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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF AN EAL INTERVENTION PUT IN PLACE TO PREPARE WEAKER EAL STUDENTS FOR THE MOTIVATION AND LANGUAGE REQUIRED AT THE PRIMARY STAGE. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT ARE PROVIDED

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Abstract

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Introduction:-

There is a plethora of pedagogical literature that suggests students with higher levels of language skills, outperform their EAL (English as an Additional Language) peers (Kirkup, Morrison and Whetton, 2008). Thus, language skills are the most important aspect of education in schooling. This blanket statement, albeit easily criticised, holds some truth. The depths to which language centric weakness is detrimental to learners is clear on a multiplicity of fronts, including but not limited to; their performance academically, their ability to integrate socially, their self-confidence and their ability to demonstrate their understanding. This does not qualify it as the most important aspect of schooling, it does however validate its importance. So, is an EAL pull out intervention strategy a very effective way to bring weak EAL students transitioning from Kindergarten to Primary up to the levels of their peers, both with regards to language and motivation?

This study critically evaluates a pull out intervention called G0, it is based within a school in an affluent region of XXXXXXX. The critical evaluation aims to elucidate the answer to the question presented in the first paragraph and provide recommendations for improvement for the school.

The G0 intervention is a 6-week program that is extremely cumulative with regards to the development of language use within it. It is aimed at students who are transitioning between the Kindergarten and Primary stages (the students are between 5 and 7 years old). The students in question are EAL learners who have not been able to pass their exams due to an English Language deficiency, and/or students who are joining at the primary level with little or no prior schooling. The purpose of the intervention is to bring these students up to the levels of the peers by the time they start the primary curriculum, both with regards to motivation and language ability.

Students start off with basic introductory skills; they are gradually exposed to the kinds of lexis required of them in the primary stage (and how to apply this language to different contexts). One teacher is responsible for each G0 class. They meet with the students twice a week during this period of time and work through the curriculum in place. The students receive 1 to 1 tutoring and have the opportunity to work with peers experiencing similar difficulties. This process is linked to the educational policies pushing for high quality education (Ministry of Education, 2017) as it aims to ensure all students are able to achieve learning objectives.

This support system is in place because in the past, many of the students starting their journey at the primary stage struggled to keep up with the students who had been there for 3 years already. The same is true for students who had joined within a year of progressing to the primary stage.

Literature Review:

This section will critically examine and elucidate how detrimental language weakness is to EAL learners; based on relevant existing literature. The extent to which EAL interventions are successful is critiqued in connection to research studies that have investigated this topic.

Theories that highlight the extent to which EAL learners can be disadvantaged:

The relationship between language skills and student potential is revealed when delving into academic literature. Self-determination theory states there are three innate needs of an individual, these are relatedness (a sense of belonging within a group), competence (a sense of one's ability to complete tasks) and autonomy (a sense of ability to work without guidance). When these needs are fulfilled, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are maximised in learners (Wang et al., 2019). Students who have limited language skills are often unable to meet these needs. Relatedness can be missed due to a lack of ability to properly socialise/integrate, competence can be missed due to a lack of ability to fully understand the language used in class and autonomy can be missed due to a need for extra assistance and guidance (Bergin et al., 2018). Motivation is a key factor in learning and student development, if students are lacking in it, their performance is deeply affected. There is however, an argument that the inability to socialise properly causes EAL learners to become incredibly independent learners (Rienties et al., 2011). Independent learners experience high levels of intrinsic motivation (an incredibly difficult force to influence) (Landry, 2019). This considered, the social and emotional development of students that is detrimentally affected by the missing sense of relatedness, connected to students social and emotional development, acts as an extremely difficult obstacle for EAL learners. This is backed up by a summary of two sets of research which shows, EAL students at completing reception Year (age 5) in the UK have a 33% lower chance of achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) compared to their peers recorded as First Language English (FLE) (Strand and Murphy, 2016)

EAL students are often the subject of teacher bias. Their low language ability can result in teachers setting low expectations on them. Low expectations on students, lead to low results, this is known as the Golem effect. Their fluent peers are more likely to be the recipients of high expectations, resulting in higher results; this is known as the Pygmalion effect. These concepts act as self-fulfilling prophesies (Wang and Cai, 2016). It is argued that students who can motivate themselves without the need of influence of others can be the highest attainers of all. However, these students tend to already have a range of advantages working in their favour, e.g. natural academic ability and lower levels of neuroticism. It is also hard for EAL learners to demonstrate their natural academic ability when the content is taught in a language that is foreign to them (Gardiner-Hyland and Burke, 2018).

The ideas discussed act as catalysts for self-efficacy within students. Self-efficacy in students is connected to higher attainment; it evolves from performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, physiological feedback and verbal persuasion. With this considered, EAL learners are clearly disadvantaged in the academic environment in comparison to their fluent peers.

Theories that show the connection between cognition and language:

Jim Cummins developed Cummins' Iceberg Model. This model highlights Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Ateneu.xtec.cat, 2019, Appendix 1). This model and the ideas surrounding it highlight that while students may be proficient in BICS, they may require an intervention to improve their CALP in order to partake competently in a mainstream English curriculum. A good way to develop BICS in the classroom is to encourage communication and the use of functional language. CALP being the harder of the two to develop, usually requires study of complex lexis and practice/production of this language is more necessary (Cummins, 2017). Cummins went on to develop the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model (Cummins, 2008, Appendix 2). This he used to explain that learning of concepts can be in either language, learning in one language is beneficial to any other language known. This is embodied by the fact that transfer of already understood concepts from a known language to a new language is simpler than learning concepts in the foreign language (Kulbrandstad, 2018). This is critiqued as learning a concept in the additional language increases language retention. Though beneficial, this does take longer. Taking into consideration the opportunity cost of the time lost and what the EAL students could have been doing to develop had they taken the fastest route, it is also argued to be an oversimplification of the language learning process (Goodrich, and Lonigan, 2017).

Relevant Policies:

The G0 intervention is not grounded in specific and guided policies. Students who need this intervention are identified when they are unable to pass their entry tests to the primary stage due to language weakness. There are

other EAL interventions within the school, these are usually 1 to 1 or involve working with parents to increase independent self-study. The students going into G0 can be progressing from the Kindergarten stage or they can be new students to the school in general. This highlights how seriously the school takes addressing language deficiencies amongst EAL learners.

The school curriculum teaches a Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) curriculum. This kind of curriculum incorporates the development of language with the teaching of all other school subjects. As such, the learning, improvement and development of English skills is a core part of the school. Ensuring students are able to keep up with their peers and understand the content being presented to them is of high importance to the school. This kind of curriculum is common in countries where English is a foreign language.

Good practice EAL intervention models:

To unveil what is good practice for EAL intervention models, one must first delve into the on-going debate around push in and pull out methods of intervention. In more modern times, the use of the push in approach has become more common and recommended. This is justified as it is more immersive and forces students into a situation whereby language acquisition becomes fully necessary and not just desirable. It is backed up by research done Rich (2010), which found remedial readers developed more from a push in method. This is however not what research by Saunders, Foorman and Carlson (2006) shows. Their research on English Language Development shows revealed the pull out approach to reap better rewards. This is justified as it gives the learners a safe space in which they can practice the language without feeling embarrassed. They elaborate on this and recommend the use of pull out interventions in which students are grouped together. The merit of this being EAL learners have a chance to study with other students facing the same difficulties. This gives them a sense of community and relatedness (Wang et al., 2019).

Whether push in or pull out, good interventions should have these a few key components. Bear in mind, EAL interventions will each have their own unique properties, as such this list is not fully comprehensive of every single good aspect of an EAL intervention.

Carder states that a good intervention has

1. A leader/experienced head (Milton-keynes.gov.uk, n.d.)
2. Experienced and qualified teachers/staff, ideally where teachers maybe bilingual/EAL learners □
3. An independent department (e.g. separate from SEN) □
4. A philosophy that is inclusive with regards to fulfilling both the EAL curriculum and the mother tongue curriculum (linguistically and culturally)
5. Clear and age-appropriate English instruction combined with content-based curriculum (e.g. maths, science, geography) □
6. Regular communication between the programme leader and other subject teachers
7. (Carder, 2007, p. 33-34).

This literature review has critically discussed some of the key theories that highlight how language deficiency is detrimental to EAL learners. It gives background on some of the schools and the G0's policies. It also gives indication of how struggles with motivation and self-efficacy may be connected to language deficiency. Finally demonstrates the debate surrounding push in and pull out EAL interventions before providing a good practice model. This information was used in consideration of the methodology of research to be applied.

Methodology:-

Mixed Methods Research (MMR) was conducted for this case study. This method was chosen because, according to Creswell (2009), combining qualitative and quantitative research is best representative of complex real-life circumstances. In contrast to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued that making connections between these data sets can prove difficult. These ideas considered, MMR was best suited to the complexity of an EAL pull-out intervention; it leads towards more comprehensive data triangulation (Green, Camilli, and Elmore, 2012). In pursuit of ethical methodologies, none of the methods used are invasive.

Quantitative research (Example in Appendix 3):

The quantitative data was done in the form of a questionnaire to the current teaching staff. It identified how effective they have found the G0 intervention to be so far. There is also an option for teachers who were employed before it was in place, they can rate whether it is an improvement on the previous intervention. These teachers are given the

option to take part in the qualitative research. This data will reveal how well the intervention is working (based on the teachers who lead its experiences). This method of research will be easy to graph and use to create correlations. This kind of easy to map data will make it easier to use with regards to data triangulation (Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier and Fowler, 2013).

The primary entrance test scores, G0 midterm scores and G0 final scores of the G0G are recorded. The G0 final is their repeat of their English primary entrance exams. This data will be easy to graph and use for correlating, contrasting and comparing with other data sets during evaluation. This kind of data also shows concrete evidence regarding the G0 interventions successor failure. (Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier and Fowler, 2013).

Qualitative research (Example in Appendix 4):

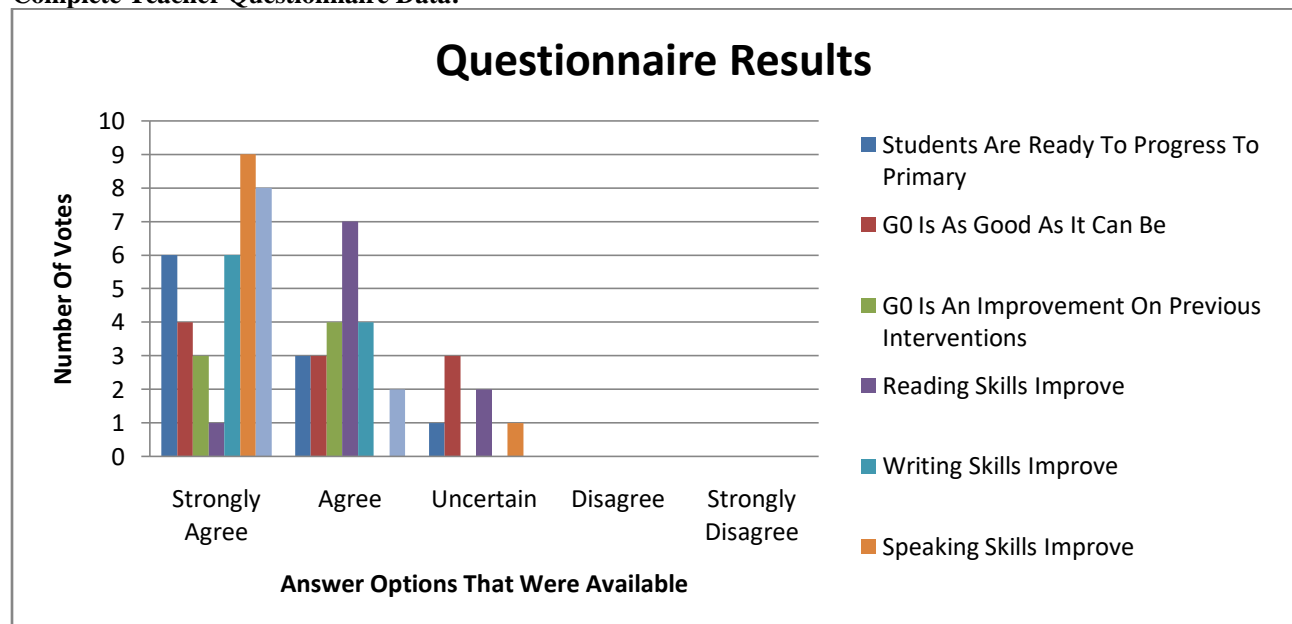
There was the intention to produce two sets of qualitative research, this was abandoned mid-way as upon deeper consideration, it would not have worked in the favour of data triangulation and could have overcomplicated the analysis. The qualitative research method that was abandoned was observations of classes as its reporting would have proved difficult to compare and contrast with the other data sets. The researcher also felt as though this method would have been coming simply from their own perspective as oppose to that of many. The qualitative research method utilised was interviews with teachers. This method was chosen as the interviewees could be identified as experienced teachers from the questionnaire; this links the research methods and works well with regards to data triangulation. Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier and Fowler (2013) and Denzin and Lincoln, (2011) agree that this kind of research will highlight to what extent the intervention is successful. With regards to the G0, how well it prepares students for the Primary stage, whether the intervention is better than its predecessor, whether it follows Cummin's good practice model and what recommendations would be applicable. It may be difficult to interpret some answers if they are not weighted positively or negatively, in this case, the researcher can look across the interviews as a whole to see if any of the teachers have more analytical thoughts on the question.

The data and information was kept confidential and the school was informed that no written documents would be kept. They were made aware that there would be examples submitted as appendix to the case study. Specific details about staff and students were avoided (e.g. names, ages etc). This keeps the case study ethically sound (Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier and Fowler, 2013).

Data Collection:

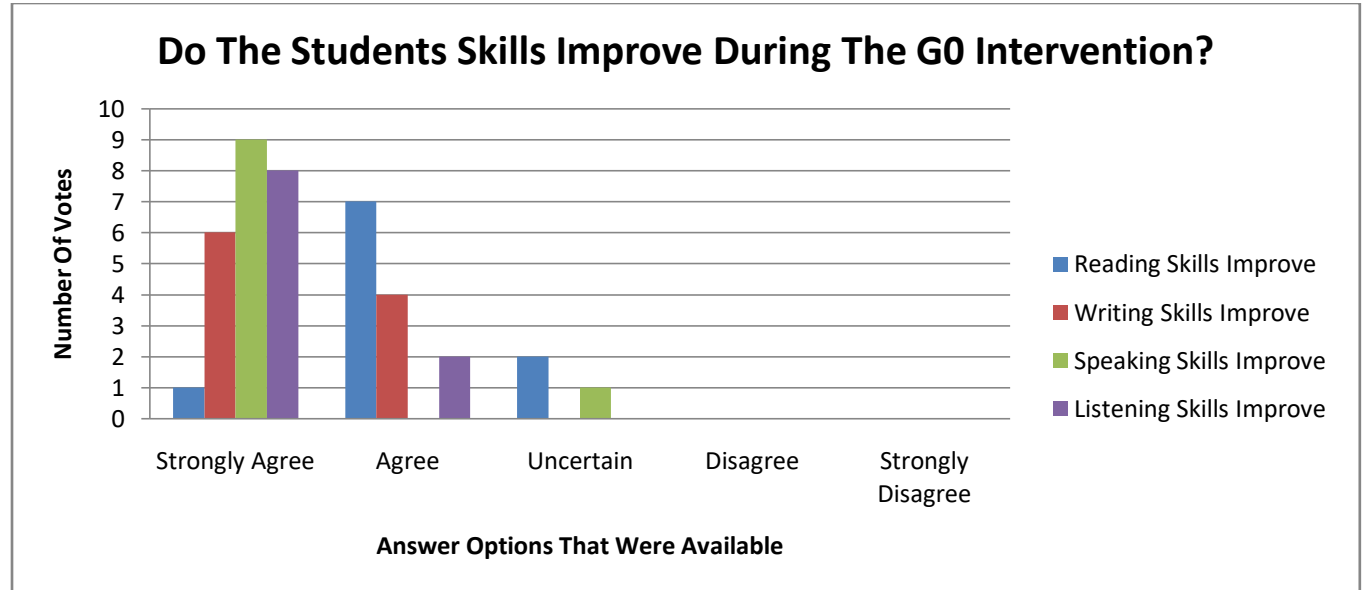
This section will unpack the data into graphs and briefly unpick it into short paragraphs to offer deeper context and understanding.

Complete Teacher Questionnaire Data:



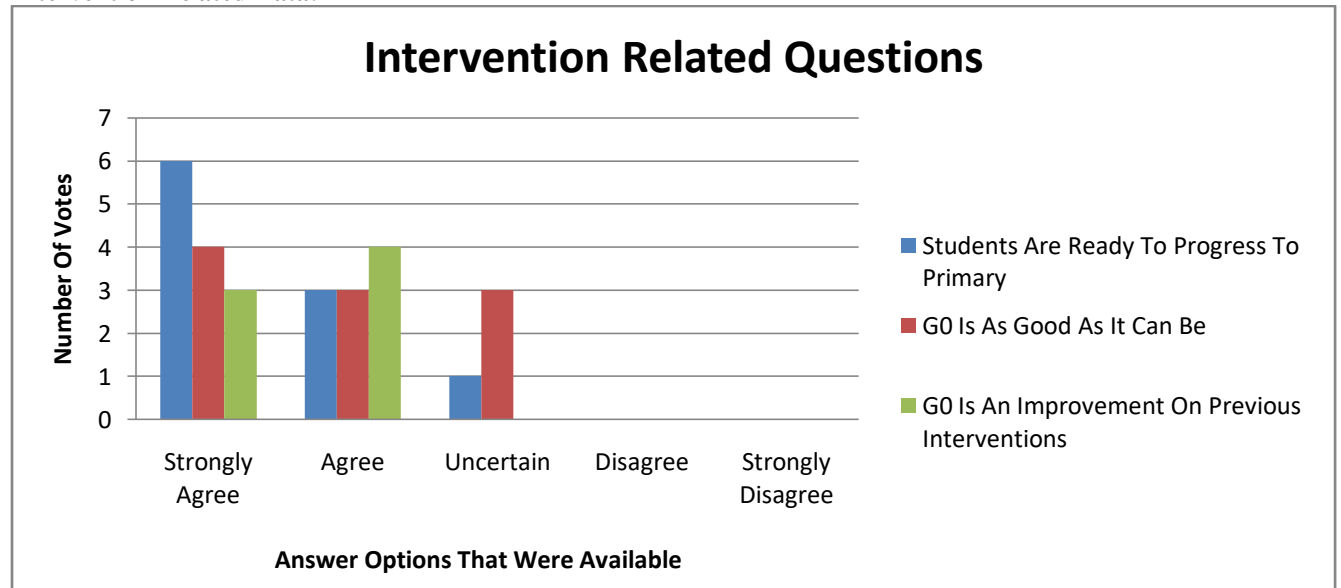
The data from the questionnaires indicated the teachers teaching within this intervention consider it to be effective and successful at meeting its purpose. None of the teachers selected either of the negative options on the form. Very few were uncertain about some of the questions. When looked at generally, there is strong indication that teachers consider this to be a working model of an EAL intervention.

Student Skills Data:

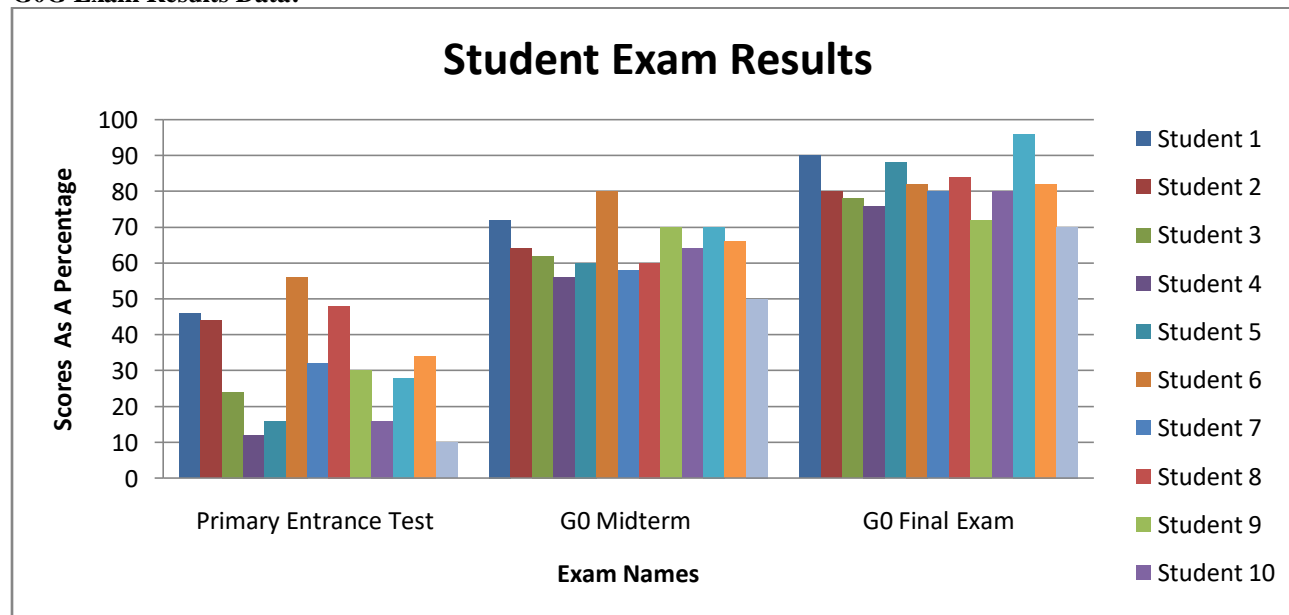


This was broken down into two separate graphs; the above one shows specifically the students skills and whether teachers feel as though they have improved. The teachers mostly chose to strongly agree that the student's skills improved over the G0 intervention, especially their speaking skills.

Intervention Related Data:



The second graph shows how the teachers felt regarding the intervention and whether it meets its purpose. The results were all positive or uncertain, heavily weighted towards positive, although a surprising 30% of teachers were uncertain if the G0 intervention is as good as it can be. The purpose of the intervention is to prepare students to take part in the primary stage of the school, over half of the voters strongly agreed that it meets this goal.

G0G Exam Results Data:

The exam scores from one class was collected, the G0G. All of the students improved from exam to exam. The pass mark for the Primary stage is 60%. All of the students were at least 10% over this with two students breaking into the 90% region. Most of the students, more than doubled their test scores from the primary entrance test to the G0 final exam. Some of them have even tripled their score as a percentage. One student was even able to improve their % grade 7 fold.

Teacher Interviews:

The interviews were overwhelmingly positive. All of the teachers had good things to say about the intervention in question. One teacher stated “This intervention is a functional and reliable intervention”. They also stated “This is an improvement on former models”. Another teacher stated “It works really well and all of the students get a chance to improve amongst other EAL learners.” Two of the teachers talked about how there was no attempt to make learner profiles for students and that doing this would improve the intervention program. Most of the interviewees agreed the G0 intervention followed Cummin’s good practice model. It was however commonly expressed that “There is no proper leadership or training for the programme, we just get given a curriculum and are expected to be able to teach it.” One of the teachers highlighted that there was no “inclusivity of the EAL curriculum and the mother tongue curriculum (linguistically and culturally).”

This collected data will be thoroughly analysed, compared, contrasted, evaluated and used to come to a conclusion

Data Analysis/Discussion:-**In connection to Self-Determination Theory:**

The questionnaire results, regarding student improvement, highlight that the students are becoming more competent with regards to their English skills. This positively correlates with the exam results data from G0G which shows the average pass percentage at first attempt for the Primary Entrance Test at 30.461%, by the G0 midterm the students average result was 64% (over double) and by the G0 final exam it had increased again to 81.384%. These great results act as fulfilling the schools policy regarding EAL interventions. Students increase in competence can lead to better mental health and meets one of the three innate needs of SDT. There is also a statement from one of the interviewed teachers about students being able to work with peers who have similar difficulties during the G0 intervention. This indicates the students will be likely to feel more related to their peers. What can be drawn from this is, the intervention is working well, although, there was no evidence to show students are given autonomy or choice in the classroom. This may be related to the lack of “proper leadership or training” for the teachers leading the program.

In connection to Self Efficacy:

Considering the student exam results, students are becoming more competent and their English language abilities have improved greatly. Knowing that one of the key things that leads to Self Efficacy is performance outcomes, the vast improvements in student exam results would therefore better equip these EAL students for attaining self-efficacy. A further positive knock on effect of this would be peers and teachers beliefs in their abilities would improve, creating a Pygmalion effect and pushing students further towards self-efficacy and into competence and self-motivation. Thus, the intervention seems to be meeting its purposes regarding language and motivational improvement of the students.

In connection to BICS, CALP & CUP:

In one of the interviews, the teacher reported “It works really well and all of the students get a chance to improve amongst other EAL learners.” This links to Saunders, Foorman and Carlson (2006) who recommend pull out interventions where students are grouped together. It also suggests the students have opportunity to communicate together during their lessons. This is further backed up by the questionnaire data, 90% of teachers strongly agreed students speaking skills improved. This was the highest rate of selection of the strongly agree throughout the whole questionnaire. Communicating with their peers during lessons is a great way to develop BICS. It does however raise concern as to whether the students are fully ready to leave an intervention process as often strength in BICS can wrongly signal a student’s CALP competence. This concern is however dulled by the strong results in the students’ exams; the final exam average of just over 81% and the lowest grade being 70%, reflects well with regards to both the students CALP and BICS competencies.

One of the interviews highlights the interventions lack of “inclusivity of the EAL curriculum and the mother tongue curriculum (linguistically and culturally).” This reflects the intervention is not taking full advantage of the CUP model. It could be deduced that this is why none of the students achieved full marks, it could also be why some teachers during the questionnaire were uncertain as to whether students skills improved or whether the G0 intervention is as good as it can be. This highlights that there are some aspects of this model that can be improved.

Does the G0 Intervention exemplify good practice?

The students’ final exam results are all strong and all students’ grades improve at each testing interval. This heavily implies the intervention is running well and the students are improving their language skills; which would in turn lead to better motivation (as discussed with regards to SDT and self-efficacy). One of the students even managed to improve their results 7 fold (from 10% to 70%). This positively correlates with the questionnaire data, which is overwhelmingly weighted in the favour of teachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that the students’ language skills are improving. From this, it can be drawn that the G0 intervention exemplifies good practice. This is further backed up by the intervention related questions results. 90% of the teachers felt students were ready to progress to the primary stage by the end of the intervention, with only 10% feeling uncertain. All of the teachers felt as though the G0 was an improvement on previous interventions. However, only 70% of the teachers felt as though the intervention was as good as it could be with 30% feeling uncertain. From this data, it is logical to conclude the teachers have no reference points... or no/little opportunity for reflection and personal development. This is backed up by the teachers’ comments regarding the lack of leadership and/or training. Perhaps the on-going development and improvement of the G0 intervention would be enhanced if such opportunities were made available. This idea is connected to the good practice EAL intervention characteristics by Carder (2007) which stated teachers should be qualified. This strongly implies there is some consideration that improvements can be made, which takes away from how good the practice of this intervention is. There is also concern expressed in the teacher interviews, teachers highlight that the G0 intervention failed to have “inclusivity of the EAL curriculum and the mother tongue curriculum (linguistically and culturally). Most teachers expressed statements like “There is no proper leadership or training for the programme, we just get given a curriculum and are expected to be able to teach it.” These are key parts of Cumín’s good practice model. The fact that this intervention fails to deliver on these points does take away from how well it exemplifies good practice. This considered, based on the exam results, the intervention proves to be very successful at improving the students’ language skills and preparing them for the primary stage. This leads to the conclusion that Cumín’s good practice model acts more as a guideline and not as essential foundations of an EAL intervention.

This analysis of data will be used to conclude this study and provide recommendations with regards to improvement of the G0 intervention.

Conclusion:-

The data collection and analysis makes it clear that this intervention is working very well. All of the students have improved dramatically; this is highlighted by the exam results of G0G and the teacher questionnaires. As seen in the data analysis and in connection with the literature review, students are well prepared for the motivation and language required for the primary stage of the school. Using the pull out method at this stage is effective as it allows students to undergo this learning process with peers in similar circumstances. Almost all of the data that was gathered was positive and symbolised this intervention is exemplary. The study does open the doorway to some recommendations for improvement though. Some deeper application of good practice models such as Cummin's one may be an improvement. Firstly, some proper leadership and training should be available to the teachers who take on these classes. This would allow them to feel better prepared and deliver the intervention in a better way; this is a key piece of improvement advice and is backed up by the literature. There could also be some consideration of inclusivity of the EAL curriculum and the mother tongue curriculum. Though this latter recommendation is to be taken lightly, the curriculum does appear to be performing very well and foundational changes may be detrimental to what is an already well-established and functional EAL intervention. It could also be relevant to produce learner profiles for the students; some of the teachers expressed this during the interviews. It is also reasonable to conclude that the teachers' uncertainty regarding the G0 intervention being as good as it could be, means there is little or no opportunity for reflection or personal development. Implementing a procedure that enables teachers to do so would likely enhance the on-going development of the intervention. The final recommendation is to consider giving the students some form of autonomy in the classroom and/or with regards to the learning process. This would tick the final box of SDT and increase the likelihood of maximal motivation within the students.

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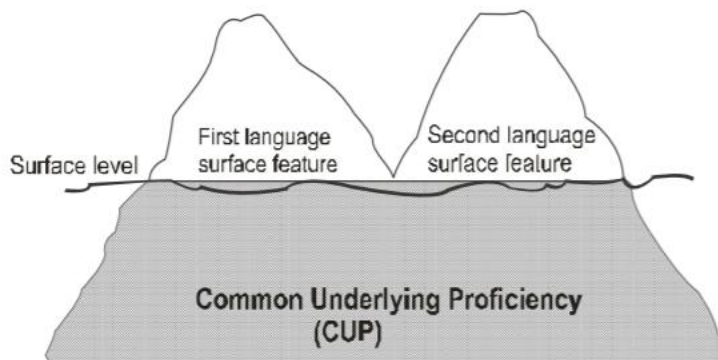
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Appendix 1:-



Appendix 2:-



Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) (Cummins, 2008)

Appendix 3:- Example of a questionnaire.

Research Questionnaire For The G0 Intervention

The questions presented are general and are about the class as a whole. Please answer them honestly and with the consideration of the G0 intervention. All questions are based on student progress or the effectiveness or the intervention in question.

Please complete the following questionnaire with specific regard to the above statement, by placing a CROSS ☒ in the appropriate box

		strongly agree	agree	uncertain/ not applicable	disagree	strongly disagree
1.	The students English writing skills improve throughout this intervention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	The students English reading skills improve throughout this intervention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	The students English speaking skills improve throughout this intervention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	The students English listening skills improve throughout this intervention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	By the end of the G0 intervention, all of the students are ready to progress to the primary stage of the school	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	The G0 intervention is as good as it can be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>This last question is for teachers who worked at this establishment prior to the G0 intervention program</i>						
8.	The G0 intervention is an improvement on previous interventions of its kind.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. Please review the questions before handing it in to ensure you have properly considered your answers.

If you have answered question 8, please inform the research conductor if you are also willing to complete a short interview about this intervention.

Appendix 4:- Example of an interview question.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you taught the G0 intervention?

8 months.

2. Do you feel as though it is successful in its aim to properly prepare weak EAL students between the kindergarten and primary stage?

This intervention is a functional and reliable intervention.

3. Is it better than the support system that used to be in place?

This is an improvement on former models.

4. Does the Intervention follow the good practice model showed to you?

There is no proper leadership or training for the programme, we just get given a curriculum and are expected to teach it. Overall it does follow that model.

5. Do you have any recommendations to improve the G0 intervention?

Some proper training & leadership should be implemented.