



A study with ESOL Prisoners - Using reading pens to help support and develop English language skills

Functional Skills Tutors stated:

"Prisoner XX was able to hear the correct pronunciation which enabled him to develop his English language skills. He became less reliant on his tutor and peer mentor for pronunciation support."

"The foreign national learners have a language barrier to their communication and understanding. They find it difficult to effectively communicate and this creates a block to learning. I found that the ESOL prisoners who used the Reading Pen in the classroom became better at hearing and understanding the English language."



Clear diction, to support learning to speak English



Supports pronunciation and communication skills



ESOL learners 'hear' English better than 'reading' English



Headphones provide privacy

Independent Researcher, and member of the PLA — Prisoners Learning Alliance, Christine Franklin, has undertaken a series of studies exploring issues affecting the educational outcomes of learners in prison. Her findings indicated the positive impact of ReaderPens and ExamReaders to support those wishing to speak, read and listen in English, improve communication skills and confidence.

ReaderPens were introduced as a supportive tool for English as a Second Language (ESOL) learners in prisons. The findings presented here are an overview of the information obtained from Christine's studies in public Category C Prisons in the South West, East, and North of England.

More than 11% of the prison population are foreign national learners, from 162 different countries. One difficulty educators face is the inability to teach lessons in a myriad of languages. The challenge is to find a way to increase the understanding of lessons taught in English, this is the key to enable integration and self-belief. In Christine's study, this challenge was addressed by providing learners with a ReaderPen™ and the opportunity to use these in their English lessons, Functional Skills and Workshop courses. Her findings indicated ReaderPens enabled inmates to decode written English, increased confidence and communication skills.

RESULTS:

In one prison an ESOL prisoner with little English, was given an ExamReader™ to help him during English lessons. He quickly adapted to the pen and used this to 'hear' the word, speaking this out loud, before copying the word in English, then writing the word in his own language. Within 3 weeks his English had improved immensely. He named the pen the "magic pen." His ability to integrate with English prisoners increased, he was able to go onto Functional Skills Level 1 English.

Tutors stated the following comments during interviews:

"The ReaderPens were easy to use in the classroom with my ESOL learners. The dictionary enabled fast understanding of words and helped them communicate more effectively."

"Inmates who had been isolated became more sociable, became more accepted members of their community because they had built language skills using the ReaderPen™. Understanding word definitions motivated the learners to continue with their studies and led to feelings of success and self-esteem."

OUTCOMES:

ESOL learners do not necessarily have a reading difficulty, the majority of those involved in the studies were experiencing a language barrier. When alleviating this barrier, the ESOL learner did exceedingly well, particularly with the dictionary function on the ReaderPens. One ESOL learner passed Levels 1 and 2 English and Mathematics, he was given daily access to a ReaderPen™ and had an ExamReader™ during his exams.