



# Addressing the Needs of Exceptional English Learners: A Book-Review

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Teaching English to Filipino learners have been challenging especially during the time of pandemic with very limited interaction between the teacher and the students. Different online learning platforms were explored and utilized so that continuity of learning may happen despite the situation. Distance learning was welcomed by every learner both in the basic education system and tertiary levels. Applications were also further accessed so that language learning can become more engaging at the same time develop the communication skills of all learners. However, this scenario was not a walk in the park for many; likewise, it becomes more difficult for those students who have special needs. These circumstances serve as challenges for teachers to reevaluate and reinvent their teaching practices to further accommodate and teach English to diverse learners may it be during times of pandemic or not.

In line with this, the book *Supporting English Learners with Exceptional Needs* by Patricia Rice Doran and Amy K. Noggle was reviewed and evaluated. The authors are faculty in Arcola Elementary School in Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland as well as in Towson University. For this reason, this gives us thought that the authors gained inspiration in writing this book through their students to provide them support and intervention. This book tries to address the needs of the learners who have high-incidence and low-incidence disabilities.

As reviewers and evaluators of this book, we have our personal thoughts and ideas in teaching English to our learners. Filipino learners who are studying English also possess diverseness and uniqueness which lets us use varied teaching strategies to accommodate different learners’ needs and weaknesses. The information featured in this book are useful to better and improve the classroom teaching of English and further develop the skills of the students. The insights shared by the author could be essential for use to devise ways towards improvement of language learning suited for the needs of Filipinos learners.

In its introduction, the writers had elaborated the extensive research of the challenges faced in the United States concerning English learners. The data showed that there is a need to reevaluate practices as well as improve class routine since learners are diverse in so many ways. Moreover, these challenges paved way for opportunities to support as well make significant changes in the education system were seen. It is also important to note that the book recognizes the potentials that could be discovered from learners with disabilities if they would be supported and nurtured through a special education system in accordance to the child development perspective.

The book is divided into three sections which include different chapters that showcase scenarios in real-life setting, elaboration of key concepts, and more importantly practical approaches relevant in teaching English to learners with learning disabilities. Specifically, Section 1 includes background knowledge related to English learners and students’ abilities. Section 2 discussed the classroom structures and framework. Lastly, Section 3 distinguishes the support needed for English learners with disability. Through these sections the strengths, weaknesses, as well as policies for English learners were emphasized together with the necessary classroom approaches and assessments that can be utilized in specializing programs for English learners.

The first Chapter of the book is *What Do English Learners Bring to Our Schools? Cognitive, Linguistic, and Cultural Assets*. In this chapter we are given a realization on how we provide interventions and assessment among our diverse learners. It is elaborated that in the case of a classroom with learners of diverse background we should highlight the essence of strength-based thinking. It also made us reflect on the resilience of our students and their funds of knowledge. The chapter could sum up the need for teachers to develop strategies that will be holistic and honing the context of the uniqueness of each learner especially in language learning. The chapter also put emphasis on educational equity among learners, we must value the strengths and assets of the learners as they attain proficiency in language learning.

The second Chapter of the book, *Challenges and Opportunities for English Learners in Our Schools*, expounds on the concept of dealing with our learners’ needs as opportunities instead of challenges. As language teachers we should see a silver lining upon hurdling the challenges of diversity among our learners. It put significant consideration on translating the learners’ need which are composed of different life-stressors into meaningful opportunities towards learning. The chapter also presents to us several challenges faced by a language learner which involves not only his cognitive ability but his family and cultural background. The chapter also expounds on several approaches and learning frameworks which can be valuable resources for educators in dealing with learners needs as opportunities rather than challenges.

On the other hand, Chapter 3, *A Policy Primer* reiterates the different government and state policies concerning children right to education and how these policies helped in transforming the language learning landscape for many English learners with difficult situation such as the child who became the point of discussion in the chapter “Eterio”. The chapter also traces back the history of how discrimination due to race or disability was not avoided by several state policies such as the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) in 2002, and the ‘Every Student Succeed Acts (ESSA)’ in 2015. More so, the chapter puts emphasis on how policies put premium on the protection of English learners with exceptional needs as well as those policies that recognizes the need to fund individualized educational services.

Section 2 of the book is welcomed by its fourth Chapter, *Ecological Approaches and Multitiered Systems of Support: Holistic Approaches to Serving English Learners* where in it distinguishes the diversity of learners in a learning community. Given the said situation, it expounds on the significance of an ecological, tiered framework which may present school personnel the chance to back up the learners in several aspects.



These may include interdisciplinary communication and collaborative work among school personnel. The chapter also assess the necessity to ensure that the intervention provided for the learners are based from their background and level of development. The chapter reflects on presenting interventions not only based on their cultural perspectives but also based on the whole-child perspective.

In Chapter 5, *Collaborative Problem Solving for English Learners: The Unique Role of the ESOL Teacher* the authors discuss the problem-solving process in language learning. The chapter reviewed the different process that are found conducive towards planning successful classes among English learners. It explains the need for a thorough discussion and observations prompts that may be relevant in solving the problem of a learner. The discussion on collaborative problem solving was given prominence in the chapter as well since it is found to be an important element in providing support in teaching diverse learners. Furthermore, the need of consistency among ESOL teachers as an integral part of the problem-solving process was focused upon since they are expected to distinguish the strengths of the learners, and how these will be used to better facilitate strategies.

The sixth Chapter is *Universal Supports for English Learners at Risk*. This chapter discusses the common problems that the English teachers are experiencing in their classes like lack of parental support and nonacademic factors (lack of sleep, living environment, and daily stressors) which leads to the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This is a framework for curriculum and instruction that is used to provide accessibility, support, and challenge by considering the needs of each learner. Moreover, thin this chapter, it is emphasized that teachers need to identify and consider a lot of factors before providing solutions and interventions. The support provided to students are not confined with the structured classroom adjustments, sometimes students are affected by external factors like family pressures or internal factors like student's disability.

Chapter seventh is *Targeted Supports for English Learners*. This chapter explains the parameters in providing targeted supports and interventions to English learners. Teachers need to consider the prior experiences of the learners including their trauma if there is. Identifying the student's strengths, needs, and unique profile is necessary. It is also emphasized that in the implementation of the intervention, parents or family members are encouraged to take part actively for an effective turnout.

Chapter eight is *Assessment and Identification for English/ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners: High-incidence Disabilities*. In this chapter, several court cases were featured to gain understanding on the experiences of the people with disabilities and their challenges encountered by the immigrants and minority populations in schools. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) was also discussed that is made to provide unbiased testing procedures and to address language barriers.

Chapter ninth is *Assessment and Identification for English Learners: Low-incidence Disabilities*. This chapter features how the students with low-incidence disabilities (LID) were specifically evaluated and assessed and the challenges that the teachers faced. The LID students are the ones who are deaf, blind, or having other health impairments. The challenges faced by the teachers were shortage of knowledgeable personnel, specialized/interdisciplinary knowledge, and skill sets, and need for appropriate assessment procedures. The teachers needed the help of some medical, speech, audiology, and assistive technology in addressing the needs of the learners under LID prior and during the learning process.

The last chapter is *Intensive Supports and Specialized Programming for English Learners*. This part talks about the recommended practices in developing and implementing specialized programs for students with low-incidence disabilities and high-incidence disabilities. Teachers may reach to the families of the learners with disabilities. A collaborative discussion is helpful to make sure that the ways in teaching the students were appropriate and fitting according to the needs of the students. Also, schools may provide intensive interventions and supports to students that takes into consideration their level of proficiency and cultural fit. This chapter provided a number of available resources and self-evaluation forms that teachers and schools may use.

In the hope of improving the teaching and learning experience of the students and to further address diverse learners, the evaluators recommend this book to teachers of English. In terms of addressing the students' needs and weaknesses, this book provided sample situations that teachers of English usually encounter while providing strategies on how to properly address them. Furthermore, this book tries to ensure that all the learners discover their giftedness and how they could use it in powerful ways.

## Reference

Doran, P. R., & Noggle, A. K. (2019). *Supporting English Learners with Exceptional Needs*. Alexandria, Virginia: TESOL Press.

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