

Direct Instruction Raises Literacy Achievement for English Learners





Direct Instruction Raises Mastery of Literacy for English Learners

In 2014–15, there were more than 4.8 million English Learners (EL) in the United States. The population of ELs across the country is growing rapidly and effective instruction that meets the specific needs of ELs is critically important as these students strive to achieve the highest learning outcomes (United States Department of Education, 2018). Academic research recommends that an instructional reading curriculum for ELs should:

- Be evidence-based
- Be explicitly taught
- Include a systematic curriculum of essential reading skills

Explicit, systematic instruction in literacy can help all K-12 students, including those who are ELs, who are struggling to achieve higher progress by providing regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills. This, in turn, empowers students to apply these skills toward content learning.

Guiding Principles for Supporting ELs

The success of English Learners in second-language literacy is directly tied to the success of these students in all core academic areas. For ELs to achieve the highest possible outcomes, there needs to be an equitable foundation of learning for all.

Based on research across a wide range of disciplines, McGraw-Hill has developed and applied a set of nine guiding principles to support ELs as they acquire content and develop language. Four of these principles are particularly relevant to reading achievement among English Learners and have informed the development of DI programs:

- **Provide Specialized Instruction:** Well-implemented instruction focused on acquiring English language skills while also teaching grade-level content is essential for providing additional support to ELs
- **Cultivate Meaning:** Providing intensive vocabulary instruction in every way—writing, speaking, and listening—encourages the learning of meaning and cultivates deeper understanding of language
- **Develop Language in Context:** Providing regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills empowers the development of language in the context of content area instruction
- **Scaffold to Support Access:** Implementing scaffolding strategies that connect language to visual or written information in ways that clarify language—pictures, videos, and graphic organizers—helps all students access grade-level core content

Achieving Higher Literacy in English Language

All students require the acquisition of essential skills to become proficient readers. For EL students, this is especially true. The National Reading Panel suggests teachers and schools pay close attention to the more complex needs of ELs as they learn word structures and sounds that are different from what they know (National Reading Panel)⁷. To become fluent, proficient readers, ELs require sometimes more intensive instruction in specific reading skill areas such as:

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Fluency

These areas of focus can help ensure EL students are learning vocabulary in all aspects of language, including writing and speaking. With the intensive focus of each of these reading skill areas, paired with the explicit instruction of programs like SRA Reading Mastery or SRA Corrective Reading, ELs can develop their language skills in context and cultivate meaning.

These key features of Direct Instruction programs create a specialized learning environment where each student has the power to succeed. The flexibility of Direct Instruction programs to work in any type of classroom allows for EL students to access material that is consistent in language to ensure they reach their full potential in reading and understanding English.

The Direct Instruction approach to teaching essential reading skills such as phonological awareness, sound-letter correspondence, and decoding and fluency is highly effective for EL students struggling to reach proficiency in language. The systematic, explicit nature of Direct Instruction methodology helps ensure all struggling readers achieve higher literacy.

Direct Instruction and Achieving Literacy for ELs

Direct Instruction is a research-validated method of teaching proven to transform all students into confident learners. It is designed with lessons that are explicit, intensive, consistent, and interactive to ensure the best learning experience for all students. Direct Instruction differs from other instructional methodologies in that it:

- Uses an extensively tested method of systematic, explicit instruction that ensures every student can learn
- Is proven to work in many different types of classrooms, schools, and districts
- Enables achievement through clear, consistent reinforcement of learning from teachers
- **Research Evidence:** In a study conducted on the effects of Direct Instruction for ELs in elementary school, it was found that *Reading Mastery* was highly effective for Spanish-speaking students and students speaking some other languages in improving these essential skill areas. The study also found that the Direct Instruction approach achieved the same level of success for ELs as with English-only students (Abbott et al., 2007)¹.
- **Research Evidence:** Another study which implemented *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* into an elementary school setting reported that EL students who received the instruction had higher test scores and better word-decoding abilities than those who did not receive instruction (Ary et al., 2000)².

- **Research Evidence:** Cartwright School District in Maryvale, AZ was struggling to close achievement gaps and remediate students until it adopted Corrective Reading. With 40% of its students ELs, the district looked into Tier 2 and Tier 3 programs. After the implementation of Direct Instruction programs, teachers and parents immediately started to see improvement in the reading and math skills of their students.

“Now, we don’t need to wait for underperforming students to fail. We can support them by saying, ‘We have already planned for you, and we can support you.’”

*Shelby Jasmer,
District Administrator,
Cartwright School District*

- **Research Evidence:** Thirty-three percent of students in the Houston Independent School District have limited English proficiency. At Dogan Elementary School, concrete steps were taken to ensure that all students have the opportunity to be successful. The school implemented Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading and will continue to use them to support ELs and below-proficient readers.

“We met them exactly where they were. We provided the support that they needed to move forward. Moving forward, we will be using Corrective Reading in grades two and three to support our ELs.”

*Errica Dotson-Hooper,
Reading Specialist,
Dogan Elementary*

To find out more, visit directinstruction.com.

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