrated with Mohammed as he was with himself. While this was apparent to me, the teacher seemed very happy with the amount of support given to Montaser by Mohammed. In the interview with the teacher afterwards, she explained that she regarded the use of pupils like Mohammed as:

…the only resort in times of crisis to help in the classroom when there was a shortage of English additional language teachers (EAL).

(Y3 teacher)

For this teacher the shortage of EAL teachers impaired the learning of English for the newly-arrived EAL children. In relation to the teachers' struggle to deal with EAL children, one teacher stressed that:

> The main problem from our point of view is that we don't have sufficient help and support in the classroom to introduce the essential early vocabulary and early reading/ alphabet skills. There are other calls upon the time of a Teaching Assistant in class, such as display, helping with the admin etc and therefore our difficulty with ensuring true equality of opportunity for our Arabic-speaking pupils remains. (Y6 teacher)

The results of the interview with teachers suggest that they are finding it more difficult to deal with EAL children on their own on a daily basis. The main problem from the teachers' point of view is that they don't appear to have sufficient help and support in the classroom to ensure true equality of opportunity for EAL children. In relation to this, Chen (2009) finds the EAL support for Chinese children in public schools is very limited due to schools' failure to

employ enough EAL teachers, whereas schools attributed the lack of EAL support to changes in the funding system (Chen, 2009). In line with this study, this has intensified the situation of disadvantage for the Libyan children. While this may reflect the growing need for experienced EAL teachers within classrooms, it raises a question as to whether classroom teachers are able to meet the challenges imposed by the wide and diverse needs of EAL children in classrooms. It is also possible to question why EAL children become the sole responsibility of classroom teachers in schools. In like manner, teachers should be prepared to respond to the language and emotional needs of EAL children and provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary for academic success. In fact, despite the current growing pressure on the mainstream schools to improve the performance of EAL children (Department for Children, Fechter and Korpela, 2006; Schools and Families, 2007; NALDIC, n.d.), schools appear to be more preoccupied with children accessing the curriculum rather than developing their English language. Inclusion in the mainstream is claimed to be the best way of ensuring 'equality of opportunity'; however, it is worth noting that EAL children will only have equal access to the curriculum if their specific language needs are properly addressed (see for example, Achievement for All, Achievement from All, 2004). In a similar way, the newly-arrived EAL children should be fully informed about their curriculum options and their parents given further advice and support.

In line with the newly-arrived EAL children's frustration and lack of school adjustment, one teacher described Farag (a boy in Y4) as:

…. quite nervous about having a go at doing tasks - and especially because he doesn't speak English. …… And he could get quite frustrated with himself, because he wanted to speak, but he didn't have the language ability to do so. So, really we're just supporting him, in making sure that he understood. And one of the ways we did that was that – there was another child in the class, at the time, who spoke his language and anything that he was unsure about, we said, 'Talk to her', and then she would tell us… And, if we wanted to tell him something, we would ask her and she would translate for us... So, gradually, within a few weeks, he would then join in with learning on the carpet, because he would talk to her first, and then, she would speak for him. … (Y4 teacher)

Accordingly, I asked one teacher to explain why they feel there is not enough support for the newly-arrived EAL children within the classroom. The teacher demonstrated that these children quite often receive help outside the class and learn separately; the following extract is taken from the interview with Y5 teacher to verify the above:

Researcher: Do you think he has enough support?

Teacher: yeah, I mean as a whole school, it would be nice to have more, because there's not enough staff that speak the same language. And, it would be nice, not maybe for them to go out, but maybe to have more support in the classrooms… rather than taking them out. Because I think that probably makes them feel like, 'Ooh right', y' know. So…

Researcher: So, do you think when they go out, do they learn the same things like other learners?

Teacher: No, no.

Researcher: So they miss?

Teacher: Yeah, yeah. So they have the basic language, rather than the Curriculum itself, do you know what I mean? So I think support in the classroom would be better. Maybe, some work beforehand, in their first language, of what they're going to do.

Researcher: Yeah.

Teacher: In the lesson before it happens. And then, when the lesson does come, they've got in their heads… Do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah.
(Y5 teacher)

The lack of additional support within the classroom for the newly-arrived EAL children appears from this study to be a sensitive issue to explore with teachers and as such some teachers gave ambiguous responses; the following conversation with one teacher illustrates this:

Researcher: As a result of the initial assessment has EAL support been required to support Sameer?

Teacher: Well, erm (pause). Yes but not additional, I mean this begs other questions which is our policy for how we integrate people's EAL needs erm, because people are not taken out of class specifically for EAL work. What it then feeds into is the way the work is prepared for him in class.

Researcher: Repeated question – So they don't come inside the class and help such pupils?

Teacher: Well, not, not, not in an interpreting capacity ermm, there are errrr, other exceptions to that. There are Burmese boys in our class, now, they do have interpreters, BUT (emphasis is placed on this word, and is said more loudly), I mean part of our policy is sort of 'immersion English'in a way….so…. we've not been looking for lots of interpreting support, often that does come from peers where it is necessary as well.

Although I was trying to establish whether there was additional language support for Sameer, it seems that due to the school policy on 'immersion English' the teacher was unable to give a direct answer. His answer is 'Yes, but not additional'. In other words, the teacher appears more in favour of immersion than providing EAL support. In this respect, the teacher suggested that additional language support was not needed due to help from other settled ethnic children who could speak English as well as Arabic. While the teacher fails in my opinion to contextualise the actual problem facing Sameer and subsequently the need for EAL was ignored, one is not sure whether the immersion method has been fully implemented within the mainstream schools that participated in this research. This is in part due to the fact that subject teachers depend very much on the help and support of more settled Arabic speaking pupils who have not yet, in my judgment, either achieved full bilingualism nor are able to accomplish the academic levels compared with English-speaking pupils. Although this raises a question mark on the whole approach and methods used by teachers to support EAL children, it certainly confirms that submersion is in practice rather than immersion. In line with this misconception, Baker and Hornberger (2001) found the term immersion commonly misconceived by teachers and educational policy makers. Initially the term immersion comes to replace bilingual education in Canada, where learners are actually taught in both L1 and L2 (see for example, Baker and Hornberger, 2001); this however has not yet been successful in

practice in England (NALDIC, n. d.). In immersion programmes teachers are expected to be familiar with EAL children's cultural backgrounds and language in order to address the learning and language needs of EAL children (Mac Einri, 2007). This involves special pedagogical adjustment which is intended to provide 'comprehensive input' in L2 (see for instance, Krashen, 1982) in which the focus is on the meaning rather than on how the language is structured. Although this can't be found among teachers practices in this study, there is certainly a need to provide the newly-arrived EAL children with the means to communicate with native English speakers.

Moreover, submersion appears from this study to be common practice in mainstream classrooms, where the newly-arrived EAL children are submersed in a classroom with very little instruction through their L1, just that received from Arabic speaking peers. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) refers to this process of learning as if holding learners under water without teaching them how to swim. Compounded by other difficulties such as a lack of EAL support, classroom teachers inexperienced in EAL, and lack of adequate school facilities, submersion makes both learning and teaching extremely difficult. Thus, it seems that in the absence of additional language support within the context of the classroom and the lack of appropriate curricula, the newly-arrived EAL children will have to struggle to pick up the language from peers on their own.

The interview with Sameer and his parents suggests that they are not happy with the lack of additional language support for the newly-arrived EAL children. They criticise the school policy for providing very few English additional classes, and these merely at the beginning, and for teachers heavily depending on Arabic-speaking children for explaining things in Arabic. In general this finding supports the growing debate in literature (e.g. Carrasquillo and Rodriguez, 2002; NALDIC, n.d.) surrounding the lack of expertise and skills required to meet the language needs of the newly-arrived EAL children. In connection with the above concern, Sameer's mother was not impressed with the level of support given at school, saying:

No I do not think there is a special plan to support Sameer with the National Curriculum ….., there is though greater expectation from him …., us …., to help him to respond to the work which is initially created for Y6 mainstream pupils …., we wonder what is the essence of giving him homework if he does not know how to answer it … or what is the point if we answer it on his behalf …., in fact the school causes many problems when they say let dad/mum help you with this or with ….. that, we sometimes know the answer to his query but do not know how to explain it to him ….., therefore we feel it would be better for him ….., his teacher to know that Sameer does not know how to tackle the task and sort it out in school rather than at home.

Following from the above question I asked the teacher whether there are a set of targets agreed to support and meet Sameer's English language needs and how did he and the school go about meeting those needs?

Teacher: Targets for what..?

Researcher: What set of targets were agreed to support Sameer's English language needs, like do you have any targets for his needs…?

Teacher: Not really any different from erm. other targets are 'curriculumly' rated in school. There aren't specific sort of EAL related targets. Well, there are I mean targets like search and recognize vocabulary and writing simple sentences and things like that

Researcher: Giving out surviving vocabularies and monitoring progress?

Teacher: yes, yes. Erm, but that sort of slots into where other people would have literary targets, yes I suppose that would seem like that, yeh.

Yet Sameer revealed in the interview that there is a lack of support and individual plans by saying:

… all they did is kept giving me and other kids new words each day to memorise and read them next day and likewise each day, but they stop doing this now …. That was in the beginning.

In a similar manner, Sameer's mother reported that he was very often given unrealistic tasks at school; she further illustrates the problem by referring to the fact that Sameer is often asked to explain in writing, in English, the reasons behind various things which he cannot do. She stressed that his teacher knows this and consequently this tends to frustrate him further. Teachers are expecting lots from him, they usually ask him to write about for example a trip that they did in the school or quite often they ask him to do a project using the internet and that put lots of pressure on him and us.

(Sameer's mother)

In line with Cummins and Davison (2007) this mother appears to suggest that the writing skill of her child has not sufficiently developed in school in order for him to write the task in English at home. Indeed, the newly-arrived EAL children found activities such as reading and writing in English, in particular, cognitively challenging, reflecting the findings of Cummins and Davison (2007), and consequently they often feel frustrated with themselves. Cummins (1991) suggests that EAL children will need to develop communicative skills in the L2 before they can begin reading and writing in the L2. In fact, the view of Sameer's mother echoes a number of parents in this study (6) suggesting that teachers are not aware of the need to develop cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) – a skill that is necessary for children to be able to work individually. In this respect Cummins in Baker (2006) urges teachers to appreciate the two forms of language: the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and the cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) in order for them to meet the language needs of EAL children. However, there is the opinion among some teachers (8 out of 12) that they are doing everything they can to help the newly-arrived EAL children settle and support them with their English in mainstream schools. The following comments reflect this:

I think we have a great deal and we are also trying to build on our own support. We sit the children in triads, so you may have an insecure child in language or something in the middle and two more confident, secure on either side. So that speaking and listening happens in a three, so you know. I think we get a fair bit but obviously any more is always welcome.

(Y6 teacher)

We do response partners… like, pairing you up with somebody who speaks Arabic, and… giving information, so that I would say something in English and an Arabic person would repeat that in Arabic. So that's the kind of support that we're using…..So we're doing

like paired support and group support also where children are encouraged to speak in their home language.(Y3 teacher)

These comments suggest that teachers are aware of children's lack of confidence when they first come and equally are trying to address their language needs by using various methods. In a similar way another teacher indicated that although she has never been to any teacher training centre to do courses on how to support EAL children, she is using "various resources to help them – lots of visual things and things like that." (Y4 teacher)

Most of the teachers (10 out of 12) hoped for more support to deal with various classroom problems, besides the lack of English language. One teacher made a rather general observation with EAL children suggesting that she is often finding herself dealing with more than one problem; by saying:

…if it's just a problem with them actually learning the English, then that's no problem at all. But if there are other problems that are included, likespecial needs problems and behaviour problems, then obviously I would need extra support. (Y4 teacher)

Another teacher referred to another point in that mainstream school teachers find themselves very often running out of time dealing with other problems e.g. managing difficult behaviour and as a consequence lots of EAL children get missed out. He said:

I think the biggest problem is time. You just don't have time to deal with everybody because there's behaviour issues as well with certain, one or two individuals. They take up a lot of your time and a lot of the quieter children, I'm thinking of a girl in my class who can't speak English, never in trouble, she just gets missed all the time, you know, cos she's not taking your attention so I think it is a time factor really that's against you. The children that need you don't necessarily get you cos there are others that are louder.(Y6 teacher)

There is indeed growing pressure on classroom teachers to give enough time/support to EAL children alongside other classroom demands. While this found to be true from the classroom observations, teachers were stuck on many behaviour problems and clearly needed help with classroom management and instructional skills. In part, it is believed that the lack of these skills appears to be responsible for teachers failing to meet the needs of EAL children. In fact, it did not seem that there was a clear procedure for teachers to follow in order to support the newly-arrived EAL children within the classroom setting. For example, Sameer, a boy in Y6, appeared isolated and wandered around, apparently looking for help. Clearly he was not able to contribute effectively to the class; he was put off on many occasions by his lack of English skills, a language which, according to his parents in the interview, he knew little of before his arrival. The interview with his parents also suggested that he was given little additional support in his new school to 'survive', apart from a few vocabulary words in English to use in a time of crisis and the support provided by Mosab (classmate) who spoke the same language as him. He was encouraged by the teacher to sit next to Mosab if he needed help. When interviewed at home, Sameer revealed that he did not want to sit next to Mosab as this made him feel less intelligent having to rely on another pupil's help. In a similar way, Sameer's parents reported that he was not learning English because he was not speaking enough English at school, nor did he speak English at home. In fact, despite of the growing concern with the importance of using mother tongue as a language of instruction (e.g. Cummins and Davison, 2007; NALDIC, n.d.; Baker, 2006), there is very little research on parental attitudes toward the language of instruction in schools (Gribbons and Shin; Shin and Kim, in Kemppainen, et al., 2004). Although the interviews with parents and teachers suggest the use of L1 is critical for cultural maintenance and also for emotional development, there

was growing concern among parents that over-exposure to L1 within mainstream schools may lead to deficiency in L2, and subsequently to poorer academic achievement. This finding, however, may not correspond with the general perception in the literature which often suggests that L1 facilitates learning L2 (Cummins and Davison, 2007).

It appears that Sameer's parents disliked the idea of his teacher sitting him almost all the time next to pupils speaking Arabic so that he could get help from them; a desire that may not correspond very well with what his school and teachers see as best for him to develop his English language skills. In line with this finding, Porter (1996) found that many immigrant parents in the United States (U.S.) do not want schools to maintain their children's first language (L1) if this is done at the expense of learning English.

In a recent publication of NALDIC reference is made to the mismatch of understandings and differing perspectives between parents and teachers as to how best EAL children can be supported. Certainly teachers would benefit from having close contact with parents; as in the case of Sameer's teacher. It would be better for all concerned had the teacher of Sameer appreciated the difficulty encountered with his peer (Mosab) and reassessed the situation – perhaps Sameer could be asked where best he could be to learn English in the classroom. Sameer may suggest that he wants to be paired with an English-speaking boy (native child) as opposed to Mosab.

In response to the researcher's question on whether he was enjoying what he was doing in the classroom, Sameer stated:

I tried to concentrate on the teacher while she was speaking and she showed us some pictures as an example. I also looked at the other children and tried to do the same as them. (Sameer, Y6)

It was not difficult to see that Sameer was not enthusiastic about the task as he said:

I am not really interested …. I am just doing what I have been told to do.

(Sameer Y6)

Furthermore, many parents (12 out of 19) stated in the interviews that they are not sure whether the language needs of their children are properly assessed in schools. In support of this seven teachers revealed in the interview that they are not aware whether an initial assessment of the newly-arrived EAL children took place. In this regard, one teacher reported:

I really don't know … it's still hard to understand what she actually knows. So I couldn't tell you whether she has been assessed or not …. I really don't know whether she knows how to count, you know, how far she actually knows how to count ….. so certain things she knows how to do what she's doing but other things you don't know if she knows.

(Y3 teacher)

While another teacher claimed:

It's what we use for everybody. It doesn't matter if it's your second language or not. So, we do like, key words testing. We do a Maths test, a simple Maths test. And we do a reading test as well… normally within the first week, so we can assess where the child is and where we can go from there with the child. (Y6 teacher)

In general, teachers suggested there is some form of assessment of the newly-arrived children's early language acquisition and language use. Yet the outcomes of these assessments and the measures taken in response are vaguely understood by teachers. In fact teachers found it difficult to assess and track the progress of newly-arrived EAL children. This finding may

not correspond with the good practice that was recently underlined in the New Arrivals Excellence Programme (NAEP) launched by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). It is stressed in NAEP that an early assessment of the newly-arrived EAL children's use of language would help teachers to predict whether their language development profiles are reasonably 'normal' for children with EAL in this particular context.

It is worth mentioning that despite teachers' uncertainty of the initial assessment outcomes, all teachers seem to agree on the importance of assessing the newly-arrived EAL children. For instance, one teacher considered the use of initial assessment as important to see "how competent the newly-arrived EAL children are in their first language." Another teacher said:

…it is essential to look at some basic skills. Do they know them in their own language? Do they know their colours? Y' know, just the basics. And so, if a new arrival comes in, I normally take them and do a bit of work with them.(Y2 teachers)

It is a widely accepted view that a well-developed first language is usually associated with good progress in EAL if appropriate approaches are implemented (Cummins, 2001); on the other hand, a restricted and less developed first language (L1) can be linked in some circumstances to disadvantage in developing a second language (L2), especially when this is the language of school and the curriculum (Baker, 2006).

The results of the interviews with teachers suggest in general that there is a lack of information about the educational history of newly-arrived EAL children – apparently this seems to constrain initially the level of effective support which schools can put in place for these children. This fits very well with the findings of Spencer (2002). Although teachers held the lack of such information responsible for the difficulties encountered to meet the needs of the newly-arrived EAL children, parents confirmed in the interviews that they could have supported teachers and provided relevant information, had the school and teachers sought their opinion. While this reflects a lack of communication in general between school and home, it underpins the need to encourage parents of EAL children to become more involved in the learning and teaching process taking place in mainstream schools. All parents confirmed that as far as they were concerned, their role with mainstream schools is to help children with homework; they could not remember that schools had asked them any more than that. There is certainly a need for mainstream schools to develop with parents effective links and strategies to support the newly-arrived EAL children, bridging the knowledge gap between what they already know and the current classroom experiences. Similarly, although all parents shared with teachers the value and importance of having the language needs of the newly-arrived EAL children assessed, none of the parents acknowledged receiving an initial assessment report concerning their children, nor were they aware of any targets set by teachers and the school for children to meet. In line with this, teachers were asked in the interview whether they sent a report home each term. One teacher said:

For all the children we do a report for parents, but we don't do it termly. But we do assessments every term with each child for their English writing, reading, Maths and speaking and listening. (Y5 teacher)

Another teacher suggested that apart from having reading records which they do for everybody; "they don't have special records for the newly-arrived EAL children that we put aside." In a similar way another teacher reported that if they were concerned with newcomers' educational development, then they would have special needs reports sent to parents. In line with this another teacher stated that she does not need to send a report because:

…at the moment I don't think she has any special needs, I think it's just the fact that the English is actually stopping her from progressing.

(Y4 teacher)

Another teacher responded with:

Well no, I mean she's doing better than some English children. You know, there are low ability children and there are higher ability children and with language sometimes… I think she has ability. (Y6 teacher)

It is very interesting to note that teachers here are drawing upon their knowledge of education policy in the UK (NALDIC, n.d.), in that they reported children should not be classified as having SEN based on their lack of English. In fact, they needed no invitation to draw a distinction between the two; however, they failed to explain what the needs of EAL children actually were and how best these needs could be addressed. This may reflect Cummins and Davison, (2007) view in that they found EAL children are not an easily distinguished group that require a special programme.

IV. Conclusion

This research has made several contributions to two essential areas. Firstly, the findings of the present research support earlier research findings by providing supplemental evidence concerning the specific factors that influence EAL children's acquisition of English and, what is more, has done so in relation to a group of children who have not been investigated thus far. Secondly, the research has provided a theory and practice; the findings have implications, not only in relation to EAL teaching methods and support, but also with regard to education and language used in out of school activities. Thus, it is essential for British educational authorities to focus on the home language and culture of newly- arrived EAL children; this could be through running sessions which concentrate on the culture and religious aspects of EAL children as part of the teacher training process. It is equally important to provide teachers with enough information on the language, educational background, religion and customs of various cultural groups in the UK in order to deal more effectively with cultural diversity in the classroom. Basic knowledge about the Arabic language would enable mainstream school teachers to better understand Arabic speaking pupils and help them to provide Arabic speaking children with a better educational experience. Perhaps it would be helpful for mainstream school teachers to develop an awareness of the different teaching methods used in supplementary Libyan school, building on the previous experiences of EAL children and taking their language and cultural backgrounds into consideration when assessing their needs. This is an area that needs to be scrutinised and investigated further by other researchers in the field. Furthermore, it might be advantageous to establish reception centres within mainstream schools in larger cities where overseas postgraduate students come to study. This would be with the aim of developing the basic language skills of newly-arrived EAL children and educating them further about life and customs in the UK, in order to avoid "culture shock" and enable them to adjust more quickly to a new school environment. Thus, the implications of this piece of research are envisaged as being extremely relevant as it will bring a significant contribution to educational literature concerned with the English language acquisition and the education of ethnic minority children in mainstream schools.

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