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EXCLUDED, ALIENATED, LABELLED: THE DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL) STUDENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Throughout England there are approximately 1.6 million English as an Additional Language (EAL) students, accounting for over 15% of pupils. This number is growing substantially, heightening the need for inclusive educational reforms to combat the varying issues they are vulnerable to. The profile of these learners is diverse; whilst the most common languages include Polish, Urdu, and Arabic, over 300 languages are spoken by children within the English education system. The circumstances of these pupils' arrival in the UK varies from parents migrating for work to refugees with a disrupted education, meaning treating them as a homogenous group fails to account for their individualised needs and experiences. There is a substantial in-group deviation in educational performance, with Chinese and Tamil speakers typically highly achieving but Punjabi, Portuguese, and Turkish speakers often falling below national averages. Overall, 68% of EAL children arriving in the UK before

school age meet literacy and mathematical standrards comparative to 65% of native speakers, but this drops to 56% for those arriving aged 5 and 18% for aged 10. The disparity between native and EAL students leaves the latter group 15.5 months behind by the end of primary school and 20.7 months by the end of secondary school. Obtaining academic-level linguistic fluency typically takes 5-7 years, outlining a major issue for these later-arriving students. However, the reasons for this transcend language barriers, with teacher labelling, insufficient resources and socio-cultural differences stifling the potential of many students.

Studies have shown teachers often have negative perceptions of EAL pupil's language use, regardless of whether they speak their native language or English, with some labelling use of their mother tongue as 'taboo'. Research exposed a relationship between this and lack of self-confidence in students, leading to detrimental academic effects. Further problems of the label "EAL" are also exposed, with evidence of it preventing social integration. Specialised resources like bilingual teachers or teacher training on working with EAL students encompassing cultural differences are therefore necessary in creating equal access to quality education, but these are often insufficient due to funding limitations.

The UK curriculum is often criticised for lacking diversity despite the school inspectorate Ofsted stating students' cultural development should include cross-cultural awareness, including that of minority groups. Inter-cultural awareness is also vital for teachers. Data showed those completing a course on EAL, and culture gained more insight and were less likely to stereotype these students, preventing exclusion, alienation, and labelling. Whilst

access to courses like these may be more prominent in multicultural areas, it is arguably even more essential in cases where there is just one EAL child in the classroom or entire school as the student cannot rely on others with the same experience for support.

Whilst the issues discussed can be complex, teacher awareness and willingness to promote inclusivity is growing. Primary school teachers are using 'show and tell' sessions to encourage EAL students to demonstrate their culture and language, with other children showing acceptance and enthusiasm. Moreover, families of EAL pupils often show high-level interest in academics, helping to combat issues emerging from negative labelling in school. This points to a more inclusive future for EAL pupils whereby their linguistic and cultural differences are advantageous rather than damaging.
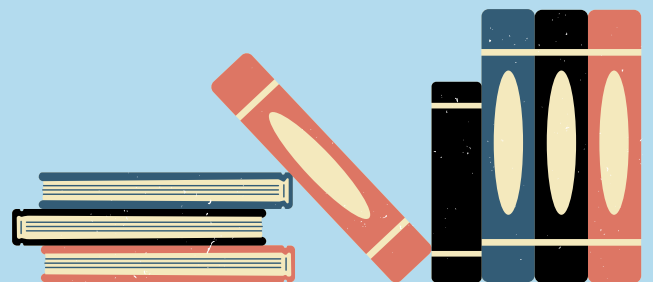
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