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## LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

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IN SCHOOL, BUT NOT IN EDUCATION – LESLLA(A) LEARNERS  
OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL) IN THE CONTEXT  
OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE UK

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**ABSTRACT:** In the past few years there has been an influx of newly-arrived children in the UK entering the education sector with little prior schooling and poor literacy skills in L1. Current research on EAL development, informing policy and guiding practice in the UK, suggests that all newly-arrived children should be provided with swift access to the national curriculum on a par with native speakers, with natural acquisition mechanisms expected to be sufficient enough to narrow the attainment gap. Given that policy is predominantly symbolic, following the officially recommended model of EAL support results in a range of 'sink or float' types of EAL provision across schools and in many instances excludes learners with EAL instead of including them. This article explores the context of EAL provision in the UK, its current issues, presents an example of good practice and calls for academic research into the framework of support that the most vulnerable members of the school community receive at present.

**KEYWORDS:** EAL, secondary school, policy and practice, example of good practice

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article outlines the context of English as an Additional Language that many LESLLA adolescent learners find themselves in, with all its pitfalls and gaps in provision that inevitably affect life choices made by these learners. Furthermore, it presents a case of a secondary school in the UK that adopted a different stance in its understanding of EAL needs. Having recognised that inclusion is just a label for the process of submersion, the school designed a special provision model to meet the needs of EAL learners contrary to the prescribed model of immediate mainstreaming, positioned as a

swift access to the UK national curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Finally, this article calls for more research into this area of language-specific provision, as not only can it be illuminating in terms of the second language acquisition processes during the developmental stage of adolescence, but may facilitate change in the policy that guides practice across the country and has dire implications for many young people who are effectively excluded from the mainstream curriculum under the guise of inclusive practice and are conditioned to assume functional social roles in adulthood as a result of poor opportunities during their formative years.

In 2004 the EU welcomed eight new member states. From that moment on, *Destination UK* quickly became a motto for a large number of families from every corner of the new EU countries in search of employment opportunities and better life prospects. Although the UK government predicted that the influx of immigrants into the country would not exceed 15,000 people a year, by July 2006, over 427,000 people travelled to the UK with the purpose of settlement, bringing almost 36,000 dependants along with them, of which 27,000 were children of school age.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, given the fact that a large number of newly-settled residents were families with young children arriving from Poland, schools did not initially feel the effects of such a massive movement of people. The majority of children who arrived into the country were of the age that allowed them to quickly integrate into school life with little differentiation needed, since natural acquisition mechanisms are at their strongest at that age. Therefore, despite a much higher than expected flow of immigration, it was not until much later that the concept of EAL, as a distinct field, fully emerged from the womb of the Ethnic Minority Achievement funding stream and became separated from Special Education Needs (further SEN) entitlements, with the needs of newly-arrived children finally being recognised as language specific and developmental, rather than as special education needs.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until 2007, however (when two more member states joined the Union generating yet another wave of immigration), that EAL strengthened its status as a specialist field. The change in the make-up of the EU marked a new beginning in education policy and practice across the UK. With a large number of children for whom English was an additional language entering mainstream schools, came the realisation that while entitled to education, they struggled to access the national curriculum and go through the standard assessment protocols on a par with children born and raised in the UK. Despite claims that in later years the achievement gap between EAL and non-EAL students narrows down, there is a growing body of evidence of long-term underperformance, especially demon-

1. The national curriculum sets out the programmes of study and attainment targets for all subjects at all 4 key stages. (For more information, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum>)

2. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5273356.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5273356.stm)

3. Until 2011, local authorities received an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) and were required to use this to support the learning of EAL and bilingual pupils and the achievement of ethnic minority learners. The bulk of this grant was devolved to schools based on a locally agreed formula, although many local authorities retained some of the money to provide a central EAL service. In April 2011, this grant was mainstreamed into general school funding and there was no requirement for it to be spent on supporting EAL and bilingual learners. (For more information, see [https://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/faqs/doschoolsget\\_extra\\_moneyto\\_support\\_eal\\_learners/](https://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/faqs/doschoolsget_extra_moneyto_support_eal_learners/))

strated by students who arrived in the UK in later school years, that cannot be ignored. (For further discussion see Cameron, 2003; Leung, 2005; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000).

Another factor that influenced the move of EAL away from SEN was a dramatic change in the learner profile in the past seven years. To understand this, we have to consider the totally different cultural and social background of people who have made up a significant proportion of new arrivals since 2007. Previously, there was a great number of professional people coming to the UK with their families from less advantaged parts of the EU, bringing not only their labour, but a somewhat strong academic capacity in their children that allowed them to integrate with relevant ease. This meant that initially the education sector in the UK was almost unaffected. Children who arrived into the country as dependants of semi-skilled immigrants were either of primary school age and/or demonstrated strong cognitive skills, strong literacy skills in home languages and in many cases a thorough understanding of the national curriculum content (predominantly as a result of curriculum differences, where whatever was being taught in British schools may have been covered earlier in home countries). This strong academic predisposition and the small numbers of newly-arrived children in secondary schools allowed children entering later key stages not only to access the content of the national curriculum, but to acquire language skills naturally and with minimum specialist provision.

On the other hand, the calibre of students that schools began to receive after 2007, and even more so after 2014, was something that nobody was prepared for. In fact, 2007 and later 2014 marked new beginnings in the field of EAL, where the acronyms LESLLA(A) and in many cases NESLLA(A) became particularly relevant to the teaching and learning context of EAL in the secondary schools sector in the UK. Many families entering the country with a view to settlement in the past three to five years came from disadvantaged regions of Romania, where early marriages coupled with strong religious affiliation result in a large number of children many families. This means that newly-arrived residents had many more dependants of school age than previously. Furthermore, there has been a great number of Roma Gypsy arrivals from this part of Eastern Europe, many of whom tend to lead a traveller life style, affecting the level of schooling that their children receive. Ultimately, this meant that almost for the first time since the concept of EAL was established, a large number of newly-arrived children who may not have even been exposed to formal schooling prior to their arrival were admitted to schools in the UK. The most dramatic thing of all is that a large number of new arrivals were not young children of primary school age or the first two key stages of secondary school, whom the school sector was used to and ready for.<sup>4</sup> A large number of newly-arrived children were young adults who may have never been to school before, were not familiar with the most basic tenets of formal education and had non-existent or only emerging literacy and numeracy skills in any language – something schools were not prepared for at all. This meant that much of what we thought we knew about EAL, or rather, much of what we assumed EAL was, based on what we had previously had to deal with, was incorrect when it came to ensuring adequate provision for the new breed of newly-arrived students.

4. The national curriculum in the UK is organised into blocks of years called 'key stages' – years 1 and 2 (key stage 1), years 3 – 6 (key stage 2), year 7-9 (key stage 3) and years 10-11 (key stage 4). For more information, see <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>

## 2. THE POLITICAL, HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF EAL – PAST AND PRESENT

It is common knowledge that the UK has ‘long experience of societal multiculturalism within its borders and hence a linguistic diversity’ (Leung, 2005:97). Therefore, EAL needs were originally seen as linguistic and cultural, rather than developmental. In fact, the approach to EAL initially fed from the body of knowledge in the field of EFL. Newly-arrived students used to be taught separately for up to 18 months in specialist language centres before being “released” into the world of the national curriculum (a standards-based framework with detailed content specifications and levels of attainment in all key subjects) that after a period of induction, would be applied to EAL and non-EAL students equally. However, the mid 80s and early 90s saw endorsement of mainstreaming as the prevalent EAL policy, encompassing all the politically-correct regalia of inclusion and integration. The landmark Swann report of 1985 and yet another similar publication produced a year later by the Commission for Racial Equality found such practice tantamount to racially discriminating in terms of outcome, despite only exploring such practice in one local educational authority, and led to almost a blanket closure of language centres and withdrawal of EAL specialisation in teacher training.<sup>5</sup>

This is when the conceptualisation of Language Across the Curriculum<sup>6</sup> tenets and the humanistic person-oriented perspective on language learning and acquisition became the main drive behind the shift in the official interpretation of meeting the needs of EAL learners. From that moment on, rather than being recognised as just a variety of ESOL provision at a different developmental stage and in a different context, EAL was seen as “an inherent part of the wider communication and participatory processes in the classroom” (Leung, 2005), with EALness of this process being encapsulated in making classroom activities accessible through the model of *Partnership Teaching* delivered by mainstream teachers and EAL staff, whether attempting to implement some aspects of ESL pedagogy by adjusting the content to ensure that EAL students can comprehend as much as at all possible, or by following the mediation support model or use of L1 in the L2 classroom, sometimes referred to as bilingual education, which may seem like an ideal example of access to the curriculum, if it was not for summative assessment, which is inevitably in English.

However, since EAL has never been recognised as a subject area of the curriculum, unlike ESOL in Post-16 Education, after the removal of specialist support across the schools and the transfer of EAL into the field of SEN as well as its emerging fusion with the postulates of

5. In 1986 a Commission for Racial Equality report into provision in Calderdale local education authority found this practice to be discriminatory and this led to the closure of language units. Funding for language support was subsequently used to provide additional specialist staff to work in the context of mainstream classrooms. For more information, see <https://eal.britishcouncil.org/eal-sector/different-models-eal-provision>

6. Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) as a concept acknowledges the fact that language education does not only take place in specific subjects explicitly defined and reserved for it, such as mother tongue education, foreign language education, second language education etc.). Language learning and education also take place in each and every subject in school, in each and every academic/mental activity, across the whole curriculum. For more information, see <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/>

Context and Language Integrated Learning methodology (further CLIL<sup>7</sup>) in the mainstream classroom, children between the ages of 12 – 16 arriving into the country with little English were, and in many schools still are, being left to their own devices. The support they receive in reality depends on sheer luck, with the majority of EAL students having to rely on translation support provided by either EAL TAs or classmates. This kind of support can hardly be classed as bilingual education, neither is it ESL-oriented - a teaching assistant who happens to speak a child’s mother tongue, only has the capacity to support this child for a fraction of the time spent in school. Furthermore, in many cases, EAL teaching assistants do not have the right skillset and/or understanding of the intricacies of SLA processes to provide the child with adequate help and guidance. Moreover, the level of pay enjoyed by EAL professionals does not attract the right kind of specialists in the field, which means that schools are left to simply employ available candidates.<sup>8</sup> Such an arrangement often results in EAL learners being submerged rather than included in mainstream education.

As observed in many schools across the country, to survive in school, EAL students quickly assume an invisible position in class and learn how “to do school” without being spotted as EAL. In many secondary school contexts, EAL becomes a stigma that a lot of children choose to avoid if they can successfully hide their needs. This leads to all sorts of behavioural problems, as having developed a range of coping strategies, in particular, the ability to come across as much more proficient speakers than they actually are, they find themselves misunderstood, and in many instances are put through the wheels of the system with a range of agencies involved, coming out at the other end with various labels attached, none of which is reflective of their real issue - a language barrier that made learning impossible.

## 3. THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF EAL

As outlined earlier, EAL is a specific teaching and learning context, which is usually brushed under the carpet as a shady area, with its issues considered a result of developmental, if not special education, rather than language-specific concerns. EAL methodology, in many instances, is equated with context and language integrated learning at best, which may indeed be an effective and rather elegant as well as inexpensive solution (since positioned in this way every teacher has to be a teacher of EAL) to facilitate the acquisition of language chunks in newly-arrived students. It does help the development of their lexical repertoire and listening comprehension skills naturally; however, it is a different story when it comes to one’s cognitive academic language proficiency, productive skills beyond the most basic range of common encounters, as well as the development and subsequent deployment of language learning strategies (Chesterfield and Chesterfield, 1985).

7. CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning and refers to teaching subjects such as science, history and geography to students through a foreign language. For more information see [www.onestopenish.com/clil/what-is-clil/](http://www.onestopenish.com/clil/what-is-clil/)

8. Given that EAL staff are not classed as or expected to be qualified teachers, and are employed on term time only pro-rata contracts, the majority of staff working with EAL students only receive Grade 3 salary of the support staff pay scale, which amounts to less than £18 000 a year. Those who are employed through various agencies, are on a daily rate of £50 - £60.

Exposed to an abundance of language patterns aimed at native speakers, EAL students struggle to communicate effectively and develop their proficiency due to segmented instruction provided by EAL teachers, and fragmented, almost snap-shot, instruction provided in the mainstream classroom, none of which is aligned with their immediate environment or provides adequate learning opportunities, in line with the findings by Jacob et al. (1996). At the same time, continuous exposure to target language in its authentic settings does allow for a much more effective natural processing and acquisition of the linguistic features of the target language and hence should be perceived as a resource, not a hindrance. On the other hand, while vocabulary can easily be picked up through exposure alone and its incidental use can lead to a strengthening of the receptive and productive skillsets, grammar is usually the biggest source of confusion with many students struggling to transfer its rules from a language classroom into their immediate mainstream environment. This, in turn, affects their relationship with the target language per se by significantly diminishing the accuracy of its use and making writing in the target language a battle that many students lose.

One thing we cannot ignore, however, is that to be successful in a mainstream setting, a student is expected to demonstrate the outcomes of his or her learning in writing. To do this, not only do students need to be able to process large volumes of authentic text in the target language, but re-produce this input in writing with elements of analysis and personal reflection. Undoubtedly, there is a wide range of EAP courses with their own methodology addressing this issue successfully. The problem with the context of EAL is that students hardly ever reach a stage of proficiency that would not only grant them access to the content of EAP courses, but would allow them to participate effectively and benefit from such provision. Having developed their conversational language skills to a level seemingly sufficient for participation in various social settings and even entering the labour market, mainly its manual and unskilled sector, EAL graduates of secondary schools stagnate at that level for a very long time and subsequently miss out on the vital opportunities that further education can offer.

Another thing we have to take into account when considering EAL pedagogy and effective methods is the diversity of pupil profiles in this context. For many newly-arrived students, learning EAL is a double burden – not only are they learning a new language, but in many cases acquiring literacy for the first time in their life, as a great number of newly-arrived children come from underprivileged backgrounds with very little prior schooling received in home countries. These students, in particular, are the most vulnerable ones and their needs do not get addressed in the mainstream classroom environment. In order not to be left behind, they need a thoroughly structured model of EAL provision in school, with methods used in the EAL classroom taking into account their backgrounds, levels and needs, in line with the model of combined instruction proposed by Saunders & Goldenberg (1999) and Montecel & Cortez (2002).

Finally, the transitional nature of such programmes should inform not only policy guiding extraction schedules, but also in-class practice. Ultimately, it is access to the national curriculums of host countries that students should be provided with, enabling them to swiftly function within a variety of curricular areas on a par with non-EAL students. This means that while the wealth of expertise in the realm of EFL has to be delved into for professional guidance, we should not dismiss the mainstream practice of teaching literacy. Finally, it is crucial to understand that EAL methodology does not belong to any of the two fields exclusively and is on the overlap of EFL and

mainstream principles. We need a model of instruction which is in between the two and while sensitive to EAL as a language-specific issue, presents language not only in a highly accessible and student-friendly manner, but in a way that will provide a smooth transition to mainstream building on the foundation received in EAL and continuing to develop their language and literacy naturally, on a par with non-EAL speakers of English.

#### 4. NATIONAL POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR EAL PROVISION IN UK SCHOOLS

When it comes to the policy that guides EAL support across schools in the UK, the choice of provision is left to the interpretation of the governing body of individual schools, provided it ensures access to the core elements of the national curriculum (Maths, English and Science) and enables children to develop their language, literacy and citizenship skills in line with the nationally expected level of attainment. This, though, makes the policy rather symbolic, as it only represents an official declaration of preferences with very low levels of material and legislative resources attached. It rests on the assumption that all teachers are teachers of EAL and all students should be provided with access to the curriculum as soon as it can be made possible.

As outlined in the Department for Education (DfE): Teachers' Standards Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies July 2011 (introduction updated June 2013), teachers should

...have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.

Furthermore, according to the DfE (September 2013): The national curriculum in England Framework document: for teaching 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015,

4.5 Teachers must also take account of the needs of pupils whose first language is not English. Monitoring of progress should take account of the pupil's age, length of time in this country, previous educational experience and ability in other languages.

4.6 The ability of pupils for whom English is an additional language to take part in the national curriculum may be in advance of their communication skills in English. Teachers should plan teaching opportunities to help pupils develop their English and should aim to provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects.

In addition, various agencies that provide support to teachers working with EAL students (NALDIC, NASSEA, and others)<sup>9</sup> only give vague recommendations on

<sup>9</sup> NALDIC - the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, is the national subject association for English as an Additional Language. It represents all staff working with bilingual learners.

meeting the needs of students with EAL, with the support base largely aimed at more proficient speakers and users of English. Rarely are the needs of LESLLA learners of EAL taken into account, with support provided being limited to a list of potential strategies one may want to use to differentiate for students who are acquiring language and becoming literate for the first time.

EAL pedagogy rests on the mechanisms of natural acquisition with a common misconception of its use embedded into the core of our understanding of EAL needs. We seem to overestimate the power of natural acquisition and of the Language Across the Curriculum approach, forgetting that context and language-integrated learning is only effective once a certain threshold of language proficiency and literacy skills has been achieved. And even once it has been achieved, we have to keep in mind that CLIL is a multifaceted approach that requires a degree of precision in the methodology of its use and is not just a label for a handful of differentiation strategies employed in a mainstream classroom in order to tick the box that EAL needs are taken into account.

Finally, there is no national assessment system of EAL needs and the only document published (Language in Common, QCA) has a rather generic framework of can-do descriptors, is not linked to old National Curriculum Levels, has not been in use since 2014, and was developed for information purposes only. This means that whatever guidance there may be is still a matter of personal interpretation. Furthermore, any progress tracking systems and procedures informing provision of support are still highly subjective and not standardised in any shape or form, which further contributes to the very confusing nature of EAL as a specialist or mainstream-integrated field.

## 5. AN EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Luckily for EAL students in some schools in the UK, the story of EAL is a story of a blessing in disguise. One such school seems to have won the battle for adequate EAL support provided to students of EAL both with and without LESLLA-type traits - Moseley School in Birmingham. Because of the difficulties of applying the prescribed approach of immediate mainstream provision, which is so reliant on natural acquisition, the school decided to make a complete U-turn and deem such provision ineffective for EAL students working below A2 CEFR level and especially for those who are not only new to English, but who struggle with basic literacy and numeracy in any language they learn or use.

The status of EAL provision as support in meeting individual needs, rather than as a nationally assigned curricular provision model, was exactly what allowed the school to fight its corner and address the needs of newly-arrived students in a radically different fashion. Since EAL is officially recognised as a developmental issue, it is the needs and abilities of each and every student that should inform provision, not their chronological age with an array of national standards that a student is expected to meet. Therefore, to

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NASSEA - the Northern Association for Support Services for Equality and Achievement, is a group of local authority services including EAL teams who provide strategic support to schools and authorities as well as accredited training and conference and regular hub meetings. For more information see <https://eal.britishcouncil.org/eal-sector/who-who-eal-uk>

be able to meet the needs of students with EAL, the school developed a fully-fledged EAL Department, allowing EAL support sessions to be timetabled on a par with other curricular subjects. Furthermore, Moseley School made EAL its focus not only in specialist classes but in mainstream subject areas as well. EAL has become an integral part of the school life and, while not overtly at the fore of the whole-school provision, it is perceived as something that everyone has to consider at every stage of planning, delivery and assessment, having made provision truly inclusive.

On entry, students go through a process of rigorous diagnostic assessment, with particular attention paid not only to their academic needs, but those of a social and emotional character. Data collected on assessment is used to inform placement in specialist classes designed to address a variety of language and literacy needs, as well as to develop a tailored programme of individual support to ensure that the effect of the continuous enrolment policy is minimised and every student is provided with an opportunity to achieve their maximum potential whatever the point of entry. Access to the core areas is provided in small groups in a CLIL-specific manner of delivery to students with LESLLA and NESLLA-type traits and in mainstream classes to students who work above A2 level in EAL and/or had a high level of attainment in these curricular areas prior to their entry to Moseley School that can be demonstrated either by transfer of their prior achievement or in the course of a subject-specific provision, via assessment administered at Moseley.

Progress is closely monitored and data is collected on a regular basis. Since there is no nationally or internationally approved system of alignment of CEFR with the standards of the national curriculum, data on reading and spelling ages is used alongside CEFR-aligned levels of language proficiency. A range of highly objective and standardised assessment tools is used to identify progress in EAL, with the Progress 8 score used to track progress and identify achievement in curricular areas. EAL provision is effectively extraction-based, with students receiving up to 18 hours of specialist classes a week before being gradually released into various curricular areas. On average, a newly arrived student with LESLLA-type characteristics spends up to 18 months attending EAL lessons and being taught subject-specific content in EAL classes by highly trained coaches who deliver a range of CLIL-based courses of study designed for EAL students. In the course of the extraction from mainstream classes that otherwise would be inaccessible and as a result highly detrimental for the academic, linguistic and emotional development of the student, they are fully integrated into the school life and the community at large by attending all of the disciplines which are of a more practical nature (PE, Technology, Art, etc.) or which use a different code (Maths) and are gradually granted access to further subjects delivered in mainstream classes, before being released into all curricular areas on a full-time basis, where the support they receive is integrated into the model of teaching in class.

As a result of such provision, not only do students feel integrated and included, but most EAL students skip the silent phase altogether and rapidly develop language and literacy skills (the average gradient of improvement in reading is 3.6 and 5.4 in spelling). Furthermore, they outperform non-EAL students on progress made in the course of their study at Moseley - average Progress 8 Score (GCSE results in 2015-2016) was 0.58 in English and 1.19 in Maths for students who were identified as having EAL needs on entry and who received intensive EAL support, as opposed to -0.64 in English and -0.11 in Maths for students who speak English as their mother tongue.

## 6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

While there are undoubtedly many research contexts with LESLLA-type subjects whose findings have an impact on outcomes for this type of learners, the EAL context of LESLLA(A) is one that is not just overlooked (since its subjects do not automatically fall into the category that LESLLA research is concerned with), but is almost ignored in many countries, especially the UK. EAL learners, swept under the carpet of mainstream provision, are effectively hidden from the public eye leaving it to every individual school, if not every individual teacher, to find ways to meet their needs. As outlined earlier, this leads to inadequate provision and has dire consequences for newly-arrived children, conditioning them from the start of their journey in a new social environment to assume less instrumental and more functional roles in society.

I believe that a lot more research is needed into various aspects of LESLLA(A) EAL. Not only should we review what we assume is already known about the process of SLA, but we should consider how it differs for LESLLA(A) learners in the context of secondary schools. When developing policy and guidelines on access to the national curriculum, more research is needed on the ability of LESLLA(A) students to access curricular areas and subsequently on ways to support teachers in differentiating for such specific needs. Finally, gate-keeping cannot be ignored any longer and there is a strong need for a review of assessment requirements or assessment tools giving access to further education. Through adequate EAL provision, schools should play a vital role in supporting LESLLA students in their transition to further study, instead of being child-care facilities while students are waiting until they are old enough to be able to access the ESOL pathway, which although, unlike EAL is unified, standardised, well-structured and supported, still in many cases leads to unequal distribution of potential, as students who have missed out on timely language support upon arrival tend to make choices they see as realistic, rather than go after what really interests them. We need more research into all aspects of EAL provision for LESLLA(A) learners, as I believe they are very vulnerable subjects in any society, struggling to find their niche and deserving of the kind of support that would enable them to be in education and not just in school.

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