Chapter 4
The EMAS and Its Role in the ESL Instruction to Immigrants in England

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the results of a quantitative research carried out through the administration of a questionnaire to the Multilingual Education Assistants who are part of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) at the Coventry City Council (UK). Authors investigate the importance and impact the EMAS service has in the reception of foreign students newly arrived in England. In particular, the strategies implemented to promote students’ integration within the new socio-cultural context are analysed. A revision of the most important theories related to the teaching-learning process of an L2 is carried out. An overview of migration in the 21st century and how intercultural education can foster the coexistence of cultures, ethnic groups, and languages is provided. This chapter concludes that Multilingual Education Assistants can help to encourage dialogue between individuals, promoting the overcoming of linguistic obstacles and developing the linguistic competence of foreign children who have just arrived in England.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is undoubtedly an important element for the integration of foreign children (Department for Education, 2003; 2014). The provision of language teaching in the language of the host country is often variable in quality and accessibility: some foreign children may need specific help as they could arrive without any previous educational experience. Fortunately, some countries have more or less comprehensive national programs available to provide specific support to newly arrived children, which could have a direct effect on their ability to achieve good results at school and to be adequately integrated into the host country. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) program in Coventry (UK), for example, has had some impact on the process of adaptation and academic results for newly arrived migrant children (Di Bartolomeo & Bonfanti, 2014).

Having had the opportunity to work as a Multilingual Education Assistant and seeing the challenges faced by newly arrived children, and the importance of cultural integration processes for the correct functioning of the socio-cultural mechanisms of the host country, the authors identified the need to deepen the effects of the program as well as objectively quantifying its impact to reach a bilingual level in the L2.

School admission of newly arrived foreign children certainly poses specific didactic problems, but also calls into question the school and the educational services in their generality. Considering the needs of foreign students means in fact pondering the communication methods to be adopted, the development of their linguistic competence in L2 and the relationship with others.

The presence of these children in schools can be considered a moment of enrichment of the educational proposal thanks to the attention paid to new needs and the diversity of abilities in the classroom. In addition, the newly arrived foreign students are children who are faced with specific urgent requirements and challenges: learning of English as a second language, adaptation and re-orientation with respect to space, time, the explicit and implicit rules of the new environment, all within ever-expanding cultural references. This is why it is important that the school is organized to be able to welcome and guide foreign students.

The EMAS service offers not only the newly arrived foreign pupil but also the school the possibility of being able to count on a welcome, orientation and teaching network, because it is fundamental for a child to be accepted, recognized and valued. The Multilingual Education Assistant allows linguistic facilitation, encouraging moments of interaction with the class group, promoting the ability to communicate, express, learn, thus fostering the development of English as L2.

The idea of this contribution is essentially to resolve the lack of previous observations and research in the context of the EMAS program of the Coventry City Council (UK) and to see the impact of this program on accelerating the acquisition of knowledge and language skills in the L2 of newly arrived children in the United Kingdom. Additionally, the authors will try to determine through a statistical survey whether a “competent” reception can facilitate the admission and integration of foreign students into an English school, also to examine the contribution of the EMAS service, demonstrate how essential it is to promote as well as strengthen school support actions and linguistic-cultural support, in order to make the school an inclusive socio-educational space.