

## Empowering multilingual classrooms: approaches and trends in English as an additional language education

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**Abstract:** The increasing linguistic diversity of student populations worldwide has foregrounded English as an Additional Language (EAL) as a pivotal area in educational policy and classroom practice. This paper examines the current state of EAL education, using one book as a foundational text. Drawing on recent academic research, the discussion explores challenges in teacher preparedness, the evolving theoretical landscape of language acquisition, and the crucial role of sociocultural and identity factors in shaping multilingual learners' experiences. The review highlights evidence-based instructional strategies, the necessity of whole-school and interdisciplinary approaches, and the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Furthermore, the paper analyzes the transformative potential and ethical considerations of artificial intelligence (AI) in EAL teaching and assessment. The conclusion calls for expanded professional development, inclusive educational practices, and ongoing research to ensure that EAL provision not only addresses linguistic needs but also recognizes and values the rich cultural and linguistic resources students bring to school. This synthesis aims to guide educators, policymakers, and researchers toward more equitable, responsive, and innovative approaches to EAL education in an increasingly globalized world.

**Keywords:** *English as an additional language (EAL), EAL classroom, Second language acquisition, Teacher education, educational equity.*

### 1. Introduction

The contemporary educational setting is characterized by an increasing level of linguistic diversity, with rising numbers of students coming from homes in which languages other than English are spoken. This demographic shift is a worldwide phenomenon and is attributed to several factors such as migration, globalization, and population mobility. In many urban cities across Europe, North America, and Asia-Pacific, classrooms are becoming miniature multilingual societies, where linguistic and cultural plurality is the norm rather than the exception (Strand & Lindorff, 2021). This scenario has serious ramifications for curriculum development, classroom practices, equitable education, and, ultimately, student achievement.

The primary purpose of English as an additional language (EAL) instruction in the context of this linguistic diversification is seen as providing inclusive, effective, and equitable learning environments. Yet teachers who are just beginning their careers, and even some with considerable experience, increasingly report feeling underprepared and relatively unsupported in the teaching of EAL (Flockton & Cunningham, 2021). One of the more significant causes for this gap in preparedness lies in the very limited inclusion of EAL-related content in beginning teacher education and professional development programs. EAL pedagogy, theories of language acquisition, and useful strategies for aiding multilingual students find little room in teacher training courses, if any. It may be exceptionally difficult to actually translate the theory and framework regarding EAL into practice if they aren't even covered comprehensively in teacher training.

This gap can be filled by offering a comprehensive and integrative exploration of language acquisition within EAL education (Sharples, 2021). This book is positioned as both a theoretical resource and a practical guide, aiming to deepen educators' understanding of the multifaceted processes involved in learning English as an additional language. Sharples discusses a whole range of issues, such as age, the status of the first language, explicit instruction, and the social parameters of language learning, and he relates these implications to reality in the classroom. The assertion around which the central argument of the book is anchored is that EAL is not just a supplementary concern in mainstream schooling but is, in fact, a discipline of considerable merit that intersects with every subject area and impacts the broader aims of education.

By foregrounding evidence-based principles and advocating for a whole-school, interdisciplinary approach, this book not only empowers educators with actionable strategies but also encourages a reevaluation of how language, identity, and learning are conceptualized within educational systems. This paper builds on Sharples' foundational arguments and situates them within the broader context of contemporary research, policy debates, and technological innovation in EAL education. It critically examines both the strengths and limitations of current approaches and explores how emerging trends—such as the integration of artificial intelligence—are reshaping the possibilities and challenges of supporting multilingual learners. Ultimately, this discussion seeks to illuminate the pathways by which educational systems can more effectively respond to the needs of EAL students, ensuring that linguistic diversity is recognized as a vital resource for academic success and social cohesion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Teacher practices, professional development, and collaboration*

The teaching of EAL in increasingly multicultural educational environments presents complex challenges for teachers, many of whom lack specialized EAL qualifications (Premier, 2021). In Victoria, Australia, teachers report that their practice is shaped by school leadership, professional learning, and collaboration, but they still require greater support, especially ongoing professional development and cross-cultural understanding (Premier, 2021). The same issues echo in other contexts. For instance, EAL teachers in Norway who took part in training developed a positive attitude towards multilingualism, yet reverted to monolingual practices-teaching beliefs in contrast to actual practices (Lorenz, Krulatz, & Torgersen, 2021).

Continuing collaboration between the “mainstream” teacher and the EAL teacher is another prevalent problem. An investigation into the International Baccalaureate schools in Eastern Europe found confusion and a lack of proper definition of co-teaching and co-planning roles, usually leaving mainstream teachers unclear about their responsibilities concerning EAL learners (Spencer, 2021). In primary schools in the UK, good practices exist, such as differentiated instruction and communication with parents, yet there is a general lack of deep knowledge about using students' home languages for the development of English vocabulary and reading skills. This emphasizes the need for more targeted professional advice and continuous professional development (Bailey & Sowden, 2021).

Teacher-student relationships and the framing of EAL learners' capabilities are also very significant factors. In secondary schools, some will remain in deficit discourse, where EAL students are considered problems instead of resources. However, critical discourse analysis has demonstrated that teachers with more complex positioning can challenge these deficit discourses and reconceptualize curriculum as a complex social entanglement rather than a one-way transmission (Alford, 2024). In contrast, Australian studies into teacher collaboration have shown that professional dialogue between EAL teachers and content teachers can build relational agency, enabling joint problem-solving and the sharing of expertise to drive improved learning outcomes for EAL students (Nguyen & Dang, 2021).

### 2.2. *Identity, decolonization, and multilingual pedagogy*

In educational contexts, EAL learners—and especially adult learners—have frequently been branded into oversimplification, wherein teachers may unwittingly perpetuate dominant discourses by

categorizing students along binary lines of self and other (Sumithran, Chowdhury, & Barnes, 2023). These essentialist views risk cutting off learners' voices while reinforcing institutional power structures. In more recent literature, drawing from postcolonial theoretical frameworks, a call for a critical pedagogy that recognizes the multidimensionality and fluidity of EAL students' cultural identities has been raised, promoting teacher reflexivity and decolonized classroom practices (Sumithran et al., 2023).

Another path toward decolonizing EAL education has been made clear through collaborative research between EAL practitioners and academics. The traditional "one size fits all" critiques avoid the situation of EAL students having complex social, political, and historical contexts, especially those who have undergone migration. Thus, emphasis is placed on the vital need for anti-racist approaches, critical assessment practices, and an authentic transition towards an inclusive and genuinely equitable curriculum (Welply, 2023). Translingual pedagogies—teaching approaches that embrace students' full linguistic repertoires—have also been identified as promising yet challenging. A systematic review of 62 studies reveals that translingual activities such as self-reflective writing and literacy narratives can enrich EAL writing pedagogy by fostering agency, increasing awareness about monolingualism, and engaging students in varied rhetorical situations (Sun, 2025).

### *2.3. Interventions, special populations, technology, and individual differences*

Teaching EAL effectively is as much dependent on specific contexts as on variations in the learning experience. In Australia, teachers dealing with adult migrants in pre-literacy EAL classes are expected to teach pronunciation without adequate training. Research by practice and exploratory practice indicated that teachers adapt the pronunciation pedagogy for local application while developing a reflective, praxis-oriented version (Playsted, Thomas, & Wilkinson, 2024). The unique needs of specific populations, such as autistic students learning EAL, have been largely overlooked in research. A recent scoping review notes that while teaching strategies for autistic EAL learners are well documented, there is little insight into their actual learning processes. The diversity of autistic learners and their strengths and weaknesses (e.g., strong microlinguistic but weak macrolinguistic skills) call for more nuanced research and tailored teaching approaches, including technology integration and visual supports (Muharikah, Li, & Roberts, 2022).

More broadly, systematic reviews of EAL interventions highlight that explicit vocabulary instruction, targeted oral practice, and shared reading with vocabulary support are effective, particularly for learners with lower initial proficiency. However, there is a notable lack of intervention research for adolescent EAL learners in the UK (Oxley & De Cat, 2021). Technology offers potential to create "third spaces" in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, leveraging students' home and community practices alongside school expectations. Yet, early-career teachers report feeling unprepared to integrate multimodal practices, citing insufficient initial teacher education and crowded curricula as major barriers (Veliz & Véliz-Campos, 2023). The broader sociocultural context also plays a role, as seen in Hong Kong, where motivation for EAL learning is shaped by the interaction of policies, institutional decisions, and classroom dynamics (Xu, 2025a). Finally, individual differences such as personality traits (extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, emotional intelligence) and motivation are critical in shaping EAL learning experiences and outcomes. Research suggests that these traits predict motivation and perseverance, while mindset and self-control help learners cope with language anxiety (Xu, 2025b). Students' emotional responses to written corrective feedback are also more closely tied to their motivation than to proficiency, highlighting the need to consider affective dimensions in EAL instruction (Ni & Xu, 2025).

This section demonstrates the multifaceted nature of EAL education, encompassing teacher professional development, collaboration, identity, decolonization, pedagogy, intervention, technology, and learner diversity. Across diverse contexts, the need for ongoing, context-sensitive professional learning, deeper collaboration, critical reflection, and inclusive, evidence-based pedagogical strategies is clear. While promising practices such as translingual pedagogy and the use of technology are emerging, gaps remain in teacher preparation, support for special populations, and the integration of learner

individuality into practice. Future research and policy should address these gaps by fostering more nuanced understandings of EAL learners and supporting teachers to become reflective, collaborative, and adaptive educators in multicultural classrooms.

### 3. Evidence-based Strategies for the Classroom and School

Sharples aimed at equipping teachers with solid theoretical and practical foundations for EAL teaching (Sharples, 2021). After a general introduction, the book is divided into three large sub-regions. The first part looks at the acquisition of language as internalized by the bilingual brain, emphasizing the inputs, practice, and feedback it derives from the environment. However, it contests the traditional practices of teaching English to EAL learners before their immersion into the mainstream curriculum and advocates instead for their seamless transition into subject disciplines. Apart from being a grammatical system, language remains a central theme of Part One considering the juxtaposition between the innate and learned variables of knowing language, the meaning of input, and interaction with age and first language in language acquisition. Establishing a sound theoretical base while demonstrating concrete links to practice, this book arms the educator with the confidence to tackle language issues. By acquiring knowledge about the complexity of language acquisition, teachers can more easily facilitate their students in achieving proficiency and success in educational endeavors. The second part examined meaning-making as a social activity and literacy as a social practice, presenting a theoretical framework and principles for language across the curriculum, and establishing a close relationship between learning and language development. The chapters discussed oracy, reading, writing genres, disciplinary language, proficiency, and some major themes. Part Three stresses the importance of EAL teaching for multilingual learners across the curriculum and the need for interdisciplinary knowledge and a whole-school approach. Beyond coverage of language acquisition, bilingualism, and functional linguistics, the book gives clear pointers for best practices concerning EAL. This book gives many practical ideas to both novice and established EAL specialists regarding things such as assessment, networking, and influencing colleagues. Along with stating the importance of acknowledging the varied backgrounds of students, it also discusses the need for language and learning to be encouraged in a community environment. The last chapter spells out a comprehensive theory of language an ideal outcome for students. It wraps up with the key findings and deeply appreciated messages for colleagues and parents. EAL is basically about working and building theories of learning and acquisition, and therefore it becomes very important to note how learning becomes distinguished from acquisition in terms of input, output, and interaction experiences, which constitute the basis of language acquisition.

This book contains immeasurable benefits because it aims to empower the educator with sound evidence and principles that support practitioner decisions. The book presents a view that EAL is not an additional consideration in teaching but a worthwhile discipline that supports language-rich instruction across the curriculum. While the book acknowledges the professional competence of teachers, it is well aware of their busy schedules and thus concentrates on information that is specific and clear. Every teacher should know how language functions in his or her subject area; while EAL teachers ought to have a view of how language functions across subjects. Through offering an overview that presents a coherent series of argumentations concerning the evidence, reasoning, and principles forming the basis of EAL provision, this book adequately provides these tools for an educator to work confidently through practice. Furthermore, it argues convincingly for the fact that EAL practice is vibrant and diverse, recognizing the continuously changing needs of learners, communities, and school cultures. An exploration of the EAL historical and international context truly expands that perspective by enabling teachers to move beyond their immediate dilemmas. The book presents various perspectives backed by lucid evidence, calling its readers to join a broader conversation but also encouraging them to put the suggested approaches to work in their classrooms. In brief, what makes the book valuable is its provision of evidence-based strategies and principles, and the acknowledgment of EAL as a great discipline and therefore an avenue for empowering teachers' classroom decisions.

This book caters to a very serious hole in teacher training and education with a holistic understanding of the processes involved as far as English acquisition is concerned in an EAL educational context. What this book is going to give teachers is the evidence, principles, and real-time practical strategies that will encourage confidence in enabling the teaching of their students' language journeys, especially when most newly qualified teachers feel that they are at sea in teaching an EAL student. The text may be seen as lacking in scope in its approach to EAL education; indeed, it could be argued that the book presents a narrow monopoly on perspectives by offering a single philosophical and methodological viewpoint without engaging with other competing theories of language acquisition. Although the author has tried to present a very well-rounded theoretical framework, the very complex linguistic and theoretical nature may hinder its applicability in practice with the recommendations and strategies. The theories presented here are, for the most part, Western-oriented, with no engagement presented towards the non-Western contexts, and very little attention was given to the intersection of language-identity factors like socioeconomic status and culture with student identity. The place where the book tries to cover everything related to EAL may end up making it generalized without going very deep in some subjects, thus leaving teachers wanting more focused help. The work could also have presented a more in-depth analysis of limitations and counterarguments. Ultimately, some critics may assert that, based on the date of publication, the research presented does not hold much relevance today in the highly dynamic and complex field of EAL education.

To conclude, this book facilitates educators in the theoretical knowledge by which they can lead their students to academic proficiency considering issues such as age and a student's first language. In conclusion, while it fills an important gap in teacher training in EAL education, the book has anomalies. The greatest merit is that it pursues furnishing the educator with the evidence, principles, and practical strategies to assist the language development of their EAL students with confidence. Using a sound theoretical base concerning age and first language influence, it provides teachers with strategies to guide students to academic proficiency. It also strongly emphasizes EAL as a specialized domain, one that is ever-present across the curriculum and never truly sidelined. There are, however, ways to make it even better by exploring more perspectives on the theory of language acquisition. Things may get complicated without a solid theoretical foundation. A better understanding is called for in this interaction between diversity and language learning. Furthermore, a Western-centric framing with no critique of its location further weakens its analysis. While this book serves as a basic reference aid for teachers, its restricted focus, and possibly dated theories suggest some of its arguments and recommendations might not capture many of the complexities found in multilingual classrooms today.

#### 4. Conclusion

The landscape of English as an Additional Language (EAL) education is rapidly transforming in response to shifting demographics, evolving theories of language acquisition, and the growing recognition of multilingualism as a core asset in contemporary schools. Sharples (2021) is a timely contribution to this field, offering educators practical strategies and theoretical insights to support EAL learners. The book's strengths lie in its commitment to evidence-based practice, its holistic approach to language development, and its conviction that EAL is central to educational success—not a peripheral concern.

However, the challenges facing EAL education extend beyond instructional strategies and classroom interventions. They include addressing deep-seated monolingual ideologies, developing culturally sustaining pedagogies, and ensuring equitable access to high-quality language support for all learners. The diversity and complexity of EAL contexts require a flexible, reflective, and research-informed approach. As highlighted in this paper, the limitations of Sharples' book—such as its Western-centric perspective, limited engagement with alternative theories, and potential datedness—underscore the need for ongoing dialogue, critical reflection, and adaptation in both research and practice.

Looking forward, EAL education must continue to broaden its horizons, incorporating global perspectives, engaging with diverse theoretical frameworks, and prioritizing the lived experiences and

voices of multilingual students and their communities. Policymakers, teacher educators, and school leaders must work collaboratively to embed EAL expertise across the curriculum and ensure sustained professional learning opportunities for all teachers. Only by embracing the rich diversity of learners and fostering inclusive, language-rich environments can education systems truly meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's students.

A significant emerging development in EAL education is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Recent years have seen an explosion of AI-driven applications designed to support language learning, ranging from intelligent tutoring systems and adaptive language assessment tools to automated feedback and real-time translation apps (Wang, 2024). These technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to personalize learning, provide immediate feedback, and support differentiated instruction for diverse EAL learners. AI tools can help identify specific linguistic challenges faced by students, track their progress over time, and recommend targeted resources or activities. For example, speech recognition software can enable EAL students to practice pronunciation with instant corrective feedback, while AI-powered chatbots can simulate conversational English in a low-stress environment. Additionally, natural language processing algorithms can assist teachers by analyzing student writing for patterns and generating formative assessments tailored to individual needs (Botelho, Baral, Erickson, Benachamardi, & Heffernan, 2023).

However, the use of AI in EAL education also raises important questions about equity, access, and cultural bias. Not all students have equal access to digital resources, and AI systems are only as unbiased as the data on which they are trained. There is a risk that automated tools may oversimplify complex language learning processes or reinforce dominant cultural norms. Teachers must therefore approach AI integration critically, ensuring that technological tools augment—rather than replace—the rich, human interactions at the heart of language acquisition. Ultimately, the integration of AI represents both a challenge and an opportunity for EAL education. When used thoughtfully, AI has the potential to enhance personalized learning, support teacher decision-making, and democratize access to high-quality language support. Its successful adoption will depend on ongoing research, robust teacher training, and a clear focus on the social and ethical dimensions of technology in multilingual education.

In sum, the field of EAL education stands at a crossroads, shaped by demographic change, theoretical innovation, technological advancement, and the enduring imperative of educational equity. Sharples' work provides a solid foundation for practitioners, but it must be situated within a broader, more dynamic conversation that includes diverse perspectives, emerging research, and the lived realities of EAL learners. As education systems continue to evolve, the collective challenge is to ensure that every classroom is equipped—through evidence, collaboration, and innovation—to support the language journeys of all students.

### Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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