



Supporting Academic and Non-Academic Needs

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What Is the Topic

[Research](#) demonstrates that English Learners (ELs) often face multifaceted academic needs, including language proficiency, content knowledge, and literacy skills (August et al., 2009). [Academic needs](#) refer to the specific educational requirements ELs must meet to develop [social and academic proficiency in English](#) while mastering grade-level content. Effective instructional practices are crucial for addressing these needs, including differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and using culturally relevant materials that connect learning to students' backgrounds and experiences (Tigert & Leider, 2022). Beyond academics, there are [non-academic skills](#) vital to ELs overall development. These include social integration, cultural adaptation, and the development of self-efficacy (Stone, 2008). Non-academic support helps ELs navigate social complexities, fostering a sense of belonging and confidence in their ability to succeed. Schools can support these needs by creating inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and offering resources like language support programs, mentorship opportunities, and accessible extracurricular activities (Heineke et al., 2012). Additionally, [peer composition and support](#) play a vital role in the success of ELs. This concept refers to the academic assistance, social companionship, and emotional backing provided by classmates, which can be structured through programs like peer tutoring or occur informally (Hattie, 2002). Research shows that peer composition and support enhance language acquisition, improve academic performance, and foster social integration, thus reducing the isolation ELs may experience (Lelieur et al., 2024).

We emphasize the importance of [social-emotional well-being](#) and [mental health](#) in promoting the skills necessary for recognizing and managing emotions, developing empathy, and establishing positive relationships within and outside of the school (Dresser, 2012; Elias et al., 2014). Studies show that a strong sense of social support and belonging in the classroom boosts disadvantaged students' achievement, motivation, and engagement (Becker & Luthar, 2012; McCormick et al., 2015). Fostering social-emotional well-being in schools can address barriers to learning caused by academic and non-academic pressures, such as feelings of isolation and disconnect from school culture (Winsler et al.,



2014; LeClaire et al., 2009). By addressing both academic and non-academic needs and fostering a strong sense of belonging and support in the classroom, educators, school counselors and leaders can enhance the overall educational experience and outcomes for English Learners (Albeg, 2013).

What Is the Evidence Base

Multiple studies indicate that building connections in the classroom is important as the classroom is the heartbeat of a school, regardless of if that classroom is in person or virtual. There are significant benefits of interactive learning in the classroom that go beyond academics. Students who are actively engaged in class make friends, learn how to be inclusive, and develop soft skills that will help them in their future career, including leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork. Those interactions also help students develop connections with friends, teachers, and the school itself.

[Research](#) shows that there is a clear link between emotions and academic performance. Valiente et al. (2012) found that positive emotions enhance academic competence because they encourage exploring, integrating diverse materials, and broadening potential methods of solving problems. In addition to promoting positive emotions and building resilience in students, effective social-emotional approaches focus on daily skill and emotional development. According to Ashdown and Bernard (2012), the most successful methods use a systematic and intentional approach to teaching critical skills and recognize these skills within their context. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) suggest that this can be achieved by implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum or program that follows a sequenced, step-by-step approach, engages students in active learning, dedicates adequate time to skill development, and sets clear learning goals (p. 408).

Framework 1: [Peer-Assisted Learning](#). This framework involves structured peer tutoring and collaborative learning activities where students support each other's learning, demonstrating numerous benefits for learners of all ages (see Figure 1). This framework encompasses peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching, and cooperative learning groups. Research has shown that PAL can enhance language acquisition, improve academic performance, and foster social integration for English Learners (ELs) (Sáenz et al., 2005). By working with peers, ELs receive additional assistance in understanding content and developing language skills, while also benefiting from enhanced social interactions and emotional support (Lelieur et al., 2024). Peer-assisted learning supports non-academic needs by creating opportunities for students to engage in meaningful social interactions, develop a sense of belonging, and build interpersonal skills. For instance, it can help students navigate social dynamics, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve self-efficacy.

- Sáenz et al. (2005) found that students who participated in Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies demonstrated significantly improved reading comprehension compared to those in the contrast group, with benefits observed across all achievement levels and irrespective of learning disabilities.
- McMaster et al. (2008) assessed the effectiveness of Kindergarten Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies and found that it was equally effective for English Learners (ELs) as for



non-ELs. These results provide evidence that classroom-based instruction can benefit both ELs and non-ELs similarly, highlighting the importance of ensuring that Tier 1 interventions are effective for diverse student populations.

- Mackley (2009) studied how peer-assisted learning impacted the learning experiences of 48 English learner kindergarten students. The findings indicated that most students showed improvement in their early literacy skills, demonstrating the potential benefits of collaborative learning strategies in supporting the academic development of young English learners.

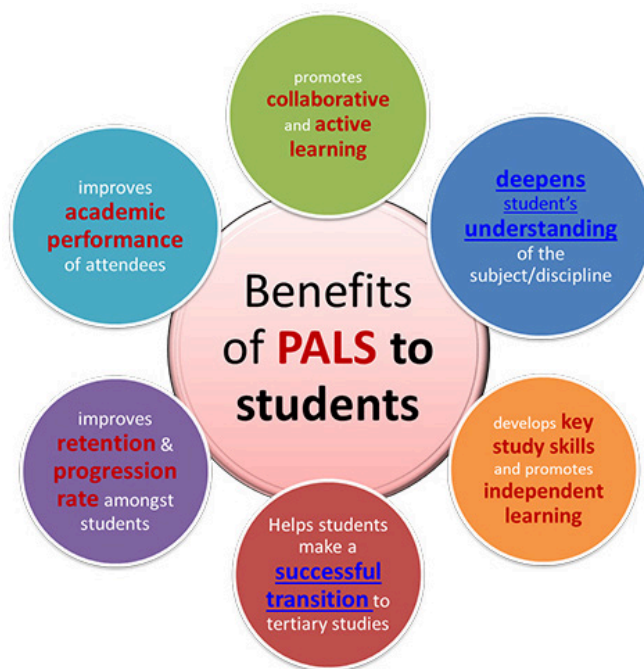


Figure 1. Benefits of Peer-Assisted Learning

Framework 2: Collaborative Strategic Reading. This is a research-based instructional practice designed to improve reading comprehension and content area learning. This model combines cooperative learning with explicit teaching of comprehension techniques. This model also supports ELs by boosting their reading comprehension, facilitating content area learning, and aiding language acquisition. By working collaboratively, ELs develop critical academic skills and gain a deeper grasp of complex subjects, while also practicing and refining their language abilities in a supportive group setting (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).

- Klingner et al. (2004) investigated the yearlong implementation of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) by examining five interventions with teachers and their students, who received CSR professional development and ongoing support. The findings show that students in CSR classrooms made significant improvements in reading comprehension compared to those in control classrooms. Teacher case studies indicated that, except for one teacher, the level of students' comprehension gains was closely linked to the quality of CSR implementation.



- Vaughn et al. (2011) studied the impact of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) on reading comprehension for seventh- and eighth-grade students, including English Learners (ELs), across Texas and Colorado. Students in 34 CSR classes received targeted reading instruction over 18 weeks, while 27 comparison classes did not. Results showed that CSR significantly improved reading comprehension, as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Comprehension Test, though no significant differences were found in reading fluency. The findings underscore CSR's effectiveness in enhancing comprehension skills, especially for EL students.
- Abella et al. (2023) examined the impact of collaborative strategic reading (CSR) in English learners, focusing on reading comprehension, content mastery, language acquisition, and collaborative learning. The review of literature highlights CSR's benefits, including improved reading comprehension, enhanced understanding of complex texts, and better content retention. CSR also supports language acquisition by increasing proficiency and communicative skills, while fostering a collaborative learning environment that promotes peer interaction.

Summary

Review of relevant literature: Theoretical basis	Review of relevant literature: Support of identified research and practice	Empirical evidence on how it serves students and promotes systemic change
Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is grounded in a collaborative learning approach, focusing on peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching, and cooperative learning. It is based on the idea that students can enhance each other's learning through structured interactions (Sáenz et al., 2005).	Research indicates that PAL effectively supports language acquisition, academic performance, and social integration for English Learners (ELs). Studies have shown that ELs benefit from additional support in content understanding and language development through peer interactions (Lelieur et al., 2024).	Empirical evidence shows that PAL improves reading comprehension for students, including those with learning disabilities (Sáenz et al., 2005). McMaster et al. (2008) found PAL to be equally effective for ELs and non-ELs, and Mackley (2009) demonstrated improvements in early literacy skills for EL kindergarten students.
Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) combines cooperative learning with explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. It is based on cooperative learning and metacognition, aiming to enhance reading comprehension and content mastery through structured group interactions (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).	CSR research highlights its effectiveness in boosting reading comprehension and content area learning for ELs. The model supports language acquisition and academic skills by promoting collaborative work and targeted instruction (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).	Findings indicate that CSR significantly improves reading comprehension for students, including ELs. Klingner et al. (2004) and Vaughn et al. (2011) reported substantial gains in comprehension, with CSR supporting both academic skills and language development. Abella et al. (2023) confirmed CSR's benefits in enhancing reading skills and content understanding for ELs.



Equity Considerations

[Equity in education](#) means ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or language proficiency, have access to high-quality instructional practices that support their academic and non-academic growth. For ELs, this includes addressing disparities in language acquisition, academic performance, and social integration. Both peer-assisted learning and collaborative strategic reading offer structured, research-based interventions that aim to bridge gaps by providing targeted support in reading comprehension and social interaction. However, it is essential to recognize that the effectiveness of these interventions can vary depending on factors such as students' initial [language proficiency](#), [cultural backgrounds](#), and the implementation fidelity of these frameworks. Ensuring that these programs are adapted to meet the diverse needs of ELs and are implemented with a focus on [diversity and inclusion](#) can enhance their impact on reducing educational inequities.

Example from the Field

“Teachers who are sensitive to children’s emotional needs might be able to transcend the language barriers and create social environments in which these children are accepted by their peers and have more opportunities to become full participants in the community of the classroom” Gillanders (2007, p. 52).

Considerations for Local Context: Strategy Selection

As we consider the optimal next steps for supporting school counselors and school leaders to establish strategies that can effectively address the socio-emotional-well being of all students, a valuable source information lies in the local context of the district and/or school. By local context, we refer to the specific factors within the community that may impact the development and effectiveness of the models and strategies discussed in this brief. To better understand the characteristics of the local context in a school or district, it is recommended to consult the Oregon Department of Education social and emotional learning approach to inform educational planning and decision-making processes around academic and non-academic needs and peer support in schools. Two local examples of districts utilizing such resources to improve mental health programs include, [Southern Oregon Education Service District](#) and [North Clackamas Schools](#).

As school counselors and leaders develop plans to foster socio-emotional well-being among English learners and implement strategies for existing programs, they should consider the following best practices identified through a review of literature on effective practices and optimal conditions for English learners. [This article](#) highlights key practices that support both academic and non-academic needs:

- [Know the students](#): Understand students' backgrounds, including their country of origin, first language (L1), duration in the U.S., prior schooling, and academic performance.



- Teach language and content: Provide both language and content instruction. Keep language instruction in its natural context with real-world applications. Help students acquire academic vocabulary relevant to content areas.
- Employ thematic instruction: Teach language within meaningful contexts and through "Big Question" themes. Use thematic instruction to provide extended exposure to the same language and integrate themes across subjects. Connect themes to ELs' lives and backgrounds.
- Draw on ELs' language and culture: Preview, view, and review content in students' L1 to enhance comprehension. Provide oral summaries in L1, ask key questions, and allow group brainstorming in L1. Use comprehensible input techniques to support understanding.
- Emphasize meaningful reading: Focus on text-level skills for reading comprehension. Gradually shift reading responsibility from teacher to student using varied approaches like read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading.
- Maintain high expectations: Set high expectations and project a belief that ELs can achieve at higher levels. Provide scaffolding to support achievement of these expectations and avoid watering down the curriculum.
- Demonstrate concepts and ideas: Use manipulatives, realia, role-play, non-verbal gestures, and visuals to clarify concepts.
- Emphasize critical information: Highlight important information with bold letters, underlining, and supplementary materials such as pictures, charts, and graphs.

What Can Educators Do: Strategies for Success

As school counselors, administrators, and educators develop strategies to support the academic and non-academic needs of English learners, it is essential to focus on their [strengths](#). Leveraging these strengths can provide a solid foundation for identifying effective support strategies within schools. Additionally, reviewing the [Oregon Model Core Teaching Standards](#) is recommended, as this resource outlines key competencies that educators should have to support all students' growth and learning, complementing the strategies discussed in this brief.

Also consider answering and reflecting on the following questions:

1. How well do our current programs and strategies address the specific socio-emotional and academic needs of English learners, considering their diverse backgrounds and varying levels of language proficiency?
2. In what ways can we enhance our instructional practices to better integrate language and content instruction, ensuring that English learners are supported both academically and in their socio-emotional development?
3. How can we effectively employ thematic instruction and connect learning themes to the personal and cultural experiences of English learners to foster deeper engagement and understanding?
4. What methods are currently in place to support English learners through their native languages, and how can we expand these methods to improve comprehension and academic success?



5. Are our expectations for English learners appropriately high, and do we provide sufficient scaffolding and support to help them meet these expectations without diluting the curriculum?
6. How can we leverage peer support and collaborative learning strategies to enhance both academic and socio-emotional outcomes for English learners, and what structures need to be in place to facilitate effective peer interactions and support?

The strategies below serve as examples of potential options rather than a definitive set of recommendations. Suitable approaches could support and key in on various factors associated with the school or district, such as the frameworks and strategies to support the academic and non academic needs of all students.

Strategy 1: Gratitude Practice

Primary audience: educators, school counselors, and students

Description: This strategy involves four essential components: noticing, thinking, feeling, and doing. Students are guided to observe aspects of their lives for which they are thankful, contemplate the reasons behind these blessings, reflect on their emotional responses, and take action to express their appreciation. This structured yet flexible approach allows learners to engage with gratitude in a manner that suits their individual needs and preferences. Research indicates that practicing gratitude can significantly enhance well-being and strengthen relationships in schools (Sansone & Sansone, 2010; Wong et al., 2018). Although writing is a widely supported method for expressing gratitude and can be calming for some students, it is essential to recognize that gratitude practices should be tailored to individual preferences and needs.

How to use it?

To effectively implement this strategy, consider the following steps:

- a) Notice: Encourage learners to identify and acknowledge aspects of their lives or learning environment that they are grateful for. This can be facilitated through class discussions, personal reflection activities, or journaling.
- b) Think: Have learners explore why they value these aspects. This can be done through guided questions, reflective writing, or group discussions.
- c) Feel: Allow learners to reflect on their emotional responses to the aspects they are grateful for. This can include artistic expression, such as drawing or painting, or using digital media like videos or slideshows.
- d) Do: Support learners in finding ways to express their gratitude. This can range from creating and sharing gratitude notes or videos, to verbally thanking someone, or posting appreciative messages on social media.
- e) Provide Options: Offer diverse methods for capturing and expressing gratitude to accommodate different preferences and skills, avoiding choice fatigue and ensuring inclusivity.

Consider checking [this resource](#) to explore more ways to promote gratitude practice in the classroom.

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

This strategy benefits students by improving their emotional well-being, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and enhancing overall classroom climate. It also supports educators and counselors by



fostering a positive learning environment and providing tools for socio-emotional development. Both students and educators benefit from increased empathy, improved mood, and a more supportive community (Wong et al., 2018).

How does it support changes in the systems?

By incorporating gratitude practices into the curriculum, schools can promote a culture of appreciation and positive interaction, which supports broader systemic changes towards more supportive and emotionally attuned educational environments (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). It helps embed [socio-emotional learning](#) into daily practices, contributing to a more holistic approach to student development.

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

Be mindful not to impose gratitude practices in a way that feels forced or superficial, as this can lead to resistance or disengagement. Avoid overwhelming students with too many options or creating unrealistic expectations about how they should express their gratitude. Ensure that the practice is developmentally appropriate and respects individual differences in how gratitude is experienced and expressed.

Strategy 2: [The Circle of Control](#)

Primary audience: educators, school counselors, and students

Description: This is a reflective practice that helps students distinguish between aspects of their lives they can influence and those they cannot. By focusing on what is within their control, students learn to manage their emotions and respond to challenges more effectively (McClelland & Cameron, 2011).

How to use it?

To effectively implement this strategy, consider the following steps:

- a) Introduce the Concept: Begin by explaining the Circle of Control, emphasizing the difference between controllable and uncontrollable aspects. Use simple examples and visual aids to make the concept accessible.
- b) Practice with Examples: Provide students with scenarios to categorize into 'in control' and 'out of control.' This can be done through discussions or interactive activities like games.
- c) Encourage Personal Reflection: Ask students to identify and write down or discuss their own situations where they can apply the Circle of Control framework. This helps them internalize the concept and relate it to their personal experiences.
- d) Apply in Real Life: Support students in applying the exercise to real-life situations, such as coping with test anxiety or dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Use worksheets or guided discussions to help them create action plans for managing their emotions effectively.
- e) Review and Reflect: Regularly review the use of the Circle of Control with students to assess its impact and make adjustments based on their feedback and evolving needs.

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

This strategy benefits students by helping them manage their emotions and focus on actionable aspects of their situations, enhancing their self-regulation and coping skills. It also supports educators and counselors by providing a structured approach to addressing emotional challenges and fostering resilience.



How does it support changes in the systems?

Implementing the Circle of Control exercise promotes a supportive learning environment where students are equipped with practical tools for emotional management. This approach supports systemic changes by integrating socio-emotional learning into daily practices, thereby fostering a more inclusive and emotionally supportive educational setting.

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

Try not to oversimplify the concept or make it seem like a panacea for all emotional issues. Avoid forcing students to conform to rigid applications of the exercise; instead, tailor it to individual needs and contexts. Ensure that students have adequate support and guidance when applying the exercise to complex emotional situations, and avoid neglecting the need for additional support when required.

Implementation Considerations

As we embark on creating a plan and proceeding with implementation, it is useful to consider topic-specific aspects as well as general factors and guiding questions that can increase the likelihood for successful implementation. Consider learning more about the [importance of socio emotional learning for English learners](#) and how it can impact their academic and non-academic needs. We also recommend educators and school leaders checking [this resource](#) as it outlines different strategies to support the academic success and emotional well-being of English learners.

Local Context

To understand how the local contexts of the school, district, and community may impact the implementation of strategies to support the academic and non-academic needs of English learners, consider reflecting on the questions below. These questions will help in evaluating how local factors can impact the adoption and effectiveness of proposed strategies:

1. How can differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques be effectively integrated into your lesson plans to meet the diverse academic needs of English learners?
2. In what ways can culturally relevant materials be incorporated into your curriculum to enhance the learning experiences of English learners?
3. What strategies can be implemented to support the social integration and cultural adaptation of English learners within the school environment?
4. How can you foster the development of self-efficacy among English learners to help them build confidence in their academic and social abilities?
5. How can peer-assisted learning strategies, such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning groups, be structured to benefit both English learners and their peers?
6. What are some effective methods for promoting positive peer interactions that support the emotional and social well-being of English learners?



Consider as well:

- **Geographical Factors:** How do the location and size of the district/school impact the practical aspects of plan implementation?
- **Learning Mode:** What considerations are needed based on the learning mode (in person/remote/hybrid/other) prevalent in the local context?
- **Duration:** How long is the plan designed to last, and what measures are in place for its continuous effectiveness?
- **Reliability:** Is the implementation plan reliable and realistic given the local context, and what factors contribute to its sustainability?

Implementation Plan and Process

The following questions can further enhance clarity and provide practical guidance for educators and school leaders as they navigate the implementation process and monitor progress effectively:

What is our capacity for implementation?

Conduct an assessment of existing staff skills, training, and availability to deliver both academic and non-academic support to English Learners. Identify areas needing further training and allocate resources for staff development in peer-assisted learning and collaborative strategic reading techniques. Ensure that necessary infrastructure, such as classroom materials, technological tools, and conducive spaces for collaborative learning, is in place.

How are families involved in the implementation of the plan?

Establish clear [communication strategies with families](#) to convey the program's objectives, benefits, and ways they can support their children's learning at home. Ensure that materials and communications are culturally relevant and accessible in the families' preferred languages. Organize workshops, meetings, or events where families can learn about the program and contribute their insights and feedback. Create opportunities for families to provide feedback on the implementation process and suggest improvements.

How will we know if the implementation is successful?

Gather initial [data](#) on ELs' academic performance, language proficiency, and social-emotional well-being to establish a baseline. Implement regular assessments to monitor progress in reading comprehension, language acquisition, and social integration. Collect qualitative data through surveys, interviews, and focus groups (if possible) involving students, educators, and families to gauge satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. Set specific, measurable outcomes such as improvements in standardized test scores, increased participation in class, and enhanced peer relationships.

What resources do we need to implement the program, plan, or strategies?

Secure culturally relevant instructional materials, scaffolding resources, and differentiated instruction tools. When possible, invest in professional development programs focused on peer-assisted learning and collaborative strategic reading. Provide access to technology that facilitates interactive and collaborative learning environments. Ensure the availability of language support programs, mentorship opportunities, and extracurricular activities tailored to ELs' needs. While funding may not always be



readily available within school budgets, educators and school leaders can explore external funding opportunities. For instance, Oregon's Department of Education offers [grants and funding opportunities](#), and organizations like [Peter G. Peterson Foundation](#) may provide additional financial support. Additionally, consider checking the Oregon Department of Education's [Guideline](#) to spending funds responsibly.

Are accessibility supports in place?

Provide translation and interpretation services for families and ensure instructional materials are accessible in multiple languages. Try to incorporate [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) principles to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs. Ensure all learning environments are physically accessible to students with disabilities. Integrate social-emotional learning strategies and mental health resources to support the well-being of students.

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Learn More

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