

ESL

English as a Second Language



FIS | Frankfurt
International
School

A Handbook for Parents

ESL

English as a Second Language

FIS Mission

Our mission is to be the leading, culturally diverse and family-oriented international school with English as the principal language of instruction.

We inspire individuals to develop their intellect, creativity and character to become independent, adaptable, socially responsible and internationally minded citizens, by ensuring a dynamic, inquiry-driven education of the highest standard.

ESL Philosophy

English being the principal language of instruction at FIS, the ESL departments prepare non-native English speakers from Pre-Primary to Grade 12 for the quickest possible entry into the full main-stream program using a content- based curriculum. Small group settings allow for individual growth, recognizing each student's developmental level and unique learning style. The program addresses individual needs and proficiencies through pull-out and in-class support.

Goals

ESL programs are designed to provide academic and social support for non-native speakers of English so they may participate in the school program as quickly and as fully as possible. The goals are:

- To provide balanced instruction in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing
- To provide a low-risk yet challenging learning environment which promotes self-esteem and independence
- To provide support to ESL students in mainstream classrooms using co-teaching strategies with mainstream classroom teachers
- To offer advice to parents on how to support language learning
- To monitor the progress of ESL students not receiving direct ESL support
- To promote bilingualism, social contacts and cultural understanding
- To provide for different proficiency levels in pull-out and in-class support

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ESL Students and Culture Shock

Introduction

Most people moving to a different country experience feelings that can range from excitement and interest to depression, frustration and irritation or even anger and aggression. The stress that is caused by these emotions has come to be known as culture shock. For ESL students matters are more complicated because they are exposed to two unfamiliar and different cultures at the same time: the culture of Germany, their new country, and the culture of FIS, their new school.

The causes of school shock - Educational differences

Culture shock is the shock of the new and unfamiliar, and for ESL students almost everything about FIS can be new and unfamiliar. The student may have come from a country where the goal of education is to teach an agreed body of knowledge and students are expected to acquire a large number of facts by rote. They will therefore be unused to learning by discovery and the amount of analysis or critical thinking that is required at FIS. They may treat enjoyable class activities with suspicion, in the belief that one cannot have fun and learn at the same time. They may feel threatened by the degree of participation expected of them in class, preferring to remain silent for fear of "showing off" or, more likely, of losing face by giving the wrong answer. They may be reluctant to ask questions for the same reasons. Being praised in front of others causes some students embarrassment; others feel uncomfortable when asked to share opinions and beliefs, which they regard as private. Some ESL students may be unused to being taught by teachers of the opposite sex, or they may have come from schools where the expectations and treatment of boys and girls are different.

If students have arrived from an educational system where teachers are stern and aloof, they may find it difficult to come to terms with the open and friendly relations between teachers and students at FIS, and with the often productively noisy atmosphere in the classroom. Some school systems are based on the notion that the way to promote academic success is by fostering competition among individual students. At FIS however teachers throughout the school foster cooperation among students, encouraging them to work together to achieve the learning goals. In many classes here students and teachers jointly decide on these learning goals and how they are to be assessed. Some ESL students do not feel comfortable at being involved in what they consider to be the teacher's job.

All of the FIS practices described above may cause ESL students some stress, but probably the most important cause of culture shock for new students is the language of the school. Everything they hear and read, everything they must write and say, is in English. For all ESL students, but particularly of course for beginning learners, this can make every day at school a very tiring and frustrating experience. It certainly is exhausting to try and concentrate for six and a half hours at a time learning difficult content in a new language. It is frustrating to sit in class understanding only a small part of what is going on, and it is probably even more frustrating when you have something to contribute but are unable to do so in English. Many students who did very well in their own school system temporarily lose their voice when they join FIS; their natural personality becomes submerged and they may even feel themselves to be worthless or stupid.

The causes of school shock - Social differences

As well as educational differences, ESL students coming to FIS experience many social differences that may cause stress. FIS is an international school with no dominant nationality. However, due to their history and location, it is obvious that the two schools present many features of a western culture. ESL students respond to this situation in different ways. Some may simply feel resentful that their own culture does not seem to have such a high value. For others, particularly for those from non-western cultures, matters may be a little more complicated. On the one hand, they may feel attracted by many features of western culture. (These features also include interpersonal aspects such as the equal and uncomplicated relations between the sexes, and the greater freedom and independence granted by parents to their children, as manifested for example in later curfew times or the sleep-over party.) On the other hand, they realize that their parents (and even more so their grandparents back home) may be hurt by any overt rejection of their own culture and customs. Students who are torn between two cultures may be troubled by fears of losing their identity.

The effects of school shock

Just as there are many potential causes of culture shock, so there can be as many different kinds of reaction to it. Among the more common physical reactions are tiredness, sleeplessness or oversleeping, headaches and stomach aches and susceptibility to illness. The emotional effects can include anxiety, irritability, aggressiveness or depression. Behavioral effects can include a refusal to speak the mother tongue with the parents, especially in front of non-native friends. Some students reject native cuisine and will not wear traditional native clothes. Others may openly rebel against the traditional role expected of the child in native family life. When school shock is combined with the typical manifestations of adolescence, the time can be a very uncomfortable one for parents and child alike.

How to help students overcome school shock

Not all ESL students suffer from school shock as described above. Many feel comfortable at FIS from the first day and really enjoy their stay with us. And most of those do have initial problems quickly adjust to their new school and enjoy the educational and social opportunities available to them. Probably the best way to help in this adjustment is to make it clear to your child that you understand the pressures she is under. If you share your own experiences in coming to terms with German culture, it will help her to realize that what she is feeling is a natural reaction to the huge change that has taken place in her life. It also helps if your child has some way of switching off from the pressures of academic work; for example you could encourage her to take part in an after-school sporting, musical or artistic activity. This will also give her the chance to make new friends, which is the key to feeling happy and settled. However, if your child seems to be taking an unusually long time to adjust to the culture of the school and is continuing to exhibit physical, emotional or behavioral problems at home, it is suggested that you contact the ESL teacher or counselor. Together you can discuss ways in which to help her to come through this difficult period.

The chance to live and study in a new culture is a privilege which is not given to everyone. Although your child maybe suffering a little now, she is almost certain to look back on her time at FIS as one of the most important and enriching experiences of her life.

For further information on culture shock and language learning, see chapter 7 of: Brown, H. D., *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey 1994

The Importance of the Mother Tongue

There is a lot of advice to parents of ESL children in this booklet. However, the most important message can be summarized in one sentence:

ESL students in international schools learn English more quickly and effectively if they maintain and develop their proficiency in the mother tongue.

How does the mother tongue help the learning of English? Research has shown that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the second language. So, for example, if your child has developed good reading skills in Korean, she is likely to be able to apply these skills when reading English. (One useful reading skill is the ability to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. Another one is the ability to decide which new words in a text are important to look up in the dictionary and which words can safely be ignored.) For this reason it helps if you can encourage your child to read good fiction and non-fiction in her own language. Similarly, the skills of being able to plan out a piece of writing or develop an argument in a persuasive essay can be applied in the second language once they have been learned in the first.

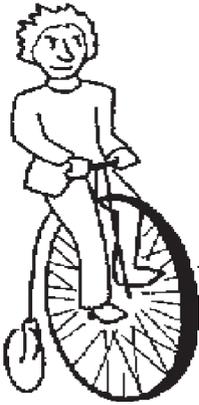
What are the other reasons for maintaining and developing mother tongue proficiency? Firstly, many children in international schools plan to return to their home country at some point to continue their education there. This is a strong reason to make sure they do not have gaps in mother tongue language or cognitive development. And secondly, ESL students who turn against or otherwise neglect their mother tongue can often suffer problems of identity loss or alienation from their parents and grandparents or other family members in their home country.

How can ESL student's best develop their mother tongue proficiency? For some students, developing mother tongue proficiency is easier because they have lessons each week in their native language. For students who are not in this fortunate position, there is still much that can be done to maintain the mother tongue. For example, parents can make sure that they have good reference books or textbooks at home - in the native language. Students should be encouraged to read good literature and to discuss school work. Some of the long summer vacation could be devoted to mother-tongue learning.

The advice on this page is so important that it is repeated below. (see the graphic on the next page)

Your child will learn English much more effectively if he or she continues to develop her first language at the same time.

With one wheel
(one language),
you can go from place to place.



With one big and one small wheel
(one good and one not so good language),
you can go farther and faster.

With two equal-sized wheels
(two strong languages),
you can comfortably go anywhere you want!



Illustrations reproduced with the permission of Professor J. Cummins

What is the Best Age to Learn a New Language?

Studies have shown that adolescents and adults are in many ways better at learning a new language than children, except in the area of pronunciation. This is probably because they are already literate in their first language and can use some of their knowledge about language and language learning when learning the second language. However, this doesn't answer the important question: What's the best age to learn a new language? This question, like most about language learning, cannot be answered so simply. It depends on the situation.

For example, a child who is born to an American father and German mother living in the USA can start to learn both German and English from the moment he is born. This is probably the most favorable situation for anyone who wishes to speak two languages fluently as an adult. A child of school age who emigrates to the USA has no choice, and must start to learn the new language, English, as soon as she arrives. Depending on the age of the child, it can take up several years for her to reach the level of a native English speaker. It is important in this time that she continues her first language development. And it is equally important that she, her parents and her teachers do not have unrealistic expectations about how easy learning will be and how quickly it will happen.

The two situations described above contrast with situations where there is more choice over whether and when the second language is introduced. Either the choice is made by the education authorities in the area where the child lives, or parents can decide on an individual basis whether to enroll their child in a foreign language learning program. It is this last situation that needs to be discussed a little further.

Some specialists in language acquisition claim that the sooner a child starts to learn a second language the better. It certainly seems to make sense that the earlier you start, the longer you will have to learn, and the more progress you will make compared with someone who started later. However, there is evidence that this is not the case, particularly if the second language comes to take the place of the first language, which has never been allowed to develop properly. One researcher* talks of the dangers of double semi-lingualism for early learners of a second language; i.e. the child does not develop full proficiency in either of the two languages. And as mentioned above, it has been found that older learners of a language are more efficient learners, so they may need less time to reach the same level of proficiency as younger learners. Also, of course, if more time is spent learning a second language during the school day, then some other subject must be cut or reduced to make way for it. This may not be desirable.

So what is the best age for a person to start learning a foreign language in situations where there is a choice, and where it is not critical that a native-speaker-like pronunciation is acquired? The answer, according to current research, is early adolescence, so about 11-13. And the more motivated the child is to learn the new language, the more successful he will be!

References

* Scovel T., *The younger the better myth and bilingual education* In: Gonzalez, R (ed.) *Language Ideologies: Critical Perspectives* Urbana, IL: NCTE 1999

What Makes a Good Language Learner?

There has been a lot of research in recent years into what makes a good language learner. Here is a brief summary of the latest theories:

- The good language learner thinks about how she is learning. She tries to find out what works for her and what doesn't. If she doesn't understand the purpose of a particular exercise, she asks the teacher.
- The good language learner is willing to experiment and take risks. For example, she will try out different ways of learning vocabulary until she finds the way that suits her best. She is also not afraid of making mistakes, because she knows that these will help her.
- The good language learner is realistic. She knows that it will take time and effort to become proficient in English, and that there will be periods where she does not seem to be making much progress.
- The good language learner is independent. She does not expect to learn English just by sitting in the classroom, and does not rely on the teacher to totally direct her learning.
- The good language learner is organized and active. She uses her time to learn English sensibly, and is always looking for opportunities to develop her language both inside and outside of the classroom.
- The good language learner has a balanced concern for communication and accuracy. Some students are experts at communicating their thoughts but do not care that they make many mistakes in doing so. The good language learner, on the other hand, is concerned with both communicating and doing so as accurately as possible.

Stages of Language Learning

Here are some of the typical stages that ESL students go through when they start to learn English in school.

- The first stage for many children starting to learn English in the classroom is called the silent stage. In this time they are listening carefully to the language they hear but are not yet ready to start speaking. Depending on the personality and nationality of the child, this stage may last 1 day or 6 months or more. It is important not to be concerned if this stage seems to be taking a long time. The child can learn a great deal without saying a word. In fact, the power of listening is so strong (provided that the language you hear is at the right level of difficulty for you) that one influential researcher* into second language learning says that this is all you need to learn a new language!
- Implications for parents. Obviously, ESL parents want to do everything they can to help their children learn English, but it is probably not a good idea, early on, to put too much pressure on them to speak English at home, unless they themselves are happy to do so. Far better is to support them in their own language!

- The next stage of language learning comes as students try to acquire control of the English grammar system. Some researchers* have found that there seems to be a fixed order in which certain aspects of the system are learned, and this cannot be influenced very much by direct teaching. Early on beginners learn that you cannot say he go, she like etc., it has to be she goes, he likes. This rule is not very difficult to remember, and if students are tested on it directly in a grammar quiz, they usually get all the answers right. However as soon as they are writing or speaking naturally, without thinking about grammar rules, they forget to use the -s ending. They are just not ready to produce it automatically.
- Another typical phase in second language learning is the backslide. By this is meant that students have periods when they get wrong what they seem to have already learned. And they do this in exactly the same way as a child learning English as her first language. Taking English verbs as an example, it very often happens that children seem to have learned some irregular past tense forms. They hear their parents saying sentences like I went to the shops, or I saw a big cow, and they use these correct forms themselves. A little later, however, they start to say sentences like He goed to the shops or I seed a big cow. What has happened is that they have started to unconsciously work out the rules of English grammar. They realize that the past tense in English is formed by adding -ed to the verb, but they overgeneralize this rule out to include all verbs. It takes a little more time before they further refine the rule to include both regular and irregular endings. So this apparent backward step is in fact a sign of progress in learning the language!
- Implications for parents. It is helpful if parents are aware of these two typical aspects of learning English as a second language. Many parents strongly encourage their children to learn English at home and supervise their efforts. It can be frustrating both for them and their children if they become despondent at the child's apparent lack of progress or backsliding. Mistakes are an inevitable and important aspect of learning a new language. A brief discussion of these points with the child can take a lot of unnecessary pressure off him or her.
- Another aspect of learning English is the distinction between the kind of language needed in everyday conversation, and the language needed to do well in school work. Most students, particularly those with language backgrounds similar to English, learn the skills of listening and speaking very quickly on joining our school. It is not uncommon for some to be completely fluent in English by the end of their second year. At this point both they and their parents might feel that they have now learned English - after all if they can understand everything they hear and say what they want to say, what more can they have to learn? The answer is: they have a great deal more to learn to catch up with the native speakers in their classes. In the areas of vocabulary and understanding of academic language they are still a long way behind. It is one thing to talk with your friends and make arrangements for your weekend; it is quite another thing to read a text about the French Revolution and write an analysis of it.
- Implications for parents. It is essential that parents and their children realize that speaking English fluently does not mean that the child has finished learning English. This will explain why students who seem to be very good in English in fact can struggle very badly in their school work. It doesn't mean they are stupid or lazy; it means they simply have not had enough time to learn the academic language they need to help them do well in their school subjects. In fact, some researchers** say it takes up to 7/8 years for a non-native speaker of English to reach the same level as the native speakers in his or her class.

- Finally, it is worth remembering that language learning does not follow a straight line getting higher and higher. For all learners there will be times when progress is slow and everything seems a struggle. At other times, however, lots of progress seems to be made in a short period.
- Implications for parents. Just being aware of the fact that progress is rarely constant will help take the pressure off children. Encouraging them through the difficult times will probably be more productive than showing disappointment or anger.



* S. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford Pergammon 1982

** Collier, V. (1987) *How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in a second language*. TESOL Quarterly, 23

Are Young Children the Best Language Learners?

A myth, in one of its senses, is a belief about something that is shared by many people, but which in fact happens to be untrue or only partly true. The field of language learning is full of myths and misconceptions, possibly because every literate person has been successful at learning at least one language and so may consider himself to be something of an expert on the topic. The myth discussed here is that young children are the best learners of a second language. This is a widely-held belief that contains an element of truth, but which for the most part has been disproved by recent linguistic research.

One reason why this myth has arisen may be that we are more tolerant of the mistakes of children than of older learners or adults. As an illustration of this, imagine that you are a German bank clerk, living in Frankfurt. On your way to work, you meet your American neighbor's 3 year old child, who is attending German kindergarten. The child says: *Guck, ich habe ein neuen Ball.* (Look, I have a new ball.) You will probably think *How cute!* You note how well she's learning German, and may not even register the mistake in the indefinite article (it should be *einen* instead of *ein*). You get to work and the first customer you see is a British woman who wants to deposit some cash. She says: *Ich will 500 € auf meines Sparkonto überweisen.* Now you will probably not think *How cute*, but will you think *Her German is good!* or will you say: *Es muss: auf mein Sparkonto sein* (correcting the faulty ending in the possessive pronoun)? Of course this is an unfair stereotyping of German bank clerks (although exactly this happened to a British colleague in the bank in her second year here in Germany). However, it does prove the point that we are generally more patient and forgiving of the mistakes of young children than of adults. Indeed, although children make mistakes of both fact and grammar when speaking in a foreign language, they are far more likely to get corrective feedback only when they make a factual mistake. Adults rarely make factual mistakes and so most of the corrective feedback they receive is grammatical in nature. This may be one of the reasons why the myth that young children are the best language learners has taken such a strong hold.

Now consider another reason. Anyone with a young family who has lived for a while in a foreign country will have seen how easily and naturally their children interact and play with others of a different mother tongue. This is very different from how most adults feel when faced with the need to communicate in a foreign language. Many people however mistakenly attribute young children's comparative ease in new language situations to children's greater **ability** to learn language. But this is not the case. The cognitive demands made on a youngster are different from those which confront the adult. With children, everything is in the here-and-now. If they are having a dolls' picnic, for example, most of the communication will centre around the concrete objects they can see and handle. They also have the right to not to speak and just watch what is happening, or take part silently. Contrast this with the problems confronting the adult who has an appointment with her tax advisor. She does not have the option of being silent, and the whole discussion will be conducted in the abstract mode. No wonder, adults envy children their supposed facility in learning languages!

References

- Snow, C and Hoefnagel-Hoehle, M (1978) *The critical period for language acquisition: evidence from second language learning* **Child Development** 49/4 (Quoted in Lightbown, P. and Spada, N., *How Languages are Learned*, Oxford 1999)
- Marinova-Todd, S.; Marshall, D. and Snow, C., *Three Misconceptions about Age and L2 Learning* TESOL Quarterly Vol 34/1 2001

The Importance of Reading

On many of the other pages of advice in this booklet we have emphasized how important reading is as far as learning English is concerned. However, there is a further, very important reason why ESL students should try to develop their reading skills: Educational researchers have found that there is a strong correlation between reading and academic success. In other words, a student who is a good reader is more likely to do well in school and pass exams than a student who is a weak reader.

Good readers can understand the individual sentences and the organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can comprehend ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. They know most of the words in the text already, but they can also determine the meaning of many of the unfamiliar words from the context - failing this, they can use their dictionary effectively to do so. In summary, good readers can extract from the writing what is important for the particular task they are employed in. And they can do it quickly!

Educational researchers have also found a strong correlation between reading and vocabulary knowledge. In other words, students who have a large vocabulary are usually good readers. This is not very surprising, since the best way to acquire a large vocabulary is to read extensively, and if you read extensively you are likely to be or become a good reader!

So if you want your child to be successful at school encourage him or her to read. Reading non-fiction in English is probably the most important, but English fiction and any reading in the mother tongue - if done extensively - will help your child develop the reading competence that is essential for academic achievement.

How Parents Can Help ESL Students Learn Faster

The single most effective thing a student can do at home is to read regularly. If this is done over a long period, it will benefit your child in various ways: it will obviously develop her general ability to understand what she reads, but it will also increase her vocabulary and provide models of grammar and sentence structure that will help her in her own writing.

Your child can develop her listening skills at home by borrowing audio cassettes and video cassettes from the main school and ESL libraries. For speaking practice your child could give a summary of the main events in the stories she has read or heard, or she could state some of the important information she has learned from non-fiction sources. Writing can be practiced if your child keeps a journal in which, for example, she records her response to the books she has read or movies or TV programs she has seen. She could also create her own fiction stories. As for grammar and vocabulary are concerned, these are best learned in the contexts of reading or listening. However, there are many grammar and vocabulary practice books available, and if your child has one that she enjoys using, there is no reason why she should not spend an hour or so a week on such exercises.

The suggestions made above will help your child to improve her general English proficiency, and this of course will have a beneficial effect on her other school work. You may, however, wish to help her more directly with her assignments in her other subjects, such as science, history, math etc. In this case the best thing you can do is to have at home good reference materi-

als*, in your own language. Your child can consult these to increase her general understanding of the topic she is learning. It would also help very much if you could discuss with her what she has read, again in your own language. This will deepen her background knowledge and prepare her to understand the difficult English she will hear and read in school.

The final piece of advice here is perhaps the most important: if your child does not herself have the desire to do extra practice at home as suggested above, then it is best to respect this. She is probably working hard enough already and may prefer to spend her free time just doing nothing, or in a sporting or musical activity. This mental and physical relaxation is the best way to prepare her for the rigors of the next school day. In fact, being involved in an after-school activity is a great way for your child to mix with native-speakers of English and practice her speaking skills!

* If you have a computer at home, you may wish to consider buying a mother-tongue encyclopedia such as Microsoft Encarta. This is available in many different language editions, and is an excellent encyclopedia to use for acquiring general background information on a huge variety of topics.

Helping ESL Students with Homework

It is a fact of school life for ESL students that they generally have to work harder to complete a piece of homework than native speakers doing the same assignment. A piece of science homework that is completed by a British or American student in 30 minutes may take an ESL student twice that time or even longer. And this of course means that there is less time for them to participate in the many afternoon activities on offer at FIS or in their local communities. Alternatively, ESL students do take part in sport or have music lessons etc. as well as spending a lot of time on homework, but then go to bed late and are tired in school the next day.

There is no easy advice to give here. The school can suggest a reasonable maximum amount of time to spend on homework and stress the importance of children participating in non-academic afternoon activities, but the way children use their time after school is a matter for each family to decide and this decision is culturally influenced. What is most important is that however long a child spends on homework, it should be time spent profitably. Here are two examples: Suppose the student has to read a primary source of evidence written at the time of the American Revolution (for example a newspaper article) and state the main purpose of the article. She could struggle for an hour or more using her dictionary to look up every new word, ending up understanding very little of the contents of the piece and feeling very frustrated. Alternatively, she could spend some time reading in an encyclopedia or history book of the period, **in her language**, to get a clearer understanding of the period and then use the rest of the time to read through the article to get a general idea of the intention of the writer, looking up a few words that seem to be of particular importance. Clearly the second method is a more profitable use of time even if the answer she then gives is incomplete or incorrect.

Another student may spend homework time on a different assignment by copying answers provided to her by a parent or dictated by a private tutor. The end **product** - the finished piece of homework - in this case may be very good, but the **process** of producing it has probably not resulted in much understanding of the work being done. A better use of the student's time would be to have a discussion about the homework, in the mother tongue, to make sure that she understands the assignment and knows in broad terms how to do it. The student is then left alone to produce the answer as best she can. Of course the finished product may fall a long way short of being in clear and ac

Exiting the ESL Program

Exiting means that an ESL student no longer requires pull-out or in-class support. English language instruction occurs in mainstream classes; however, an exited ESL student may be withdrawn from mainstream classes for specific help over a short period.

In general, the following conditions for exiting must be understood and met:

- Decisions about exiting the ESL program are taken by the ESL teacher in consultation with (the) class/subject teacher(s).
- Students leaving ESL should be functioning in class competently, fluently, confidently and with increasing accuracy.
- Students should be competitive with other exited students in fulfilling the student learning outcomes of the mainstream curriculum based i.a. on teacher observations, portfolios, writing samples and other appropriate class work.

Exiting from the program in the Primary School generally does not take place. This is due to the fact that a) even under optimal circumstances it takes at least five years for a foreign learner to achieve native fluency and, b) progress made in reading and writing is considerably slower than in speaking and listening. Therefore it is very difficult to measure proficiency in those areas in any meaningful way.

In addition to linguistic criteria for exiting the program, there are also social and psychological factors which are taken into consideration. These include:

- The child's linguistic background
- His/her motivation and ability to work independently
- His/her longer-term academic plans after discussions with parents
- The attitude of the child towards learning English at FIS

As stated earlier in this booklet, a motivated beginning ESL student is likely to be mainstreamed within two to three years. As soon as this happens, s/he will be monitored by the ESL departments at regular intervals to make sure that the student is keeping pace with the class. What follows are typical linguistic exit criteria for each grade level which will form **part** of the decision taken by the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher as to whether a student is ready to be mainstreamed.

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Primary Grades

Only under highly exceptional circumstances to be determined by ESL and homeroom teachers will a primary school child be exited from the ESL program.

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Grade 2

Speaking

- converses with confidence in both social/interpersonal and academic situations
- expresses feelings, needs and experiences with a richness of language approximating that of a native-speaking peer
- describes a picture, object or person accurately
- retells a familiar story in a few sentences
- gives explanations
- asks questions relating to the content of the lesson
- participates as a speaker in group activities
- pronunciation and intonation do not interfere with the listener's understanding

Listening

- understands spoken instructions in the school environment, and responds appropriately to these instructions
- understands the spoken language sufficiently well to answer questions in response to teachers' requests
- comprehends, responds to and participates in stories, rhymes and songs
- has sufficient academic vocabulary and structures to understand and be able to participate fully in lessons
- listens for specific information, e.g. ignoring redundant material

Reading

- comprehends written materials used in the mainstream curriculum well enough to complete related learning activities
- reads for information

Writing

- performs written tasks for academic and personal purposes with a degree of grammatical accuracy and coherence which approximates grade level

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Grade 3

Speaking

- converses with confidence in both social/interpersonal and academic situations
- expresses feelings, needs and experiences with a richness of language approximating that of a native-speaking peer
- describes a picture, object or person accurately
- retells a familiar story using appropriate vocabulary and syntax
- organize and present ideas in content areas effectively in oral presentations at a level of ability appropriate to grade level
- asks questions with confidence in the academic environment
- participates as a speaker in group activities
- pronunciation and intonation do not interfere with the listener's understanding

Listening

- understands spoken instructions in the school environment, and responds appropriately to these instructions
- understands the spoken language sufficiently well to answer questions in response to teachers' requests

- has sufficient academic vocabulary and structures to understand and be able to participate fully in lessons
- understands the different meanings that can be conveyed by variations in word and sentence stress, word and sentence intonation, and gesture
- listens for specific information, e.g. ignoring redundant material

Reading

- comprehends written materials used in the mainstream curriculum well enough to complete related learning activities
- reads for information, including recognizing important facts and ignoring irrelevant or redundant material
- reads for different purposes: skimming, scanning, extensive reading and intensive reading
- develops reading-aloud skills
- uses dictionaries and other reference materials effectively
- uses printed sources to complete a range of written tasks

Writing

- performs written tasks for academic and personal purposes with a degree of grammatical accuracy and coherence which approximates grade level

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Grades 4 & 5

Speaking

- converses easily in both social/interpersonal and academic situations
- expresses feelings, needs and experiences with a richness of language approximating that of a native-speaking peer
- organizes and present ideas in content areas effectively in oral presentations at a level of ability appropriate to grade level
- asks questions with confidence in the academic environment
- participates as a speaker in group activities
- pronunciation and intonation do not interfere with the listener's understanding

Listening

- understands spoken instructions in the school environment, and responds appropriately to these instructions
- understands the spoken language sufficiently well to answer questions in response to teachers' requests
- sustains concentration during sustained/extended/ lengthy discourse
- has sufficient academic vocabulary and structures to understand and be able to participate fully in lessons
- understands the different meanings that can be conveyed by variations in word and sentence stress, word and sentence intonation, and gesture
- listens for specific information, e.g. ignoring redundant material

Reading

- comprehends written materials used in the mainstream curriculum well enough to complete related learning activities
- reads for information, including recognising important facts and ignoring irrelevant or redundant material
- reads for different purposes: skimming, scanning, extensive reading and intensive reading
- develops reading-aloud skills
- uses dictionaries and other reference materials effectively
- uses printed sources to complete a range of written tasks

Writing

- performs written tasks for academic and personal purposes with a degree of grammatical accuracy and coherence which approximates grade level
- presents written work using appropriate vocabulary, syntax and style
- lists, classifies and organizes information in summaries and dossiers, using the appropriate style
- presents written work with increasingly clear handwriting, correct paragraph organization, punctuation, capitalization, etc.

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Grades 6, 7 & 8

ESL 1:

Novice-Intermediate proficiency (Communication at this stage will contain errors which could impede comprehension by a native speaker.)

Listening

- understand general classroom instructions given by subject teachers
- understand most of the questions asked in ESL and subject classes
- understand the most important details of what is said by native speakers, both in and out of class
- identify the main ideas in a passage of extended, context-based language

(** all the above without the need for repetition or rephrasing)

Speaking

- answer questions relating to personal experience and shared visual material
- answer context-based questions in subject classes and ask for clarification when something is not understood
- contribute ideas and opinions in group work such that she is understood by native-speaking peers
- make her meaning clear, if necessary by paraphrasing or gesturing, when missing a word
- give an extended account in the appropriate tense of the following:
 - events that have happened in the past
 - the plot of a story or film
 - future plans or events

Reading

- read and understand the main storyline and most details in a level 2 ESL reader (800 - 1000 words);
- scan a subject-based text for specific information.

- read and understand the main ideas in subject texts, (with the support of the ESL teacher)
- take factual notes from reference works (with clear guidance)

(** all the above with the help of a dictionary)

Writing

- write an extended account of an event, film or book in the present or past tenses
- answer subjectbased comprehension questions in such a way that the teacher can tell if s/he has understood the question and knows the correct answer

ESL 2:

Intermediate High- Advanced low Proficiency (Communication at this stage may contain occasional errors but these do not impede comprehension on the part of a native speaker.)

Listening

- understand virtually all of what is said to her by classmates, both in class and out
- understand all classroom instructions addressed to her or to the group by the subject teacher
- understand both contextbased and contextfree questions;
- grasp the main ideas and most of the details in a passage of extended context-based discourse

Speaking

- initiate, sustain and close conversations in a variety of school situations;
- express her ideas and opinions on a broad variety of personal and school topics, such
- that the listener is able to readily understand what she wants to say
- answer subjectbased questions in such a way that the teacher is able to make an accurate judgment on the state of her knowledge of the particular issue.

Reading

- read and understand the main storyline and most details in a short story taken from the mainstream English anthology

- read and understand the main ideas and most details in subject texts
- use appropriate strategies for discerning the meanings of new words in context;
- extract important details from reference materials, unassisted.

Writing

- write, at a grade-appropriate level of syntactical and semantic complexity, on a variety of topics and in a variety of genres;
- complete subjectbased written assignments in such a way as to be able to convey knowledge and ideas fully and clearly

Linguistic ESL Exit Criteria for Grades 9, 10, 11 & 12

ESL Intermediate

Students leaving course should be able to:

- express themselves orally in sentences, communicating basically what they want to say,
- understand almost all of what is said in mainstream classes,
- understand what is expected of them in assignments for mainstream classes, and possess a moderate independence in completing these
- read texts for mainstream classes and comprehend the essential points, being able to answer most questions, though sometimes perhaps still with difficulty,
- write complete sentences with accurate use of simple tenses, with some competence in dependent clauses.

ESL Advanced

Students leaving course should be able to:

- express themselves orally in longer sentences, communicating most of what they want to say,
- contribute a bit to what is said in mainstream classes,
- exhibit general independence in completing assignments for mainstream classes,
- read texts for mainstream classes and comprehend the essential points, being able to write complete answers to questions, though sometimes perhaps still with inaccuracies,

and

- write complete sentences with accurate use of simple tenses, with clear competence in complex sentence structure, dependent clauses, time expressions, gerunds, etc.

ESL Transitional

Students leaving the course should be able to

- express themselves orally in longer sentences, communicating accurately what they want to say,
- contribute actively to what is said in mainstream classes,
- demonstrate independence in completing assignments for mainstream classes,
- exhibit a wide lexical variation, use a monolingual dictionary well, and
- write complete sentences with accurate and idiomatic use of all tenses, with clear competence in complex sentence structures and in linking ideas.

FAQs about Learning a Second Language

How long does it take to learn a second language?

This is a little like trying to answer the proverbial English question: *How long is a piece of string?* Or the more similar question: *How long does it take to learn how to play the piano?* The answer clearly depends on what you mean by learning a language or learning to play the piano, and the point at which you decide that your learning is at an end. A sensible answer to the question requires that you first define your learning purpose. Do you want to learn to play the piano sufficiently well that you can entertain yourself and your family at home, or is your intention to become a concert pianist? Do you want to learn English so that you can communicate effectively with business partners, or because you would like to be as proficient in English as you are in your own language?

Let us assume in this case that the goal is to learn sufficient English to be ready to exit from the ESL program and join the full mainstream. How long will this take? Now it is possible to answer: on average students need about three years in ESL before they have sufficient English to function independently in the mainstream. But even here it is necessary to stress the words „on average“. The actual time needed will depend on a number of learner variables, such as the native language of the learner, his language learning aptitude, how motivated he is, how many other languages he already knows and so on.

(It is important not to assume that exiting from the ESL program means that the child is now able to function on the same level as a native-speaker; researchers into second language acquisition have estimated that it takes between 5 to 7 years for an ESL student to catch up with his native-speaking peers as far as academic English is concerned. *)

Why do some ESL students learn much more quickly than others?

Although the average ESL student needs about 3 years in ESL before being ready to exit, some students pass through the ESL program more quickly, while others need a fourth or fifth year of ESL. There are a number of reasons why this should be the case - the „learner variables“ referred to in the answer to the previous question. The first language is obviously a very important influence. It is easier for a Dutch or German child to learn English than a child from Japan or Korea because of the similarities in the German/Dutch and English languages. Also, as children learn new languages they generally find each successive one easier to master because along the way they acquire a great deal of knowledge and skills in how to learn languages. So a Dutch child who has already learned some French and German will probably find learning English easier than a compatriot for whom English is the first foreign language.

Another factor influencing second language development is the child's attitude to the target language and culture. The situation at FIS is a little complicated as the new ESL student is exposed to two new cultures at the same time - the culture of Germany, the host country, and the predominantly Anglo-American culture of our school. A child who is unhappy about being in Germany or uncomfortable in the academic and social environment of FIS will probably learn English more slowly than a child for whom being here does not present a problem.

A related factor is the attitude of the child to his new teachers and the classroom environment. Learning will not take place very easily when the student does not feel that he or his own culture is accepted or valued by the teacher or the other students in the class. A further influence on the speed at which a child learns a second language is related to personality. Confident students who are willing to take risks and are not afraid of being wrong have a language learning advantage over the fearful and timid. And finally, it is clear that a motivated, hard-working student with an interest in and aptitude for learning languages will do better than someone with opposite characteristics.

There are many other students of my child's nationality in her classes.

Won't this stop her learning English quickly?

It would be difficult to find any international school where your child is the only speaker of her language. And in such a school she may well feel isolated and unhappy. In fact there are important advantages for having students in your daughter's classes who speak the same language as her. Firstly, concentrating on English for up to 2 hours at a time in lessons is a hard and stressful task, and your daughter will be more able to do so if she has had the chance to someone to talk to and relax with her same-language friends at break and lunch times. Secondly, if your daughter fails to understand something in class, particularly if she is a beginner, someone with the same language will be able to explain it to her. Or maybe she will be the one who can explain to someone whose English is not as good as hers. In this case, by explaining, she will be deepening her own understanding of the topic and practicing how to say it in her own language. Thirdly, if your daughter has understood something in her own language, she will be able to understand more of what the teacher says or of what she has to read in English. And so, in fact, her English may well get better more quickly if there are other students of the same nationality in her classes.

My child speaks English fluently but has a lot of problems in her subject classes. Why is this? It is not uncommon for students to speak English as fluently and accurately as a native speaker, but to struggle with the reading and writing assignments of their subject classes. The reason why this may happen is that there are, according to current theories*, two different kinds of language proficiency.

Firstly, there are the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) of listening and speaking which are typically acquired quickly by many students; particularly by those from language backgrounds similar to English, who spend a lot of their time interacting with native speakers. Researchers* have found that it can take as little as two years to develop native speaker fluency in the target language.

Secondly, we have what is known as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). As the name suggests, this is the basis for a child's ability to cope with the academic demands placed upon her in the various school subjects. It can take between 5-7 years for a child to be working at the same level as native speaking peers as far as academic English is concerned. An important reason why it takes so long is that a large and specialized vocabulary must be acquired. While it is relatively easy to learn the words used in everyday communication, the type of vocabulary needed to understand the more difficult academic language of the classroom is much harder to acquire. For example, everyday words such as lesson, homework, vacation, meet, cafeteria are more easily learned than abstract and academic ones such as rate, democracy, separate, doubt, evaluate etc.

This means that it is quite normal for an ESL student who sounds like a native speaker to still be a long way from having the academic language proficiency she needs for the classroom.

What is the best way to learn a foreign language?

The fact that there are dozens of different *language learning methods*, each with its own supporters, makes it clear that there is no simple answer to this question. It depends very much on the learner and why he wants to learn. An extrovert will be probably learn better with a method that involves lots of role plays and participation in unstructured discussions, whereas a quieter, more reflective person may prefer written exercises with plenty of grammatical explanations. Someone who is only interested in being able to communicate well enough on holiday in the foreign country will require a different method of learning than another person who wants to study at a foreign university. For the general language learner an eclectic mix of several different methods is often the best approach.

In fact, however, method is usually not the most important factor in whether someone will learn a foreign language or not. The key issue is motivation. If you have a good enough reason for learning; if you want or need to learn it badly enough, you will probably be successful.

For a good summary of the research, see *The Acquisition of English as a Second Language*, Cummins J. (1994) In: *Reading Instruction for ESL Students* Spangenberg-Urbschat, K. and Pritchard, R., International Reading Association.



Website and Acknowledgements

Do visit our ESL website at <http://esl.fis.edu>

There you will find more information and advice for students, teachers and administrators. The site is maintained by ESL teacher Paul Shoebottom who is the author of the “General Advice” and “FAQs” sections of this booklet and who has kindly allowed them to be reproduced.



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