



BRIEFING

Educational Outcomes Among Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

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This briefing examines data and evidence on school pupils in England with English as an additional language (EAL), which includes both children who have moved to the UK from overseas and those born in the UK. It examines information on the number and distribution of EAL pupils and summarises findings on their outcomes, drawing in particular on an in-depth analysis by the author in the recent report, English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database.

Key Points

About 19% of primary school students and 15% of secondary school students were recorded as EAL in 2015, although many will be bilingual or have substantial familiarity with English.

The proportion of EAL students varies widely across regions, local authorities and individual schools.

EAL students have lower achievement on starting school, but this effect reduces markedly with age and is largely eliminated by age 16.

Ethnicity and first language, as well as length of residency in the UK, are important factors affecting the educational attainment of EAL students.

There is currently no evidence that EAL students negatively affect the attainment of those with first Language English.

Understanding the evidence

The most comprehensive data source for examining the outcomes of school pupils in England is the National Pupil Database (NPD), which collects data from schools on pupils and their educational outcomes. The NPD is limited in a number of ways, however. Importantly, it does not have a variable such as nationality or country of birth that can be used to identify migrants, nor does it include data on students' age of arrival in the UK.

However students' characteristics such as their ethnicity and first language are recorded by their schools. Pupils are coded as having English as their first language (FLE) or having a first language other than English, i.e. having English as an Additional Language (EAL). A small number of students are recorded as first language 'Believed to be English' or 'Believed to be other than English' and these pupils are recorded within the FLE/EAL groups.

The EAL variable needs to be interpreted with some caution. EAL recorded by the NPD captures exposure to a language other than English in the home or community but provides no indication about the English language proficiency of EAL students. On the one hand, the EAL group includes second or third generation ethnic minority students who may be exposed to a language other than English as part of their cultural heritage, but may use English as their everyday language and be quite fluent in it. At the other extreme it includes new migrants arriving in England who speak no English at all, and may have varying levels of literacy in the language of their previous country of origin.

Although first language and ethnicity do not give information on the student's country of birth, a proxy for international arrivals to England can be derived from the NPD using the absence of a prior attainment score (either at age 5, 7, 11 or 16) to indicate students who have arrived from overseas.

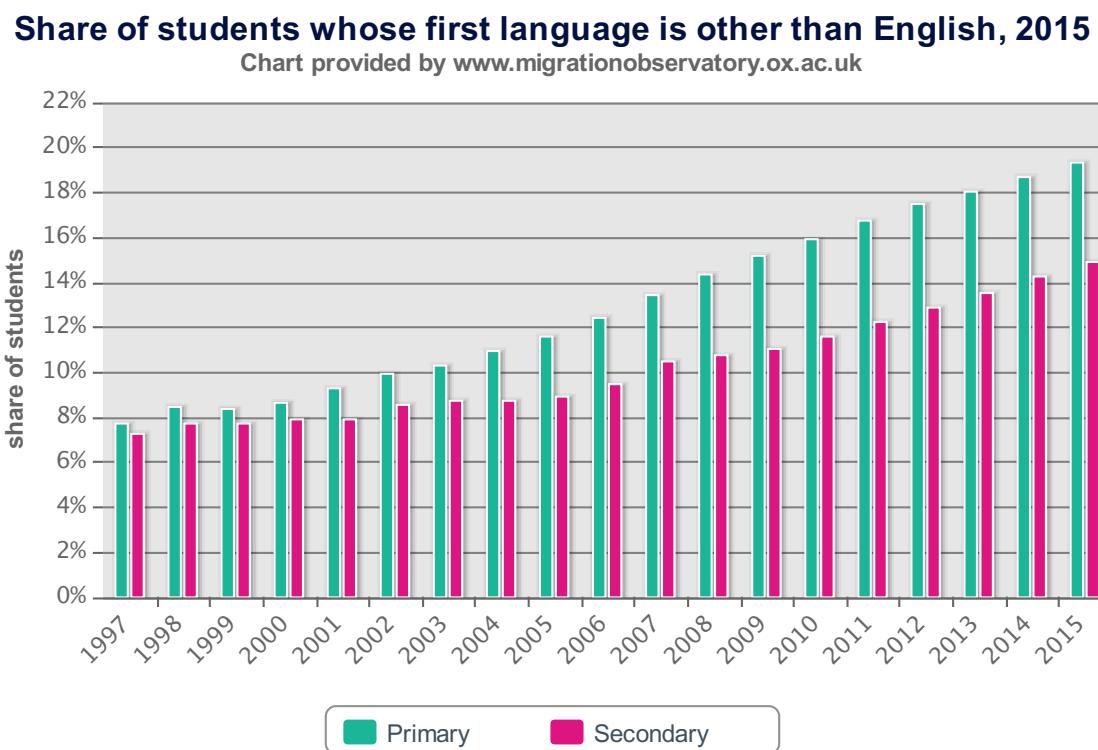
Data on pupils' place of birth and the time of students' arrival in the UK is available in a different data source, the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). This is a longitudinal panel study by the Department for Education collecting data from a nationally representative sample of over 15,000 students since 2004. Pupils and their parents are interviewed from Year 9 (age 14) and re-interviewed regularly. Unlike the NPD, data are collected directly from the young people on which they consider their main language. The LSYPE also provides some indication about the English proficiency of EAL students as it distinguishes between students who are bilingual, who speak multiple languages but where English is the main language (EAL-English-Main) and those who speak multiple languages but a language other than English is the main language (EAL-Other-Main). However, it is only available for specific cohorts of pupils and so is less comprehensive than the NPD.

There are many different measures of educational attainment and the findings may depend on which measure is used and at which stage of schooling outcomes are measured. National assessment data are available from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) at age 5, end of Key Stage 1 (KS1) teacher assessment at age 7, end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) tests at age 11 and public examinations at age 16. Results may be summarized using points scores, which express test results on a continuous scale based on the marks achieved; National Curriculum months (NC months) representing represent the typical pupil's progress over a given period of time; or threshold measures referring to the proportion of students achieving at a given level. Threshold measures are sensitive to small changes in performance at the threshold, but nevertheless can provide useful summary indicators.

About 19% of primary school students and 15% of secondary school students were recorded as EAL in 2015, although many will be bilingual or have substantial familiarity with English

The percentage of students aged 5–16 in English primary and secondary schools recorded as having English as an additional language has more than doubled since 1997, reaching 19% of primary school students and 15% of secondary school students in 2015 (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Source : Strand et al., 2015; National Tables of SFR16/2014; SFR16/2015, Tables 5a.

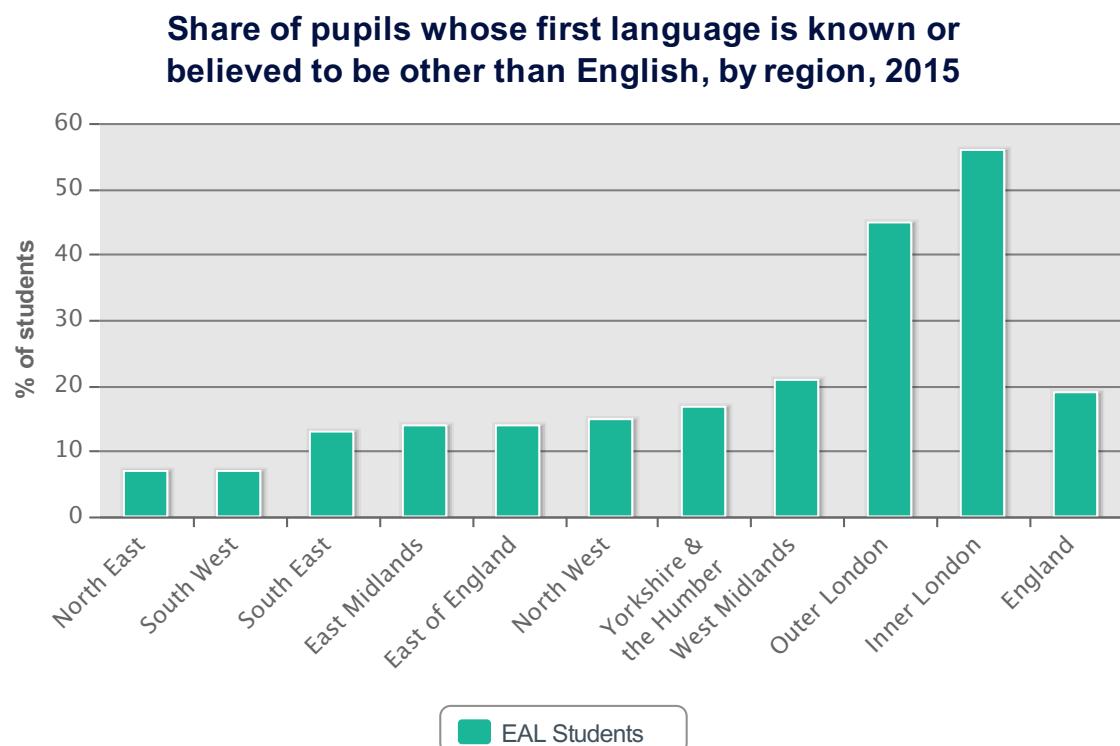
EAL is not a measure of English language proficiency. According to the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) conducted in 2004, 9% of students age 14 in 2004 responded that they speak a language other than English, almost identical to the proportion (8.8%) recorded as EAL in the 2004 secondary school census. However, over two-thirds of the EAL students (6.4% of all students) indicated substantial familiarity with English, either naming it as their first language or responding they are bilingual. Only a small proportion (2.8%) indicated that a language other than English was their first or main language.

The share of students recorded as EAL is considerably higher than the share of people of school age who were born abroad. At the time of the 2011 Census, for example, 6.2% of 5–10 year olds were born outside the UK (Markaki, 2015), while 16.8% of primary school children were recorded as EAL (Figure 1, above). In other words, many EAL students were born in the UK and this is consistent with the LSYPE data showing substantial numbers of foreign-language speakers being bilingual or having English as their first or main language.

The proportion of EAL students varies widely across regions, local authorities and individual schools

The geographical distribution of EAL students varies widely across the primary schools of English regions, and ranged from around 7% in the North East to 56% in Inner London in 2015. The average for England is 19%.

Figure 2



Source : School Census-SFR Schools, pupils & characteristics: Jan 2015, LA and regional tables, Table 10a.

The distribution of EAL students across all maintained, mainstream schools in England is uneven. In 2013, the average proportion of EAL students in all schools was 14%. Approximately one-quarter (22%) of schools had less than 1% EAL students, over half (54%) of all schools had less than 5% EAL students and approximately 68% of all schools had less than 10% EAL students. On the other hand, approximately 8% had a more than half of students recorded as EAL in 2013 (Strand et al, 2015).

Although EAL students have lower achievement on starting school, this effect reduces markedly with age and is largely eliminated by age 16

When comparing national assessment threshold results between EAL and FLE pupils overall, EAL pupils initially have lower achievement but this gap reduces over time.

Perhaps not surprisingly, at the end of their first year of full-time education children from homes where they may have had less exposure to English on average achieve lower results. Analysis of 2013 national assessment results showed that at the end of Reception, the odds of achieving a 'good level of development' (GLD) were 0.67 (or 33%) lower for EAL children compared to FLE children. Just over half (54%) of pupils recorded as FLE were recorded as having achieved this standard, compared to only 44% of pupils recorded as having EAL (Strand et al, 2015).

However, the association between EAL and achievement decreases markedly at later ages. The odds of reaching summary measures of achievement for a given age group is 33% lower for EAL than FLE students at age 5, 27% lower at age 7, 19% lower at age 11 and just 10% lower at age 16. There is no EAL gap at all on the broader measure of the 'Best 8' points score, an overall summary of achievement indicating the sum of the eight best results of all Key Stage 4 (i.e. GCSE or other exams taken at age 16).

EAL students' scores in maths assessments are always higher than in reading assessments at every age; for maths the EAL gap is almost eliminated by age 11 and by age 16 EAL students are slightly more likely than FLE students

to achieve an A*-C pass in mathematics. EAL students are also more likely than FLE students to achieve the English Baccalaureate, and to achieve a GCSE A*-C in a Modern Foreign Language (Strand et al, 2015).

Ethnicity and first language, as well as length of residency in the UK, are important factors affecting the educational attainment of EAL students

When we look at the variability in achievement within students recorded as EAL, the range of achievement is just as wide as it is for FLE students. The heterogeneity within the EAL group is so large that the average EAL/FLE gap is fairly meaningless in comparison, and the binary EAL indicator obscures the considerable differences in achievement between different subgroups.

There are many factors that are associated with educational attainment for both EAL and FLE students, such as whether they have identified Special Educational Needs (SEN), mobility across schools, ethnicity, entitlement to free school meals, neighbourhood deprivation, and region of residence with in the UK.

However, analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) shows that an important factor affecting the attainment of EAL students in particular is the age at arrival in the UK for those who are foreign born (Strand et al, 2015).

EAL students with English as their main language who were born in the UK or arrived age 0-4 do not differ significantly in achievement at age 14 from English only speakers. In contrast, EAL students who still have a language other than English as their first or main language at age 14 achieve lower scores, regardless of when they arrived in the UK. Within all groups, attainment at age 14 is lower among students who have very recently arrived in the UK at age 11-14.

The associations weaken somewhat by age 16, however, reflecting greater than average progress by EAL students. However, students with a main language other than English still lagged behind, particularly those who had entered age 11-14 (Strand et al, 2015).

Educational attainment of EAL students also varies by ethnicity and first language spoken. For example, analysis of the LSYPE data for the “White Other” ethnic group—that is, those reporting white ethnicity other than White British, White Irish, Gypsy/Roma or Traveller of Irish heritage—found that after accounting for student background the achievement of EAL students whose first language was English differed very little from those students whose first language was Russian, Spanish, French or Italian, while Romanian, Turkish, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Polish and Albanian speakers were still behind English speakers.

Within the “Black African” ethnic group, at speakers of Igbo and Yoruba (which are both spoken in Nigeria) achieved as well as English speakers, but French, Arabic and Somali speakers were behind (Strand et al, 2015).

There is currently no evidence that EAL students negatively affect the attainment of those with first Language English

Policy and media debates have often raised the question whether high concentrations of EAL learners needing extra help in primary schools might have negative consequences for English first language speakers in those schools.

There is very little research on the associations between the concentration of EAL students in a school and student achievement in those schools.

However, the studies that have been conducted (Strand et al, 2015; Geay et al, 2012), have found that the percentage of EAL students in a school has minimal association with student attainment or progress when controls for student background were included. If anything, Strand et al (2015) find that FLE students had marginally higher

attainment and made marginally more progress in high % EAL schools than in low % EAL schools, net of all other factors.

There does seem to be a significant variation between schools in the EAL gap, which suggests that some schools are better at facilitating the progress of EAL learners than others (Strand et al, 2015).

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The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.

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