

Profiling Writing Challenges in Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Murphy, Kyriacou & Menon (2015)

This study identifies the writing challenges faced by EAL pupils compared to English native speaking children (NS) and how their writing develops over a year.

48 EAL and 52 NS pupils were tested in Phase 1 (Autumn 2011) and Phase 2 (Spring/Summer 2012) using a range of standardised language and literacy tests.

Tests:

CELF - expressive and receptive linguistic skills
BPVS - receptive vocabulary for Standard English
BASII - measured cognitive function in spelling and reading
WASI - non-verbal IQ
LBQ - Language background questionnaire
WIAT - measured reading, language and numerical attainment
WAM - assessed text-level skills



Phase 1

Tests were matched against pupils' chronological age (CA) and language age (LA). Pupils completed 1 narrative written task.

1 Fewer EAL pupils matched NS on language age, but those who did had higher non-verbal IQ scores than NS peers.

2 WAM test - EAL pupils only differed from NS on higher level features of writing: **organisation** and **ideas**.

3 EAL pupils scored lower on CELF, BPVS and WIAT than age-matched NS peers.

CA comparisons confirmed previous research, showing that EAL pupils have lower vocabulary and literacy scores than age-matched peers.

Organisation:

Paragraphing, based on themes and providing a cohesive text for the reader.



Ideas:

Using creative and interesting literary techniques to engage the reader through suspense, tension, observation etc.

Phase 2

Tests were matched against pupils' chronological age (CA) and language age (LA). Pupils completed 1 narrative and 1 expository written task.

1 EAL and NS writing showed more similarities due to greater matches on LA.

2 EAL pupils out-performed NS on WAM expository spelling score.

3 EAL pupils scored lower on vocabulary in the narrative genre task than in the expository composition. NS showed no difference between the two genres.

EAL pupils showed more language-related differences on both written tasks compared to NS peers.

After a year EAL pupils faced more challenges related to vocabulary.

Receptive and expressive language scores are a significant predictor of EAL children's writing skills



Implications for Schools:

EAL pupils' writing would be improved by teaching vocabulary- both breadth and depth, including academic, multi-word and figurative lexical items.

Schools need to ensure staff are sufficiently well-trained in EAL pedagogy to develop appropriate strategies to improve pupils' overall linguistic knowledge and skills.