

Table 6.1. Possible Problematic Aspects of Instruction for ELLs

Reading Components	Potential Challenges for ELLs
Phonological awareness	<p>When the student’s first language does not include some English phonemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is not accustomed to hearing these sounds. • It can be quite difficult to distinguish between sounds. • Pronouncing new sounds can be difficult. • Phonological tasks in general become more challenging.
Alphabetic principle	<p>Some orthographies are very different than English; even when the orthography of the student’s first language is similar to English, differences can be quite confusing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters might look the same but represent different sounds. • Unfamiliar English sounds and their various spellings can make decoding and spelling difficult. • Not knowing the meanings of words limits the ELL reader’s ability to use context clues. • Learning letters and sounds can seem very abstract.
Fluency	<p>ELLs typically have fewer opportunities to read aloud in English and receive feedback than their English-speaking peers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELLs may read more slowly, with less understanding. • ELLs can have an accent and still read fluently.
Vocabulary	<p>Students may become good word callers but not understand what they are reading.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELLs can be confused by prepositions, pronouns, cohesion markers, words with multiple meanings, figurative language, and idioms. • False cognates can perplex students (e.g., <i>fast</i> in German means “almost”; <i>embarazada</i> in Spanish means “pregnant”).

Table 6.1 (continued)

Reading Components	Potential Challenges for ELLs
Reading comprehension	<p>Many factors affect comprehension, such as oral language proficiency, word recognition skills, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, ability to use comprehension strategies, variations in text structure, interest, and cultural differences. To determine what students comprehend, teachers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide them with alternative ways to show understanding (e.g., in their native language, using diagrams), and • focus more on content than grammatical errors or accents.

Teachers, speech and language pathologists, and psychologists sometimes misinterpret why an ELL cannot hear the differences between sounds and erroneously conclude that the student has deficits in auditory discrimination or phonological awareness. Having an understanding of which English phonemes do not exist in the student's language can diminish the chances of making this error (see Table 2.2 and Kress, 2008, for lists of phonemes that do not exist in different languages). To more accurately assess the student's phonological awareness, use phonemes the student knows. Also, provide explicit instruction in unfamiliar English phonemes. In addition, keep in mind that the order of phonemes in a word matters. It is more difficult to distinguish and manipulate phonemes presented in an unfamiliar order.



Classroom Example: Maria teaches kindergarten ELLs. She knows that ELLs cannot develop phonological awareness in English until they are familiar with the sounds of English. So, Maria keeps in mind two aspects of phonological awareness: that students need to become familiar with the sounds in English; and that there are sounds that will cause confusion, which she needs to anticipate. She makes sure that her students have lots of experiences with fun and motivating songs, poems, chants, and read-alouds that allow them to hear and reproduce the sound patterns of English. Then, once she begins explicit instruction, she makes sure to provide more practice with sounds that can potentially cause confusion, either because they do not exist in the native language or because they are perceived as different in English but the same in the native language.