St George International School of Madrid

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About our school

St. George School Madrid

St. George School Madrid is a private non-selective British international school in northern Madrid, offering an English-based education for children aged 2 to 18 within a diverse, multilingual community. It combines the English National Curriculum with international elements and prepares students for IGCSEs and the IB Diploma Programme.

There are currently 792 from over 40–50 nationalities, creating a strongly international environment. English is the main language of instruction, and students also follow the Spanish Curriculum (language and history/geography), with additional options such as French and German, supporting genuine multilingual development.

Students joining the school with little English or Spanish proficiency receive EAL and SAL classes. We have a strong SEN department with 140 students on register, accounting for 18.2% of the total students. Eleven of these students (1.4% of total students) are Wave 3, who require one-one support.

Research Question

How to support *communicative skills* in an EAL student with ADHD? An action research study on tools and resources in an international school context.

mlrc Multilingual Learning Research Center

iSP Multilingualism

Literature review

Supporting the communicative language skills of English as an Additional Language learners with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder presents a significant challenge in international school contexts, where linguistic diversity and cognitive differences often overlap. This study adopts an action research approach to explore how targeted tools and classroom resources can support the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in an individual EAL learner with ADHD.

The literature suggests that ADHD can create important barriers to second language learning, particularly in relation to attention regulation, working memory, and executive functioning. These difficulties affect learners' ability to process, retain, and produce language across the four communicative skills (Turkati, 2010).; Pérez Cabello et al., 2024).; Mohebbi, 2023). However, much of the existing research tends to treat ADHD as a relatively uniform condition, giving limited attention to how different ADHD profiles may interact with varying levels of English proficiency. This is especially relevant in EAL contexts, where learners already face the additional cognitive demands of unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, and communicative expectations.

Motivation is also widely recognised as an important factor in supporting learners with ADHD. Research indicates that students are more likely to sustain attention and persist with tasks when activities are meaningful, rewarding, or engaging (Skalski et al.,2020).; Morsink et al.,2022 Kakoulidou 2021) also links motivation to improved reading engagement. Nevertheless, these studies do not always explain how motivational strategies translate into measurable improvements in communicative language performance across reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This highlights the value of classroom-based research that examines motivation within authentic learning environments.

A range of instructional strategies is commonly recommended for learners with ADHD and EAL backgrounds. Clear instructions, task segmentation, scaffolding, and structured support are frequently identified as ways to reduce cognitive overload and make language tasks more manageable (Turkati, 2010.; Pérez Cabello et al., 2024). Similarly, differentiation and inclusive pedagogical practices are emphasised as essential for responding to learners' diverse cognitive and linguistic needs (Lopez Valero, 2023.; McDougal et al., 2023). Although these strategies are strongly supported in theory, the literature remains largely descriptive, with limited classroom-based evidence comparing their impact on communicative language development.

Literature review (continued)

Multisensory and interactive approaches are also frequently recommended for learners with ADHD. Visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic input can support engagement, retention, and access to language, particularly in speaking and listening activities (Mohebbi,2023.; Moro-Ramos, 2021.). However, a limitation in the literature is the assumption that increased engagement automatically results in stronger linguistic development. Without a clear focus on language accuracy, complexity, and communicative purpose, interactive activities may promote participation without necessarily improving communicative competence.

The use of digital tools and structured classroom resources has also gained attention. Digital platforms may support learners with ADHD by offering multimodal input, immediate feedback, and gamified learning experiences (Mohebbi, 2023.). In addition, scaffolding tools such as sentence frames, graphic organisers, visual prompts, and structured speaking supports are often recommended to guide language production and comprehension (Lopez Valero, 2023). However, these tools are rarely evaluated systematically in relation to balanced progress across reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Overall, the literature reveals a clear gap in research on the intersection of ADHD, EAL learning, and communicative competence in real classroom contexts. Reading and writing have received greater attention, with Kakoulidou (2021) highlighting difficulties in sustaining attention during reading and integrating textual information. By contrast, speaking and listening remain comparatively underexplored, despite their importance for classroom interaction and real-world communication. Mohebbi (2023.) notes challenges in processing spoken input and maintaining fluency, but these areas require further investigation.

This study therefore addresses a significant gap by using action research to implement, adapt, and evaluate targeted tools and resources in an international school classroom. In doing so, it aims to generate practical insights into how communicative language skills can be supported in an EAL learner with ADHD through responsive, inclusive, and evidence-informed classroom practice.

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Methodology - Starting point

Context:

- The subject of our case study is an 8-year-old primary school student from Turkey who joined St George in September 2025. They were classified as Wave 3 on the SEN register and a support plan was drawn up for them soon after entering the school. They currently receive one hour of one-one support per day with a member of the SEN department. Pupil Profile

Diagnosed with:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (F90.0) in 2023

ADHD presentation:

- Mid-range profile (neither fully hyperactive nor fully inattentive)

EAL:

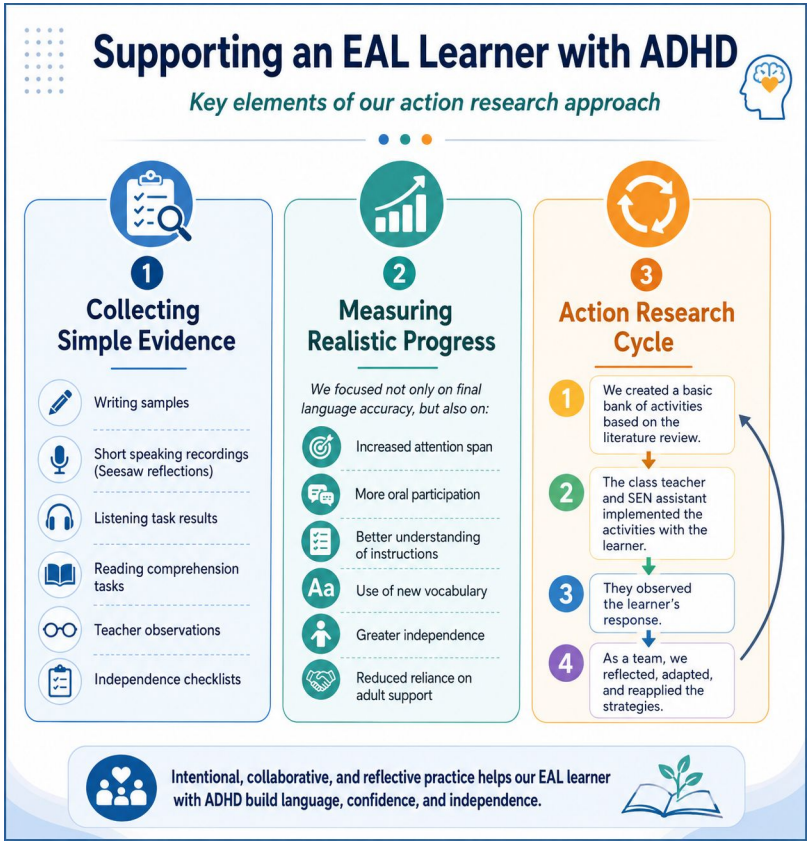
- The student took **Cambridge Movers Listening, Reading and Writing tests** in September 2025. (Listening 7/25; Reading and Writing 1/34). In conjunction with these, their phonics knowledge was tested with the **Key Stage 1 Phonics screening check (UK 2024 National Curriculum Assessments)** (15/40). In addition they took the **New Group Reading Test (NRGT Digital)** on 20/10/2025 (Reading age: 5:00). See page 10

Methodology 2 - Teacher Coordination post MLRC Research Symposium

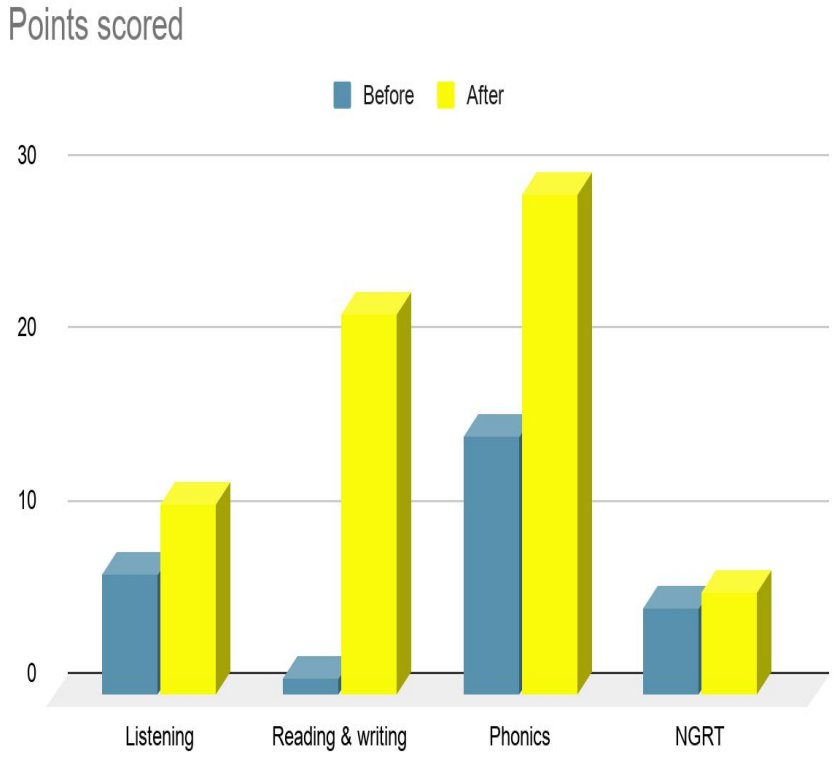
- **Initial coordination meeting:**
  Teachers met at the beginning of the process to agree on the learner's main ADHD-related barriers, shared strategies, useful resources, and the evidence that would be collected.
- **Implementation:**
  The class teacher, subject teachers, EAL teachers, and SEN specialist applied the agreed strategies and resources consistently across lessons. Activity Bank
- **Shared monitoring document:**
  Teachers used a shared document to record which strategies were used, how the learner responded, what worked well, and what needed to be adapted. Template
- **Regular review meetings:**
  The team met every two or three weeks to review evidence, discuss progress, and decide whether strategies should be continued, adapted, or replaced.

Methodology 3 - Assessment and monitoring

1. **Collect simple evidence:**
   We collected a range of classroom-based evidence to monitor the learner's academic, communicative, and independence skills.
2. **Measure realistic progress:**
   We measured progress beyond language accuracy, focusing also on attention, participation, understanding, vocabulary use, independence, and reduced adult support.
3. **Action research cycle:**
   We used an action research cycle to implement a bank of activities, observe the learner's response, and adapt strategies collaboratively over time.



Comparative start and end progress



KEY

Cambridge Movers Listening:

- First test taken on 20/09/25 2025 (7/25)
- Second test on 15/05/26 (11/25).

The learner showed clear progress in listening, suggesting improved ability to understand spoken English with support.

Cambridge Movers Reading & Writing:

- First test taken on 21/09/25 (1/34),
- Second test taken on 15/05/26 (22/34).

This was the area with the greatest improvement, showing significant development in academic EAL skills.

Phonics: Key Stage 1 Phonics screening check (UK 2024 National Curriculum Assessments).

- First test taken 8/10/25 (15/40).
- The same test was repeated on 20/05/26 (29/40).

The learner made significant progress in phonics, indicating better sound-letter recognition and decoding skills.

New Group Reading Test (NRGT Digital) on

- First test 20/10/2025 (Reading age: 5:00).
- Second on 18/05/26 (Reading age: 6:04).

The learner showed good progress suggesting improvement in all areas of reading ability.

Findings: Why does collaboration among teachers benefit EAL-ADHD students?

- It creates a shared understanding of the learner's language, academic, and ADHD-related needs.
- It helps teachers align EAL objectives with attention, organisation, and executive functioning supports.
- It promotes consistency in routines, instructions, scaffolding, and expectations across subjects.
- It allows teachers to use a shared bank of targeted, evidence-informed activities.
- It reduces fragmented support and makes interventions more coherent and responsive.
- Data collected from September to May showed progress in academic EAL performance, vocabulary use, task completion, and participation.
- The strongest progress occurred when teachers planned together, used common tools, and reviewed evidence collaboratively.
- Translanguaging was particularly effective in supporting the student's vocabulary development in both English and Spanish.

Findings

Data Collection	Key Takeaways	Next steps
EAL and ADHD assessments	The learner's needs affected English development, attention, organisation, memory, and access to academic content. Collaboration allowed teachers to understand these needs more holistically.	Plan EAL goals and ADHD supports together as one coordinated intervention.
Academic EAL evidence	Progress was seen across communicative skills, especially when teachers used shared scaffolding and visual support.	Continue using common tools such as sentence frames, word banks, models, and graphic organisers.
Shared activity bank	The activity bank helped teachers select targeted, evidence-informed strategies instead of using isolated support.	Refine the bank by skill, objective, level of support, and ADHD-related need.
Teacher collaboration	Coordinated planning created consistency in routines, expectations, classroom language, and scaffolding across subjects.	Maintain regular reflection meetings to review data and adapt strategies.
Student progress evidence	From September to May, the learner showed stronger academic engagement, vocabulary use, task completion, participation, and confidence in EAL learning.	Continue collecting evidence and gradually reduce support when the learner shows readiness.

According to the SEN specialist, the following activities from our activity bank were the most successful in improving the student's learning outcomes.

- **Describe & Draw**

Skill: Speaking
Strategy: Output clarity + real-time feedback
Description: One student describes, partner draws.
Sources: Mohebbi, A. (2023).

Used with a Christmas/Winter theme, it enabled the student to get their ideas on paper without having to worry about grammar or spelling. Translanguaging was also used (English, Turkish, Spanish).

- **Interactive Video Quiz**

Skill: Listening
Strategy: Multimodal engagement + retrieval practice
Description: Video broken into segments with quizzes.
Sources: Moro-Ramos, S. (2021); Q., Bao, T., Zhu, J., & Ma, X. (2024).

Following the creation of an island brochure, the student used Seesaw to explain her writing in more detail and also what she could do to improve it.

- **Storyboard Writing (Journal)**

Skill: Writing
Strategy: Visual sequencing + narrative support
Description: 4–6 frame story with captions.
Sources: Mohebbi, A (2023); Kakoulidou, M. (2021)

This went deeper than just 'describe and draw' as it required the student to build full sentences.

- **Highlight & Connect**

Skill: Reading
Strategy: Visual attention cues + semantic linking
Description: Highlighted text with connection tasks (synonyms/main ideas). - filling gaps with key words.
Sources: Mohebbi, A (2023); Kakoulidou, M. (2021)

This was excellent for learning key words for speaking and writing tasks.

- **Timed Writing Sprint**

Skill: Writing
Strategy: Structured fluency + attention regulation
Sources: Nation (2009); Harrison, J. R., Soares, D. A., Rudzinski, S., & Johnson, R. (2019): Mohebbi (2023)

Used once a week with 5 multiplication and 5 division questions (same times table - 5 mins for both); and also for spellings specifically chosen for the child, 9 words a week practised every morning in registration). This activity was highly beneficial for increasing processing speed.

Activity Bank

Discussion

How do these findings matter to other schools?

These findings show that EAL-ADHD students benefit when teachers work collaboratively rather than separately. Other schools can use this approach to create more consistent support through shared planning, common routines, targeted activities, and regular communication between EAL, classroom, subject, and learning support teachers.

This matters because coordinated support can reduce confusion, improve access to academic English, and help students develop greater confidence, participation, and independence.

How do these findings matter to the larger field of research?

These findings contribute to research by focusing on the connection between EAL learning, ADHD, and teacher collaboration in a real school context. They show that collaborative planning can support academic language development and help address attention, organisation, and learning barriers.

The study also suggests that more research is needed on how shared teacher strategies impact EAL-ADHD students over time.

Reflections About Research

What have we learned as a team and/or individually about the research process?

As a team, we learned that the research process is most effective when it is collaborative, flexible, and based on real evidence from the classroom. Working together helped us understand the learner's needs more clearly and make more informed decisions about EAL and ADHD support.

We also learned that action research is not a fixed process. Strategies need to be planned, tested, observed, and adapted over time. The evidence collected from assessments, observations, student work, and teacher reflection helped us identify what was working and what needed to change.

Individually, we learned the importance of looking beyond one area of need. The learner's progress was not only connected to English level, but also to attention, motivation, organisation, confidence, and consistency of support. This showed us that effective intervention requires both academic planning and an understanding of the whole learner.

Looking Forward

What are our next steps as a team to engage in action research?

Our next step is to take teacher collaboration to the next level by **creating a shared tool** where teachers can access specific activities, strategies, and resources for each student. This tool would help ensure that EAL, classroom, subject, and learning support teachers are using consistent and targeted interventions.

The aim is to make support more personalised, practical, and evidence-informed. Teachers would be able to see what works for each learner, apply agreed strategies across subjects, and update the tool as new evidence is collected.

What are our next steps to further develop our capacity to engage with and in research?

To develop our research capacity, we will continue using the action research cycle: plan, act, observe, and reflect. We will collect evidence from assessments, observations, student work, and teacher feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies.

We also aim to strengthen our ability to use research in daily practice by reviewing relevant literature, sharing findings as a team, and using data to refine the shared tool. This will help us move from individual teacher decisions toward a more collaborative and systematic approach to supporting EAL-ADHD learners.

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