

Helping children with English as an additional language reach their potential

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One in five children in English schools do not count English as their mother tongue, and a lack of English proficiency can hinder children's overall academic performance. Teachers of all subjects need to know

their pupils' English proficiency. Trustworthy and reliable assessment of English as an Additional Language (EAL) is an indispensable part of high-quality teaching for these pupils.

To help address this, Professor Constant Leung from King's has led the development of an EAL assessment framework designed to improve the way teachers assess and support children with EAL so each pupil can reach their full potential. Thousands of teachers in the UK have been using it successfully, and English-medium international schools operating outside the UK have also recognized its usefulness.

Stretching over 20 years, his work began by documenting how mainstream classroom activities and assessment practices in English are a factor contributing to the lower attainment levels of EAL learners.

"These children are expected to participate in the regular classroom activities, like all the other pupils in the school, but many of them find the experience quite daunting and don't learn effectively. Meanwhile, there is very little systematic, curriculum-based provision for their development of the English language," says Leung.

Prof Leung's work supports teachers' assessment of their pupils' EAL proficiency [as part of the teaching and learning activities in classroom contexts](#), and for them to identify their students' English [language development](#) needs.

Providing teachers with accurate assessment tools for EAL learners

Prof Leung, with colleagues at the University of Cambridge—Dr. Michael Evans, Dr. Neil Jones and Dr. Yongcan Liu—led the development of the [Assessment Framework for Schools \(AFfS\) for EAL](#)

. The research and development was funded by the Bell Foundation, an education charity that aims to enable speakers of EAL to overcome disadvantage through language education.

Drawing on an analysis of more than 12,000 teacher judgements of EAL proficiency, this is the first framework to be underpinned by theory and validated by long-term empirical research, for assessing EAL language learning available for use by UK schools.

"The Assessment Framework provides teachers with a set of descriptors to make informed judgments about the different levels of [language proficiency](#) that can coexist in their classroom. The different bands of proficiency give teachers a kind of roadmap to help teachers decide what to do to bring the students at a higher level of proficiency. So it's a framework designed for assessment but it also informs teaching, it's a formative assessment framework."—Prof Constant Leung

The School of Education, Communication & Society has been strongly associated with the research, development and promotion of formative assessment in school education, as an important addition to summative assessments (which evaluate students' learning at the end of a program, rather than throughout the learning process).

A 'game-changer' for educators

In January 2017, the Bell Foundation published the AFfS on their website, along with relevant educational principles and guidance for its practical implementation in schools and classroom resources for primary and secondary teachers (also developed by Prof Leung and his colleagues). The web-based platform is free for teachers working in the UK, who can access and download the resources to use them with their students. In 2020 alone, the AFfS was downloaded 31,582 times.

The Bell Foundation also extended access to the AFfS to a global audience in 2019; in just a few months, 475 international schools and other educational organizations had downloaded the Framework from across 82 countries.

The Assessment Framework has supported teachers to set appropriate targets for their learners. Echoing the overwhelmingly [positive feedback](#), an England-based EAL coordinator explained: the AFfS "has helped the EAL department show real progress [by] our students, as opposed to tracking them against the National Curriculum. Using the old system, we couldn't see the progress as much but with The Bell Foundation assessment we can share the results with the students and parents to show real progress."

The AFfS is transforming EAL learner assessment and support in the UK: it has been showcased as best practice by the Department for Education (DfE), the Education Policy Institute, and the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC); referenced in official Scottish and Welsh curriculum guidance documents; and recommended by the Ethnic Minorities and Travelers Achievement Services to be used in all schools.

"And the work has not stopped. We've been working on various projects related to the extension of the Framework, and also its application in different educational environments. So the project is ongoing, and we'll be reporting our progress from time to time," says Leung.

Provided by King's College London

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