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## “That’s my kind of ideal but that’s not necessarily what happens” A Case Study of English as an Additional Language (EAL) Policy Enactment in a UK Primary School: Policy, Understanding and Practice

Grace Bentham 

University of Cambridge, Cambridge

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“That’s my kind of ideal but that’s not necessarily what happens” A Case Study  
 of English as an Additional Language (EAL) Policy Enactment in a UK  
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Grace Bentham   
 University of Cambridge

### Abstract

The increasing number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners integrated into UK primary schools has heightened the need to research how teachers “enact” policies or make them happen. This qualitative case study investigated eleven participants’ views about EAL provision within one primary school in the East of England. The study addressed **1)** the extent to which national guidance underpins the school’s own approach towards EAL provision, **2)** the understandings classroom teachers have about teaching EAL pupils, and **3)** the extent to which teachers’ enacted practices align with policy guidance and their own understandings.

The data collection methods included policy document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and interviews with teachers involving a stimulus card task and semi-structured questioning. Emergent themes were identified using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Unlike previous research, the study drew on teacher sensemaking theory to frame its inquiry around the intersection between teacher understandings, policy messages, and enacted practices in the context of EAL provision. The positioning of these constructs as interdependent challenges traditional assumptions that policy is superior to teachers’ own implementation.

This MPhil study found that while tensions between EAL-specificity and generality emerged in all teachers’ reports and observed enacted practices, the school employed “macro-adaptive” approaches that included EAL learners (Cronbach, 1954). The study argues that the lack of systematic EAL-specific information and communication shaped teacher sensemaking. Despite no written EAL-specific school policy, teachers made sense of EAL provision by enacting shared unwritten approaches. Through the dissemination of its findings, the study has immediate implications at micro-level, shaping the case school’s provisional development of an EAL-specific policy.

### Resumen

El creciente número de estudiantes de inglés como idioma adicional (EAL) integrados en las escuelas primarias del Reino Unido ha aumentado la necesidad de investigar cómo los maestros "ponen en práctica" políticas o las hacen realidad. Este estudio de caso cualitativo investigó las opiniones de once participantes sobre la enseñanza de EAL dentro de una escuela primaria en el Este de Inglaterra. El estudio abordó **1)** la medida en que la orientación nacional sustenta el enfoque propio de la escuela hacia la enseñanza de EAL, **2)** la comprensión que tienen los maestros de aula sobre la enseñanza a los alumnos de EAL, y **3)** la medida en que las prácticas educativas de los maestros se alinean con la orientación de las políticas y sus propios entendimientos.

Los métodos de recolección de datos incluyeron análisis de documentos de políticas, observaciones en el aula y entrevistas semiestructuradas con el Equipo de Liderazgo Senior (SLT), y entrevistas con maestros las cuales incluyeron una tarea con tarjeta estímulo y preguntas semiestructuradas. Los temas emergentes se identificaron mediante el análisis fenomenológico interpretativo (IPA). A diferencia de investigaciones anteriores, el estudio se basó en la teoría de la construcción de sentido de los maestros para enmarcar la investigación en torno a la intersección entre la comprensión de los maestros, los mensajes de políticas y las prácticas educativas en el contexto de la enseñanza de EAL. El posicionamiento de estos constructos como interdependientes desafía los supuestos tradicionales de que la política es superior a la propia implementación de los maestros.

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Qualitative, policy enactment, teacher sensemaking, English as an Additional Language (EAL), primary education

### Palabras Clave

cualitativo, políticas puestas en práctica, construcción de sentido del maestro, inglés como idioma adicional (EAL), educación primaria.

Este estudio de MPhil encontró que, si bien las tensiones entre la especificidad y la generalidad de EAL surgieron en los informes de todos los maestros y en las observaciones de sus prácticas, la escuela empleó enfoques "macroadaptativos" que incluían a los estudiantes de EAL (Cronbach, 1954). El estudio sostiene que la falta de información y comunicación sistemáticas específicas de EAL moldeó la construcción de sentido de los maestros. A pesar de que no había una política escolar de EAL específica y por escrito, los maestros dieron sentido a la enseñanza de EAL al poner en práctica enfoques compartidos no escritos. A través de la difusión de los hallazgos, este estudio tiene implicaciones inmediatas a nivel micro, dando forma al desarrollo provisional de la escuela de una política específica de EAL.

### مُلخَص

لقد أدى العدد المتزايد لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة إضافية (EAL) المدمجين في المدارس الابتدائية بالمملكة المتحدة إلى زيادة الحاجة إلى البحث في كيفية قيام المعلمين "بسن" السياسات أو تحقيقها. بحثت هذه الدراسة النوعية وجهة نظر إحدى عشرة من المشاركين حول توفير تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة إضافية EAL وقد تم البحث ضمن مدرسة ابتدائية واحدة في شرق إنجلترا. فقد تناولت الدراسة أسئلة مثل (1) إلى أي مدى يدعم التوجيه الوطني نهج المدرسة الخاص تجاه توفير EAL، (2) مفاهيم معلمي الفصل حول تدريس تلاميذ EAL، و (3) إلى أي مدى تتوافق ممارسات المعلمين مع توجيه السياسات والمفاهيم الخاصة بهم. وتضمنت طرق جمع البيانات تحليل وثائق السياسة التعليمية، والمراقبات الصفية، والمقابلات شبه المنظمة مع فريق القيادة العليا (SLT)، والمقابلات مع المعلمين التي تنطوي على مهمة بطاقة التحفيز وطرح أسئلة شبه منظمة. تم تحديد معرفة المواضيع باستخدام تحليل الظواهر التفسيرية (IPA). فعلى عكس الأبحاث السابقة، استندت الدراسة إلى نظرية sensemaking للمعلم وذلك بغية الاستفسار حول التقاطع بين مفاهيم المعلم، ورسائل السياسة، والممارسات التي تم سنها في سياق توفير EAL. إن وضع هذه المفاهيم على أنها مترابطة يتحدى الافتراضات التقليدية بأن السياسة متفوقة على تطبيقها وتنفيذها من قبل المعلمين. وجدت هذه الدراسة MPhil أنه بينما ظهرت التوترات بين خصوصية EAL والعمومية في جميع تقارير المعلمين والممارسات التي تم تطبيقها، استخدمت المدرسة نهج "تكتيكية كلية" التي ضمت متعلمي EAL (كرونباخ، 1954). وتزعم هذه الدراسة بأن الافتقار إلى المعلومات والتواصل المنتظمين الخاصين بـ EAL شكلا طريقة sensemaking لدى المعلم. فعلى الرغم من عدم وجود سياسة مدرسية مكتوبة وخاصة بـ EAL، فهم المعلمون توفير EAL عبر تفعيل نهج مشتركة غير مكتوبة. ومن خلال نشر نتائج هذه الدراسة، فإن هناك آثاراً فورية على المستوى الجزئي، التي ستشكل الحالة التطويرية المؤقتة للمدرسة بخصوص السياسة الخاصة بـ EAL.

الكلمات المفتاحية  
تسريع السياسات  
اللغة الإنجليزية  
كلغة إضافية (EAL)،  
التعليم الابتدائي

## Introduction

Situated within the field of policy enactment, this study aims to explore how teacher understandings, policy messages, and practices intersect in the context of primary English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision in England. It has become critical to explore how teachers make sense of and apply policy, in light of the politicisation of EAL through conflict in policies nationally (Conteh & Foley, 2019) and the reduction in EAL-specific resourcing in maintained primary schools (Strand, Malmberg, & Hall, 2015).

The most recent definition states that a pupil has EAL if they are "exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English" (Department for Education [DfE], 2020). Historically, EAL status related to notions of proficiency, which implicated not only the amount of provision required, but also the diversity in provision required to cater to different learner needs. EAL status is no longer dependent upon the child's English language proficiency; the current label includes children from well-established ethnic minority communities, refugees and asylum seekers, and more recently arrived migrants whose parents

have come to the UK to work. Nevertheless, this broad label acknowledges the diversity in pupils' English language proficiency, including those who "have no English" and those who "are fluent multilingual English-speakers" (Hutchinson, 2018, p. 11). Of primary school pupils, 21.3% belong to the EAL group (DfE, 2020). The increasing diversity in proficiency levels and the increasing number of EAL learners integrated into maintained schools has heightened the need for provision. Despite this demand, provision remains a point of contention for policymakers and educators, as changes in funding structures have led to a further reduction in support for Local Authorities (LA), according to the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to explore how teachers enact the policy guidance in place for EAL, or in other words how they make policies happen (Ball et al., 2012).

## Literature Review

### *Contextual Background*

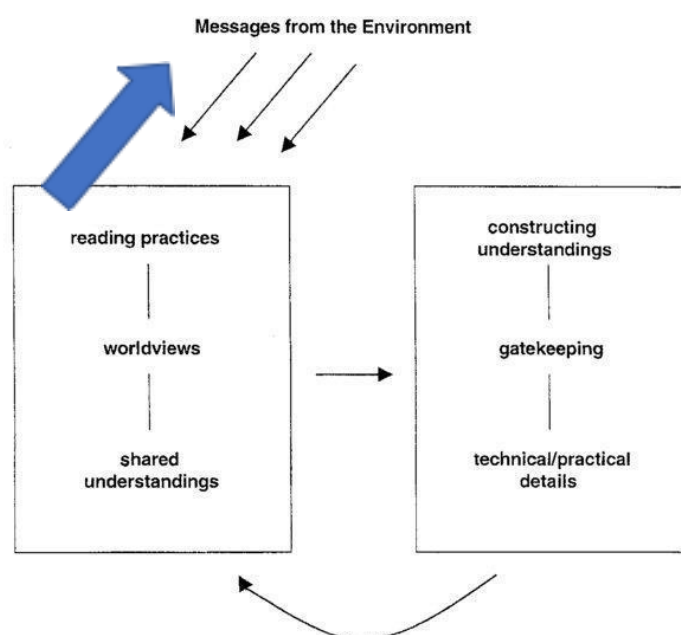
The government introduced a requirement to measure the effectiveness of provision for the "high needs [EAL] group", in the form of a "Proficiency in English" census with nuanced categories (Ullmann, 2018, p. 1). However, this lasted just one year, which saw "negative consequences" for teachers' practice (*ibid*). The Bell Assessment Framework was then designed to align with the DfE's "Proficiency in English" pro forma, using the same five-band scale (Evans et al., 2016a). It aimed to support schools in fulfilling the statutory requirement to report a proficiency level for EAL pupils.

Scholars agree that England tends to adopt a "mainstreaming" approach towards EAL (e.g. Leung, 2016; Anderson et al., 2016a), as there is an expectation that EAL students will "follow the statutory National Curriculum in age-appropriate classes" (Leung, 2005, p. 2). This aligns with the broader national ethos of "inclusion" (Conteh & Foley, 2019). EAL pupils' assimilation into the target language environment is perceived as conducive to greater inclusion in school (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019 & Foley, Sangster, & Anderson, 2013).

The "mainstreaming" approach has consonance with the Teachers' Standards protocol, which states that to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), teachers must "have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils ... including those with EAL" and "use ... distinctive teaching approaches" (DfE, 2012, p. 7). As EAL pupils' academic ability across the curriculum "may be in advance of their communication skills in English", teachers are expected to "provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects" (DfE, 2013, p. 8). Despite the emphasis on access, there remains "no mandatory specialist qualification" for teachers of EAL pupils (Leung, 2005, p. 2). Thus, the responsibility for EAL pupils' needs is devolved to individual teachers. The guidance on "how", however, is lacking, which affects how teachers make sense of policies in the classroom.

### *Teacher sensemaking in the EAL domain*

Coburn reframed Weick’s sensemaking theory as “teacher sensemaking” (2005), a process that can shape school leaders’ strategic organisational choices and teachers’ practices (*ibid*). Coburn’s investigation into teachers’ enactment of reading policy in two Californian elementary schools found that principals influenced teacher sensemaking “by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of meaning making, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning” (Coburn, 2005, p. 477). However, Coburn’s framework (Figure 1) neglected to consider whether individual teachers’ interpretations influenced EAL-related national or school guidance communicated to teachers by SLT, which will be referred to as “policy messages”, nor how teachers themselves might develop policies.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual model of sensemaking (adapted from Coburn, 2005, p. 152)

Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen’s 2018 study is the first to apply teacher sensemaking to examine the relationship between policy and practice regarding EAL. The study attributed further meaning to “sensemaking” in the EAL context, reframing the definition as “how teachers select information from their environment, interpret that information, and then act on those interpretations, developing practices, making social norms, and forming communities” (2018, p. 411). A survey was distributed to teachers in England, investigating how teachers understood policy, teachers’ subject knowledge of and attitudes towards second language acquisition, classroom practice, and assessment for EAL pupils. It found tensions between macro-level policy concerns and micro-level classroom cultures, including pupils’ “learning conditions and linguistic profiles” (*ibid*). Although this was a large-scale study, it did not elicit details of individual cases and did not draw on internal school policies.

### *Teacher understandings about EAL*

While EAL provision has been explored in the literature in the form of enquiries into teachers’ “beliefs” (Borg, 2003; Anderson et al., 2016b; Arnot et al., 2014; Foley et al., 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2010; Sood & Mistry, 2011) and “perceptions” (Anderson et al., 2016a; Arnot et al., 2014), this study’s focus is on what is known about how teachers understand the EAL domain. Empirical studies conducted by Anderson et al. (2016) and Hall (2018) concentrate on how teachers perceive the challenges and affordances involved in working with linguistically diverse young learners. It was, however, beyond their scope to explore how teachers understood the broader dynamic context of EAL policy. Furthermore, teachers’ perceptions on their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and skills to teach EAL learners has also been well-documented in the research literature (Cajkler & Hall, 2009; Foley et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2016a; Anderson et al., 2016b). Collectively, these studies highlight the variation in training that pre-service teachers received, and their perceived gaps in training. These empirical studies indicate the likely dissonance between intentions and practice yet underline the need to investigate in detail how teachers understand EAL policy and provision.

### *From EAL policy “implementation” to “enactment” by school leaders and teachers*

Teacher sensemaking is closely related to the field of policy enactment (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, as cited in Gunnulfson, 2016). Sensemaking activities are “critical in dynamic and turbulent contexts” (Weick, 1993, as cited in Maitlis, 2005), in this case the primary school EAL domain. Previous studies based around education policy have considered “policy implementation” (Andrews, 2009; Foley et al., 2013), which has been viewed as a “top down” process (Gunnulfson, 2016). Since research has been framed as “policy implementation” and has prioritised the role of school leaders (*ibid*), it is necessary to reconsider the role of teachers as actors in enacting policies. Increasingly, the term “policy enactment” is used to refer to “the dual processes of policy interpretation and translation by a diverse range of policy actors” (Ball et al., 2011, as cited in Singh, Heimans, & Glasswell, 2014, p. 826). The present study reflects on the internal school policies related to EAL by focusing on how teachers make sense of policies and provision.

Controversially, EAL has long been regarded a “general teaching and learning issue” (Leung, 2005, p. 2). Underpinned by Coborn’s “teacher sensemaking” theory, the proposed framework addresses the gaps in the literature and situates EAL as a specific curriculum domain. The positioning of teacher understandings, policy messages, and practices as interdependent challenges long-held assumptions that policy is superior to teachers’ practices (Hinnant-Crawford, 2016). Contrary to Coburn’s model, which portrays “messages from the environment” as one-sidedly impacting teachers’ practices and worldviews, the following conceptual framework proposes that the key constructs can move in two directions, as in Arnot et al.’s framework (2014). This shows the interdependence between policy messages, teacher understandings, and enacted practices, which challenges the earlier research that considers policy to be superior to enactment.

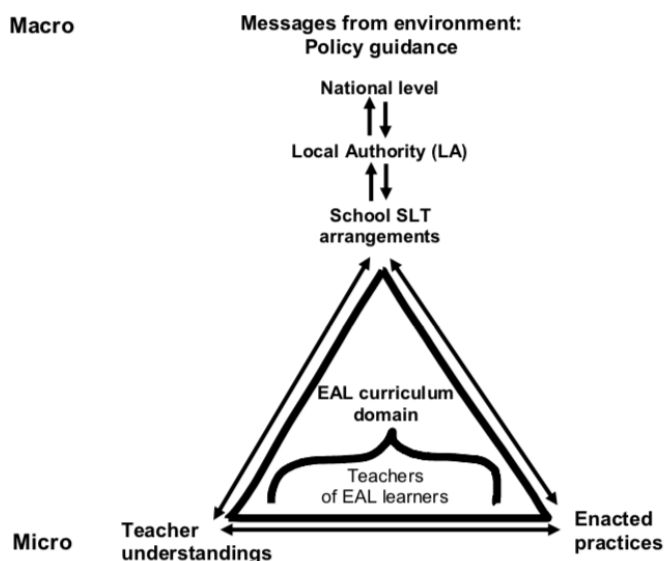


Figure 2. Conceptual framework: teacher sensemaking in the EAL domain.

### Research Questions

As shown in Table 1, the study aims to address three questions, which emerge from the gaps identified in the literature.

Table 1  
*Research questions and data collection methods*

RQ#	Methods to be applied
<b>RQ1:</b> To what extent does the national guidance underpin the School’s own approach towards EAL provision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Document analysis including internally produced school documents and externally produced policy guidance sheets and resources</li> <li>● Semi-structured interviews with Headteacher, Inclusion Manager, and Inclusion Coordinator</li> </ul>
<b>RQ2:</b> What are teachers’ understandings about teaching EAL pupils?	<u>Interviews</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stimulus card task</li> <li>● Semi-structured questioning</li> </ul>
<b>RQ3:</b> To what extent do teachers’ practices align with policy guidance and their own understandings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Semi-structured lesson observations</li> <li>● Interview questions to follow up on specific instances from the lessons</li> </ul>

The first question explores how the school adhered to or adapted national policy guidance to formulate their own policies. Given the high proportion of EAL pupils, this question aims to investigate the EAL-specific guidance in place to meet the school’s provision needs.

The second question explores teacher understandings of teaching, learning, and policy related to EAL. It draws on episodic memory to elicit teachers’ past experiences and specific instances

as learners or teachers of EAL pupils. Previous qualitative studies have not explicitly considered teachers' understandings of EAL-related policy messages (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016a; Anderson et al., 2016b), nor how teachers make sense of the recently developed Assessment Frameworks. Therefore, this question investigates how teachers understood EAL, which possibly informed their practices.

The final question investigates how teachers' pedagogical practices aligned with their understandings and the policy guidance. It explores the extent to which teachers' sensemaking corresponded with guidance from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and how teachers' understandings might have supported their pedagogical practices. As knowledge about the enactment of EAL policy is limited, teacher understandings and practices are situated within the context of policy messages.

## **Methodology**

### *Paradigm, approach, and strategy of inquiry*

The interpretive-phenomenological paradigm is an approach to educational research that focuses on interpreting participants' own experiential accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Such an approach was selected for this study, in order to interpret how teachers made sense of the EAL domain. The importance of context in policy enactment calls for a qualitative approach, given the detailed investigation into teachers' sensemaking processes. A qualitative approach is also favoured in interpretive-phenomenological research that localises the phenomena under study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The study adopted a case study strategy of inquiry to capture sensemaking in one school, which involved the in-depth analysis of a particular group (Yin, 2009). Contrary to other studies (e.g. Singh et al., 2014), this exploratory case study did not seek transformative change in teachers' practices. Instead, it explored an intersection between teacher understandings, policy messages, and enacted practices for EAL.

### *Participants and sampling*

Over a six-week period, I collected data at one non-selective primary school in the East of England. This school was selected due to its large proportion of EAL pupils, forming approximately one third of the pupil population. The purposive sampling composed of the Headteacher (HT) and Inclusion Manager (IM) from the SLT, the Inclusion Coordinator (IC) and eight classroom teachers (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Table 2).



Table 2

*Teacher participants and classes: demographic information as of April 2019*

Key Stage	Key Stage 1				Key Stage 2			
	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
Class	Sarah	Sophie	Vanessa	Alice	Jane	Claire	Laura	Sally
Pseudonym			a					
Total in class	16	17	24	28	17	18	23	23
No. of EAL New to English	0	3	0	2	0	2(?)	2(?)	0
No. of EAL (including New to English)	7	9	7	22	6-7(?)	9(?)	8	10
EAL and SEND	1	0	1	10	0	0	0	1
Joined school	1y ago	1y ago	2y ago	4y ago	2y ago	1y ago	2y ago	This year
Identifies as an EAL learner?	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Previous specialist experiences of teaching EFL/EAL?	X	-	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓

### *Data collection methods*

The study employed three data collection methods to address the RQs: document analysis of EAL-related policy documentation (Bowen, 2009), semi-structured lesson observations, and two sets of semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Appendix A). As shown in Table 1, the triangulation of methods sought to improve the credibility of data (Cohen et al., 2011).

To understand the SLT's adherence to, or adaptation of, national guidelines (RQ1), I consulted the school's EAL-related policy documents (Creese & Leung, 2003, p. 3). In the absence of an EAL-specific school policy, these documents included the "Provision Map", the "Inclusion Action Plan", and the "Pupil Data Records". These documents referred implicitly or explicitly to EAL. Following trends in the EAL domain to employ interviews as the key method (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016a), the study relied heavily on interview data. The first set of interviews was conducted with three SLT members on the school's approach towards EAL.

Next, twenty-four lessons (English, Maths, and Topic) were observed to investigate these approaches in practice (RQ3). Finally, interviews were conducted with eight teachers from Years 1-4 to explore their understandings about EAL policy and provision (RQ2), and to explore how these related to their practices (RQ3). I designed a “diamond-9” ranking card task and asked teachers to rank nine teaching strategies recommended by the SLT in order of importance for EAL pupils (Clark, 2012, p. 224; Appendix B). When probing for teachers’ views on sensitive constructs such as internal school politics (Heerwig & McCabe, 2009), this interview task was an attempt to “change the power balance” between myself and the participants (Barton, 2015, p. 180). Piloting in a school with similar characteristics maximised the relevance of the data collection instruments (Creswell, 2014).

### *Ethical considerations*

The Faculty of Education approved ethical clearance for this project, complying with the University of Cambridge and the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA) (2014; 2018). I sought consent for teachers’ voluntary participation and anonymised names by using pseudonyms (Walford, 2005). This protected participants’ democratic rights (BERA, 2018; Cohen et al., 2011). I took account of the rights of all pupils passively implicated in the research, receiving informed consent from the gatekeeper (BERA, 2018). In accordance with safeguarding, observations were audio-recorded to minimise risks to minors (Kvale, 1996).

### *Data analysis of observations and interviews*

Observational data in the table in Appendix C indicated the presence of classroom resources, teaching assistants (TA), and the visibility of multilingual or multicultural signs. Key themes emerged as patterns across the observed lessons. Themes included the use of multimodality, which includes both written and spoken language, and also visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial forms of communication. Fieldnotes from all observed lessons were systematically compared across data sets to extract prevalent similarities and differences.

Semi-structured interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). The key features of IPA outlined by Smith et al. enabled me to systematically organise the raw interview data into themes (2009). I conducted a detailed verbatim transcription of all interviews (Noon, 2018), requesting that participants performed a member check of the interview transcript to ensure that my transcriptions represented the essence of their interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The first stage of analysis involved fully immersing myself in the data by re-reading the transcripts, which enabled me to ground the analysis in the data. The second stage involved annotating the transcripts with initial ideas on the margin, based on the participants’ narratives. The third stage involved assigning initial descriptive codes to the corresponding raw data in each interview transcript. The inductive coding scheme can be found in Appendix D. An external reviewer checked the consistency of the scheme (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

## Findings

This section is divided into three sections, to present the findings chronologically as they pertain to each RQ.

### **RQ1: To what extent does national guidance underpin the School's own policy and approach towards EAL provision?**

#### *No explicit whole-school EAL policy*

There was no EAL-specific school policy, despite the high proportion of EAL pupils. While the "Inclusion Provision Map" referred to the inclusion of all pupils and particularly Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), there was no reference to EAL. However, an EAL-specific section within the "Inclusion Action Plan" specified teachers are to "use the Bell Foundation Framework to assess the children" twice a year. An INSET (In-Service Training) session on assessment procedures was to be provided to teachers, with the success criteria that "EAL children [are] to be fully supported". This written guidance aligns with the HT's report that "we want them to be able to access the whole curriculum". Therefore, EAL pupils were included within the school's broad inclusion aims.

Instead of an explicit policy, all SLT participants reported that responsibility was first devolved to classroom teachers. EAL pupils were expected to "pick it [English language] up" (IC) in the "language-rich" (HT) immersive mainstream environment. When asked which strategies supported the teaching of EAL pupils, the most prevalent were the *use of visuals* (HT, IM, IC), *pre-teaching* (HT, IM), *use of technology* (HT, IM), and *differentiation* (HT, IC). Yet, other than the EAL-specific assessment requirement, these approaches were not framed as EAL-specific but to include EAL learners.

#### *Conflicting views on the need for an EAL-specific policy*

Views on the need for an explicit EAL-specific policy did not fully align. The HT characterised the school's approach as "evidence-based", voicing plans to formalise a policy informed by teachers' practices. Similarly, the IM identified a need to formalise teachers' strategies, since "there could maybe be something more specific", but these references would be embedded within the current "Teaching and Learning guide". Furthermore, the IM expressed that "you have to look at separate groups when you're looking at data and progress", yet also that "it is almost wrong to put them into different groups". The tension between the need for an explicit EAL-specific policy that is included within another policy reflects an inconsistency between EAL-specific and mainstreaming approaches. In contrast, the IC reported the need for "a very explicit policy" yet expressed with conviction that any policy would "fail" due to financial barriers, which suggests a preference for no policy over one that cannot be implemented. Such diverse views highlight different understandings about the relationship between policy and practice.

### *Contrasting views on home/first languages*

Despite reports that data are important for coordinating EAL provision, mismatches in the number of pupils' home/first languages were uncovered in the SLT interview and document data. The pupil data records showed missing values for "home" and "first" languages for certain pupils identified as EAL. Furthermore, the number of home/first languages in the spreadsheet (=42) did not match the figure in the "Inclusion Overview" (=31), nor did this align with the figures reported by the HT and IM (=37) and the IC (~40). This discrepancy reflects a broader dissonance in how EAL status is understood among staff members.

As shown in Table 3, the importance of home/first languages also ranged from "vital" to "non-existent". The IC expressed absolutist negative views from the subtractive perspective, that home/first language use is conducive to the slower acquisition of English. The contrast in agendas suggests that a unanimous "top-down" whole-school approach towards language was absent.

Table 3

#### *SLT views on home/first languages*

<b>Headteacher</b>	<b>Inclusion Manager</b>	<b>Inclusion Coordinator</b>
<p><i>Encouraged</i></p> <p>"Vital. I think we want parents to celebrate both languages. There used to be a time when children used to be encouraged not to speak their home language. We're not like that at all. We encourage them to be bilingual or <u>trilingual</u> in cases."</p>	<p><i>Encouraged</i></p> <p>"I think we're extremely happy for children to [use home/first languages]."            "It could be as simple as doing the register in the morning, saying hello or good morning in different languages."</p>	<p><i>Discouraged</i></p> <p>"I think for us the importance for that child's first language is probably non-existent within a school environment."            "It's a slower process of them learning the English language."</p>

#### *Financial and practical challenges to enacting national and school policies*

Returning to the IC's view that an EAL policy would "fail", the SLT interview data were coded as *practical and financial challenges* that interfered with implementing national guidelines and developing a school EAL policy. Following the disbandment of the LA-funded Race Equality and Diversity Service, the school no longer receives external financial or practical support for EAL, which restricts the access to EAL-specific resources. The HT expressed that while budgets are "tight", staff "try to make the most efficient use of resources". Yet, budgets were a "problem" for purchasing EAL-specific resources (IM). The IC stated that there is insufficient financial investment to deploy staff to implement national policy guidelines. This finding aligns with the IM's characterisation of "*staffing*" as a resource, as "when we think of

resources we've got to stop thinking about practical resources". Consequently, the approach was to prioritise resource allocation by need.

## RQ2: What understandings do teachers have about teaching EAL pupils?

### *A diverse group with a range of abilities*

When asked to report their understandings of "EAL", six teachers reported more than one understanding (Table 4), acknowledging that EAL refers to a diverse group. Furthermore, seven teachers referred to EAL parents' linguistic repertoires in their explanations of EAL. Despite their diverse understandings, all teachers reported positive views about EAL learners. Six teachers indicated that *EAL pupils have high ability*, with four noting high ability in Maths. Therefore, EAL pupils' strengths were broadly recognised across the curriculum.

Table 4.

*Varied understandings of the term EAL.*

Teachers	Views about the term English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Laura	Uncertain about EAL term
	<b>References to EAL pupils</b>
Laura	English is not EAL pupils' " <b>first language</b> "
Sophie	English is not EAL pupils' " <b>primary language</b> "
Alice, Jane, Sally	EAL pupils can be "fluent" in English
Sally, Claire	EAL pupils might have English as their " <b>first language</b> "
Sarah	EAL pupils' " <b>mother tongue</b> " might be other than the school language
Sophie, Claire	EAL pupils speak another language at home
Vanessa, Jane	EAL pupils might speak one or more language(s) other than English at home
Sophie, Jane, Claire	EAL pupils might speak English at home or at school
	<b>References to EAL pupils' parents</b>
Sophie, Jane	EAL pupils' parents might speak English at home
Alice, Claire, Vanessa	EAL pupils' parents may be New to English or have low proficiency
Alice	EAL pupils' parents might be unable to support at home
Sarah, Sophie, Jane	EAL pupils' parents might speak another language at home
Claire	EAL pupils' parents may have knowledge of more than one language
Claire	EAL pupils translate for their parents
Sally	EAL pupils' parents can be fluent in English
Jane	EAL pupils' parents might lack confidence in English

### *A need for an EAL-specific policy?*

Contrary to teachers' positive understandings about EAL pupils, the interview data suggest a lack of consensus on EAL policy. No teachers expressed familiarity with the national guidance and five reported *unfamiliarity with an EAL-specific school policy*. None were able to provide details of EAL-related documents, with Sophie claiming, "if you ask me about SEND policies and SEND coordinator, there's lots in place, with EAL not so much here". This suggests ambiguity in the specific guidance for teaching EAL pupils.

Five teachers considered an *EAL-specific written policy as necessary*. Of the three teachers who expressed *uncertainty about the need for an EAL-specific policy*, Vanessa stated that a policy “can be really helpful if it’s written, it sounds silly, but in quite dumb terms”. The need for any written policy to be simplified highlights that “top-down” policies are not always accessible. Thus, teachers’ overall interest in EAL-specific guidelines aligns with the SLT’s agreement that EAL-specific strategies can be formalised.

#### *EAL assessment and monitoring protocols*

There was less clarity among teachers regarding EAL-specific assessment approaches. Six teachers *referred to EAL-specific assessments*, including the Bell Assessment Framework and/or the census EAL data, but not by name. Only five teachers reported *having already used an EAL-specific assessment*. Thus, there was no consensus on differentiation between the two assessments. Contrary to the “twice yearly” protocol printed in the “Inclusion Action Plan”, five reported a requirement to assess *once a year*, which raises the question of whether the Bell Framework was used for formative assessment. Sophie suggested that there should be a “written document just to say that if a child has come in, you just need to assess them on this level grid”. Similarly, Sarah’s resolve to write an “assessment for EAL children entering Year 1” shows intent to assume an active role in shaping practices.

#### *No formal information system for EAL*

All teachers reported that *EAL-specific information is “limited”* to age, languages, and country of departure. It is meaningful that five teachers reported the *need for more information about EAL pupils*, as, “if you don’t have the information, it’s tricky to assess whether it’s an EAL issue or a SEND issue” (Sophie). Sophie’s claim that “EAL sometimes gets a bit missed” reinforces the ambiguity between SEND and EAL. Contrary to all KS1 teachers’ reports that *more information is needed*, three KS2 teachers considered that the *current information is sufficient*. This finding might correspond with the lesser numbers of EAL pupils reported in KS2 and might also reflect pupils’ numbers of years in school or as UK residents.

#### *Tensions between EAL-specific/general approaches*

Analysis of the eight semi-structured teacher interviews and the diamond-9 stimulus task addresses teachers’ views about their practices with EAL pupils. Responses were coded in terms of *strategies* and *challenges*, which exemplifies the emergent theme of tensions between *EAL-specific* and *general* approaches.

In the absence of a formalised policy, Sarah characterised teachers as united in the task of supporting New to English pupils: “I think we’re all in the same boat, like what do we do? Can we translate on Google?” Three teachers claimed *knowledge of common approaches*, which included *exposing EAL pupils to the language, providing additional vocabulary support, pre-teaching content, and using visuals*. Furthermore, mean values for strategies ranked from “1” (Most Important) to “5” (Least Important) in the diamond-9 task are displayed in Table 5. The

data suggest that *visual resources* were the most important (=1.5) strategy, which supports the finding that seven teachers reported *using visual resources for all pupils* and five *for EAL pupils*. In contrast, the *use of external resources, such as Racing to English*, appeared the least important strategy (=4.75). The interview data support this, as no teachers reported using *Racing to English*. The reasons for teachers' non-use are manifold, including *unfamiliarity with the resource, timetabling restraints, insufficient knowledge to use the resource, and no need for current pupils*.

A total of six teachers mentioned practical constraints to supporting EAL learners, including *limited access to resources, the lack of an additional adult, limited time to pre-teach, detecting difficulties with comprehension for higher proficiency EAL pupils, and explaining vocabulary to Year 1 EAL pupils*. Alice attributed the constraints to moderation, KS1 assessments, and the loss of funding. Vanessa's account strikes a chord with this notion, uncovering tensions between ideal and practical strategies: "I feel like that's my kind of ideal but that's not necessarily what happens for my EAL children."

However, seven teachers reported that their current EAL pupils' language needs are not high enough to require teachers to seek EAL-specific strategies, resources, or a policy. Two teachers claimed that non-EAL pupils have more difficulty learning than EAL pupils, with Claire stating that "my needier children are not EAL". These findings resonate with the SLT's tendency towards an improvised approach towards EAL pupils.

#### *Views on home/first language use*

Returning to the diamond-9 data in Table 5, all teachers assigned Medium (3) or Less (4) importance to the *use of resources reflecting home/first languages*. While seven teachers reported in the interviews that *home/first language use can be important*, including when taking the register, six teachers reported *an inability to use pupils' home/first languages*, due to their own lacking knowledge and pupils' reluctance to share their languages. Nevertheless, no teachers reported prohibiting their use. Thus, there was more consistent agreement on home/first language use among classroom teachers than the SLT.

#### *Proposals for developing provision*

Most teachers reported areas for developing EAL provision. In KS1, Sophie and Vanessa expressed the need for *ways to help EAL pupils with writing and different interventions and activities for more proficient EAL pupils*. Sarah expressed the need for *resources in home/first languages* (i.e. dual-language dictionaries and timetables). In KS2, Sally called for *a range of books* with "strong vocabulary" for higher proficiency pupils. Thus, teachers' visions for EAL provision depended on learner characteristics. The IM's value of *staffing as a resource* aligns with seven teachers' reports coded as *an additional adult is helpful for EAL pupils*.

Table 5.

*Reported “importance” of strategies for teaching EAL pupils.*

Strategies	Key Stage 1				Key Stage 2				Mean
	Y1 Sarah	Y1 Sophie	Y2 Vanessa	Y2 Alice	Y3 Jane	Y3 Claire	Y4 Laura	Y4 Sally	
Visual resources	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	1.5
Additional verbal support (e.g. repetition and modelling)	3	=2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2.25
Pre-teaching of content or vocabulary	2	=2	2	3	3	1	2	3	2.25
Differentiation of tasks for EAL pupils	3	3	3	1	3	4	3	2	2.75
Collaborative learning activities	3	4	4	3	1	2	2	3	2.75
Literacy-based interventions (e.g. storytelling)	3	=2	3	4	3	3	3	4	3.125
Resources reflecting home/first languages and cultures	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	3.25
Technology, (e.g. iPads/online translation tools)	5	3	5	4	4	4	4	3	4
External resources (e.g. Racing to English)	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.75



### **RQ3: To what extent do enacted practices align with policy guidance and teachers' self-reported understandings?**

No teachers reported using “distinctive” approaches for EAL pupils, as advised by the national guidance. The sense that approaches were not EAL-distinctive is echoed by the lesson observations. Despite value attributed to staffing, TA deployment was concentrated in KS1 classrooms for SEND support.

Aligned with the whole-school focus on vocabulary for all pupils, teachers corrected language and provided explanations for new vocabulary for all pupils. Topic-specific terminology was, however, observed to be challenging for EAL pupils. In a KS1 lesson, two EAL pupils asked the researcher the meaning of words in their task. Combined with reports that non-EAL pupils had more difficulty than those with EAL (RQ2), it appeared that homogenous approaches existed for EAL and non-EAL pupils' language development. This reinforces the SLT's approach to include EAL pupils yet raises questions concerning their full access to the curriculum.

The following extract from Laura's Year 4 History lesson, combined with Laura's reflection that she “didn't know how to” explain the definition, reinforces challenges to check EAL pupils' understanding of topic-specific vocabulary.

“It will be soldiers that arrive on horses alright and paying tribute (.) have we got questions about that, do we know what it means? (...) OK it's sort of like alright we'll pay you taxes (.) because they got invaded so they don't want the Romans to give them grief (.) yeah (.) so they'll pay them so that they leave them in peace. Right moving on, first invasion...”

#### *Unwritten “macro-adaptive” approaches in spite of policies*

Reports of enacting strategies based on the classroom characteristics are echoed by the observational data. Beyond the use of visuals, “multimodal” strategies were observed across all twenty-four lessons. These strategies included gestures and realia to aid explanations of technical vocabulary, such as “precipitation” in Year 3 Water Cycle Topic lessons. Story maps were also visible in five classrooms across both Key Stages (Figure 4). While the Talk for Writing strategy was used for “all pupils”, Jane and Sophie characterised these activities as *valuable for EAL pupils' language development*, with Sophie claiming that “having visuals, acting it out, breaking it up, writing it helps all pupils, but it's really helpful for EAL”.

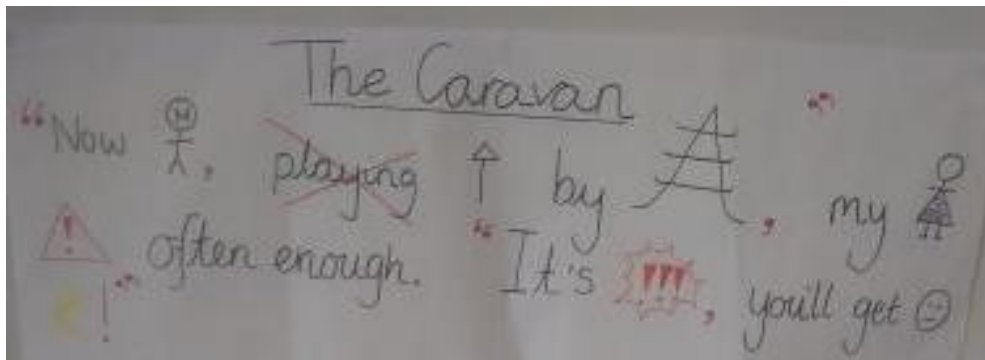


Figure 4. Story Maps

Teachers included EAL pupils in story map activities, thus encouraging multisensory learning. Teachers engaged pupils in visuals, movement, sound, touch, smell, and taste, with food tasting to introduce Mexican culture in Topic lessons and plastic shapes to teach 2D shapes in Maths. This corresponds with the HT's intent for EAL pupils to access the curriculum. Thus, multimodality was a "macro-adaptive" strategy, which refers to "the adaptation of teaching practices to characteristics of the class" (Cronbach, 1975, as cited in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009, p. 90).

Home/first languages visibly played a more minor role than English. However, home/first languages were used twice during the register, reinforcing reports in RQ2. Although the use of Spanish in the Year 2 Topic lessons themed around Mexico was not an example of intentionally using a home/first language, but the school's foreign language, it gave way to discussions about language. Alice admitted to pupils that "my Spanish isn't great" but acknowledged that she is "trying her best" and drew on the Spanish TA's knowledge to pronounce "folklórico" (Appendix C). Alice also invited pupils to multimodally "tell a story, write a story, draw a story". One EAL pupil asked, "can I write the story in my language?". Alice's response, "It's fine to tell a story in another language", resonates with the finding that no teacher reported discouraging home/first language use (RQ2). Similarly, the reflection that "it's the act of them writing and knowing that it's not that they've come and now they're standing from nothing" shows an intention to empower EAL pupils to express their linguistic identities. Thus, teachers engaged with language and showed openness towards multilingualism as a resource.

No permanent multilingual signs were observed in any classrooms, with the exception of one Spanish display. Outside classrooms, however, a Chinese New Year display and a world map showing pupils' names were visible attempts to celebrate diversity. Multilingual storybooks were available in the library, although limited to 14% of pupils' home/first languages.

## Discussion

This study has argued that the school's absence of a formal and EAL-specific policy and communication system shaped teacher sensemaking in the EAL domain. National and school policy messages, as identified in RQ1, did not visibly align with teachers' understandings and practices, most notably in terms of assessment approaches, use of external resources like

Racing to English, and the role of home/first languages (RQ2; RQ3). The mismatch in policy and enactment resonates in similar studies (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). In Schneider and Arnot's exploratory case study in two Scottish schools, for example, neither school established an explicit communication plan that "outlined the formal communication structures regarding EAL provision" (2018, p. 252). Teachers' unfamiliarity with the details of EAL national guidance and school policy approaches chimed with Foley et al.'s finding that pre-service teachers were unfamiliar with the formal arrangements for EAL in their placement schools (2013, p. 200). It follows that teachers' self-reported understandings and practices were informed by the conflicting messages they received.

To return to sensemaking, formal policy is "only one of many mechanisms" that can carry messages about provision (Coburn, 2005, p. 146). This study has highlighted the school's attempts to support EAL learners, which included unwritten and shared enacted practices. This is similar to Hall's 2018 study, where "individual teachers were developing their own practices and beliefs" (p. 24), and Anderson et al.'s (2016b) study, where teachers "acted in an agentic fashion to facilitate EAL students' learning" (p. 53). The case school's planned EAL-specific policy guidance could reflect existing "good practice", as teachers' own theories and understandings can inform school-wide practices (Conteh & Foley, 2019).

The investigation uncovered a tension between the need for EAL-specific resources and a tendency to manage with existing *general* resources that supported EAL learners as one group included within the classroom. This tension corresponds to the mainstreaming tendency to embed EAL within curriculum learning (Leung, 2005; 2016). Instead of the formalised "distinctive" approaches recommended for EAL provision by the government (DfE, 2012, p. 7), shared "unwritten" teaching approaches were enacted across the school. The dominant *general* approach chimes with the view that good teaching and learning of all pupils is synonymous with good teaching and learning for EAL pupils (Graf, 2011), which remains a contentious claim for advocates of EAL-specific practice for EAL pupils' "distinctive" needs (NALDIC, 2011).

Drawing again on Cronbach's "macro-adaptivity" (1957), teachers tended towards a "macro-adaptive" approach to include EAL learners (RQ3). Teachers also made sense of EAL in relation to SEND pupils' needs by using the same strategies (RQ2; RQ3), which matches the broad inclusion focus in the literature (Institute of Education [IoE], 2009; Arnot et al., 2014). Multisensory practices that supported both SEND and EAL pupils offered a "macro-adaptive" approach to meet the needs of the classroom characteristics. A similarly multimodal approach was found in Secemski, Deutsch, and Adoram's project, which provided withdrawal support in the form of structured multisensory teaching for English as a Foreign Language learning in Israel (2000). Similarly, Liu et al.'s knowledge base for teaching in linguistically diverse contexts conceptualised a place for multimodal aids "to reduce the language demands in learning" for EAL pupils (2017, p. 384). It is necessary to assess the effectiveness of multimodal pedagogy on EAL learners' academic attainment and English language proficiency, which is yet to feature in the body of research literature.

A consistent multilingual classroom pedagogy was absent, yet the school's overarching aims to celebrate diversity were clear. Although the use of home/first languages appeared limited to informal routine activities, there is potential for non-specialist teachers to engage more with multilingual pedagogy (Barton, Bragg, & Serratrice, 2009, as cited in Bailey & Marsden, 2017, p. 12).

### *Limitations*

The present study is based on a single case, and as such, makes no attempt to generalise its findings. Due to timetabling restrictions, there was a time lapse between observations and interviews, which potentially impacted the trustworthiness of teachers' responses. It was not feasible to prevent discussions between the SLT and teachers about the study's EAL focus, which may have influenced practices and led to heightened social desirability bias (Heerwig & McCabe, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

### *Implications and contributions*

The present study has contributed to the field of policy enactment by drawing attention to school leaders' and teachers' roles in shaping EAL policy and provision. Its conceptual framework takes forward Coburn's teacher sensemaking model by incorporating the neglected policy dimension. By considering the dynamism in policy enactment at national, school, and classroom levels, this research proposes that teachers have potential to interact further with policy messages, given the SLT's openness to developing a policy based on teachers' unwritten and multimodal practices, and some teachers' engagement in developing EAL provision.

Following the attributes of sensemaking, which is an "ongoing" process (Weick, 2005), the findings inform the HT's planned development of an EAL-specific school policy. A policy strategy could formalise teachers' multimodal practices with EAL pupils and provide a protocol for assessing EAL learners. The study also provides policymakers with knowledge of EAL policy enactment in one school; if those with responsibility for teaching EAL learners are using "macro-adaptive" strategies rather than "distinctive" strategies, then national policy agendas must reassess the current EAL policy guidance. In light of COVID-19, which has immediate implications for educational achievement, particularly of marginalised pupils, the enquiry into EAL policy enactment remains relevant.

### *Future research*

Longitudinal research in the EAL domain, including that which traces teachers' sensemaking trajectories over time, would prompt policymakers to reconsider existing policies and provide directions for "distinctive" approaches. Given Conteh and Foley's (2019) appeal for policymakers to consider "transformative pedagogies" that draw on a "transcultural" lens,

future research could explore how multilingual (i.e. translanguaging, as in Garcia & Flores, 2012) and multimodal pedagogies can be used to meet the diverse needs of EAL pupils.

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