

## IMPROVING FLUENCY AMONG MULTINATIONAL LEARNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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### Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, classrooms are becoming more diverse, hosting students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity, while enriching, also presents unique challenges, particularly when it comes to developing language fluency in multinational learners. Fluency in the language of instruction is crucial for academic success and social integration in primary schools. For many multinational learners, the primary language spoken at home differs from the language they are expected to use in school. This creates a gap that educators must address to ensure that all students can thrive academically and socially.

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Fluency encompasses not only the ability to read and write but also the ability to speak and understand a language naturally and effortlessly. For multinational learners, achieving fluency in a new language while balancing the cognitive demands of learning new academic content can be overwhelming. Educators must employ strategic methods to support these learners, using approaches that consider both linguistic and cultural diversity. This article will explore various strategies to improve fluency among multinational learners, providing practical examples and drawing on the insights of experts in language acquisition and education.

Language fluency is fundamental for students' participation in all aspects of schooling. Without fluency, multinational learners may struggle to grasp complex academic concepts, express themselves confidently, or interact socially with their peers. Fluency allows learners to navigate classroom discussions, engage with texts, and complete writing assignments effectively. According to linguist Jim Cummins, language proficiency can be categorized into two main types: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins). BICS refers to the everyday conversational language used in social interactions, while CALP involves the more complex language required for academic tasks. For multinational learners, acquiring CALP is especially challenging, as it

involves mastering the specific vocabulary and structures needed to succeed in academic subjects like math, science, and social studies.

In addition to academic challenges, limited fluency can also lead to social isolation. When students cannot communicate effectively with their peers, they may feel left out or misunderstood, which can affect their self-esteem and motivation to learn. Therefore, improving fluency is not just an academic issue but also a social and emotional one (Cummins).

One of the most effective ways to improve fluency in multinational learners is by creating interactive learning environments. These environments encourage students to engage in meaningful communication through activities that require them to use the language in real-world contexts. For example, group work, discussions, and presentations are all excellent ways for learners to practice speaking and listening in the target language. According to educational researcher Lev Vygotsky, social interaction plays a critical role in the process of cognitive development (Vygotsky). When multinational learners interact with their peers, they are exposed to new language structures and vocabulary, which helps them improve their fluency.

An example of this approach can be seen in a classroom in New Zealand, where teachers use project-based learning to encourage language use among multinational students. In one project, students were asked to research a topic of interest and present their findings to the class. This activity not only helped students practice speaking in front of an audience but also provided opportunities for them to listen to and learn from their peers (Vygotsky).

Interactive learning environments also allow for the use of authentic materials, such as videos, podcasts, and real-life scenarios, which expose learners to how the language is used in everyday situations. This exposure is crucial for developing fluency, as it helps students understand how language functions in different contexts (Vygotsky).

#### Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction is another powerful strategy for improving fluency. Scaffolding involves providing learners with temporary support structures that help them achieve a task that they would not be able to accomplish independently. As learners become more confident and proficient, the scaffolds are gradually removed, allowing them to perform the task on their own. Educational psychologist Jerome Bruner emphasized the importance of scaffolding in the learning process, arguing that it allows learners to build on their existing knowledge while acquiring new skills (Bruner).

In the context of multinational learners, scaffolding might involve using sentence frames, graphic organizers, or visual aids to support language development. For example, during a writing activity, a teacher might provide sentence starters such as "I

believe that..." or "In my opinion..." to help students structure their ideas (Bruner). As students become more comfortable with these structures, they can begin to create more complex sentences independently.

Scaffolding is also effective in speaking activities. In a classroom in the United States, teachers often use guided discussions where students are provided with key vocabulary and phrases before engaging in a conversation. This support allows learners to participate in the discussion without feeling overwhelmed by the need to generate language on the spot. As students gain more practice, they can engage in discussions with less support, gradually improving their fluency (Bruner).

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is an approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. For multinational learners, culturally responsive teaching is essential because it helps bridge the gap between their home language and the school language. Educator Gloria Ladson-Billings argues that culturally responsive teaching not only improves academic outcomes but also validates and affirms students' cultural identities (Ladson-Billings).

In a culturally responsive classroom, teachers might incorporate multilingual resources, such as bilingual books or materials in students' native languages, to support fluency development. For example, in a primary school in Canada, teachers use bilingual picture books to help multinational learners make connections between their home language and English. This approach not only supports language development but also fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging (Ladson-Billings).

Culturally responsive teaching also involves recognizing and valuing the cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom. In one classroom in the United Kingdom, teachers asked students to share stories from their home countries as part of a language-learning activity. This allowed students to draw on their cultural backgrounds while practicing their language skills, making the learning experience more relevant and meaningful (Ladson-Billings).

#### Parental Involvement

Parents play a crucial role in supporting the language development of multinational learners. Research has shown that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, students tend to perform better academically, including in language learning (Epstein). However, many parents of multinational learners may not speak the language of instruction, which can make it difficult for them to support their children's fluency development directly.

One way to involve parents in language learning is by encouraging them to read with their children in their native language. According to educational researcher Joyce Epstein, literacy skills developed in the home language can transfer to the language of instruction, helping students become more fluent readers and writers (Epstein). In one

program in Australia, schools provided parents with bilingual books and resources to read with their children at home. This not only improved students' language skills but also strengthened the home-school connection (Epstein).

In addition to reading, parents can support language development by engaging their children in conversations about everyday topics. Even if these conversations take place in the home language, they help students develop the cognitive and linguistic skills needed to become fluent in the school language (Epstein).

### The Role of Technology

Technology offers a wide range of tools that can support fluency development in multinational learners. Educational apps, online games, and language-learning platforms provide students with additional opportunities to practice language skills outside of the classroom. For example, apps like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone allow students to practice vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation at their own pace (Gee).

James Paul Gee, a researcher in educational technology, argues that digital games and simulations can provide a low-pressure environment where learners can experiment with language and receive immediate feedback (Gee). In one classroom in Singapore, teachers use interactive language-learning apps to supplement classroom instruction. These apps allow students to practice language skills through games, quizzes, and other interactive activities, which helps build fluency in a fun and engaging way (Gee).

Technology can also support differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to tailor language-learning activities to the needs of individual students. In a classroom in Finland, teachers use language-learning software that adapts to each student's level of fluency, providing customized lessons that target specific areas for improvement (Gee).

### Conclusion

Improving fluency among multinational learners in primary schools requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive needs of students. By creating interactive learning environments, providing scaffolded instruction, embracing culturally responsive teaching, involving parents, and utilizing technology, educators can help multinational learners develop the fluency they need to succeed academically and socially. As experts like Cummins, Vygotsky, Bruner, Ladson-Billings, Epstein, and Gee have shown, supporting language development in multinational learners is not only an academic endeavor but also a social and cultural one. With the right strategies, multinational learners can achieve fluency and thrive in their educational environments.

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