

Acknowledgement format of AI tool use

I acknowledge that I used Grammarly (<https://app.grammarly.com/>) on (1/3/25) to refine the sentence structure of my work. The prompt(s) I used were:

1. Copy and paste my text into Grammarly, which then highlights areas for improvement. As I do not have Grammarly Premium, it does not provide specific suggestions on how to improve those areas, so I make the necessary changes myself.

I also acknowledge that I used ChatGPT (<https://openai.com/index/chatgpt/>) on (1/3/25) to assist with spelling and grammar corrections. The prompt(s) I used were:

1. Check this text for correct spelling and grammar.
2. Arrange this list of references in alphabetical order and remove any duplicates.

I certify that no content generated by AI has been presented as my original work. Moreover, I have records of my preliminary versions, annotations, and any materials used both prior to and following the use of AI tools, which I can supply as proof if necessary.

Ben

Considered Targets from My Last Assignment

1. Engage with a broader range of relevant and peer-reviewed books and journal articles, including sources from WG and Estyn, during research.
2. Integrate research effectively into my writing to strengthen key arguments.
3. Further develop a critical approach by consistently presenting and evaluating opposing viewpoints.
4. Provide more detailed recommendations for pedagogical development when discussing counterarguments.

ECAD 7005- PART 2: A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections

Introduction

The aim of this assignment is to critique a primary school's action point from its School Development Plan (SDP). The schools focus to enhance outcomes in languages, literacy, and communication (LLC) while mitigating the effects of poverty on student education. This target is of particular significance within the school's context, as it directly addresses the attainment gap linked to socioeconomic disadvantage while supporting language development for all learners, including English as an additional language (EAL) students. In accordance with BERA 2024, the school will be anonymised and referred to as "School A".

School A is in South Wales, serving 407 students from highly diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. A considerable proportion of students receive free school meals (35.5% FSM), a key indicator of economic deprivation. Additionally, some students require additional support to develop their literacy skills, making this strategic target crucial for improving educational outcomes.

The assignment is structured as follows: first, it will explore the literature surrounding the school development process, then outline the selected action point from the SDP, detailing its rationale and intended impact. Next, it will critically examine the implementation process, followed by an evaluation of its effectiveness. Finally, the assignment will provide an evidence-based reflection on the success of an action with potential opportunities for further improvement.

Literature Review

School Development Process

School Development Planning (SDP) is a structured process that aims to improve educational outcomes through targeted, evidence-based actions (Harris & Jones, 2018). In Wales, the SDP process is guided by national frameworks such as the School Development Plan (Wales) Regulations 2014, which mandates that schools outline key priorities for improvement, aligning them with government policies (Welsh Government, 2014). The Welsh Government's broader educational strategy, Curriculum for Wales, emphasises equity and literacy, and closes the attainment gap, reinforcing the importance of robust school development planning (Donaldson, 2015). The SDP typically follows a cyclical process: assessment of current performance, identification of strategic priorities, implementation of actions, and ongoing evaluation (Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017).

The SDP has a multifaceted purpose. It provides a path for school improvement, ensuring accountability and alignment with national educational priorities (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). It facilitates a data-driven approach to school leadership, encouraging data to be used to inform decisions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As for Wales, a SDP is particularly significant as it seeks to mitigate disparities in educational attainment, especially those arising from socioeconomic disadvantages (Welsh Government, 2021). Research suggests that effective SDPs must be context-specific, addressing the unique challenges faced by individual schools while aligning with broader policy objectives (Day & Sammons, 2016).

Additionally, implementing an effective SDP requires a cooperative approach, involving teachers, leaders, parents, students, and other stakeholders to develop a shared goal for increased performance (Muijs et al., 2014). Leadership is paramount in driving this process,

as distributed leadership models have been found to enhance school improvement efforts by fostering a sense of collective responsibility (Spillane, 2006).

Moreover, continuous professional development for teachers is essential in ensuring that SDP initiatives translate into meaningful classroom practices (Cordingley et al., 2015). Schools that integrate SDP with self-evaluation methods mostly achieve more sustainable improvements, as ongoing reflection and adaptation help maintain progress (MacBeath, 2013). This means that SDP is not just a compliance tool, it's an affective mechanism which enhances teaching quality, student outcomes, and overall school effectiveness (Chapman & Hadfield, 2015).

Challenges in Raising Standards in Languages, Literacy & Communication

Addressing literacy disparities, particularly among disadvantaged students, presents considerable challenges. Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the strongest predictors of educational attainment, with lower-income students often experiencing limited access to literacy-rich environments before formal schooling (Moll et al., 1992). This gap can manifest in lower levels of phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In Wales, data from Estyn (2020) indicates that students who receive free school meals (FSM) typically perform lower in literacy assessments compared to their peers.

Another significant challenge is supporting EAL students. Research highlights that EAL learners require tailored instructional strategies, particularly in early literacy acquisition (Cummins, 2000). While bilingualism can be an asset, transitioning from conversational fluency to academic proficiency is often slow, requiring sustained pedagogical support (Genesee et al., 2006). Additionally, studies show that EAL students from lower SES backgrounds face compounded difficulties due to a lack of home literacy resources (Strand, Malmberg, & Hall, 2015).

Furthermore, teacher preparedness is a crucial factor. Teachers often report feeling underprepared to support EAL learners or to implement differentiated literacy strategies effectively (Gibbons, 2015). In Wales, the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (NLNF) emphasises the need for targeted professional development to enhance teacher competencies in literacy instruction (Welsh Government, 2013). However, gaps remain in accessibility to high-quality, literacy-focused professional learning opportunities (Estyn, 2018).

Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Literacy Challenges

A growing body of literature suggests several effective strategies for improving literacy outcomes, particularly among disadvantaged and EAL learners. One widely recognised approach is systematic phonics instruction, which has been shown to enhance early reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonics-based interventions have been particularly effective for struggling readers, including those from low-SES backgrounds (Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006). In Wales, phonics instruction has been embedded within the NLNF, reinforcing its role in foundational literacy development (Welsh Government, 2013).

Another key strategy is explicit vocabulary instruction, which research indicates is critical for literacy success, particularly for EAL learners (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). Stahl and Nagy (2006) argue that direct teaching of academic vocabulary, combined with

contextualised exposure, significantly enhances comprehension skills. Schools that integrate vocabulary-rich environments, through methods like storytelling and interactive read-alouds, tend to see improved literacy outcomes (Wasik & Hindman, 2011).

Additionally, metacognitive reading strategies have gained traction as an effective tool for developing reading comprehension skills. Strategies such as reciprocal teaching, where students predict, question, clarify, and summarise texts, have enhanced literacy engagement (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). These approaches align with the Welsh Government's focus on fostering independent learners as part of the Curriculum for Wales (Donaldson, 2015).

Beyond direct instruction, parental engagement has a vital role in developing literacy. Research shows indications that those who have exposure to home-based literacy activities, such as shared book reading, demonstrate stronger literacy skills (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). However, for families experiencing economic hardship, barriers such as limited time, resources, or literacy skills may hinder effective home-school collaboration (Hart & Risley, 1995). Schools have attempted to bridge this gap through initiatives like family literacy programs, which have shown promise in engaging parents in their children's literacy development (Epstein, 2011).

Critical Engagement with the Literature

While there is strong evidence supporting structured literacy interventions, gaps remain in the research. One challenge is the long-term sustainability of literacy initiatives. Studies highlight that short-term interventions often yield immediate gains but may not lead to sustained literacy improvements unless embedded within a school-wide culture of literacy development (Slavin et al., 2009). Moreover, research on phonics, while overwhelmingly positive, has been criticised for being too narrowly focused, sometimes neglecting the importance of broader comprehension skills (Goodman, 2006).

Additionally, while EAL-focused literacy strategies are well-documented, research in the Welsh context remains limited. Much of the literature is based on English-dominant settings, necessitating further studies on bilingual education within Wales' unique linguistic landscape (Baker, 2011). The interplay between English and Welsh language development presents additional complexities that require further exploration (May, 2013).

A further emerging trend is the role of digital literacy tools in bridging attainment gaps. With the increasing integration of technology in education, research suggests that digital platforms can enhance literacy engagement, particularly for reluctant readers (Higgins et al., 2012). However, digital access disparities must be addressed to ensure equitable benefits, particularly among disadvantaged students (Selwyn, 2020).

The literature underscores the complexity of raising literacy standards, particularly for disadvantaged and EAL learners. While strategies such as systematic phonics instruction, vocabulary enrichment, and parental engagement have shown significant promise, challenges remain in ensuring sustained impact. In the Welsh context, SDP frameworks offer a structured approach to addressing these literacy challenges. Extended studies are needed to establish proof of literacy interventions effectiveness within bilingual education settings. Future studies should explore the long-term sustainability of literacy initiatives and the future potential of digital tools to support literacy development in diverse classrooms.

Action Point Development

Context of the Target

The strategic target of raising standards in Languages, Literacy, and Communication at School A aligns with the school's broader vision of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students. This goal directly supports the Welsh Government's priorities, particularly those outlined in Curriculum for Wales (Donaldson, 2015), which emphasises literacy as a foundational skill essential for lifelong learning. Furthermore, research has consistently highlighted the link between early literacy development and future academic success (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The decision to prioritise literacy improvement is grounded in internal assessments and external inspection feedback from Estyn (2020), which identified the need to strengthen phonics instruction and spelling proficiency. Additionally, the socioeconomic context of the school, with a proportion of students receiving FSM, reinforces the urgency of addressing literacy gaps to mitigate the long-term effects of educational disadvantage (Welsh Government, 2021).

Implementation

School A has taken a structured approach to addressing literacy challenges through a phased implementation plan. The initiative to raise standards in phonics awareness and spelling began with a comprehensive review of phonics and spelling data across all progression steps. This step was critical in identifying patterns of underachievement and inconsistencies in instructional delivery. Following this, the school audited existing phonics provisions, ensuring that resources were allocated effectively to target areas of need (Harris & Jones, 2018).

A key milestone in the implementation process was the school's development of the Phonics and Spelling Programme of Progression, which standardised expectations across year groups. This initiative was complemented by creating an overview of phonics and high-frequency word instruction, ensuring coherence in teaching strategies across key stages. Additionally, the school reintroduced the Grammar Glossary, aligning grammar expectations with developmental stages to reinforce language structure and writing proficiency (Gibbons, 2015).

To enhance writing standards, the school adopted the Talk for Writing strategy, a research-based approach that promotes oral rehearsal as a precursor to written composition (Corbett, 2008). This was supported by professional development sessions where all teaching staff received training in Talk for Writing methodologies. Moreover, a designated project team was established to oversee implementation, fostering a culture of collaborative professional learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Classroom practice and leadership were further reviewed by cooperating with an external literacy consultant, ensuring that instructional strategies remained evidence-based and aligned with best practices (Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017).

Resource allocation was a critical consideration throughout the process. The school invested in high-quality phonics materials, spelling programs, and interactive literacy tools to support differentiated instruction. Regular coaching sessions were embedded within the professional development framework, ensuring teachers had the necessary skills to deliver effective phonics and writing instruction (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). Additionally, literacy-focused

parent engagement workshops were introduced to reinforce home-school collaboration, recognising the vital role of parental involvement in literacy attainment (Epstein, 2011).

Impact Measurement

The effectiveness of the literacy strategy is evaluated through multiple assessment mechanisms. Formative assessments, including phonics screenings and writing samples, provide immediate insights into student progress. These are supplemented by standardised literacy tests, enabling the school to track long-term trends in achievement (Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006). Pupil progress meetings ensure data is analysed collaboratively, allowing for targeted interventions where necessary.

Furthermore, pupil and teacher surveys are conducted to assess the perceived impact of instructional strategies. This qualitative data provides valuable insights into student engagement levels and teacher confidence in delivering phonics and writing instruction (Wasik & Hindman, 2011). Additionally, external moderation by literacy consultants offers an objective evaluation of teaching practices, ensuring alignment with best practices (Higgins et al., 2012).

Critical Analysis

The school's approach to raising literacy standards demonstrates several strengths. The emphasis on data-driven decision-making ensures that interventions are targeted and responsive to student needs (Day & Sammons, 2016). The phased implementation strategy allows for gradual refinement of instructional practices, reducing the risk of overwhelming staff with simultaneous changes. Moreover, the integration of Talk for Writing is a strong component, as research supports its efficacy in developing writing fluency (Corbett, 2008). However, there are areas for improvement. One potential limitation is the sustainability of professional development initiatives. While initial training sessions have been comprehensive, ongoing support is essential to prevent skill attrition among teachers (Slavin et al., 2009). Establishing literacy coaching as a permanent feature of professional learning communities could help address this issue (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Additionally, while formative assessments provide valuable data, there is a need for greater emphasis on student self-assessment practices to foster independent literacy development (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Another consideration is the accessibility of literacy resources for disadvantaged students. While classroom-based interventions have been robust, barriers to home-based literacy engagement persist, particularly for FSM-eligible students (Hart & Risley, 1995). Expanding family literacy initiatives and providing take-home literacy kits could help bridge this gap (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Furthermore, given the increasing role of technology in education, there is scope to integrate digital literacy tools to enhance student engagement (Selwyn, 2020).

Overall, the school's literacy strategy represents a well-structured, evidence-informed approach to raising attainment. By addressing sustainability challenges, enhancing parental engagement, and leveraging digital tools, School A can further strengthen its impact on literacy outcomes.

Reflection and Evaluation

Reflecting on the implementation of literacy strategies at School A, it is evident that structured, evidence-based approaches can drive significant improvements in literacy

outcomes. The emphasis on professional development and collaborative learning has fostered a more cohesive teaching environment, with teachers demonstrating increased confidence in delivering phonics and writing instruction (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, long-term sustainability remains a critical challenge, necessitating continuous investment in teacher training and literacy resources.

One of the key lessons learned is the importance of integrating parental engagement more systematically. Research highlights the impact of literacy in home environments and the links to shaping children's reading development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Future efforts should focus on equipping parents with the tools to support literacy at home, potentially through digital resources and targeted workshops.

Additionally, there is a need to refine assessment strategies to capture a broader picture of student progress. Making use of self-assessment and student-to-student feedback methods can encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, fostering metacognitive skills that are essential for long-term literacy success (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

While the school's literacy strategy has raised standards, continuous reflection and adaptation are necessary to ensure its long-term impact. Strengthening home-school partnerships, enhancing assessment methodologies, and sustaining professional development initiatives will be key to achieving lasting literacy improvements at School A.

Conclusion

This assignment critically evaluated the development of a strategic target regarding School A's SDP. The aim was to enhance outcomes in LLC while mitigating the effects of poverty on student education. The literature review underscored the significance of structured school development planning, aligning with national policies and research-backed methodologies.

The action point development demonstrated the systematic implementation of phonics and writing strategies, highlighting the effectiveness of professional training, resource allocation, and data-driven interventions. Furthermore, the reflection identified both positives and negatives, particularly in relation to sustained professional learning and improving parental engagement.

Identifying the importance of evidence-based decision-making in educational improvement was a key lesson from this analysis. The findings reinforce that targeted, research-driven interventions, such as Talk for Writing and structured phonics programs, yield measurable progress when consistently implemented (Higgins, 2023). Moreover, ongoing staff skills advancement and collaboration in fostering sustainable literacy improvement are evident (Timperley et al., 2022).

This experience has reinforced my commitment to using reflective practice and empirical evidence to inform my teaching. By prioritising inclusive, data-informed strategies, I aim to contribute to meaningful learning experiences, ensuring that literacy development remains central to educational success and equity.

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