

EAL glossary of terms

A National Literacy Trust membership resource

Throughout the world, different terms are used to refer to students who are in the process of learning English. Knowing these terms is helpful when researching practice across the world. However, in England, the government has specific guidance as to which terms should be used, and when. The Department for Education's definition is as follows:

A first language other than English should be recorded where a child was exposed to the language during early development and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or in the community.

If a child was exposed to more than one language (which may include English) during early development the language other than English should be recorded, irrespective of the child's proficiency in English.

In schools in England and Wales, the following [EAL proficiency stages](#) are used for all pupils of school age who speak another language at home. Schools are required to record and submit stages as part of the annual school census every January.

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

Other terms used for English as an additional language across the world

<p>Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)</p>	<p>Everyday communication or conversational fluency in a language. It refers to the types of communication associated with routine social interactions. In school settings this is sometimes referred to as 'playground' English. This term arises from the early work of Jim Cummins. Not all informal language use can be categorised as using BICS. For example, teachers often use everyday common expressions to explain complex concepts.</p>
<p>Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)</p>	<p>The type of language needed to understand academic texts in reduced context situations. In education this 'academic' English is usually contrasted with BICS (see above). This term derives from the early work of Cummins in Bilingualism and Special Education (1984). This is sometimes referred to as Academic English.</p>
<p>English as an additional language (EAL) and English as a Second Language (ESL)</p>	<p>EAL and ESL are used to describe the learning of English in addition to the learner's first language. The two terms are interchangeable. However, in England the term 'English as an additional language' or 'EAL' is used to refer to school age pupils learning English in school. This term was deemed a more neutral term and it also recognises that, for some learners, English may be their third or fourth language.</p>
<p>English as a foreign language (EFL)</p>	<p>EFL refers to the learning and teaching of English in a non-English context, such as learning of English in Hungary or Thailand. The purpose of learning is initially for social or leisure as opposed to curriculum learning.</p>
<p>English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)</p>	<p>English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) is a term generally used in England to describe adult learning of English as an additional language. For example, in post-16 further education colleges.</p>
<p>English for academic purposes (EAP)</p>	<p>The term EAP refers to the teaching of English at higher education or university level where the language is used for academic study. Most EAP teaching is subject-domain specific. (English for business, medicine etc.)</p>

Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME or BME)	The term describes all ethnicities other than white British. In the past, only a small percentage of EAL learners in the UK were white. Since EU enlargement in 2004, and greater globalisation, this is changing. Issues of race, ethnicity and culture are not the same as EAL issues, but there are links between them.
English Language Learner (ELL)	This term is mostly used in the USA to describe pupils and students learning English as an additional or second language.
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	Term used by the U.S. Department of Education to refer to pupils and students who lack sufficient mastery of English to meet state standards and succeed in an English-medium classrooms. English Language Learner (ELL) is the preferred U.S. term because it highlights learning needs, rather than a deficit view of bilingual students.