Chapter 14
Enhancing Multilingual Learner (ML) Program Decisions in English Medium International Schools:
Factors, Benefits, and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to identify what factors English medium international schools currently use to make multilingual learners (MLs) program decisions and to explore the benefits of utilizing students' multilingual assets in the decision-making process. There is limited information about factors English medium international schools use to determine EAL program models. The researcher collected EAL policies from participating schools and surveyed and interviewed 18 teachers and seven administrators from seven schools in six East Asian countries. The chapter provides suggestions for international schools with EAL programs to make changes to utilize MLs' assets in EAL programming and instructional practices. These include reviewing and revising existing EAL policies and placement decisions to include MLs' multilingual assets, providing staff professional development on what multilingual assets are and the importance and rationale of utilizing them, and putting protocols in place to enable effective communication about MLs' multilingual assets between all relevant stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years, international schools have witnessed a remarkable demographic shift. In 1994, these schools predominantly enrolled expatriates, constituting nearly 80% of the school's population, but by 2019, this demographic makeup had evolved significantly, with locals comprising 80% of the student

body ("25 years of ISC Research and the international schools market-ISC Research," 2021). In parallel, the global population of multilingual learners (MLs) has experienced explosive growth in comparison to other student groups (Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Consequently, educational leaders have implemented English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs, often with the common aim of reintegrating MLs into mainstream education within a predefined time frame, sometimes without considering the potential adverse effects of premature exit (de Jong, 2004). This study delves into the strategies employed by English medium international schools in Asia to leverage MLs' multilingual assets, spanning linguistic, educational, and experiential aspects, in shaping their EAL programs and support. Asia, with its 57.1% share of English medium international schools and approximately 3 million students, primarily comprising of local students, a significant portion of whom are MLs, offers a unique perspective on this issue ("25 years of ISC Research and the international schools market-ISC Research," 2021).

The focus of this research centers on the Asian region due to its overwhelming presence in the international school landscape. No other region can match the volume of international EAL programs than Asia. With such a vast number of international schools, Asia can provide valuable insights into EAL program and how it ensures that the diverse needs of all students are met, especially in the decision-making process surrounding EAL programs (Hayden, 2006). One challenge is the potential mislabeling of student behavior when EAL programs are not appropriately aligned. According to Hayden (2006):

If students are placed in the right program, this can assist with students' culture shock, experienced when we realize that the behavior we consider to be "normal" or "natural" is not perceived or appropriate or is possibly rejected by another culture; when what has always been self-evident does not seem to be so anymore; when we do not understand the behavior of members of another culture; when we get the impression that they do not behave in a normal way. (p. 56)

To further explore the implications of misaligned programs on MLs, data was collected through school artifacts, such as policies, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. For confidentiality, artifacts were numbered by school (I-VII) and participants were assigned unique identifiers; Administrator Participant (A.P), Teacher Participant (T.P). The analysis of the artifacts and interviews discovered that Asian English medium international schools solely used language proficiency assessments to make admissions and EAL program decisions (Schools I-VII). This process overlooked the students' multilingual (educational, linguistic, and experiential) factors (Schools I, III, and V).

BACKGROUND

In general, people are becoming more mobile, and immigrating to other countries. The mobility over the past 100 years has created a diverse classroom of needs (Honigsfeld, 2009; Rong & Brown, 2002; "25 years of ISC Research and the international schools market - ISC Research," 2021) with little to no standardized way to support the immigrant student. There are many inclusive educational and language policies for specific geographical locations (UNICEF, 2018). Yet, even with the UN's influence, "immigrant students continue to be linguistically, culturally, and academically marginalized as they have been for centuries" (Schultz, 2016, p. 106).

Even with EAL programs in place for students, research shows that it can take MLs at least five years to reach comparable levels of the academic performance of native English speakers (Cummins,

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