

INSIGHTS FROM ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CLASS WITHDRAWALS ON LEARNING SUCCESS AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

ROUA ALHALAWANI

Hartland International School
ralhalawani@hartlandinternational.com



© 2024 Roua Alhalawani, Hartland International School and the Centre for Education Action Research (CEAR). All rights reserved.

This research paper is protected by copyright law. Unauthorized reproduction, distribution, or use of any part of this paper in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the author and CEAR is strictly prohibited.

The content within this paper is provided for educational and research purposes only. Any references, quotations, or excerpts used must include appropriate citations and attribution to the original author and CEAR. For permissions or licensing inquiries, please contact ralhalawani@hartlandinternational.com or sfernandes@disdubai.ae.

Introduction

Acquiring proficiency in a new language is a multifaceted journey that extends beyond the classroom. For English language learners (ELL), this journey is often marked by unique challenges and opportunities. A key factor affecting the learning paths of ELL pupils is the decision to withdraw them from certain classes to provide language support sessions, aiming to boost their language proficiency. These intervention sessions lay the foundation for developing English language skills, enabling pupils to engage and succeed in the mainstream curriculum. This article examines the impact of ELL class withdrawals on their language proficiency.

The small-scale study explores Year 9 English language learners' experiences and feelings associated with class withdrawal at Hartland International School, located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The English as an Additional Language (EAL) department provides ELL sessions in place of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), Arabic (if exempt), and Prep period to language learners who are new to English or developing their English competency. Ultimately, the outcome of this study aimed to offer practical insights to enhance teaching practices and support mechanisms for pupils in ELL programs, as well as their integration into mainstream subjects.

Literature Review

In Leung and Davison's (2001) terms, EAL is described as "a diffuse curriculum area" meaning that it is integrated across various subjects and aspects of school life. Also, ELL pupils are not a homogenous group; factors such as "first language development, culture, ethnicity, previous schooling history, and socioeconomic status" must be considered (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Trzebiatowski (2017) explains that ELL pupils can feel safer and valued in small group interventions also known as class withdrawal sessions.

Gardner (2007) identifies four stages in the development of second language acquisition: elemental, consolidation, conscious expression, and automaticity and thought. The final stage, automaticity and thought is applied when the learner thinks in the language they are vocalizing.

Vygotsky (1986) argued that "what one can do in cooperation with others today, one can do alone tomorrow." In an ELL classroom, learners might initially struggle to articulate their understanding of new concepts in English. However, through interactions with ELL teachers, pupils can acquire the language skills needed to express their comprehension effectively.

Methods

Research Question – What is the impact of class withdrawal on pupil progress and language proficiency?

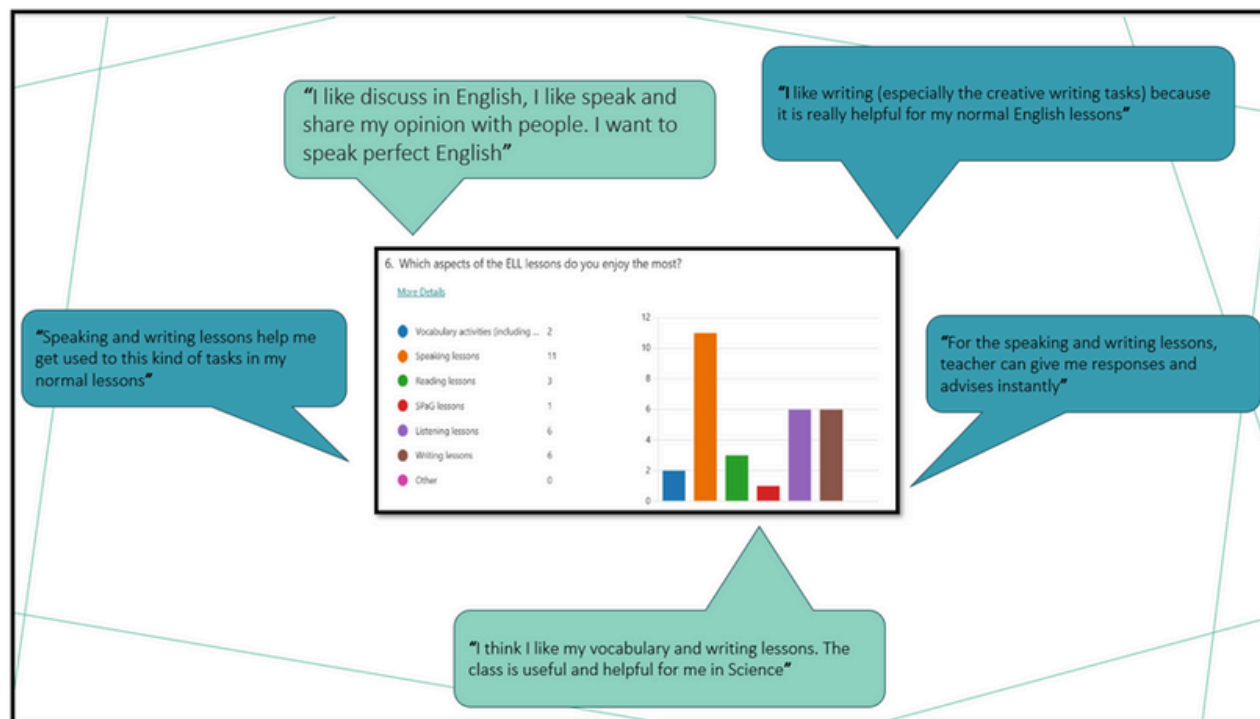
The sample of this research study consisted of 13 Year 9 pupils who responded to an anonymous survey. The survey comprised 15 questions, including a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Most questions were multiple-choice to facilitate responses from language learners. The survey was conducted during an afternoon lesson in Term 2. The questions were thoroughly explained before the pupils completed the survey independently.

Results

Figure 1
Pupils' responses on ELL activities, home study, and practice frequency



Figure 2
Pupils' feedback on their favourite aspects of ELL lessons



Feedback from Pupil's ELL experience included:

"I am happy that I do not attend some subjects and attend ELL instead."

"I think I need to continue but reduce it slightly. Since I need to practice writing skills."

"I want to have more ELL lessons because I want to prove my skills."

"It is great but would like to attend 2 French classes and 2 ELL classes instead."

"I would like more speaking lessons and more practical vocabulary. I want to read more in lessons and analyze it, Write more essays and WHW paragraphs."

"I think it is helpful for students who has some problems with language. For me it is good, because I never studied in British Schools."

"My English is improving gradually and if you compare my English level now with the one I came to Hartland with, I think it has improved a lot."

"It's a really informed English class for people that has to learn English. I will encourage people to come in ELL about their learning."

Participants viewed class withdrawals as an immediate and positive approach to tackling the language barrier. There were different views on the duration of class withdrawals, some pupils wanted less, and others wanted more. Participants identified speaking lessons as the most enjoyable. Listening and writing lessons were ranked as the second most enjoyable.

Most notably, writing lessons were identified as the area with the greatest improvement, significantly aiding ELL pupils in developing their English language skills. Additionally, vocabulary was ranked as the second-highest level of improvement. However, roleplays, online reading, and mini projects received fewer votes. Overall, the responses indicate that ELL sessions are a strong supporting mechanism, enhancing pupils' confidence and motivation to succeed linguistically and academically.

Discussion and Reflections

The study offered valuable insights into pupils' perspectives, highlighting their strengths, concerns, and needs. Notably, it helped inform tailored support and promoted cross-departmental communication and collaboration. Wong-Fillmore (1985) suggests that teachers must try to scaffold and break down their language instructions to avoid pupils' constraints of learning the second language. Graf (2011) states that the most effective ELL provision involves partnership teaching between language specialists and classroom teachers. Integrating SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) language objectives into mainstream lessons is strongly recommended. To promote best practices, ELL specialists are encouraged to continue sharing exemplary speaking, writing, and vocabulary tasks across mainstream subjects to support ELL integration.

Furthermore, this research study has guided the development of more rigorous ELL exit writing criteria, focusing on transcription, grammar and vocabulary, punctuation, overall text and structure, presentation, and evaluation and improvement. This writing criteria outlines SMART objectives designed to improve writing skills in ELL by targeting specific areas that require improvement. Applying these writing criteria in mainstream classes can enhance writing skills, ensuring that language improvement strategies are integrated across all subjects, ultimately contributing to achieving high standards in writing proficiency.

Lastly, this research study had its limitations. For instance, with only 13 respondents, it may have lacked sufficient statistical power to draw robust conclusions or generalize findings to a larger population of English Language Learners (ELLs).

Conclusion

The effectiveness of class withdrawals for academic development and English proficiency was explored from the pupils' perspectives. The responses suggest that class withdrawals positively impact ELL pupils' language acquisition and development, though the reasons, individual preferences, and attitudes toward learning may vary. This research study has offered practical insights to improve teaching practices and support mechanisms in ELL and mainstream subjects, particularly focusing on enhancing writing proficiency. Based on this research study, it is worth exploring other research topics related to this area, such as teachers' perspectives on ELL provision and mainstreaming ELL pupils, developing and testing EAL training for classroom teachers at GCSE level, and assessing ELL pupils' readiness to succeed without language support.

References

- Department for Education and Skills (2007). *Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement. Ensuring the Attainment of Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language. A Management Guide*. London, UK: Department for Education and Skills.
- Gardner, R. C. (2007). Motivation and second language acquisition. *Porta Linguarum*, 8, 9-20.
- Graf, M. (2011). *Including and Supporting Learners of English As an Additional Language*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Leung, C., & Davison, C. (2001). "England: ESL in the Early Days." In Leung, C., & Davison, C., & Mohan, B (Eds.), *English as a Second Language in the Mainstream, Teaching Learning and Identity* (pp. 153-165). Harlow, UK: Longman.
- Trzebiatowski, K. (2017). EAL: Excluded by Inclusion. Retrieved from: <http://valuediversity-teacher.co.uk/eal-excluded-by-inclusion/>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. W. (1985). Second language learning in children: A proposed model. In R. Esch & J. Provinzano (Eds.), *Issues in English language development* (pp. 33-42). Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.