FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: STRENGTHENING LITERACY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH THE SCIENCE OF READING

ARTICLE

Zygouris-Coe, V., Noor, L., Ceballos, M., et al. (2026). Educators' perspectives on the science of reading for English learners in VPK–Grade 3. Early Childhood Education Journal, 1-14.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

In this qualitative study, researchers examined educators' perspectives on the Science of Reading (SoR) for English Learners (ELs) in VPK–grade 3 and how professional learning influenced instruction. Six participants included teachers, instructional coaches, and paraprofessionals who completed job-embedded professional development through Project ELITE, a training program focused on SoR and evidence-based instruction for ELs.

Project ELITE provides participants with 72 hours of job-embedded professional learning paired with instructional coaching. The training is organized into two modules across four strands: Module 1 focuses on evidence-based literacy practices, while Module 2 emphasizes family and community engagement. Training begins in June and concludes the following May.

After training, researchers analyzed participants' perspectives to examine changes in mindset, instructional practices, and perceived student outcomes. Data sources included focus group interviews, written reflections, coaching reflections, and capstone reflections.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

Overall, educators viewed SoR as essential for early literacy development in ELs, with phonological and phonemic awareness identified as foundational skills.

Following professional learning, educators reported shifts in understanding, highlighting Scarborough's Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading as key frameworks for EL literacy instruction. They also emphasized using WIDA proficiency levels to guide scaffolding and instruction.

Findings aligned with research supporting explicit, systematic literacy instruction combined with intentional language development. The study reinforced integrating literacy domains and using proficiency-based scaffolds to ensure equitable access to grade-level literacy.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

Effective reading instruction for English Learners goes beyond phonics to include oral language, vocabulary, and background knowledge. Instruction should be explicit, scaffolded, and aligned to students' language levels, with supports like visuals, discussion, and connections to their home languages. Ongoing formative assessment helps guide instruction and meet students' needs.

Administrators can support teachers by providing ongoing professional development on the Science of Reading for English Learners. They should ensure consistency across classrooms, provide strong instructional materials, and prioritize early intervention in the primary grades. Administrators should also create time for collaboration among teachers, specialists, and EL staff to build a supportive, culturally responsive school environment where English Learners can succeed.

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