Systematic Synthetic Phonics and Bilingual Learners: *Primary school teachers' perspectives, perceptions and experiences.*

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DECLARATION FORM

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated primary school teachers' perceptions, experiences, and pedagogical adaptations when delivering Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) instruction to bilingual learners, particularly those identified as using English as an Additional Language (EAL). Against the backdrop of rising linguistic diversity in English primary schools, where over 22% of pupils use EAL, the research critically examined the suitability of SSP and the statutory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (PSC) for supporting early reading development among bilingual pupils. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated a comprehensive literature review, analysis of national PSC datasets (2011–2024), and qualitative data from semi-structured questionnaires and interviews with Key Stage 1 teachers. It is underpinned by sociocultural theory, second language acquisition (SLA), and early literacy development frameworks, including Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Cummins' BICS/CALP distinction, and the Simple View of Reading (SVR). These theoretical lenses illuminated the complex interplay between decoding proficiency, language comprehension, and the sociolinguistic realities of bilingual learners. Findings from the PSC data revealed a consistent attainment gap of 1–2% between EAL and monolingual pupils, with EAL learners also more likely to be disapplied from the assessment altogether. While some literature suggested bilingual pupils may possess enhanced phonological awareness, the data suggested that systemic and contextual factors (such as interrupted schooling, orthographic differences between languages, and limited English exposure) may hinder performance. Questionnaire responses showed that although 57% of teachers adapt SSP instruction for EAL pupils, confidence levels varied, and 29% of respondents did not consider SSP and the PSC beneficial for bilingual learners. Interview data further highlighted concerns around the rigidity of SSP schemes, the relevance of pseudowords, and the emotional impact of grouping practices that isolate EAL pupils or place them with younger peers. Teachers reported using a range of adaptive strategies, including visuals, dual-language resources, tactile materials, and small-group interventions. However, many felt constrained by the prescriptive nature of SSP programmes and the performative pressures of the PSC. The study identified a tension between policy-driven fidelity and the pedagogical flexibility required to meet diverse learner needs. It also underscored gaps in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which leave many educators underprepared to support bilingual pupils effectively. The study concluded by advocating for a more balanced and inclusive approach to early reading instruction; one that integrates SSP with rich vocabulary exposure, adaptive pedagogy, and formative assessment practices. Policy recommendations include revisiting the design and validity of the PSC for EAL learners, embedding training within ITE, and promoting adaptive teaching within SSP frameworks. Ultimately, the study calls for a reimagining of phonics pedagogy that recognises bilingual learners' linguistic assets and supports equitable literacy outcomes in increasingly multilingual classrooms.

KEYWORDS: *Adaptive Teaching, Assessment, Bilingualism Decoding, EAL Learners, Early Literacy, Key Stage 1, Linguistic Diversity, Multilingualism, Pedagogy, Phonics Screening Check (PSC), Reading Comprehension, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP)*

ACRONYMS

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GLD	Good Level of Development
GPC	Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KS	Key Stage
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSC	Phonics Screening Check
RWI	Read, Write, Inc.
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SSP	Systematic Synthetic Phonics
SVR	Simple View of Reading
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In English primary school settings, 22.8% of pupils speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), which signifies a 0.8% increase since 2024 (Collen and Duff, 2025). In terms of raw numbers, this equates to approximately 1,806,029 pupils in the English maintained school sector (DfE, 2025), of which 975,238 are children between the ages of four and eleven in primary education (The Bell Foundation, 2023). Lindorff, Strand and Au (2025) state that 10% of primary schools in England are comprised of a school population where 50% of pupils use EAL. Statistics also demonstrate a consistent, yearly rise in the number of children who use EAL in the English school system (Lindorff, Strand and Au, 2025).

Statistically, pupils using EAL are less likely to achieve age-related expectations as their monolingual peers. Lindorff, Strand and Au (2025) identify that EAL pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are 7% less likely to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) than monolingual pupils. By the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1), the attainment gap remains, with monolingual pupils outperforming their EAL peers by approximately 5% in reading and 6–7% in science, while the difference in mathematics is narrower at around 2%. By the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2), although monolingual pupils continue to lead in reading and overall performance, EAL pupils slightly outperform them in mathematics and in grammar, punctuation, and spelling, indicating a steady academic catch-up as their English language skills develop. The attainment data for EAL pupils across EYFS, KS1, and KS2 closely correlates with Cummins' (1979) Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) theory, reflecting the gradual development of

academic language proficiency over time and its delayed impact on educational outcomes.

Baker and Wright (2021) argue that language minority children appear to underachieve due to a range of factors, including socioeconomic background, home conditions, race, attendance, parental support, peer influence and teaching quality. It is important, therefore, that teachers recognise that pupils with EAL are not a homogenous group (NALDIC, 2025). Each child is unique, with their own level of English proficiency based on a range of factors, such as length of time in the country, prior exposure to English, refugee status etc. (Conteh, 2023). Given that the Teachers' Standards prescribe that qualified teachers in England must adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils, *including those with English as an Additional Language (*DfE, 2011), it is of paramount importance that staff understand the unique linguistic profile and background of each bilingual learner in their care.

According to the DfE (2023, p.4), 'pupils who find it difficult to learn to read are likely to struggle across the curriculum, since English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching'. As a result, it is vital that bilingual pupils are equipped with the skills required to become fluent and competent readers as soon as possible. Additionally, there is often uncertainty around how to incorporate pupils' first languages into classroom practice, reflecting broader inconsistencies in understanding and approach; underscoring the need for more targeted training, clearer policy frameworks, and culturally responsive teaching practices.

This paper will undertake a comprehensive literature review, examining books, articles, journals, and policy documents. It will delve into Synthetic Systematic Phonics (SSP), the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (PSC) (a statutory assessment in England that evaluates early phonics decoding skills), bilinguals' phonological awareness,

bilinguals' comprehension, and teacher preparedness to work with bilingual pupils. By exploring these areas, the paper aims to provide a detailed understanding of the current research landscape, highlighting key insights and identifying gaps to inform future educational practices and policies. Furthermore, this will present a qualitative investigation into the perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of qualified primary school teachers in delivering SSP instruction to bilingual learners, with a particular focus on pupils who use EAL. It will explore how teachers support and prepare these pupils for the Year 1 PSC. Through qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses, the study aims to capture teachers' views on the effectiveness of SSP for bilingual learners, the specific challenges these pupils may face in early reading development, and the strategies educators employ to support their literacy progress. In addition to qualitative insights from practitioners, the paper incorporates a quantitative analysis of questionnaire data and publicly available Year 1 and 2 PSC data from the DfE, covering the academic years 2011/12 to 2023/24 (excluding 2019/20 and 2020/21, when the Year 1 PSC was not administered due to the COVID-19 pandemic). This longitudinal dataset enables the identification of trends and patterns in attainment for EAL pupils compared with their peers with English as a first language (L1).

In summary, this paper will;

- critically examine the effectiveness of Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) in supporting early reading development among bilingual pupils, particularly those who speak EAL.

- investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences of delivering SSP instruction to bilingual learners through qualitative methods such as interviews and open-ended questionnaires.
- explore primary school teachers' experiences of adaptive teaching practices for bilingual pupils when preparing for the Year 1 PSC.
- analyse longitudinal attainment data from the Year 1 PSC (2011/12 to 2023/24, excluding COVID-19 pandemic years) to identify whether there are any trends and/or patterns in EAL pupils' performance compared with their monolingual peers.
- seek to identify gaps in teacher training, policy, and classroom practice regarding the integration of pupils' first languages and the development of reading comprehension skills beyond phonics.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the effectiveness and limitations of SSP as a dominant approach to early reading instruction in English primary schools, with a particular focus on its impact on pupils who use EAL. Over the last two decades, SSP has been embedded in national policy and practice, reinforced by statutory assessments such as the Year 1 PSC. While SSP is widely credited with improving decoding skills, especially among disadvantaged pupils, its suitability for bilingual learners remains contested. To explore this issue, the review is organised into five key sections. It begins by outlining the historical and policy context of SSP, including its validation by the DfE and its perceived benefits for early literacy. The second section examines the Year 1 PSC, exploring its design, rationale, and implications for bilingual learners. The third section focuses on existing literature on bilingual pupils' phonemic and phonological awareness, drawing on research that considers both the cognitive advantages and challenges associated with learning to read in an additional language. The fourth section discusses the limitations of phonics instruction taught in isolation, particularly in relation to reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Finally, the review explores teacher knowledge and pedagogical approaches, highlighting gaps in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional development that may affect the quality of support provided to linguistically diverse pupils.

By synthesising these strands, the review aims to evaluate whether current phonics-based approaches are inclusive and effective for EAL learners, and to identify areas where more responsive, evidence-informed practices may be needed. This review also serves as a foundation for the next phase of the research, which will involve gathering perspectives through participant questionnaires and analysing existing data

to further investigate the lived experiences of teachers and bilingual pupils in early reading contexts.

2.1. Systematic Synthetic Phonics

SSP is a method of teaching that explicitly teaches pupils about the relationship between phonemes (sounds of language) and graphemes (written representations of sounds). Ehri (2001) argues that phonics instruction is *systematic* in nature when children are taught all major grapheme-phoneme correspondences in a specific, pre-defined order. Sir Jim Rose's (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading* argued that SSP instruction should become a central tenet of the National Curriculum in English EYFS and primary school settings. Rose (2006, p.18) presents the view that English is harder to read and write than many alphabetic languages as 'the relationship between sounds and letters is more complex'. Therefore, fidelity to a rigorous, explicit, systematic and comprehensive SSP programme is recommended (Ehri, 2001; Rose, 2006). The Rose review marked a major turning point in early reading policy. It recommended that SSP becomes the core method for teaching reading in EYFS and KS1, leading to its formal inclusion in the National Curriculum and, more recently, the statutory requirement for schools to use validated SSP programmes. School leaders must select from (or offer a programme that is comparable in rigour) a list of validated phonics schemes. The DfE (2021) validated several SSP teaching programmes, to 'give all children a solid base on which to build' and 'help [pupils] develop the habit of reading both widely and often, for both pleasure and information'. It is noteworthy that the sixteen validation criteria make no reference to EAL learners. According to the DfE (2021), 'the programme [must] meet the needs of those at risk of falling behind, including the lowest attaining 20%' and 'programmes should provide

guidance on how to support these children'. Therefore, one would expect that validated providers offer guidance to teachers on how to support pupils for whom English is not their first language.

There are many proponents of SSP as the preferred approach to teaching early reading. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) states that SSP teaching can have a positive impact of up to +5 months progression in the development of early reading skills, especially for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not clear, however, to what extent this applies specifically to bilingual pupils. Furthermore, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is a global assessment conducted every five years that evaluates Year 5 pupils' reading comprehension and gathers contextual data to understand the factors influencing literacy outcomes across countries. Lindorff, Stiff, and Kayton (2024) report that, according to the 2021 PIRLS study, Y5 pupils in England who had exceeded the expected standard in the Year 1 PSC were more likely to achieve higher reading comprehension scores by Y5. This suggests a positive correlation between early SSP proficiency (ages 5–6) and later reading comprehension outcomes (ages 9–10). However, a note of caution must be attached to these findings, since the study includes all pupils, irrespective of their first language. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether this trend holds true for bilingual pupils.

There is also some resistance to SSP as the preferred approach. Buckingham (2024) acknowledges that the teaching of reading in England is deeply influenced by political ideologies. SSP instruction is often associated with conservative educational policies, whereas approaches such as balanced literacy or whole-language methods are typically aligned with more progressive pedagogical philosophies. Beyond the political sphere, Bowers (2019) argues that, despite its widespread adoption, there is limited

empirical evidence to support SSP as a superior method for teaching reading. He contends that the research base is often mischaracterised, with an overemphasis on grapheme-phoneme correspondences at the expense of broader linguistic instruction. Furthermore, Bowers (2019) highlights that SSP neglects morphological and meaning-based approaches, which may be more effective in supporting vocabulary and comprehension development. This is particularly important for bilingual learners. In addition to this, the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) included the first cohort of pupils in England who were taught SSP from Year 1, and this study showed no significant improvement in reading outcomes. This challenges claims that SSP has enhanced reading performance. Comparable or better results were achieved in countries using a broader range of instructional methods (Bowers, 2019).

Whereas Rose (2006) accepts that SSP, essential as it is, must form part of a *balanced* approach to reading development. However, other skills such as comprehension and fluency are also contributory factors to successful reading. This view is supported by the Education Endowment Foundation (2021), which states that 'good implementation of phonics programmes will also consider pupils' wider reading skills and will identify where pupils are struggling with aspects of reading other than decoding that might be targeted through other approaches such as the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies'. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) also acknowledges that English is a more complex language for word recognition compared to more transparent orthographies, due to its high volume of Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences (GPCs) and exception words. Guidance highlights that this complexity means it takes significantly longer for children to acquire word recognition skills in English. However, the guidance fails to consider the specific challenges faced

by bilingual pupils, who must navigate dual language acquisition and English literacy development simultaneously.

Although much of the existing literature fails to explicitly address the needs of bilingual learners, a subset of research offers a more critical perspective, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on SSP and agreeing with Rose's (2006) advocation for a more balanced and inclusive approach to early reading instruction. Paran and Wallace (2016) argue that an over-reliance on SSP leads to children who use EAL 'barking at print'. Children with EAL may also face significant challenges when engaging with texts due to limited prior knowledge of both English and their first language, as noted by Maude (2021). This lack of linguistic and contextual familiarity can hinder their ability to make sense of meaning within reading materials. As Gibbons (2009) highlights, this can lead to the reading process becoming overly abstract, making it harder for these learners to anchor new information in familiar concepts. Furthermore, learners who come from home language backgrounds other than English are unlikely to have shared the same English-mediated experiences with their families and caregivers. Therefore, a narrow focus on SSP benchmarks to assess their language development is not suitable (Chalmers, Hamish and Bennett, 2022).

2.2. The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

The Year 1 PSC is a statutory assessment that is administered by KS1 teachers of children in English primary schools. The rationale for the Year 1 PSC is to confirm whether pupils can segment, blend and decode to an appropriate standard. It will identify pupils who need extra help to improve their decoding skills (DfE, 2024). Children are provided with a booklet of 40 words that they need to segment, blend and decode to read accurately. The check is comprised of 20 real words and 20

pseudowords, increasing in difficulty as the check progresses. The pseudowords are denoted by an alien, to demonstrate that they are not real. The teacher is expected to mark the pupils' responses on an answer sheet (see Appendix 2). Typically, the pass mark for the assessment is 32/40.

After the DfE had piloted the Year 1 PSC in 2011, they commissioned an evaluation of the pilot by Coldwell et al. (2011) by the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University. By 2012, the Year 1 PSC became a statutory instrument of reading assessment in all maintained primary schools in England. Schools are required to publish their Year 1 and Year 2 PSC performance data on an annual basis. The DfE's (2023, p. 120) reading framework describes the Year 1 PSC as a 'short, light-touch assessment' that takes 'about five minutes to conduct with each pupil'. The reading framework explicitly states that the purpose of the Year 1 PSC is not to assess reading comprehension, but 'whether pupils can read accurately a selection of words that include common grapheme-phoneme correspondences' (DfE, 2023; p. 120). No reference is made to pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or those who use EAL.

Coldwell et al. (2011) found that some teachers who had carried out the Year 1 PSC with bilingual EAL learners felt that these pupils were better equipped to access the check, as their narrower vocabulary meant that they were more likely to rely on phonics as the sole approach to decode words. It also revealed that pupils using EAL were less likely to alter words than their monolingual peers, who would more frequently make plausible attempts to 'correct' words (e.g. '*sprace'* would become '*space'*). These initial findings from the pilot review have been supported by Murphy (2016) and Conteh (2023), who argue that bilingual children are adept at, and in some cases better at, *decoding* both real and pseudowords, but they are less confident in attaching

meaning to words. Clark (2014) and Clark and Glazzard (2016) warn that the Year 1 PSC may not be suitable for certain pupils, including those with SEND, EAL or high ability learners. In addition, Clark (2014) urges that further research is advised to ascertain the full impact and validity of teaching pseudowords to pupils whose mother tongue is not English. Indeed, Mistry, Malini and Sood (2020, p.57) argue that (some) EAL pupils 'may not have time to settle and feel comfortable in a setting before they are bombarded with phonics and keywords to help them assimilate into the majority language and culture as soon as possible regardless of their needs'. Baker and Wright (2021, p. 307) warn against *teaching to the test* as this 'decreases the importance of developing higher order language and thinking skills', which, in a high-stakes and data-driven educational landscape, may prove easier said than done.

2.3. Bilinguals' Phonemic and Phonological Awareness

Murphy and Franco (2016) state that *phonological awareness* is understanding the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and written forms (graphemes) of a language, and Conteh (2023) and Gillen and Hall (2003) stress that it is associated with the ability to hear, recognise and play with sounds. Given that second language learners can draw upon a repertoire of existing metalinguistic awareness, Baker and Wright (2021) argue that there is already a 'template' that can be used for cross-linguistic transfer. Phonological awareness is 'gradually and implicitly acquired through the oral development of a language' (Murphy and Franco, 2016; p.38), but the sooner this takes place, the better. Although now dated, Asher and Garcia (1969) and Oyama (1976) support this hypothesis, arguing that the earlier bilingual children are exposed to the phonological systems of two languages, the more likely that they will be able to achieve a native-like or interference-free pronunciation of both languages. Sharples (2021,

p.88) shares this view, stating that bilingual children 'generally have very good phonological awareness' which supports them in decoding new words. According to Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, it is expected that bilingual children should demonstrate phonological awareness *on a par* with their monolingual peers. Diaz and Klingler (1991) and Bialystok (2002) go one step further, arguing that bilingual children are more sensitive to, and therefore *better at*, differentiating between phonological systems between languages. However, Verhoeven and Vermeer (2006) offer a note of caution that bilingual children learning an additional language in school may develop their L2 phonological awareness more slowly, as they are likely to have had less exposure to it. Later research from Bialystok (2012) partially contradicts earlier findings, stating that additional factors can influence a bilingual's phonological awareness. Factors such as language similarity (e.g. Spanish and Portuguese vs Spanish and Mandarin), structure and orthography play a significant role in metalinguistic awareness (Lenters, 2004, Grabe, 2009; Bialystok, 2012; Wren and Hambly, 2012). The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) argues that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (of which some may be bilingual) may not develop phonological awareness at the same rate as other pupils. This is because they have had less exposure to spoken language and literature at home.

2.4. Bilinguals' Reading Comprehension

NALDIC (2006), Grabe (2009), Hardy (2015), Murphy (2016), Sharples (2021) and Conteh (2023) warn against the overreliance on one single approach to reading. Although there is a growing bank of evidence to suggest that SSP is beneficial in supporting young bilinguals to learn the mechanics of reading (through decoding, segmenting and blending), teachers must facilitate opportunities to develop reading

comprehension skills. Gough and Tunmer's (1986) seminal theory of The Simple View of Reading (SVR) proposes that reading comprehension is the product of two essential components; *decoding*, which is the ability to translate written symbols into spoken sounds, and *language comprehension*, which involves understanding spoken language including vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge. They propose that if either component is weak or absent, overall reading comprehension will be impaired. Developing reading and writing skills is essential for EAL learners as part of CALP. If pupils do not achieve this, then they are likely to have trouble in accessing the wider curriculum. Phonics supports rapid word recognition, but decoding alone does not guarantee comprehension; especially for learners lacking sufficient grammar and vocabulary in English (Saunders, 2015). Murphy (2016) argues that relying solely on phonics instruction overlooks a crucial factor consistently highlighted in research on EAL learners' reading development — the importance of vocabulary knowledge. To effectively support EAL pupils' reading comprehension, greater emphasis must be placed on expanding their vocabulary. Hardy (2015, p.13) argues that 'limited lexical knowledge impedes comprehension and the ability to decode does not help [bilingual children to understand what they have read]'. The literature is clear in its recommendation, therefore, that bilingual children receive greater exposure to rich vocabulary and language structures and more opportunities to practise and communicate in a meaningful way. Joliffe, Waugh and Gill (2022) support this, offering a note of caution that the ability to decode and blend sounds using the SSP approach does not necessarily improve reading *comprehension* or foster a love of reading. Instead, Joliffe et al. (2022) argue that SSP instruction simply helps to develop a child's awareness of the relationship between written symbols and their sounds. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) state that pupils must be explicitly taught

comprehension, vocabulary and spelling to supplement the teaching of SSP. Therefore, the use of visuals and realia, as part of a dual-coding approach, would be useful in helping early bilinguals to attach meaning to unfamiliar words (Hardy, 2015; Waugh et al., 2015). However, the methods recommended in SSP, and particularly in preparation for the Year 1 PSC, discourage this approach, as pupils are expected to rely solely on their decoding skills without visual cues.

2.5. Pedagogical Approaches and Teacher Understanding

A post-pandemic survey of 491 primary school teachers highlighted that many staff had noticed a disproportionately negative impact on EAL pupils, with 'language loss' being cited as a common issue by 74% of primary teachers (Scott, 2021). Furthermore, the study identified that '15% of primary school teachers reported that their pupils using EAL had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class' (Scott, 2021, p.7). Against this backdrop, research suggests that teacher knowledge and understanding of bilingual-centred pedagogies are lacking. According to Starbuck (2018) and Foley et al. (2019), a lack of confidence in supporting EAL children stems from inconsistent coverage in the ITE phase. Fewer than half of teachers who have qualified since 2004 have consistently rated their ITE as 'good or better' in preparing them to teach pupils with EAL (Davies, 2012; Starbuck, 2018). Geographical location played a significant role in the provision of EAL training during ITE, according to Davies (2012, p. 14), as 'some providers in urban areas offered short courses or modules as an EAL subject specialism although these were rarer in low linguistic diversity contexts', and initial recommendations were made to ensure that EAL pedagogy played a more prominent role in ITE. Davies (2012) proposed that six key strategies can support EAL pupils: connecting new learning to their prior knowledge, valuing and

using their first language, providing rich visual and contextual support, encouraging early and active language use, drawing attention to how language works within content, and promoting independence through feedback and strategy development. Foley et al. (2019) build on these recommendations, making pertinent links between EAL pedagogy and the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF). It is their belief that student teachers must be equipped to support EAL pupils during their ITE, given the scale of linguistic diversity in schools and the importance of fostering inclusive, equitable teaching practices (Foley et al., 2019).

However, it is not only trainee teachers that require training in supporting EAL pupils. Wardman (2012) highlights that even experienced teachers face significant challenges in supporting EAL learners effectively, largely due to a lack of formal training in EAL pedagogy, geographical location, and limited access to ongoing professional development. This gap in preparation leads many teachers to rely on personal experience rather than structured, evidence-based strategies (Wardman, 2012; Starbuck, 2018). Urban-based teachers tend to exhibit greater confidence in teaching EAL pupils, largely due to more frequent interaction with EAL learners and increased access to relevant CPD and resources (Starbuck, 2019).

According to the DfE (2024), schools must take an approach to SSP teaching 'that is rigorous, systematic and used with fidelity'. The notion of rigid fidelity contradicts much of the research that underpins EAL pedagogy. While such fidelity offers a structured foundation for early literacy, it may inadvertently constrain the pedagogical flexibility required to meet the diverse linguistic needs of learners with EAL and can restrict teachers' capacity to tailor instruction.

2.6. Conclusion

The literature highlights varied perspectives on the DfE's promotion of SSP as the dominant model for early reading instruction. While SSP may be effective in supporting bilingual pupils' English acquisition during their initial schooling years, scholars caution against its overuse. The consensus favours a balanced approach, integrating SSP within a wider array of reading strategies. Excessive reliance on SSP may limit bilingual learners' curriculum access by overlooking the development of comprehension and meaning-making skills. Consistent with Hardy's (2015) argument that EAL reading instruction requires both structured phonics and rich opportunities for understanding, there is evidence to support a more pedagogically inclusive framework.

Based on the varied linguistic backgrounds and exposure levels of bilingual pupils, that Year 1 PSC data reflects a degree of heterogeneity in outcomes. Specifically, the indicates that children with early, sustained, and supportive exposure to both languages tend to demonstrate stronger phonological awareness and decoding proficiency. Conversely, those from disadvantaged contexts, with limited access to literacy-rich environments or with linguistically divergent language pairings, can demonstrate slower phonological development, resulting in lower scores.

This research shall seek to identify whether educators currently employ adaptive teaching approaches to reconcile programme fidelity with the realities of increasingly multilingual classrooms. The structured emphasis on SSP in the Year 1 PSC may inadvertently disadvantage bilingual pupils. While SSP supports early decoding, it may not fully address the broader linguistic needs of bilingual children, particularly those with disrupted language development or limited exposure. Limited coverage of EAL pedagogy within ITE leaves many teachers, both new and experienced, underprepared, and access to ongoing CPD remains inconsistent. There is also evidence to suggest that

there is value in providing early reading structure through SSP, while also acknowledging concerns about its ability to meet the needs of EAL learners. The literature highlights gaps in ITE training, challenges in adapting SSP to diverse classrooms, and a desire for greater flexibility and targeted professional development.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY REVIEW

To explore the complex and multifaceted experiences of primary school teachers working with bilingual learners within the framework of SSP, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach comprising semi-structured questionnaires, opt-in interviews, and the analysis of existing Year 1 and Year 2 PSC quantitative datasets. This study is underpinned by a theoretical framework that draws on sociocultural theory, second language acquisition (SLA), early literacy development, inclusive education, and assessment theory. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for exploring how SSP and the PSC are experienced by bilingual pupils, and how teachers perceive and adapt their practices in response. Central to this framework is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which argues that learning is a social process shaped by interaction and the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory is particularly relevant to bilingual pupils, whose acquisition of English literacy is influenced by their engagement with peers, teachers, and instructional materials. SSP, as a structured and scripted approach to phonics instruction, may not always align with the individual ZPDs of EAL learners, especially if their oral language development in English is still emerging. Understanding how teachers navigate this tension is a key focus of the study. The framework also incorporates SLA theory, particularly Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP. This distinction highlights the gap between conversational fluency and the more complex language skills required for academic success. EAL pupils may appear verbally proficient while still struggling with the phonological and syntactic demands of SSP and the Year 1 PSC. SLA theory helps to contextualise the challenges these learners face and informs the analysis of teacher perceptions and adaptations. In addition, the study is grounded

in theories of early literacy development, including the SVR (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), which separates decoding from language comprehension. This model is particularly useful for evaluating the effectiveness of SSP and the Year 1 PSC, as it allows for an understanding of how bilingual learners may excel in phonics decoding while facing difficulties in comprehension due to limited English proficiency. The study also engages with policy-driven frameworks such as the Rose Review (2006), and the 2014 National Curriculum which established SSP as the central approach to early reading instruction in England.

Together, these theoretical strands offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the intersection of phonics instruction, assessment and bilingualism in English primary classrooms.

3.1. Context of Study

This study is situated in a small region of the North-West of England, with participants drawn from the Merseyside and Lancashire areas. It explored teacher perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of SSP and the Year 1 PSC when working with bilingual pupils, specifically those identified as EAL learners. The rationale for this research is grounded in several timely and pressing factors. The number of EAL pupils in UK schools is steadily increasing, with projections suggesting continued growth. Following recent changes in government, potential shifts in education policy may be on the horizon, making advocacy for EAL pupils particularly relevant. This study also sought to identify whether there are training needs for ITE providers, current classroom teachers, EAL leads, and English leads, especially in relation to phonics instruction and assessment.

Using a semi-structured questionnaire, the research aimed to determine:

- whether teachers feel confident in delivering SSP to EAL learners.
- whether, and how, staff adapt their teaching practices to meet these pupils' needs.
- what barriers EAL pupils face when learning through SSP and accessing the Year 1 PSC.
- the range of languages present in participants' classrooms.
- perceptions of teachers as to whether SSP and the Year 1 PSC are beneficial to the early reading development of bilingual children.

Additionally, the study incorporated analysis of existing Year 1 and Year 2 PSC datasets from the DfE to compare outcomes between monolingual and EAL pupils. A key objective was to test assumptions found in the literature, including the hypothesis that bilingual learners perform as well as, or better than, their monolingual peers in phonemic and phonological awareness.

3.2. Justification for Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method, triangulated methodological approach, integrating quantitative analysis of national datasets, data from teacher questionnaires and interviews, and a comprehensive review of existing literature. This strategy was chosen to enhance the validity, reliability, and depth of the research findings. Triangulation is a well-established research strategy that allows for the cross-verification of data from multiple sources. Mears (2021) argues that drawing on both numerical and narrative data, a mixed-methods approach can reduce the potential for

bias and provide a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand. Each data source contributed a distinct perspective: PSC datasets offered large-scale, national evidence of pupil performance; teacher responses provided rich, contextual insights into classroom practices and challenges; and the literature review situated these findings within broader theoretical and policy frameworks.

The use of DfE PSC datasets was particularly important for testing assumptions found in existing research, such as the hypothesis that bilingual learners perform as well as, or better than, their monolingual peers in phonemic and phonological awareness. These datasets allowed for comparative analysis across pupil groups, helping to identify patterns and trends that may not be visible at the classroom level. This quantitative component provided a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of SSP and the Year 1 PSC in supporting early reading development among EAL pupils.

Complementing this, the quantitative and qualitative data gathered through semi-structured questionnaires and follow-up interviews with teachers offered a nuanced understanding of practitioner experiences. These instruments were designed to explore teacher confidence in delivering SSP to EAL learners, the extent to which teaching practices are adapted to meet diverse linguistic needs, and the perceived barriers that bilingual pupils face in accessing phonics instruction and assessment. Additionally, teachers were asked to reflect on the range of languages present in their classrooms and to share their views on the appropriateness and impact of SSP and the Year 1 PSC for bilingual learners. This qualitative dimension was essential for capturing the lived realities of teaching in linguistically diverse settings, which cannot be fully understood through quantitative data alone.

Finally, the literature review served as both a foundation and a point of comparison for the study findings. It helped to identify gaps in current knowledge, informed the design of research instruments, and provided a theoretical lens through which to interpret the data. By engaging with current debates and policy developments, particularly considering potential shifts following recent changes in government, the study ensures its relevance to both academic and school-teacher audiences.

In sum, the triangulated methodology was justified by the need to explore a multifaceted educational issue from multiple angles. It enabled the study to produce findings that are contextually relevant and theoretically informed, thereby contributing meaningfully to discussions around phonics instruction, assessment, and support for EAL learners in English primary schools.

3.3. Population and Sample

Using la Velle's (2024, p. 367) belief that 'teachers are also researchers of their own practice', current and/or former EYFS and KS1 teachers were selected for inclusion in the study because of their perceived benefits and relevance. Their dual role as educators and participants allowed them to provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and innovations in the classroom. This perspective was crucial for grounding the research in real-world experiences. The population and sample for this study were selected based on specific criteria to ensure that data and findings were relevant and insightful. Participants were required to have taught SSP and have experience in preparing children for, and administering, the Year 1 PSC. Additionally, participants needed to have experience working with EAL bilingual pupils. This rationale for selecting interviews as a method of data collection was based on Mears'

(2021) view that asking open-ended questions can effectively explore participants' experiences, understandings, and challenges.

3.4. Questionnaires

The semi-structured questionnaire (see Fig. 1) used in this study was designed to gather comprehensive data on primary school teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding SSP and bilingual learners. The rationale for this instrument was rooted in the need to balance structured data collection with the flexibility to capture individual nuance. The questionnaire was divided into thematic sections that aligned with the research aims and allowed for both quantitative analysis and qualitative insight. The initial section collected demographic and professional background information, including qualifications, qualified teaching experience, and roles within the school. These data points allowed for the contextualisation of responses and to identify patterns across different experience levels and responsibilities. Questions about SSP teaching and preparation for the Year 1 PSC (especially in relation to bilingual pupils) helped establish the relevance and depth of participants' engagement with the topic. The following section explored institutional practices, specifically whether the school follows a DfE validated SSP programme, and which scheme(s) is/are used. This provided insight into the consistency and fidelity of phonics instruction, which may influence teacher perceptions and pupil outcomes. The questionnaire captured the range of home languages spoken by pupils using EAL, offering a snapshot of the linguistic landscape in which SSP is being delivered. The questionnaire probed whether, and how, teachers modify their phonics teaching for bilingual learners. By asking for specific examples, the questionnaire encouraged reflection and provided qualitative data on pedagogical strategies. This was complemented by the participant confidence section,

which used a numerical scale to quantify teachers' self-assessed ability to meet the needs of bilingual learners in SSP contexts. This data was analysed statistically and compared across variables such as experience or school approach. The final section invited teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of SSP and the Year 1 PSC for bilingual pupils. Open-ended responses here yielded rich qualitative data that reflected personal beliefs, professional judgments, and contextual factors. Finally, the last question facilitated the second phase of data collection by identifying participants who were open to follow-up interviews. This opt-in model respected ethical considerations and supported deeper exploration of themes emerging from the questionnaire.

Fig. 1 – Questionnaire questions

Participant Experience	*Do you hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS)?* *How many years of post-QTS teaching experience do you have?* *Which Phase/Key Stage and year group do you currently teach?* *Do you have any additional roles in school?* *Do you have experience of teaching Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP)?* *Do you have experience of preparing pupils for the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check?* *Do you have experience of preparing bilingual pupils, who use English as an Additional Language (EAL), for the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (PSC)?*
School Approach	*Does your school follow one of the Department of Education's (DfE) Validated SSP programmes?* *Which of the DfE's validated schemes does your school use?*
Linguistic Diversity	*Of the pupils using EAL, which other languages do they speak? (Select all that apply)*
Adaptive Teaching	*Do you adapt your SSP teaching for bilingual pupils?* *What might these adaptations look like? Try to be as specific as possible.*
Participant Confidence	*On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that you can effectively meet the learning needs of bilingual learners of SSP?*

Participant Perceptions	*Do you feel that SSP and the Year 1 PSC is beneficial in helping bilingual children to learn how to read?* *Please state why you think this is (not) the case.*
Interview Willingness	*Would you be prepared to have a follow-up meeting of approximately 20 minutes, via Microsoft Teams or in person, to discuss in greater detail some of the answers that you provided and explore further?*

3.5. Interviews

The follow-up interviews in this study served as a critical qualitative component designed to enrich and deepen the data collected through the semi-structured questionnaire. These interviews offered participants the opportunity to elaborate on their initial responses, share personal experiences, and reflect more fully on their professional practices and beliefs regarding SSP and bilingual learners. This approach was particularly valuable as it involved the exploration of pedagogical strategies and the linguistic diversity of pupils. While a questionnaire provides structured insights into teacher experiences, interviews allowed for a more nuanced exploration of themes that could not be fully captured through questionnaire responses alone. The interviews were intentionally semi-structured to maintain consistency across participants while allowing flexibility for individual narratives to emerge. This format supported the identification of common patterns and divergent viewpoints, enabling the researcher to explore how teachers interpret and respond to the challenges of delivering SSP to pupils who use EAL. By inviting participants to expand on their questionnaire answers, the interviews fostered a space where teachers could articulate the reasoning behind their practices, describe adaptations in detail, and reflect on the perceived effectiveness of phonics instruction for bilingual learners. Importantly, the interviews also served a 'triangulation' function within the broader research design. They allowed me to cross-reference and validate findings from multiple sources, including questionnaire data,

relevant assessment outcomes (Year 1 and Year 2 PSC data) and existing literature. This triangulation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in multiple forms of evidence.

Furthermore, the opt-in nature of the interviews respected ethical considerations by allowing participants to choose whether to engage more deeply with the research. This voluntary model supported participant agency and ensured that those who contributed to the interview phase were doing so with informed consent and a willingness to share their experiences. The interviews were designed to be approximately 20 minutes and were offered via Microsoft Teams or in person, ensuring flexibility and accessibility for busy professionals.

3.6. Ethics

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed when designing the research process. All participants were provided with a clear information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, what their participation involves, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymised during transcription and securely stored in accordance with GDPR regulations. No identifying information was included in any published findings. Ethical approval was granted by the UWTSD university ethics committee. Particular care was taken to minimise any potential discomfort or harm, with all questions designed to be non-judgmental and supportive. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives offered. These measures ensure that the research was conducted responsibly, with full consideration for the rights, privacy, and wellbeing of all participants.

3.7. Reliability / Validity / Transferability

While this study was designed to offer valuable insights into teacher perspectives on SSP and the PSC in relation to EAL learners, several limitations may affect its reliability, validity, and transferability. One such consideration was the geographic scope of the research, which was limited to a small region of the North-West of England, specifically Merseyside and Lancashire. These areas, particularly Lancashire, are known for having relatively high proportions of EAL pupils, and some participants may work in schools that are not representative of the wider national demographic and linguistic patterns. While this ensured relevance to the research focus, it may also have introduced a degree of bias, as the findings may reflect the experiences of schools that are more accustomed to working with bilingual learners and potentially better suited to support them. Consequently, the study may not capture the challenges faced by teachers in schools with fewer EAL pupils, where support structures may be less developed and staff may have less experience in adapting SSP delivery to meet diverse linguistic needs. Drawing on Bassey's (2001) concept of 'fuzzy generalisation', this study examined teacher perceptions of SSP teaching with the aim of generating contextually rich and relatable insights that may inform practice in educational settings, rather than seeking universal generalisability. Another factor that may influence the reliability and validity of the findings is the sample size. While this mixed-methods approach allowed for both breadth and depth, a relatively small sample may limit the consistency and generalisability of the results. Teacher responses, particularly in the qualitative phase, were inherently subjective and may vary depending on individual experiences, school contexts, and levels of training. This variability can affect the reliability of the data, especially if common themes do not emerge across a small number of interviews. Transferability is also a concern, as the findings may not be

easily applicable to other regions of England, particularly those with different demographic profiles or educational priorities. Schools in rural or less diverse areas, for example, may face distinct challenges in supporting EAL learners that are not reflected in this study. Furthermore, school policies and access to professional development opportunities may vary widely, influencing how SSP and the Year 1 PSC are implemented and perceived.

To mitigate these issues, the study clearly acknowledged its contextual limitations and recommended further research in contrasting regions and school settings. It also emphasised its exploratory nature, aiming to generate insights and hypotheses that can inform broader investigations into phonics instruction for bilingual learners.

3.8. Conclusion

This study investigated primary school teachers' experiences with bilingual learners, specifically those using EAL, within the context of SSP and the PSC. It used a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured questionnaires, opt-in interviews, and analysis of PSC datasets. The methodology was informed by sociocultural theory, SLA, early literacy development, inclusive education, and assessment theory. Key theoretical influences included Vygotsky's ZPD and Cummins' BICS/CALP distinction, which helped contextualise the challenges EAL pupils may face in phonics instruction. The study was based in Merseyside and Lancashire and aimed to explore teacher confidence, instructional adaptations, perceived barriers, and the effectiveness of SSP and the Year 1 PSC for EAL learners. The questionnaire gathered demographic data, teaching experiences, school practices, linguistic diversity, and teacher perceptions, while interviews provided deeper qualitative insights into

pedagogical strategies and beliefs. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, GDPR compliance, and voluntary participation, with approval granted by UWTSD. Limitations may include the regional scope and small sample size, which could have affected reliability and transferability, as findings may reflect well-supported schools and not be applicable to less diverse or rural settings. To address this, the study recommended further research in varied contexts and emphasised its exploratory nature. Triangulation of data sources enhanced validity and depth, with PSC datasets offering national performance insights, questionnaires capturing classroom-level experiences, and interviews providing rich narratives. The study aimed to generate empirically grounded, contextually rich, and theoretically informed findings that contribute to discussions on phonics instruction and support for bilingual learners in primary schools in England.

CHAPTER 4 – PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1. Existing PSC Datasets (2011 – 2024)

An in-depth analysis of the DfE database from academic years 2011/12 to 2023/24 (excluding 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to COVID-19 disruptions) revealed consistent patterns in attainment in the Year 1 PSC when comparing pupils with English as a first language (L1) with those with EAL (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 – Phonics Screening Check Data 2011-2024 (English L1 v EAL)

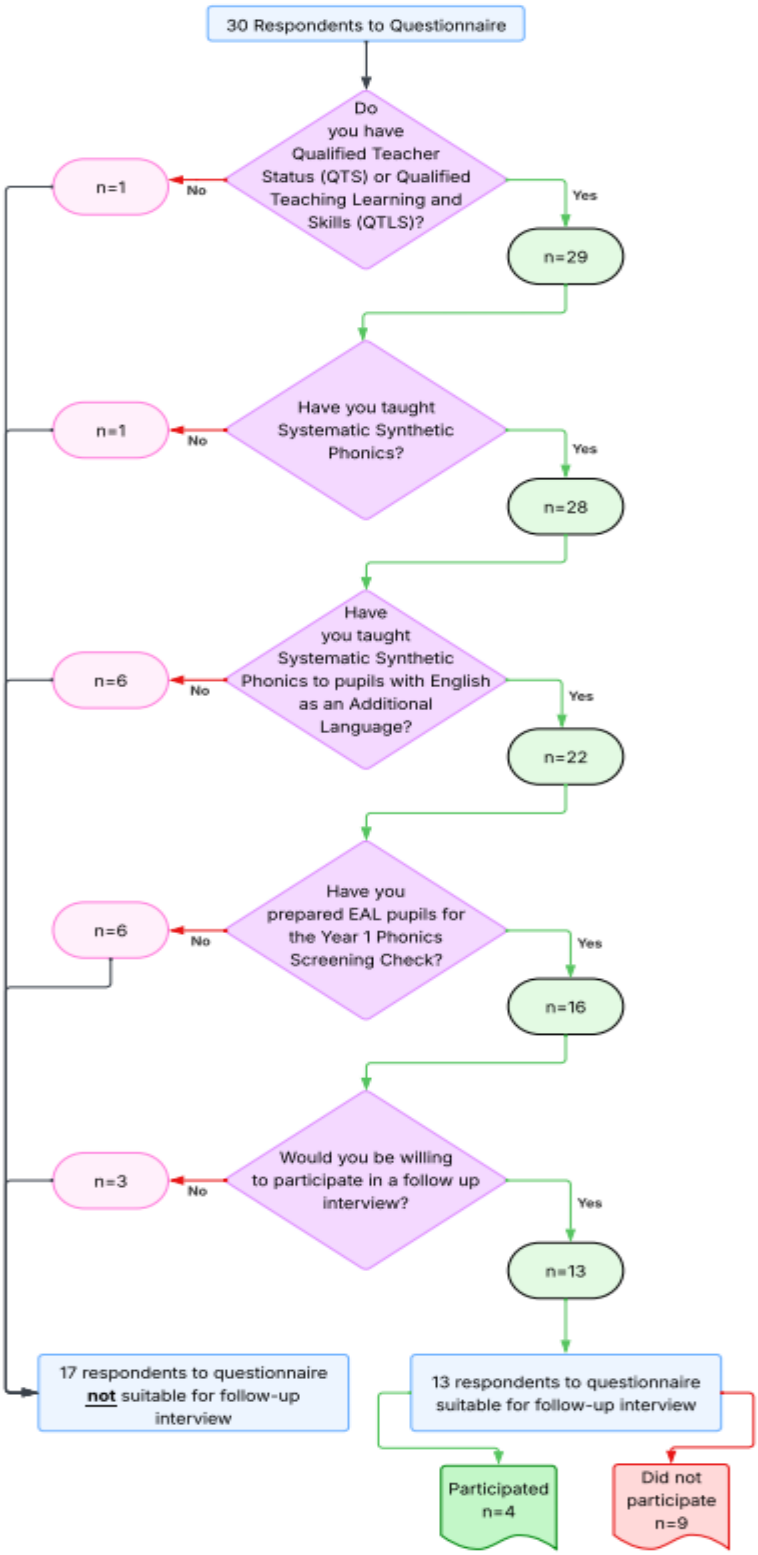
	Pass in Year 1		Pass in Year 2		Disapplied Y1		Disapplied Y2	
	L1	EAL	L1	EAL	L1	EAL	L1	EAL
2011/12	58%	58%	x	x	1%	**2%**	x	x
2012/13	69%	69%	x	x	1%	**3%**	x	x
2013/14	75%	**74%**	x	x	1%	**3%**	x	x
2014/15	77%	**76%**	x	x	1%	**2%**	x	x
2015/16	81%	**80%**	92%	**90%**	1%	**2%**	1%	**2%**
2016/17	82%	**81%**	92%	**91%**	1%	**2%**	1%	**2%**
2017/18	83%	**82%**	92%	**91%**	1%	**2%**	1%	**2%**
2018/19	82%	82%	92%	**91%**	1%	**2%**	1%	**2%**
2019/20	COVID-19							
2020/21	COVID-19							
2021/22	76%	**75%**	88%	**86%**	2%	**3%**	2%	2%
2022/23	80%	**78%**	89%	**87%**	2%	**3%**	2%	2%
2023/24	81%	**80%**	90%	**88%**	2%	**3%**	2%	2%

The PSC, administered at the end of Year 1 and again at the end of Year 2 for pupils who do not meet the expected standard initially, serves as a key early indicator of phonics proficiency and foundational reading skills. Across all available years, there

was no instance in which EAL pupils outperformed their L1 peers by the end of Year 1. In three academic years, the pass rates for both groups were equal, suggesting occasional parity in early phonics acquisition. However, most years (seven in total), L1 pupils outperformed EAL pupils by a margin of 1%, and in 2022/23, this gap increased to 2%. These differences, while numerically small, are consistent and statistically meaningful given the large sample size involved in this national statutory assessment. By the end of Year 2, when pupils have had an additional year of instruction and support, the trend remained unchanged: L1 pupils outperformed EAL pupils every year. The attainment gap at this stage fluctuates between 1% and 2%, indicating that while EAL pupils do make progress, they do not fully close the gap with their L1 peers by the end of Key Stage 1. This persistent disparity suggests that language background continues to influence phonics attainment even after extended exposure to English instruction. Furthermore, the data showed that pupils with EAL were statistically more likely to be disapplied from the PSC altogether. Disapplication typically occurs when a pupil is deemed unable to access the assessment, often due to limited English proficiency or other educational needs. The higher disapplication rate among EAL pupils raises important questions about equitable access to assessment and the adequacy of support structures in place for these learners. Taken together, these findings highlighted a consistent, if modest, attainment gap between L1 and EAL pupils in early reading development as measured by the Year 1 PSC. They underscored the need for targeted interventions and sustained language support for EAL learners, particularly in the early years of schooling, to ensure all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed in foundational literacy.

4.2. Profile of Participants

Fig. 3 – Participants Flowchart



A total of 30 participants self-selected to take part in the semi-structured questionnaire, which aimed to explore educators' experiences with SSP and its application with EAL learners. Of these, 29 participants held either Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), meeting the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study. One participant, who did not hold either qualification, was excluded from the data analysis.

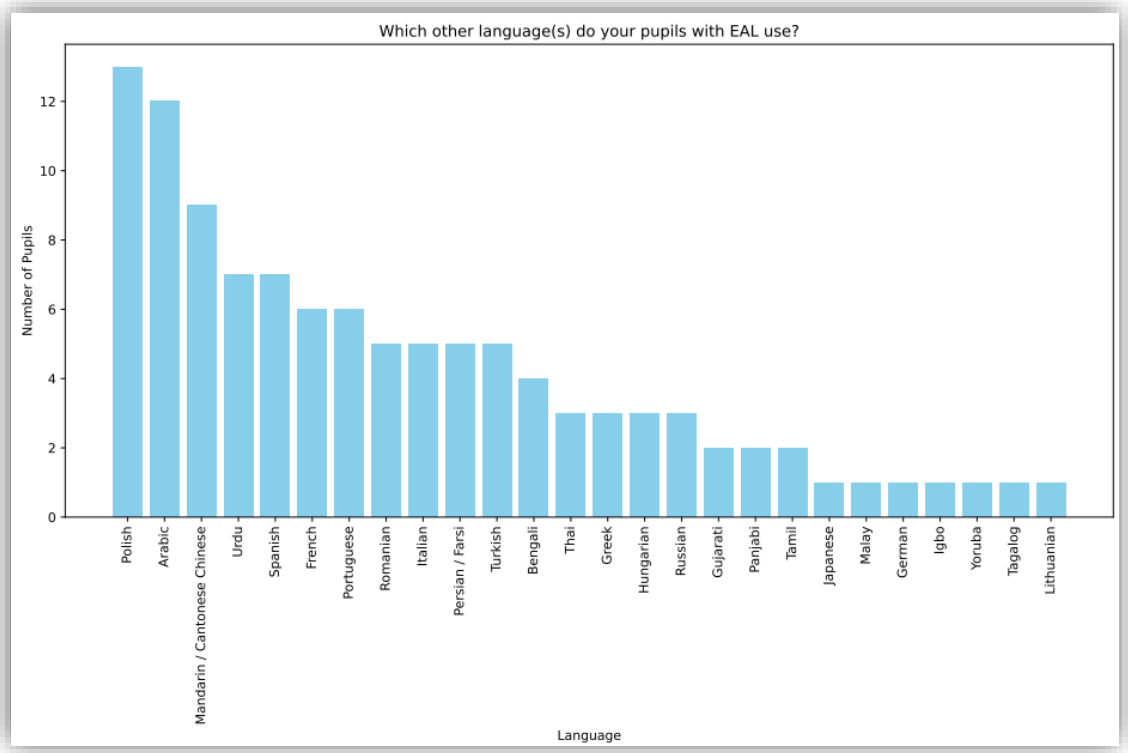
Among the 29 eligible respondents, 15 were currently employed in KS1 settings, with 9 respondents teaching in Year 1 and 6 respondents teaching in Year 2. An additional 6 participants were working within the EYFS, comprising of 2 in Nursery and 4 in Reception. 4 respondents were teaching in KS2, while the remaining 4 were engaged in roles outside mainstream primary education, including Higher Education, educational consultancy, and international teaching contexts. This distribution reflected a diverse range of professional experiences and educational settings. Of the 29 eligible respondents, 28 reported having experience teaching SSP. One participant indicated no such experience and was therefore excluded from subsequent analysis related to phonics instruction. Among the 28 remaining participants, 22 had specific experience teaching SSP to EAL learners, while 6 did not. This distinction was important for understanding the extent to which SSP strategies are adapted or applied in linguistically diverse classrooms. 19 of the 22 respondents expressed a willingness to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. However, 6 of these were excluded from the interview sample due to a lack of direct experience in preparing EAL pupils for the Year 1 PSC. As a result, the viable interview pool was a maximum of 13 participants who met all inclusion criteria for the second phase of the study.

4.3. Questionnaire Responses

4.3.1. Language Combinations

To better understand the linguistic contexts and potential influences on pupils' language development, participants were asked the question 'Which other languages do your pupils using EAL use?' The pupils using EAL in the sample used a diverse array of 26 different languages, with Polish, Arabic and Mandarin/Cantonese Chinese being the most prevalent. This linguistic diversity included both alphabetic and non-alphabetic languages, showcasing a variety of writing systems and orthographies. The sample represented languages from various geographical regions, including Africa, Asia and Europe, highlighting the rich linguistic backgrounds of the pupils. Additionally, some languages, such as Lithuanian, Tagalog, Yoruba, Igbo, German, Malay and Japanese were represented by only one pupil each, further emphasising the wide range of linguistic diversity within the group. Respondents were primarily working in the north-west of England, although some were from other parts of the UK and international locations. It was necessary to identify the range of languages to triangulate participants' responses with the research claiming that language structure and orthography play a significant role in metalinguistic awareness (Lenters, 2004; Grabe, 2009; Bialystok, 2012; Wren and Hambly, 2012).

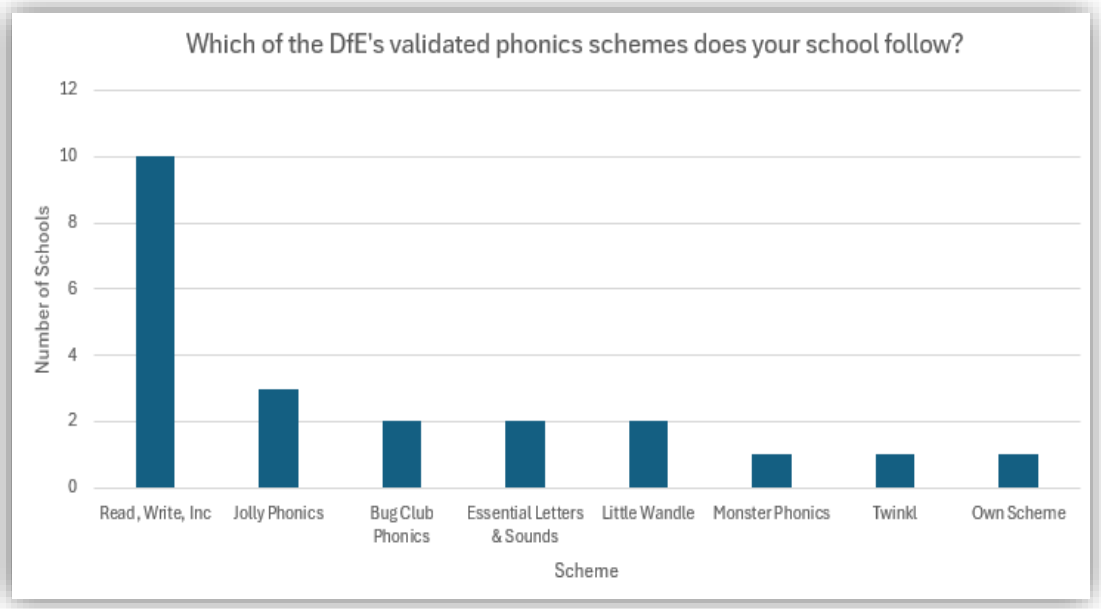
Fig. 4 – ***Of the pupils using EAL, which other languages do they speak? (Select all that apply)***



4.3.2. Validated Scheme Use

It was necessary to identify which of the DfE's validated SSP schemes schools were using to investigate the extent to which, if at all, these programmes are cognisant of the needs of bilingual pupils. Of the participants surveyed, 6 did not specify which phonics scheme they used and have, therefore, been excluded from the analysis; although understanding the reasons behind these omissions could offer valuable insights into either gaps in awareness, confidence in reporting, or the use of non-standard approaches. This left 22 valid responses, providing a more accurate representation of the DfE validated SSP programmes currently in use. The data revealed that Read, Write, Inc. (RWI) was overwhelmingly the most represented scheme, used by nearly half of respondents. Interestingly, one participant reported following a bespoke approach, indicating a tailored solution outside the standard validated options.

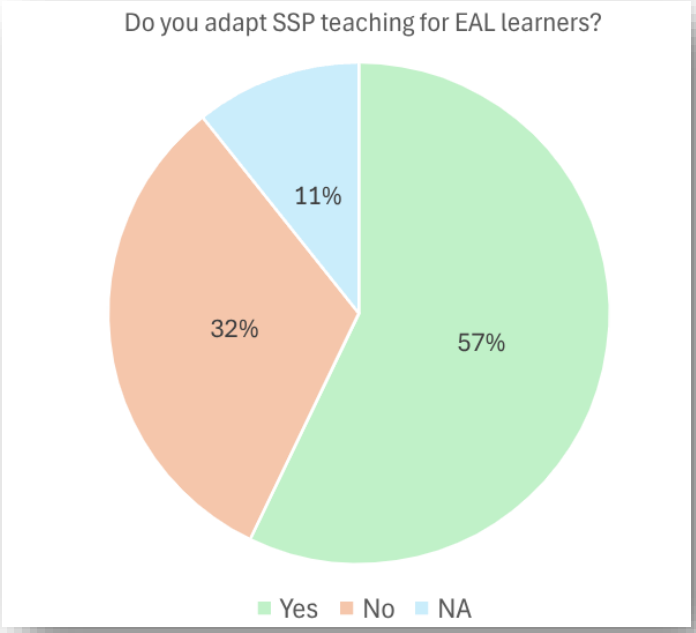
Fig. 5 – ***Which of the DfE's validated SSP schemes does your school follow?***



4.3.3. Adaptive SSP Teaching for EAL

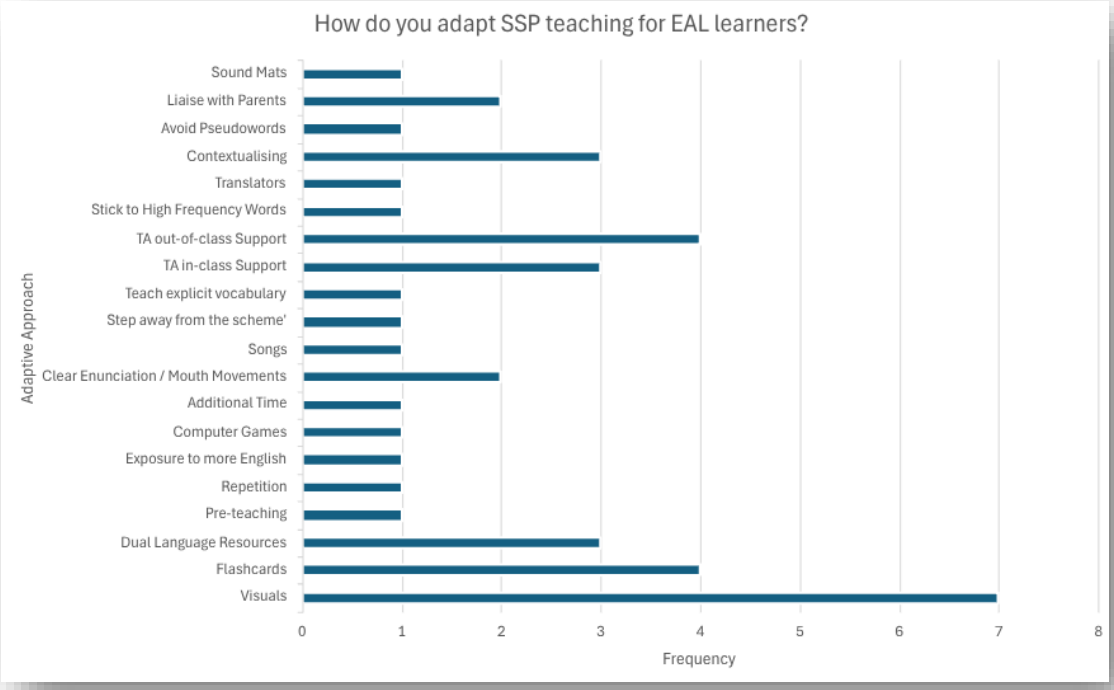
The purpose of this question was to determine whether teachers adapt SSP teaching and to identify the nature and scope of these adaptations. In response to this question, 57% of participants stated they *do* adapt their SSP teaching to cater for EAL learners, whereas 32% *do not*. An additional 11% declined to respond to the question. Phonics teaching is highly prescriptive, with teachers encouraged to follow the *Review, Teach, Practise, Apply* model, or a scheme-specific variant of this approach.

Fig. 6 – ***Do you adapt SSP teaching for EAL learners?***



The adaptations cited included the use of various physical resources such as sound mats, visuals, flashcards, dual-language resources and computer games. Additionally, adult support was provided through in-class and out-of-class interventions by teaching assistants and school-employed translators, ensuring that students received the necessary help to understand and engage with the material. Respondents also focused on the most pertinent elements by avoiding pseudowords, contextualising words, sticking to high-frequency words and occasionally stepping away from the chosen scheme altogether to better meet the needs of their students. Various teaching techniques were employed, including the use of songs, repetition, additional time, pre-teaching, explicit vocabulary teaching, and clear enunciation with visible mouth movements.

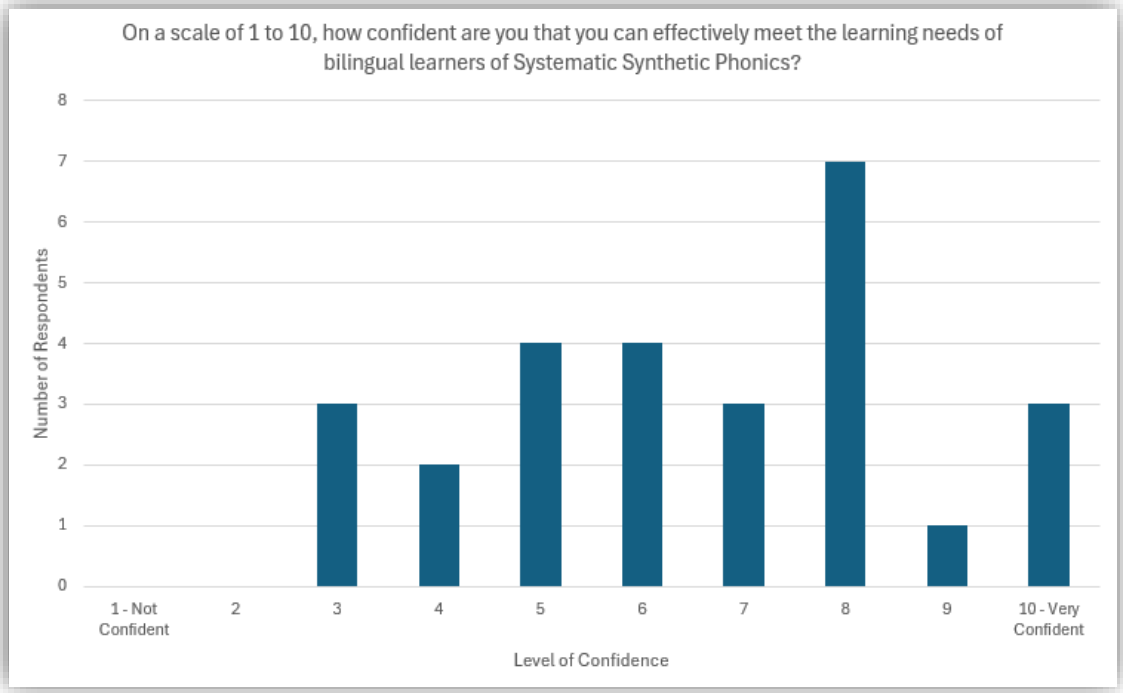
Fig. 7 – ***How do you adapt SSP teaching for EAL learners?***



4.3.4. Teacher Confidence

The purpose of this question was to gauge teachers' confidence in their ability to effectively meet the needs of bilingual learners within the context of SSP. The data suggested that, overall, more teachers felt confident than not, with the most common response being a confidence rating of 8 out of 10, selected by 26% of participants. The mean confidence score was 6.55, indicating a generally positive trend, with many teachers feeling relatively assured in their practice. However, approximately one-third of participants rated their confidence at 5 or below, suggesting a significant proportion of teachers who feel less secure in supporting bilingual learners through SSP. Reassuringly, no participants selected the lowest confidence ratings of 1 or 2. These findings point to a mixed picture, where confidence levels vary considerably across the teaching population. To better understand the factors influencing these levels of confidence, subsequent semi-structured interviews explored the reasons behind teachers' self-assessments.

Fig. 8 – ***On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that you can effectively meet the learning needs of bilingual learners of SSP?***

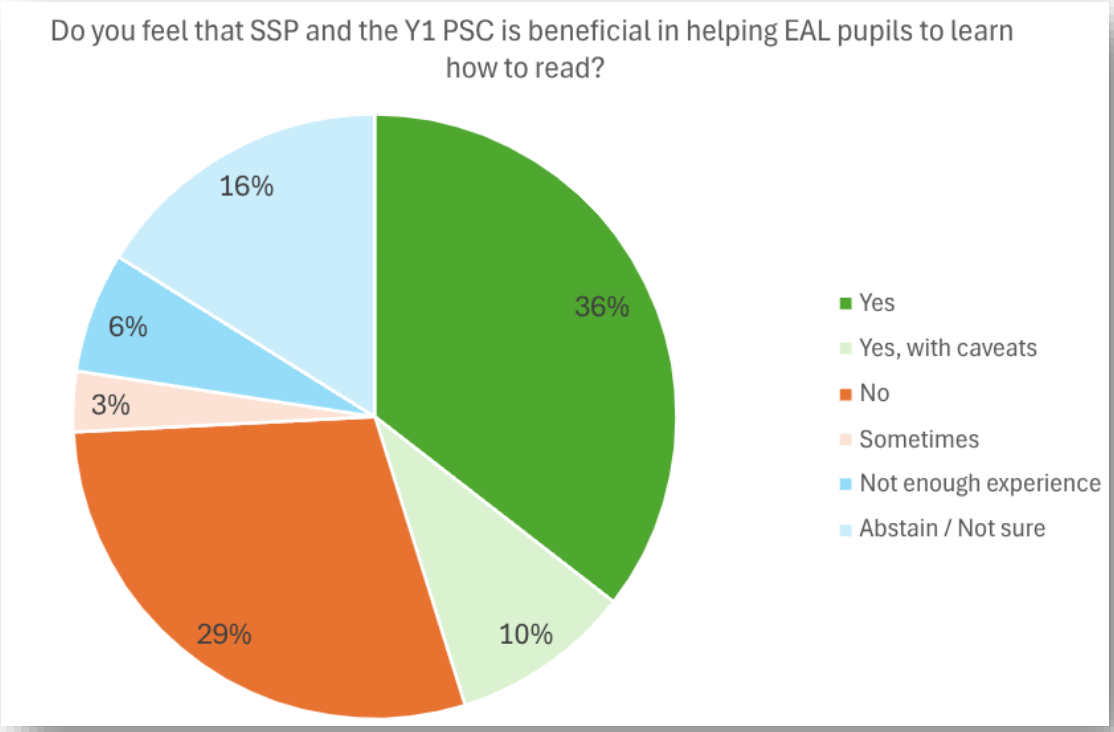


4.3.5. Usefulness of SSP and the PSC

The responses to this question revealed a wide range of views regarding the effectiveness of SSP in supporting pupils' reading development, highlighting a clear lack of consensus among teachers. While 36% believed SSP was 'beneficial', 10% felt it was 'beneficial but with certain caveats', and 3% believed it was 'only sometimes beneficial'. Notably, 29% did not consider SSP beneficial for EAL pupils, raising important questions about its inclusivity and adaptability for diverse learner needs. Additionally, 16% of respondents were unsure of SSP's overall value, suggesting a degree of uncertainty or lack of confidence in its implementation or outcomes. This spread of opinion indicated that teachers' experiences with SSP were varied and potentially influenced by contextual factors, such as pupil demographics, language proficiency, language combinations, school policy, or assessment pressures. To explore these perspectives in greater depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted as a

follow-up. These interviews aimed to uncover the reasoning behind teachers' views, including why they believe SSP is or is not beneficial, and whether external factors, such as the influence of the PSC, play a role in shaping their opinions. Understanding these nuances provided valuable insight into how SSP is perceived in practice and may inform future training, policy, or curriculum development.

Fig. 9 – ***Do you feel that SSP and the Y1 PSC is beneficial in helping EAL pupils to learn how to read?***



4.4. Interview Responses

Of the thirteen questionnaire respondents who stated that they were prepared to participate in a follow-up interview, four participated.

Participant	Experience	Role / Context	School Characteristics
1	15 years	KS1 Teacher	Home and International: Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and England (state and private schools)
2	6–7 years	KS1 teacher	Area with high socioeconomic deprivation and 73% EAL pupils.
3	9 years	Assistant Head; several years' KS1 experience	City centre school with 67% EAL. High pupil mobility.
4	19 years	ITE Lecturer; several years' KS1 experience	Diverse city school with 30+ languages represented.

4.4.1. Participant A

Participant A had 15 years of teaching experience and has worked in six diverse locations: Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and the UK. This international background has given her a broad perspective on phonics instruction, particularly for pupils with multilingual backgrounds. She has used several SSP schemes, including Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS), Read Write Inc (RWI), and Jolly Phonics. While these schemes offer structured approaches, participant A noted that they are often too prescriptive and lack the flexibility needed to support EAL learners effectively. To

address this, she has experimented with adaptations, such as using songs, visuals, and small intervention groups.

'They are very prescriptive [the SSP schemes], which are great for the children who can keep up. They do have intervention times where we can take the children out and do sort of 'fast track' phonics with them. However, in the state schools in particular, we never really had the resource or the manpower to do that. It had to be done within that phonics lesson. So, in order to make sure that the EAL children were making progress alongside the other children, we had to separate them into their own part of the classroom.'

Participant A observed that some bilingual pupils face pronunciation challenges, such as issues with the '*schwa'*, and that rote learning, prevalent in some cultures, can hinder phonics progress. Participant A stated that she understands the rationale behind using pseudowords in the Year 1 PSC, as these words help identify pupils who rely on sight reading rather than phonetic decoding.

'I get the idea that the pseudowords are looking at whether they've grasped the actual phonics of it. What you find is, particularly children from Asia, in my experience, is that they learn by rote, so a lot of their reading isn't based on phonics. So, if they know words, they know the words and that's that. The pseudowords do help identify those children who have learned by rote, because when you present them with the ph, as in phone, and then you give them a pseudo word with phe, then they'll just be stuck.'

However, while the Year 1 PSC was seen as a useful diagnostic tool, Participant A believed that it is not always suitable for EAL learners. In some cases, alternative assessments were used to avoid undermining pupil confidence. Participant A also highlighted that SSP schemes tend to focus heavily on decoding, with comprehension only becoming a focus in Year 2 when the curriculum shifts towards grammar and spelling. A major concern raised was the issue of staffing and resources,

'It's all very well giving you this big scheme and going 'alright, you can do this, do this.' That's great. But who's going to do it?'

Limited staffing makes it difficult to provide individualised support, and while fast-track tutoring was available, it was often impractical due to time constraints. It was also Participant A's belief that adapting teaching for EAL pupils can inadvertently slow progress for monolingual children, underscoring the need for a balanced and well-resourced approach.

4.4.2. Participant B

Participant B, a KS1 teacher with 6 to 7 years' experience, shared nuanced insights into the effectiveness of phonics instruction, particularly for EAL learners. She affirmed that phonics provides valuable decoding strategies and supports reading fluency, especially through structured schemes like RWI. However, she expressed reservations about RWI's repetitive nature and lack of engaging content, which may dampen children's enthusiasm for reading.

'[SSP] is repetitive, which is really, really good for the children, particularly our EAL children. But I think they do it through Reception, they do it through year 1 and some of our children will then be doing it through year 2 as well. And I think because it's so repetitive and the books are not that exciting, I think some of our EAL children really lose that love for reading, and so it needs to be supplemented well with really good texts in your English lessons.'

Participant B felt that, while repetition benefits newly arrived EAL pupils, who often make rapid progress due to the clarity and consistency of phonics, those with partial English knowledge tended to rely on guessing, which can hinder their decoding accuracy. Participant B highlighted that pseudowords in the Year 1 PSC pose a

significant challenge for EAL learners, as these children sometimes attempt to connect unfamiliar non-words to real vocabulary, often leading to confusion.

'I think what trips loads of our [pupils] up are the alien words. We're trying to immerse these newly arrived children into lots of new vocabulary, and then they're thrown into a test that has loads of 'alien words' that are not real. They're trying to link those words to real words, and that's where they'll fall apart. But if you're looking purely at the phonics screening check it's the alien words that always slip up the EAL children. Yes, I'm not a fan of these alien words!'

Participant B questioned the fairness and relevance of this assessment, suggesting it may not accurately reflect reading ability or support long-term literacy development.

'I just think it's a bit unfair. I think it puts our EAL children at a real disadvantage when their vocabulary is nowhere near as wide and varied as our English-speaking children. And so why put them in for a test where they're thrown in with alien words? It just doesn't make sense.'

Furthermore, she felt that while phonics helps EAL pupils achieve word-level reading proficiency, it did not always translate into sentence-level fluency or comprehension, particularly as pupils transition to more complex reading tasks in Year 2 and beyond. The teacher emphasised the need for phonics instruction to be supplemented with rich texts and meaningful reading experiences to foster comprehension and a genuine love of reading. Overall, while supportive of phonics as a foundational strategy, Participant B expressed concern that the current assessment model may not adequately prepare children, especially those with EAL and SEND needs, for broader literacy demands.

4.4.3. Participant C

Participant C, a KS1 teacher with nine years' experience, provided a rich and reflective account of teaching phonics to bilingual learners in a diverse, city-centre school. With over 67% of pupils identified as EAL, and many joining mid-year due to family relocations linked to academia, healthcare, or refugee status, Participant C

highlighted the challenges of delivering consistent phonics instruction in a transient and linguistically varied environment. The teacher acknowledged the value of SSP, particularly through schemes like RWI, but expressed concern about its rigidity and the emotional toll it can take on older pupils (both monolingual and multilingual) placed in younger aged phonics groups.

'To me that doesn't sit right… how degrading is that to be sat with four-year-olds as an 11-year-old?'

This comment reflected a broader critique of fidelity to phonics schemes, especially when older children, whether EAL or with SEND, were placed in younger year groups due to their decoding level. Participant C questioned the appropriateness of this approach, citing the negative impact on self-esteem and motivation. She described instances where children cried daily due to being placed in groups far below their chronological age, suggesting that such practices may hinder rather than help literacy development.

In terms of pedagogy, Participant C demonstrated a flexible and responsive approach to phonics instruction for bilingual pupils. She adapted lessons using visuals, sensory materials and sight-reading strategies, particularly for children whose home languages differed significantly from alphabetic orthography. For example, she noted that children from Chinese and Russian backgrounds often struggled with sound production due to phonemic and phonological differences, whereas those speaking Romance languages like Spanish or Italian tended to adapt more easily. This linguistic insight was paired with a practical understanding of individual needs, including one-to-one support and the use of tactile resources like sand or shaving foam for children with additional learning needs. She also highlighted the importance of the cultural context, noting that parental attitudes toward the Year 1 PSC varied widely. Some EAL families

placed high pressure on children to perform well, while others, especially those with limited English, were unable to support phonics learning at home, which paradoxically reduced anxiety around the test.

'You have two extremes… some parents can't support at all, [whereas] others are very intense about it being a test.'

The Year 1 PSC itself was critiqued for its reliance on pseudowords, which Participant C felt confused bilingual learners who are actively trying to make semantic sense of unfamiliar vocabulary. They argued that teaching children to decode non-words added unnecessary cognitive load, especially for those still acquiring English. While they appreciated the Year 1 PSC's ability to demonstrate progress in decoding, they questioned its fairness and relevance for EAL pupils.

'We're teaching them all these words that aren't in the language… we're adding extra words into their vocabulary that don't need to be there.'

Finally, Participant C raised concerns about the long-term efficacy of phonics instruction, noting that while it supported word-level reading, it did not always translate into comprehension or fluency. They estimated that only around 50% of pupils progressed effectively through the scheme, with the remainder requiring alternative approaches.

4.4.4. Participant D

Participant D, an academic with 19 years of experience, provided a critical reflection on the implementation of SSP for bilingual and polylingual learners. Drawing on extensive classroom experience in a linguistically diverse city school, where over 30 languages were spoken, the teacher highlighted both pedagogical and structural challenges in delivering phonics instruction to EAL pupils.

The school used RWI. Participant D described the scheme's rigid structure, noting that the whole class worked at the same pace, and that children dynamically moved between groups based on regular assessments of phonemic awareness. While this allowed for some differentiation of instruction, the teacher expressed concern about the lack of adaptive teaching, particularly for EAL learners.

'The only kind of adaptive teaching that happens within the heavily scripted scheme is to take those children who are consistently struggling and put them into small group remedial work.'

A key critique centred on the dismissal of prior linguistic knowledge. Participant D observed that many EAL pupils arrived with linguistic awareness from previous educational systems and/or their home languages, which was not acknowledged within the phonics programme, ignoring the fact that some EAL pupils often had a broader educational foundation than their monolingual peers.

'In no other subject would we dismiss pupils' prior knowledge as routinely as we do in phonics. [Some EAL pupils] knew their ABCs… whereas first language children who had been through the whole school system had zero alphabetic awareness'

The teacher also highlighted the limitations of grouping children solely by phonemic awareness, which isolated EAL pupils from fluent English speakers. However, the phonics scheme's grouping practices often contradicted this principle, undermining opportunities for social language acquisition.

'We have a very specific thing in terms of EAL good practice… don't sit someone who doesn't speak English well with the least able English speakers in the class. We just would never do that.'

Participant D shared a poignant example of a child whose linguistic journey had been overlooked. *"His first language was Arabic… his second language was Finnish… his*

only safe space was Arabic", he recalled. Despite demonstrating strong language learning capabilities, the child was placed in a low phonics group, which limited his exposure to fluent English and hindered his progress. *"We're saying, 'you can't do it like that. These are the rules.' I think that's just not good practice in terms of language learning,"* he argued.

The Year 1 PSC was also critiqued for its performative nature and reliance on pseudowords. Participant D questioned its educational value, stating,

> *'Are we teaching effective reading or are we trying to get the greatest number of children to pass the phonics screening check?'*

He described how schools often *'intensively coach'* children in the lead-up to the PSC but doubted whether this translated into lasting phonemic awareness. Moreover, the use of pseudowords was seen as confusing and culturally insensitive. *"Some of them aren't nonsense… they might exist in another language,"* he explained, citing the example of "*chine*," which could be interpreted differently by children with knowledge of French or regional dialects.

> *"Why create nonsense?"*

he asked, challenging the cognitive and linguistic rationale behind the PSC's design.

In conclusion, Participant D advocated for a more flexible, culturally responsive approach to phonics instruction, one that values prior knowledge, supports social language learning, and moves beyond rigid scripts and performative assessments. His insights underscored the need for phonics pedagogy that is inclusive of bilingual learners' diverse linguistic experiences and educational backgrounds.

4.5. Conclusions

4.5.1. Structure of SSP and Year 1 PSC

Respondents and interviewees stated that while the SSP programme's repetitive structure can support EAL learners, the consensus was that its rigid and prescriptive nature limited flexibility and engagement. Many felt the content lacks real-world application, which discouraged children from reading, especially if SSP was their only exposure to books. Concerns were raised that strict adherence to the scheme hindered the progress of multilingual pupils. Questionnaire results reflected this, with only 46% of respondents believing that SSP and the PSC supported EAL pupils in learning to read, while 29% disagreed and 3% found it only 'occasionally useful'.

4.5.2. Adapting Teaching

Many educators emphasised the need to 'go beyond' the SSP scheme by incorporating rich texts, visuals, sensory materials, and small-group interventions to better support EAL learners. The consensus was that while schemes offered structure, it must be adapted with tactile resources, sight-reading strategies, and additional teaching input to meet diverse linguistic needs. Small remedial groups were seen as particularly effective in boosting engagement and progress. This view was supported by questionnaire data: 57% of respondents reported adapting their approach, while 32% adhered strictly to the scheme. Confidence in adapting teaching for EAL pupils varied, highlighting a need for further support.

4.5.3. Phonics Screening Check

Views on the Year 1 PSC were mixed, with many respondents and interviewees questioning its suitability for EAL learners. While some saw it as a useful diagnostic

tool and an opportunity to monitor pupil progress, others felt pseudowords added unnecessary cognitive load and confused bilingual pupils, revealing rote learning, guessing or 'fixing' strategies. Concerns included its performative nature, cultural insensitivity, and the impact on pupil confidence, prompting some schools to disapply pupils from the PSC altogether. The consensus was that PSC does not always reflect meaningful progress for EAL learners. This is supported by DfE data, which shows EAL pupils perform consistently 1–2% lower than their monolingual peers.

4.5.4. Decoding and Comprehension

Educators expressed concern that the emphasis on decoding within SSP delayed the development of reading comprehension, often until Year 2 and beyond. While word-level decoding is a foundational skill, many felt that the time dedicated to it was disproportionate and did not guarantee fluency or understanding, especially without exposure to rich texts. The consensus was that decoding alone does not equate to reading, and questions were raised about the long-term efficacy of this approach. One interviewee argued that although many pupils 'pass' the PSC, comprehension outcomes remain very inconsistent. These insights highlighted the need for a more balanced approach that integrates decoding with meaningful, text-based learning experiences.

4.5.5. Resourcing and Staffing

Respondents and interviewees recognised both the challenges and opportunities in resourcing and staffing for EAL support. While limited manpower and transient pupil populations present planning difficulties, many highlighted the potential of small-group and one-to-one interventions to make a meaningful impact. Supplementing SSP with engaging texts and targeted support was seen as essential for inclusive practice. Though

structural constraints can limit flexibility, educators are finding creative ways to group pupils effectively without isolating EAL learners. The consensus was that with thoughtful planning and appropriate resources, schools can better meet the needs of all learners and foster more equitable progress.

4.5.6. Cultural Sensitivity and Parental Involvement

Cultural sensitivities and parental involvement were identified as key factors influencing EAL pupils' experiences of the PSC. While some pupils came from rote learning backgrounds, others faced vocabulary gaps due to limited English exposure, making the PSC feel unfair or confusing. Pseudowords were seen as culturally insensitive, with some resembling real words in other languages. Parental involvement varied widely, from intense pressure to limited engagement, shaped by differing cultural expectations, which can affect pupil stress and confidence. The consensus was that more culturally responsive approaches and flexible assessment methods were needed to ensure fairness and support for all learners.

4.5.7. Grouping Practices

Classroom grouping practices were identified as a key concern in supporting EAL learners effectively. Respondents and interviewees noted that EAL pupils were often separated within the classroom or placed in SSP groups with younger children, particularly new arrivals. While intended to support phonemic development, this approach can lead to emotional stress and feelings of isolation. Grouping by phonemic awareness, though well-meaning, may contradict best practice for EAL learners, who benefit from integrated, language-rich environments. The consensus was that more

inclusive and age-appropriate strategies were needed to ensure EAL pupils feel supported both academically and socially.

4.5.8. Pedagogical Principles

A more balanced and well-resourced approach to phonics was widely advocated by respondents and interviewees. While phonics was recognised as a foundational skill for effective early reading, the consensus was that it must be enriched with engaging, vocabulary-building texts to support deeper comprehension and language development. Flexibility within SSP was deemed essential, allowing for responsiveness to individual needs and prioritising emotional wellbeing. Culturally responsive teaching that values pupils' prior linguistic knowledge was seen as key to inclusive practice. Many critiques focused on the rigidity of SSP pedagogy, with calls for a more adaptive model that reflects the diverse backgrounds and strengths of EAL learners.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Phonics Screening Check Datasets (2011 - 2024)

A range of scholars support the view that bilingual pupils typically exhibit stronger phonological and phonemic awareness, including Sharples (2021), who noted their generally higher decoding ability; Cummins (1979), whose Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis suggests bilinguals should perform on par with monolinguals; Baker and Wright (2021), who argue that bilinguals possess a metalinguistic 'template' for cross-linguistic transfer; Murphy and Franco (2016), who emphasise the gradual and implicit development of phonological awareness through oral language; and Bialystok (2002), who found that bilingual children are more sensitive to phonological distinctions across languages. However, recent data from the PSC revealed a consistent performance gap of 1–2% below their monolingual peers. Additionally, bilingual pupils are disapplied from the PSC at a slightly higher rate (1–2%), which may reflect broader systemic or contextual challenges rather than cognitive limitations. This apparent contradiction may be explained by the diverse backgrounds of bilingual learners. Factors such as varied starting points in English literacy, differences in language combinations (e.g., alphabetic vs. non-alphabetic scripts), interrupted schooling, and refugee or migration experiences can significantly influence early literacy outcomes. Therefore, the modest performance gap may obscure underlying strengths in phonological processing that are not fully captured by the PSC. Post-COVID trends show a decline in PSC outcomes for both groups, followed by a gradual recovery, suggesting that external disruptions have had a widespread impact, irrespective of language. The findings from the DfE data highlight the potential need for more nuanced assessment tools and pedagogical approaches that account for the

complex linguistic and educational experiences of bilingual pupils, rather than relying on standardised measures that may not reflect their full capabilities.

5.2. Questionnaire Responses

RWI was overwhelmingly identified as the SSP scheme of choice, reflecting the strong adherence to DfE-validated programmes recommended by Rose (2006) and formalised in the National Curriculum. Only one respondent noted that their school did not follow a DfE-validated scheme, underscoring the widespread influence of policy-led fidelity in phonics instruction. This aligns with the DfE's (2024) emphasis on a "rigorous, systematic" approach to SSP teaching, though such rigidity may constrain the pedagogical flexibility required to meet the diverse linguistic needs of EAL learners (Wardman, 2012; Foley et al., 2019). 57% of respondents reported using adaptive teaching strategies to support bilingual pupils, while 32% did not. This disparity may reflect the tension between maintaining fidelity to prescriptive SSPs and implementing pedagogical approaches aligned with EAL 'good practice' (Paran & Wallace, 2016; Davies, 2012). It may also highlight variability in teacher confidence and autonomy when adapting structured programmes—an issue compounded by inconsistent coverage of EAL pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education (Starbuck, 2018; Foley et al., 2019). Many of the adaptive strategies mentioned—such as visuals, flashcards, dual-language resources, and support from additional adults—are also commonly used in Quality First Teaching. This overlap suggests that some adaptations for bilingual pupils may not be explicitly recognised as distinct but rather embedded within general inclusive practice. However, several respondents did identify EAL-specific strategies, including avoiding pseudowords, dual-language resources, and translators. These approaches indicate an awareness of the unique challenges faced by bilingual learners in phonics instruction,

echoing concerns raised by Clark (2014) and Conteh (2023) about the suitability of pseudowords for pupils whose first language is not English. The mean confidence score for teachers in meeting the needs of bilingual learners within SSP was 6.55 out of 10. This moderate score supports the hypothesis that teachers may be uncertain about whether, and how, to adapt SSP provision. It may also reflect a belief that SSP is universally effective, reducing the perceived need for adaptation—a belief that risks overlooking the linguistic and cultural needs of EAL pupils (Gibbons, 2009; Maude, 2021). Post-pandemic research by Scott (2021) further complicates this picture, revealing that 74% of primary teachers observed language loss among EAL pupils, and 15% reported reduced confidence in classroom communication; factors that may influence both teacher practice and pupil engagement. Only 46% of respondents believed that SSP and the Year 1 PSC are beneficial for EAL pupils. This suggests that while SSP may contribute to early reading development, it is not sufficient on its own. The data supports the view that SSP should be enhanced with additional, inclusive content and pedagogical flexibility to effectively support bilingual learners. These findings reinforce the need for professional development focused on integrating EAL strategies within SSP frameworks, and for clearer guidance on balancing fidelity with responsiveness to pupil needs—an imperative echoed across the literature (Foley et al., 2019; Baker & Wright, 2021).

5.3. Interview Responses

All four interview participants reported using, or having used, Read Write Inc. (RWI), reflecting the dominance of validated SSP programmes in English primary schools and aligning with the policy-driven fidelity outlined by Rose (2006) and the DfE (2024). However, participants expressed concern about the rigidity of SSP

structures, particularly the tendency to overlook pupils' prior knowledge. One teacher noted, "In no other subject would we dismiss pupils' prior knowledge as routinely as we do in phonics," highlighting a disconnect between SSP's linear progression and the diverse linguistic starting points of EAL learners. This critique resonates with Bowers (2019) and Gibbons (2009), who argue that SSP's narrow focus on grapheme-phoneme correspondence may neglect broader linguistic competencies and contextual understanding. Interview data also suggested that orthographic and linguistic (dis)similarity between English and the first language may influence the ability to access SSP and the PSC, echoing Coldwell et al.'s (2011) observation that bilingual pupils may decode effectively, but struggle with semantic processing. Staffing emerged as a significant barrier to effective SSP delivery, with participants noting insufficient capacity to provide intensive support for both monolingual and bilingual pupils. This concern aligns with Wardman (2012), who identified limited access to CPD and resources as a persistent challenge in supporting EAL learners. A strong consensus also emerged around the use of pseudowords in the Year 1 PSC. While one participant acknowledged their diagnostic intent, most expressed discomfort with the "alien words," noting that EAL pupils often attempt to anchor them to real vocabulary, leading to confusion. This mirrors the critiques of Clark (2014), Murphy (2016), and Conteh (2023), who question the validity of pseudowords for bilingual learners and warn against the cognitive load of decoding non-lexical items. One participant underscored broader concerns about fairness, particularly for newly arrived pupils who may be unfamiliar with English phonics or classroom norms. Several participants also raised concerns about repetition within SSP programmes. While some viewed it as beneficial for reinforcing grapheme-phoneme correspondences, others found it cognitively unstimulating and potentially demotivating for pupils with stronger linguistic

foundations. This tension reflects Baker and Wright's (2021) caution against overly reductive literacy instruction, especially in high-stakes, data-driven environments where pedagogical nuance may be sacrificed for performance metrics.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having triangulated the data from DfE PSC outcomes, semi-structured questionnaires and interviews, the following policy, practical and assessment implications may be inferred from the data.

6.1. Policy Implications

The modest performance gap and higher disapplication rates may indicate that the PSC does not fully capture bilingual pupils' phonological strengths. This could suggest a need to explore alternative or supplementary assessments that better reflect linguistic diversity and reduce reliance on pseudowords, which may not support vocabulary development. In addition, the widespread use of DfE-validated SSP programmes may highlight a tension between policy fidelity and pedagogical responsiveness. Policy guidance might benefit from explicitly supporting adaptive strategies for EAL learners, including greater use of real-word blending and contextual vocabulary application. Furthermore, the overlap between general inclusive practice and EAL-specific adaptations may point to a lack of clarity in current policy. Further guidance could help schools distinguish and implement targeted support for bilingual pupils, such as bespoke resources that match words to images. The observed decline and gradual recovery in PSC outcomes may reflect broader pandemic-related disruptions (although the decline has been addressed in the last two PSC results). Policymakers might consider targeted recovery strategies for bilingual pupils, including targeted phonics support and grouping strategies that reflect linguistic starting points rather than age or attainment alone. Finally, the variability in teacher confidence and practice may be linked to inconsistent coverage of EAL pedagogy in ITE. This could

suggest a need for policy-level reform to ensure EAL-specific training is embedded within literacy instruction frameworks and includes guidance on phonics grouping, resource use, and vocabulary development.

6.2. Practical Implications

The use of visuals, dual-language resources, and additional adult support may indicate that teachers are already making informal adaptations within their SSP teaching. However, these practices might be further encouraged and formalised to better support bilingual learners, particularly those new to English. Greater emphasis could be placed on blending real words and using vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Teacher discomfort with pseudowords may highlight concerns about their appropriateness for EAL pupils. Schools might consider minimising pseudowords for bilingual learners, as they may not contribute to vocabulary building and could increase cognitive load. Moreover, interview responses suggest that SSP delivery often overlooks pupils' prior linguistic knowledge. Practitioners might benefit from approaches that activate cross-linguistic transfer and build on existing literacy foundations, including bespoke resources that match words to pictures and support semantic understanding. Another key issue identified was staffing and resource allocation. Concerns about capacity may point to the need for additional staffing or specialist support to enable targeted phonics instruction. Schools could explore models that include bilingual assistants, translators, or peer-led interventions, and invest in tailored materials for bilingual pupils. However, this would inevitably lead to additional costs and is unlikely to be possible in the current economic climate. Finally, grouping practices may not always reflect pupils' linguistic needs. Reconsidering how pupils are grouped—based on language proficiency, prior knowledge, or learning potential—could support more effective phonics instruction.

Teachers may also benefit from collaborative inquiry into how SSP schemes can evolve to better meet the needs of increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms.

6.3. Assessment Implications

The Year 1 PSC's narrow focus on decoding may obscure bilingual pupils' broader linguistic competencies. This could suggest a need for assessment tools that include semantic processing, oral language development, and cross-linguistic awareness, with reduced emphasis on pseudowords and increased focus on real-word application. Similarly, the diversity of bilingual learners' experiences may highlight the limitations of standardised, static assessments. Dynamic approaches that measure learning potential—such as matching words to images or assessing vocabulary in context—might offer a more equitable and informative alternative. Year 1 PSC outcomes may need to be interpreted alongside contextual data—such as language history, migration experience, and classroom engagement—to avoid reductive conclusions about pupil ability. This may also support more informed decisions about pupil grouping and intervention planning. The current 'snapshot' approach to phonics assessment may miss longer-term literacy trajectories. Longitudinal tracking could help identify how early decoding skills relate to later comprehension and academic success, particularly for pupils with non-alphabetic L1s or interrupted schooling. Teacher uncertainty around adaptation may reflect a need for greater support in interpreting assessment data. Professional development could help educators critically evaluate PSC and SSP outcomes in light of pupil diversity and consider how assessment practices might evolve to better reflect bilingual learners' strengths.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlights several areas where further research could enhance understanding of literacy development among EAL pupils and inform more inclusive educational practice. A key recommendation is to investigate the relationship between decoding and comprehension, particularly for multilingual learners. While SSP may support early decoding, this does not always translate into reading comprehension—especially for pupils with limited vocabulary or unfamiliarity with English syntax. Future studies should explore how instructional balance between phonics and meaning-making strategies affects long-term literacy outcomes. Longitudinal research tracking EAL pupils from EYFS through KS2 and beyond would offer valuable insights into how, and whether, early phonics attainment interacts with broader literacy development. Comparative studies could examine the effectiveness of SSP-only instruction versus blended approaches that integrate vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension scaffolds. These could include qualitative measures of pupil engagement and teacher confidence. It is also recommended to explore how first language characteristics influence phonological awareness and decoding success. For example, tracking Year 1 PSC outcomes of pupils with Romance languages (e.g. Spanish, Italian) against those using Asian languages (e.g. Mandarin, Urdu). This will help to identify the extent to which language combinations may play a role, due to orthographic and/or logographic systems. Given the inconsistencies in teacher preparedness identified in this study, an audit of ITE programmes may be warranted to equip future teachers with greater knowledge around EAL pupils' phonemic and phonological awareness. This could lead to the development of targeted modules or CPD interventions. Further research into the cultural responsiveness of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) is also recommended, including exploration of alternative

assessment formats. Finally, the emotional and social impact of phonics grouping, particularly for older EAL pupils placed in lower phases, could be examined through qualitative research incorporating pupil, teacher and parent perspectives.

6.5. Limitations of Study

This study acknowledges several limitations that constrain the generalisability and scope of its findings. The small sample size of respondents and interview participants limits statistical robustness and breadth of representation. Furthermore, the geographic concentration of participants, primarily within Merseyside and Lancashire, restricts the applicability of findings to broader national contexts. The sample is also skewed toward teachers working with high proportions of EAL pupils, which may reflect more confident or experienced perspectives and under-represent those with limited exposure or greater uncertainty. Self-selection bias is a further consideration, as voluntary participation may have attracted individuals with strong views or vested interest in phonics and EAL pedagogy. The absence of pupil and parent voice narrows the lens to teacher perceptions alone, omitting valuable insights into lived experiences of phonics instruction and assessment, particularly within multilingual households. While PSC data is used to contextualise attainment, it offers a narrow measure focused on decoding, without capturing comprehension, vocabulary development, or broader literacy outcomes—key concerns for EAL learners. Disapplication data is noted but not explored in depth, limiting understanding of the rationale behind exclusions. Finally, the study's reliance on teacher self-report introduces subjectivity, and while triangulated with literature and attainment data, it remains interpretive. These limitations do not undermine the study's contributions but rather highlight areas for

future research, including broader sampling and the inclusion of pupil voice to better capture the complexities of phonics policy and practice in multilingual classrooms.

6.6. Conclusion

This study has explored the complex relationship between SSP, the Year 1 PSC and the literacy development of bilingual learners. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research triangulated national attainment data, teacher questionnaires, and interviews to examine how SSP is perceived, adapted, and experienced in linguistically diverse classrooms. Findings reveal that while SSP provides a structured foundation for early decoding skills, its rigid and prescriptive nature often fails to accommodate the nuanced needs of bilingual pupils. The Year 1 PSC, with its emphasis on pseudowords, was widely critiqued for being culturally insensitive and cognitively demanding for EAL learners, some of whom attempt to attach unfamiliar words to known vocabulary. National data consistently showed a modest but persistent attainment gap between EAL and monolingual pupils, alongside higher rates of disapplication for EAL learners, raising concerns about equitable access and assessment validity. Teachers reported varying levels of confidence in adapting SSP for bilingual pupils, with many relying on visuals, dual-language resources, and small-group interventions. However, the performative pressures of the PSC and fidelity to validated SSP schemes often constrained pedagogical flexibility. Interview data highlighted emotional and social challenges, particularly for older EAL pupils placed in lower phonics groups, underscoring the need for more inclusive grouping practices. The study also identified significant gaps in ITE and CPD, which leave many educators underprepared to support bilingual learners effectively. Despite some evidence of enhanced phonological awareness among bilingual pupils, comprehension and

vocabulary development remain under-addressed within SSP frameworks. Ultimately, the research advocates for a more balanced and culturally responsive approach to early reading instruction that integrates SSP with rich vocabulary exposure, formative assessment, and adaptive pedagogy. Policy recommendations include revisiting the design of the PSC, embedding EAL-specific training within ITE, and promoting flexible teaching strategies within SSP programmes. Future research should explore longitudinal literacy outcomes, the impact of language combinations, and pupil voice to better understand the lived experiences of bilingual learners. This study contributes to ongoing discussions around phonics pedagogy, assessment equity, and inclusive education, calling for a reimagining of early literacy practices that recognise and nurture the linguistic assets of all learners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: 'Pupil characteristics - number of pupils by ethnicity and language' for 'Known or believed to be other than English in England' between 2015/16 and 2024/25 (Department for Education, 2025)

2015/16	1,249,487
2016/17	1,308,127
2017/18	1,570,556
2018/19	1,595,432
2019/20	1,619,999
2020/21	1,608,270
2021/22	1,644,019
2022/23	1,715,912
2023/24	1,770,160
2024/25	1,806,029

Appendix 2: Phonics Screening Check 2024 Pupil Materials and Answer Sheet

nop	jick	brop	shin
yim	sheb	sleen	fang
zeg	deeg	sint	sort
ild	quish	doilt	chill

fled	bew	blenk	bar
speck	clune	froast	sneak
ramp	baup	scrup	curl
corns	cheve	sprace	doze

plank	relay
shrimp	ending
split	dolphin
stripe	crackers

2024 Phonics

Screening check: answer sheet

First name	
Last name	

Screening check responses: Please tick the appropriate box for each word. The use of the comment box is optional.

Section 1			
Word	Correct	Incorrect	Comment
nop			
yim			
zeg			
ild			
jick			
sheb			
deeg			
quish			
brop			
sleen			
sint			
doilt			
shin			
fang			
sort			
chill			
fled			
speck			
ramp			
corns			

Section 2			
Word	Correct	Incorrect	Comment
bew			
clune			
baup			
cheve			
blenk			
froast			
scrup			
sprace			
bar			
sneak			
curl			
doze			
plank			
shrimp			
split			
stripe			
relay			
ending			
dolphin			
crackers			

Total correct	

Appendix 3: Ethics Application

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:		Ben Thomas			
2	Tick all boxes which apply:		Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
3	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student	☐

4	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	Institute of Education & Humanities
5	Campus:	Distance Learning
6	E-mail address:	2005873@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
7	Contact Telephone Number:	07877717047
	For students:	
8	Student Number:	2005873
9	Programme of Study:	MA Bilingualism & Multilingualism
10	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	**YES**	☒	**NO**	☒
				Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): ***Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval***	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
3		Institute Research Committee	☐		
4		Other (write in) Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis Programme Manager	☒	09-04-24	

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	☒
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	☒
3	**BERA Ethics Guidelines**	☒

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

1	Does the research activity involve collaborators outside of the University?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☒
2	If Yes, please provide the name of the external organisation and name and contact details for the main contact person and confirmation this person has consented to their personal data being shared.as part of this collaboration.					
3	Institution					
4	Contact person name					
5	Contact person e-mail address					
6	Has this individual consented to sharing their details on this form?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
7	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
8	Is your research externally funded		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
9	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
10		Employed	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
11	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
12	Permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

13	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
14	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Systematic Synthetic Phonics and Bilingual Learners: A case study of primary school teachers' perspectives, perceptions and experiences.		
2	Proposed start date:	20th May 2024	Proposed end date:	20th December 2024
3	**Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words)** **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the three points below:** • *Purpose of Research Activity* • *Proposed Research Question* • *Aims of Research Activity* • *Objectives of Research Activity* Demonstrate, briefly, how **<u>Existing Research</u>** has informed the proposed activity and explain • *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge* • *How it addresses an area of importance.*			
4	**Purpose of Research Activity** The purpose of this research activity is to gauge to what extent Systematic Synthetic Phonics teaching in Key Stage 1 is beneficial or detrimental to bilingual learners. Current research suggests that bilingual children have greater phonemic awareness than their monolingual counterparts. However, research also points to the fact that phonemic awareness alone does not necessarily lead to improved comprehension and better reading skills, especially in children who have more than one language. The purpose of this research is to gather the thoughts, opinions and experiences of primary school teachers working with bilingual children who have undergone or are preparing for the Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening Check*, using the Systematic Synthetic Phonics approach. The researcher intends to look at publicly available assessment data and outcomes of Phonics Screening Check, and compare the data with the perspectives, perceptions and experiences of teachers. **The Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening Check is a statutory instrument of assessment used in English primary schools to ascertain a child's ability to blend specific phonemes. The test is comprised of real and pseudo words and is usually scored out of 40, with the pass mark typically being 32.* (this box should expand as you type)			
5	**Research Question** Systematic Synthetic Phonics, and Bilingual Learners: A case study of primary school teachers' perspectives, perceptions and experiences. (this box should expand as you type)			
6	**Aims of Research Activity**			

	- To add to the ever-increasing knowledge base about Systematic Synthetic Phonics and its effects on early reading and language acquisition. - To identify to what extent primary teachers consider the specific needs of bilingual children when designing their phonics provision. - To gather a range of perspectives and experiences of primary teachers about teaching Systematic Synthetic Phonics to bilingual children. (this box should expand as you type)
7	**Objectives of Research Activity** - To use publicly available data, as well as teacher perspectives to analyse how bilingual children perform on the Phonics Screening Check. - To analyse responses and data collected from surveys and semi-structured interviews with primary teachers, currently working within EYFS or Key Stage 1, who have taught Systematic Synthetic Phonics to bilingual children. - To identify whether there are any further recommendations to support teachers with their Systematic Synthetic Phonics provision. - To investigate whether Systematic Synthetic Phonics has a beneficial impact on reading and comprehension skills. (this box should expand as you type)
8	**Proposed methods (maximum 600 words)** Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed.
9	The piece of research that I wish to conduct will take the form of a small-scale case study. The case study will look at teachers' perspectives and perceptions of how bilingual children in their classes perform on the Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening*. **The Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening Check is a statutory instrument of assessment used in English primary schools to ascertain a child's ability to blend specific phonemes. The test is comprised of real and pseudo words and is usually scored out of 40, with the pass mark typically being 32.* Within this case study I intend to: - **analyse publicly available local authority data** pertaining to bilingual pupils' outcomes in the Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening assessment. This will involve using Department for Education National Statistics data, that can be filtered by national, regional and local authority level. It can also be filtered by gender, disadvantage, free school meal eligibility, ethnicity, special educational need status, **first language** and month of birth.

	- **design and send surveys** to help me identify suitable candidates for semi-structured interviews. - **design and carry out semi-structured interviews with teachers** who are preparing children for and delivering the Key Stage 1 Phonics Screening. - **carry out a thematic analysis of interview transcripts** to identify whether there are any emerging themes, trends and patterns. (this box should expand as you type)

10	**Location of research activity** Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
11	**Interviews**: participants will decide whether they prefer to have a face-to-face interview or whether the interview will take place online using the UWTSD Microsoft Teams login, or at the participant's place of work (a primary school setting). (this box should expand as you type)
12	**Research activity outside of the UK** If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants.
13	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*

14	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents **NOT** publicly available?	**NO**	☒
		YES	☐
15	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with prevailing data protection law of the country in question and England and Wales. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

1	**Will the research activity include:**		

		YES	NO
2	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
3	Use of interviews?	☒	☐
4	Use of diaries?	☐	☒
5	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
6	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
7	Use of video or audio recording? *Recording of interviews on MS Teams, with permission*	☒	☐
8	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
9	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
10	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
11	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
12	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
13	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
14	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
15	Other primary data collection methods, please explain in this box For example, 'focus groups'. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) in this box and tick the accompany box.	☐	☒
16	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

1	**Who are the intended participants:**	YES	NO
2	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
3	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
4	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
5	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
6	Prisoners?	☐	☒
7	Young offenders?	☐	☒
8	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒

9	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
10	Others (please identify specifically any group who may be unable to give consent) please indicate here and tick the appropriate box.	☐	☒
11	Other – please indicate here: (this box should expand as you type)		

12	**Participant numbers and source** Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
13	How many participants are expected?	10-20 *(this box should expand as you type)*
14	Who will the participants be?	Primary teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), employed in Key Stage 1 settings in local primary schools affiliated with my current employer, Edge Hill University. Schools in the partnership are located in the north-west of England, predominantly around Merseyside, Lancashire, Cheshire and Greater Manchester. *(this box should expand as you type)*
15	How will you identify the participants?	Participants will be self-selected via a survey sent out to partnership schools. Once the participants have been identified, they may be invited for a subsequent semi-structured interview, either online via UWTSD Teams account, or in person at a participant's school. *(this box should expand as you type)*

16	**Information for participants:**	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
17	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
19	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
21	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
22	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
23	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐

24	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
25	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
26	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
27	*(this box should expand as you type)*			

28	**Information for participants:**	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
29	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
30	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☒	☐	☐
31	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
32	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
33	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
34	If participants agree to interview, it will be recorded using: - MS Teams on a computer, logged in to the UWTSD account (online interviews) - on a personal handheld recording device that is stored securely in the researcher's locked cupboard, with the audio file being transferred to the UWTSD password protected OneDrive area at the earliest opportunity. *(this box should expand as you type)*			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

1	**Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.** If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
2	**Full risk assessment completed and appended?**	**Yes**	☐
		No	☒
3	**Risks to participants** For example: emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
4	Risk to Participant:	*How will you mitigate the Risk to Participant*	

	- Participants, and their school settings, could be identified unless data is handled securely and sensitively by the researcher. *(this box should expand as you type)*	- Ensuring any data is stored in an encrypted, UWTSD cloud are. - Ensuring participants and their settings remain anonymous in the submission. *(this box should expand as you type)*
5	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*	
6	**Risks to investigator** For example: personal safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to Investigator: - There could be a perceived conflict of interests, as the teachers could be identified for interview from local partnership schools with which the researcher already has contacts. - Schools may be reticent to participate, as they feel that external researchers could look to	*How will you mitigate the Risk to Investigator:* - Reinforce that the research is designed to gather a range of teacher perspectives and not looking to address individual teacher and school performance. - Reiterate that all findings will be anonymised and not linked to the schools. *(this box should expand as you type)*

	cast a judgment on their SSP provision, data or outcomes. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
7	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to University: - Data Protection: Poor management of sensitive participant data. - Adverse Publicity: Should the research not take place, or be conducted in an unprofessional manner, this could have negative repercussions for the researcher and reputation of UWTSD. *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How will you mitigate the Risk to University:* - Ensure that all online interviews are conducted through the UWTSD login on MS Teams. - Ensure that all data is saved in the password protected UWTSD OneDrive area. - Ensure that the highest levels of professionalism and professional standards are upheld at all stages of the research process. *(this box should expand as you type)*

8	**Disclosure and Barring Service**			
9	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**

	contact with such participants.			
10	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☐	☒

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	- Participants will be afforded the opportunity to proof-read any transcripts of conversations and interviews with the researcher. This process will involve the researcher sending a copy of the transcript, via email, within a specified time frame, to ensure that the participant is confident of the accuracy and content of the transcript. - The researcher will provide a user-friendly version of findings with participants to outline the key findings from the research. *(this box should expand as you type)*
2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	- The researcher will design a comprehensive Participant Information Sheet that will outline the purpose of the research and the required time commitments that participants should be expected to dedicate to the research. The Participant Information Sheet will identify the methods of data collection and how the data will be processed. It will also outline the procedures and policies in place for the effective management of data. - Surveys & Interviews: Upon completion of the survey, participants will be asked for their expressed permission to participate in a semi-structured interview. *(this box should expand as you type)*
3	**Confidentiality / Anonymity** Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	- The anonymity of participants, and the schools in which they work, is paramount. Therefore, all individuals involved in the surveys and interviews will be anonymised and be referred to via pseudonyms. - Data will be safely stored, in a lockable cupboard to which only the researcher has access, to ensure the data of participants is secure.

	- As the research involves adults who work closely with children, it is important to make participants aware that any disclosure of safeguarding risk or criminal activity overrides confidentiality. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

In completing this section refer to the University's Research Data Management Policy and the extensive resources on the University's Research Data Management web pages (http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/).

1	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	**YES**	**NO**
	"Personal data" *means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.*	☐✓	☐
2	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	- **Participant Name** - This will be anonymised in the dissertation. - **Email address** - This is required to contact the participant directly and provide feedback and transcripts. - **School Address** – This is required if surveys are to be conducted in person. - **Profession** – This is important, as all participants in the research need to be primary-trained teachers who hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and have taught Systematic Synthetic Phonics at primary schools in England. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
3	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	**YES**	**NO**
	"Special category data" *means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –* *(a) racial or ethnic origin,* *(b) political opinions,* *(c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) physical or mental health or condition,*	☐	☐✓

	(f) sexual life, *(g) genetics,* *(h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),*		
4	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

5	Will the research activity involve storing personal data and/or special category data on one of the following:	**YES**	**NO**
6	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
7	University computers?	☐	☒
8	Private company computers?	☐	☒
9	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
10	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
11	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
12	Other – specify:	☐	☒
13	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All information will be stored on a personal device, kept at home in a lockable cupboard, to which only the researcher will have access. All research will be conducted using my password protected UWTSD student email, data storage and video conferencing software. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
14	**All Data Storage**		
15	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
16	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
17	Sharing of data with others at the University?	☒	☐
18	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
19	Export of data outside the European Union or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
20	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☒	☐
21	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
22	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
23	Data archiving?	☐	☒
24	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and DPA (and/or any international equivalent):		
	- Participants will be sent a transcript of their interview to their agreed email account, via researcher's UWTSD email. The email addresses, telephone numbers, addresses etc. of participants will be stored in a password protected document, within the researcher's UWTSD personal OneDrive area. - Transcripts may be shared with Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis for tutoring purposes.		

	(this box should expand as you type)		
25	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	- Ben Thomas (researcher) - Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis (tutor – who will be given access to all data generated by research activity, if requested) *(this box should expand as you type)*		
26	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	- Ben Thomas (researcher) - Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis (tutor – who will be given access to all data generated by research activity, if requested) *(this box should expand as you type)*		
27	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	All information will be stored on a personal device, kept at home in a lockable cupboard, to which only the researcher will have access. All research will be conducted using my password protected UWTSD student email, data storage and video conferencing software. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
28	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (*Most relevant to academic staff)*		
	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*		
29	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	**YES**	☒
		NO	☐
30	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	**YES**	☒
		NO	☐

SECTION K: Declaration

31	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
	Signature of applicant:	Ben Thomas	**Date: 12.04.2024**

For STUDENT Submissions:

32	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis	**Date:** 18/04/24
33	Signature:	Hywel Glyn Lewis	

For STAFF Submissions:

34	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		**Date:**
35	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (**where appropriate**)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (and have NOT completed Section H of this form) (where appropriate) *ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE **ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT***
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.
☒	I have deleted the guidance notes before submitting the PG2 for consideration

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.
STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.