

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE  
ADVANCEMENT OF LITERACY

Leading with **evidence**

## Newsletter

### Issue 9, October 2025

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

**Feature: Oral language skills matter for reading development of EAL students**

By Dr. Claire Qiuzhi Xie

- Study with us
- Myth versus fact
- Research opportunities

Visit our website here:

<https://www.acu.edu.au/advancing-literacy>



Improving students' literacy skills so they can pursue their dreams

AUSTRALIAN  
LITERACY CLINIC  
literacy.clinic@acu.edu.au



#### RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

University researchers around Australia are investigating children's mental health and language and literacy skills during the transition to high school. Do you know a child in Year 6 (with/without reading or language difficulties) and their parent/caregiver?

Find out more and [register here](#).

#### ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS MATTER FOR READING DEVELOPMENT OF EAL STUDENTS

BY DR. CLAIRE QIUZHI XIE

In many classes in Australia, there are students who speak a first language (L1) other than English, and they learn English as an additional language (EAL). For these children, the way they learn to read in English may differ from native English-speaking children.

One difference is that for native English-speaking children, their oral language skills are usually well developed before they receive formal reading instruction. By contrast, many EAL children receive instruction in English oral language and reading skills almost concurrently. How can teachers best support oral language development for EAL children?

[Read the full article here.](#)

#### GRADUATE CERTIFICATE SPECIALISING IN LITERACY

We offer an evidence-based postgraduate certificate designed by expert researchers and educators. Our graduate certificate can be used towards a Master's degree in Education.

#### Teaching Foundational Reading Skills

Expand your knowledge of the foundational skills necessary for the development of reading ability at any age. Learn the theory and research surrounding early reading instruction, and how to build, plan, deliver and evaluate evidence-based reading instruction that meets the needs of all learners. [Register here.](#)

#### MYTH: *"Dyslexia is hereditary."*

#### FACTS:

- Yes; research evidence shows that dyslexia has a strong genetic component.
- However, dyslexia does not always get passed down from parents to their children.
- A person's chance of having dyslexia is influenced by a complex interplay of both genetic and early life environmental factors, such as maternal smoking and socioeconomic status.

Read more here: <https://www.dyslexic.org.uk/genetics-of-dyslexia>

# Oral Language Skills Matter for Reading Development of EAL Students

By Dr. Claire Qiuzhi Xie

In many classes in Australia, there are students who speak a first language (L1) other than English, and they learn English as an additional language (EAL). For these children, the way they learn to read in English may differ from native English-speaking children.

One difference is that for native English-speaking children, their oral language skills are usually well developed before they receive formal reading instruction. By contrast, many EAL children, especially those who migrated to Australia in their early childhood, receive instruction in English oral language and reading skills almost concurrently. This means that their oral language may not be adequately developed when they start reading. Hence, along with regular instruction in learning to read, these children may need extra support to develop their oral language skills.

According to the influential “simple view of reading”, reading comprehension involves two main skills: language comprehension and decoding (that is, matching spelling to their sounds). Oral language skills, such as vocabulary and phonological awareness, are important in both of these processes.

## How does oral vocabulary learning vary between EAL and L1 speakers?

Research shows that oral vocabulary can be especially important for EAL children when learning to read. As their phonological awareness in English may not be adequately developed when learning to read, these children are more likely to rely on vocabulary as a phonological resource to help them decode written words.

The degree of the contribution of vocabulary to reading in EAL speakers may vary as a function of learners’ L1 and their exposure to English. A study in Hong Kong showed a strong effect of vocabulary on decoding among Chinese EAL children, whereas a similar study in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) among Arabic-speaking EAL children showed this effect to be moderate. The difference may reflect the larger contrast in phonology between Chinese and English compared with Arabic and English.

In both Hong Kong and the UAE, children had limited exposure to English. In Australia, where English is the main language used in the society, EAL children have more exposure to English, which can hasten their development of oral language skills. Even so, developing oral language skills is very important for EAL children.

To support oral language development for EAL children, teachers can try the following strategies:

- **Encourage everyday speaking and listening**  
Provide frequent opportunities for EAL students to use English in authentic classroom interactions.
- **Pair and group discussions**  
Provide students with structured opportunities to practice oral language in small groups.
- **Play rhyming games**  
Have students produce words with the same rhyme to strengthen phonological representations of words.
- **Apply flashcards**  
Present oral words and their corresponding pictures simultaneously to facilitate vocabulary learning auditorily and visually.
- **Interactive read-alouds**  
Pause to define and discuss new words in the contexts and model their use during shared reading.
- **Storytelling and role-play**  
Encourage students to use a diverse vocabulary in these speaking activities.
- **Create word maps**  
Have students create diagrams around a target word with its definition, synonyms, antonyms, and collocations to deepen understanding.
- **Develop vocabulary journals**  
Ask students to record new words on a notebook with their own definitions, example sentences, and illustrations.
- **Leverage digital tools**  
Use apps, games, and multimedia resources to make vocabulary practice interesting and extend learning beyond the textbooks.

These activities are simple but effective ways to help EAL students expand their vocabulary and enhance their reading foundation.

## Learn more information here:

Xie, Q., Cai, Y., & Yeung, S. S.-s. (2024). How does word knowledge facilitate reading comprehension in a second language? A longitudinal study in Chinese primary school children learning English. [\*Reading and Writing\*](#), 37, 921-941.

Xie, Q. & Yeung, S. S.-s. (in press). How is vocabulary involved in second language reading comprehension? A study in Chinese-English bilingual children. *PLOS ONE*. 10.1371/journal.pone.0334529

Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2020). *Vocabulary in language teaching (2nd ed)*. [Cambridge University Press](#).

[Explicit vocabulary instruction with Anita Archer](#)

[Effective vocabulary instruction \(Decodable Readers Australia\)](#)