How can the use of speaking and writing frames support children with EAL to discuss and record ideas in Standard English?

Orchard School, KS1 Phase

Abstract

Research has shown that pupils with EAL tend to underperform compared to their non-EAL peers in reading and writing during the earliest years of their education. The purpose of this study was to investigate and improve applied Standard English of pupils with EAL, particularly those who speak little English at home. The research was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of speaking and writing frames by assessing the impact they have on written and spoken outcomes of children with EAL. The study also took into consideration the impact that speaking and writing frames have on pupil's understanding and use of grammar as well as confidence when speaking aloud in front of their peers. The findings show that the speaking and writing frames did have impact on the quality of Standard English used by EAL children in their writing and that there was an improvement of spoken Standard English when the scaffolds were in place.

Introduction

Pupils are classed as having EAL (English as an additional language) if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English, (DfE. 2020). The level of English exposure for children with EAL varies between each household and is dependent on a range of factors, such as, parental engagement and understanding of the English language, (Strand et al., 2015). In some cases across the UK, particularly in inner city communities, the only exposure to English that EAL children will experience is outside the home. This highlights the importance that schools have on the development and understanding of the English language for children with EAL.

Orchard Primary is a larger than average primary school located in Hackney. It is an ethnically diverse school where the percentage of EAL children is much higher than the national average. At Orchard 44.7% of the children are EAL compared to 20.9% for the rest of the UK. Across the country, the number of EAL children has continued to rise over recent years with numbers of EAL children in schools doubling from 2006 to more than 1.6 million pupils in maintained schools in England (Strand et al., 2015).

Within the Federation, scaffolds are put in place to support with sentence construction and the children's understanding of Standard English. For EAL pupils, scaffolds are particularly important for modelling the language structure of Standard English, (Gibbons. 2015). One example used in the Federation of this is Communication In Print, (see appendix 1). This scaffold uses images and colours to help children with understanding vocabulary and supports with constructing sentences. Another example is the use of reading stems (see appendix 2) to provide children with relevant sentence starters that are used when discussing books and texts. The Bell Foundation, one of the UK's leading providers of language education in Britain, suggests the use of speaking and writing frames to support children with EAL. They support pupils with sentence construction, use of grammar, understanding of language structure and development of vocabulary. Speaking and writing frames can be used in any part of the curriculum and help EAL pupils develop spoken language as well as develop their writing, (Bell Foundation. 2022).

Across the school, there are several children whose parents and families speak very little English at home and are part of disadvantaged households. Consequentially, these children have a lower exposure to vocabulary and Standard English in comparison to their non-EAL peers, as noted in the school's Pupil Premium Strategy. The attainment gap between pupils with EAL and non-EAL gradually closes over compulsory education by age 16, (Dixon et al., 2020).

It had been identified in the school Year 2 cohort, that several EAL children found speaking in full sentences a challenge and this was also evident in written Standard English. The research focussed on testing writing and speaking strategies (writing and speaking frames) in oral and written sentence construction.

Research Process

The study was led by the phase leader with the support from the Year 2 class teachers. The research was carried out over a term with a focus on applying the speaking and writing scaffold during Literacy lessons to support with discussing and recording ideas in Standard English. Five EAL children were selected across the three classes who had demonstrated a limited knowledge of vocabulary and were known for speaking very little English at home. The proficiency of English was then graded in line with the English Proficiency levels. All children involved in the study were graded at either level C or D, (see appendix 3). These children were then the focus for adult support during Literacy by either the class teacher or the teaching assistant. All adults in the study were trained on understanding and using speaking and writing frames and understood how to use these to support the focus children. Bespoke speaking and writing frames were created alongside Literacy resources during weekly PPA and incorporated into planning.

Evidence was gathered at the start and end of the process. Samples of children's writing from before the study were taken and then after the study to allow comparisons to be made. Throughout the study, examples of the children's writing were analysed to identify areas of Standard English that needed to be addressed. Furthermore, observations of the focus children were made at the end of the study to ascertain the quality of their spoken Standard English as well as their confidence of speaking in front of their peers and to identify the impact of the study.

The sample of writing taken before the study revealed that the focus children were not demonstrating Standard English in their writing. One common thread that was apparent in all focus children's writing was the confusion of tenses for example, "the boy runned" instead of "the boy was running." Another common mistake made was the incorrect use of plurals, for example, "they are friend," "instead of "they are friends." These misconceptions were incorporated into the writing and speaking frames.

Fig 1. A Literacy flip created on Active Inspire with speaking and writing frames incorporated. These frames were replicated for children to use for their application task.

During Literacy lessons, the speaking and writing frames were used on the flips so that teachers could model their ideas using the structured sentence starters, (see fig. 1). On the carpet, the children were then given lots of talk partner opportunities and encouraged to use the speaking frames to support their answers. The focus children were supported by the teacher or teaching assistant during talk application to ensure that the speaking frames were being used accurately. If the focus child made an error in their Standard English, the adult would model to them how to phrase the idea correctly using an 'I do, you do' structure.

Findings

Two sets of data were compared. There was a comparison of observations of child engagement and participation during the carpet input (see figure 2) and a comparison of written work before and after the study.

Figure 2. Comparative data before and after study

| Pupils	Proficiency grading	Before study	After study
A	C	Struggled to share ideas with talk partner. Listened well to partner however could not verbalise own ideas. Did not volunteer to share ideas aloud with class however did share aloud when chosen.	Accurately using speaking frames to support with sentence formation and incorporated their ideas into their responses. Volunteering to share ideas in front of class without adult prompt.
B	C	Did not engage with discussion unless prompted by an adult. Responses to talk partner short and quiet. Did not volunteer to share ideas aloud with class or when asked by adult.	Still required prompting by an adult to engage with talk partner discussions however independently putting hand up to share ideas in front of class. Quiet voice used.
C	C	Engaged with talk partner well with conversation. Used a clear voice so partner could hear. Did not discuss in full sentences (started answer with "because"). Struggled with pronunciation of certain words.	Continues to engage with talk partner – is eager to share first. Able to accurately construct own sentences without using speaking frames as a scaffold. Occasional mistakes in grammar which is corrected by CT.
D	C	Did not speak with talk partner unless directed by adult. When discussing with talker partner, few words used with a quiet voice. Would not share aloud to class.	Confidently using speaking frames to support talk partner discussion and incorporating own ideas. Shared answer aloud however used very quiet voice.
E	D	Very confident with discussing with talker partner, led the conversation. Eager to share discussion with class and fixed grammatically mistake when prompted by teacher	Continues to show confidence in discussions with talk partner. Self-selecting which speaking frame to use and constructing own sentences without using.
F	D	Eager to discuss with talk partner however did not understand question that was given by teacher. Question repeated by CT however child did not understand how to answer until another child modelled aloud first.	Understanding of question provided by CT and used to speaking frames to support with response. Listened well to partner and incorporated both her ideas and her partners into her response which was then shared with class.

The observations of the focus children after the study show that all the children were able to use the speaking frames well with their talk partner. The speaking frames supported the pupils with constructing sentences in Standard English as well as giving the children the knowledge and confidence to create their own sentence starters. Generally, there was an increase in confidence of sharing ideas aloud in front of the whole class, especially in the children who would not share before the study.

The findings indicate that the writing frames had impact on the level of Standard English used in writing of children with EAL. Sentences were typically well structured, and punctuation was used accurately in writing. There is evidence of an improvement in the quality of writing, (see figure 3). Child A's example of writing before the study shows a lack of understanding of basic sentence construction. Words were missing from sentences;

sentences were not clearly demarcated and there was a confusion around the correct use of plurals. Moreover, there were numerous spelling errors. In comparison, the piece of writing from after the study showed a significant improvement in the quality of the writing and the use of Standard English. The pupil evidenced using the writing frames to structure their sentences and more accurate vocabulary use.
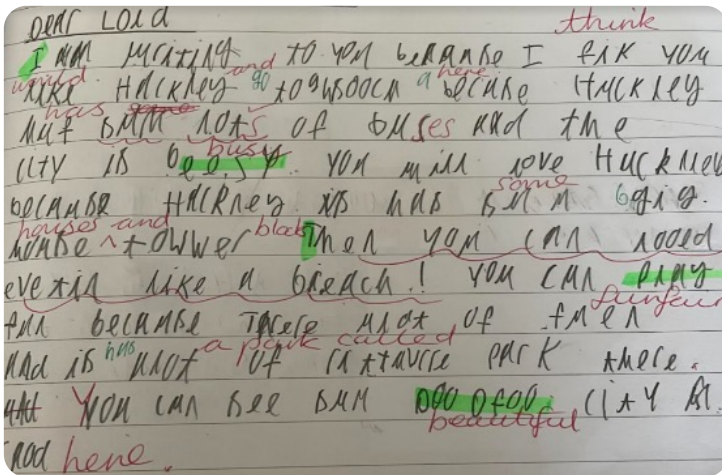
Written outcome of Child A before the study.
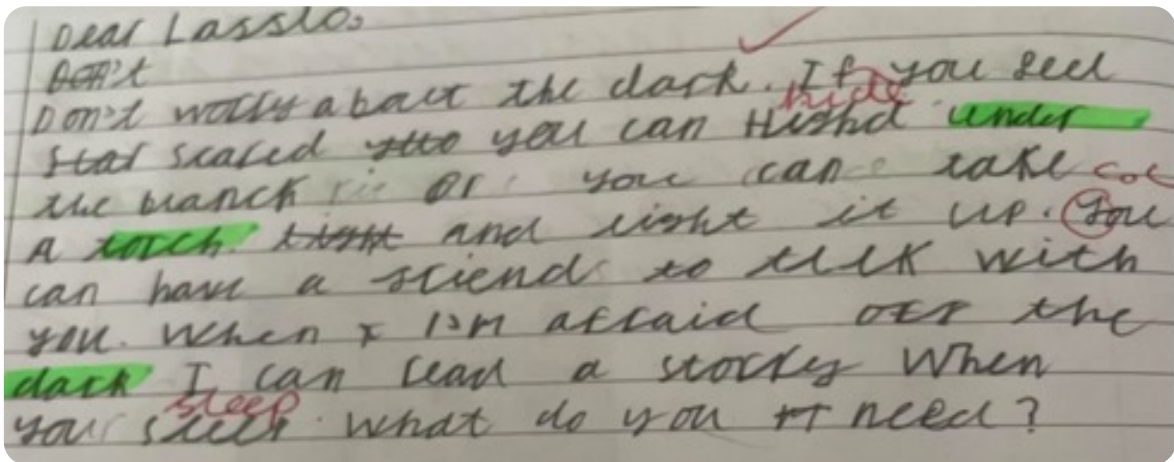
Written outcome of Child A after the study.

Fig 3. A comparison between the written work (a letter) of Child A before and after the study

Impact and Conclusion

The data presented indicates that the speaking and writing frames were successful and supported the focus EAL children with speaking and writing in Standard English. Observations from talk partner interactions suggest that the children felt confident with using the speaking frames to construct their sentences and the clear modelling from the adults involved in the study supported this.

The results show that the speaking and writing frames had a positive impact on EAL children in more ways than just oracy and written outcomes. The focus children were more confident with sharing their ideas aloud in front of their peers by using the speaking frames as a way of support. Additionally, those who were already confident with speaking aloud in front of peers were able to accurately create their own speaking and writing frames to construct their sentences. Due to the positive impact that this study has had, the Year 2 team have made this standard practise in the year group to support with the Standard English of all children within the classes.

References

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Communication In print

Appendix 2 - Destination Reader stems

Predicting
- I wonder if…
- I predict that…
- I think that…
- I bet that…
- The next part will be about…

Inferring
- The word * tells me…
- The part * tells me…
- This makes me think that…
- I think this character…
- I think the setting is…

Asking Questions
- Who…
- What…
- When…
- Where…
- Why…

Making Connections
- I know about this because…
- I've been to/ seen…
- I think this book is a * book…
- This reminds me of…
- The character is similar to…

Appendix 3 – Levels of Proficiency in English

English proficiency

A: New to English: May use first language for learning and other purposes. May remain completely silent in the classroom. May be copying/repeating some words or phrases. May understand some everyday expressions in English but may have minimal or no literacy in English. Needs a considerable amount of EAL support.

B: Early acquisition: May follow day-to-day social communication in English and participate in learning activities with support. Beginning to use spoken English for social purposes. May understand simple instructions and can follow narrative/accounts with visual support. May have developed some skills in reading and writing. May have become familiar with some subject specific vocabulary. Still needs a significant amount of EAL support to access the curriculum.

C: Developing competence: May participate in learning activities with increasing independence. Able to express self orally in English, but structural inaccuracies are still apparent. Literacy will require ongoing support, particularly for understanding text and writing. May be able to follow abstract concepts and more complex written English. Requires ongoing EAL support to access the curriculum fully.

D: Competent: Oral English will be developing well, enabling successful engagement in activities across the curriculum. Can read and understand a wide variety of texts. Written English may lack complexity and contain occasional evidence of errors in structure. Needs some support to access subtle nuances of meaning, to refine English usage, and to develop abstract vocabulary. Needs some/occasional EAL support to access complex curriculum material and tasks.

E: Fluent: Can operate across the curriculum to a level of competence equivalent to that of a pupil who uses English as his/her first language. Operates without EAL support across the curriculum.

N: Not Yet Assessed is also available for use where the school has not yet had time to assess proficiency.