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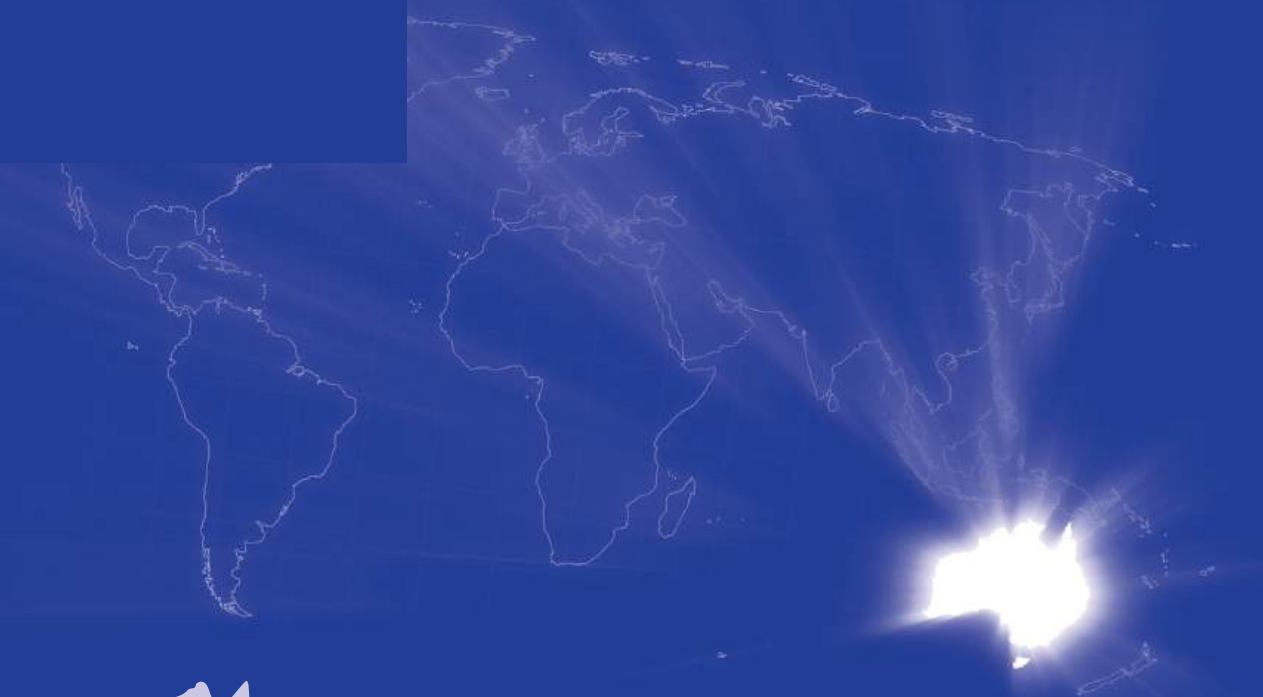

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Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. We acknowledge that the arrival of the English language to this continent impacted the traditional languages and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and celebrate the work to reclaim or maintain these languages. ACTA members teach English in addition to supporting the maintenance and development of First Languages, and encourage the acquisition and use of other languages – including First Nations Languages.

About **TESOL** *in* Context

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ACTA statement

TESOL in Context is a refereed journal with a wide target audience, both national and international. Readership includes TESOL / EAL professionals working in all sectors of education; universities, primary and secondary schooling, early childhood settings, adult migrant programs, vocational training, ELICOS and TESOL teacher education, both in Australia and internationally. Articles published in *TESOL in Context* typically examine the nexus between theory and practice.

The aims of *TESOL in Context* are to:

- provide professionals in the field with insights into TESOL issues in Australia and internationally
- contribute to the development of classroom expertise through dissemination of current research and thinking around TESOL.

For **guidelines** on length and presentation of items submitted to *TESOL in Context*, please consult the Notes for Contributors.

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Navigating policy, pedagogy, and the self in TESOL

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Introduction

From time to time, those of us working in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) become acutely aware that the field is evolving in ways that demand our attention. Established conversations take on new contours, and challenges long familiar begin to reveal unfamiliar dimensions. This issue – Volume 34, Number 1 of *TESOL in Context* – emerges at one such moment.

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In the current issue, it is clear that our field is grappling with a convergence of pressures. The lingering shadows of systemic policy shifts and the burgeoning integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom have compelled practitioners to rethink professional identities, day-to-day pedagogy, as well as the psychological and identity-based dimensions of language education. This issue brings together a collection of papers, a special report, and a book review that collectively examine where the field stands today and, importantly, where it is heading as these forces intensify and further influence learning and teaching.

The contributions in this issue can be broadly categorised into three intersecting themes, as we 1) discuss some of the key dimensions of present-day TESOL policy and advocacy, 2) evaluate the pedagogical affordances of emerging technologies, and 3) create insights into the inner lives of learners and teachers, specifically regarding identity, anxiety, and investment. Together, these publications challenge us to look beyond the surface of policy and classroom

practice to the structural and emotional undercurrents that shape the educational experience of language learners and teachers.

The erasure of expertise: A call for policy literacy

We begin this editorial by drawing attention to the issue's Special Report, a historical policy analysis by Michael Michell. Michell's contribution is essential reading for every TESOL professional in Australia and might offer a cautionary tale for international contexts. For decades, educators in Australia fought for the recognition of English language teaching (being it English as a Second Language (ESL), or English as an Additional Language/Dialect [EAL/D]) as a specialised field requiring specific funding, curriculum, and expertise. Michell discusses how this recognition has been systematically eroded. He traces the trajectory from the specific-purpose ESL provisions of the 1980s, described as a high-water mark for equity, to the 'broadbanding' in the 1990s, and finally, the 'disbanding' in the 2000s.

Michell's analysis uses Kingdon's (1984, 1995) policy streams and New Public Management frameworks to explain how ESL was subsumed under general literacy and disadvantage agendas. This bureaucratic sleight of hand, also known as broadbanding, effectively rendered the specific linguistic needs of migrant and refugee students invisible within broader equity programs. The report argues that this was not accidental but a result of 'displacement by design'. By reframing ESL issues as generic literacy deficits, policymakers could dismantle tied funding and specialised support structures.

What makes the report really worthwhile, however, is its call to action. Mitchell argues that for TESOL educators to reclaim their professional standing and advocate effectively for their students, they must develop policy literacy. It is not enough to be a good classroom teacher; one must understand the machinery of government that determines whether that classroom is funded or whether the specialist is replaced by a generalist literacy support officer. This report sets the tone for this issue, reminding us that pedagogical innovation (the focus of other papers in this volume) occurs within a policy ecosystem that requires vigilance, input, and change from those working on the ground: the TESOL professionals.

Advocacy beyond borders

Complementing Michell's Australian domestic policy critique is the Book Review by Xiaoxiao Kong, discussing *Decentering Advocacy in English Language Teaching: Global Perspectives and Local Practices* (Reynolds et al., 2024). If Michell documents the structural dismantling of support in Australia, Kong's review highlights the grassroots resilience of teachers worldwide who are filling the gaps. This emphasis on locally grounded, teacher-led advocacy also reflects insights emerging elsewhere in the literature, which identify such everyday practices as a stabilising force amid broader systematic pressures (Tang, 2025).

The review focuses on the book's shift away from Western-centric, top-down models of advocacy toward locally responsive initiatives. Kong details how the edited volume showcases educators in contexts such as Nigeria, Belize and Vietnam who are navigating resource constraints and institutional indifference to advocate for their students. The review notes that true advocacy is often 'situated, everyday practice,' driven by teacher resilience rather than grand policy reform. The review argues that this decentring is a critical intellectual move. It validates the work of teachers who may not hold structural power but who exercise agency to create inclusive spaces for their learners. Alongside Michell's report, it suggests a dual approach: we must be aware of what happens top-down, fight for policy that works for the field, while simultaneously valuing, equipping, and being inspired in this fight by bottom-up, teacher-led advocacy.

Challenging the "saviour" mentality

Bridging the gap between policy/advocacy and classroom practice is Mandana Arfa-Kaboodvand's opinion piece. This piece serves as a check on the international development of TESOL. Arfa-Kaboodvand critiques the 'paternalistic mindset' and 'saviour mentality' often embedded in English language teaching projects in the Global South.

Drawing on personal experiences in Eswatini and other contexts, the author argues that well-meaning interventions often fail because they are predicated on the assumption that developing nations are 'deficient' and need rescue by Western expertise. Instead, she advocates for 'respectful support' that centres local autonomy, intercultural competence, and dialogue. For TESOL practitioners, especially those involved in international education or aid work, this is a reminder that language teaching is never neutral. It can either reinforce colonial power dynamics or foster genuine, reciprocal partnership. The paper calls for a pedagogy that 'bridges cultural divides' rather than one that simply reinforces archaic norms and inequalities.

The digital classroom: AI, gamification, and translation

Moving from policy to pedagogy, this issue features a number of papers that explore how technology is reshaping the TESOL practice landscape. These studies move beyond the hype of educational technology to examine the messy, complex reality of digital implementation in our classrooms.

Louise Smith and Mingyan Hu discuss the use of AI in adult migrant and refugee learner settings in Australia. The study reveals a tension: while teachers see the potential for AI to support personalised learning (which is often seen as a holy grail in diverse classrooms), they do require time and guidance in how to effectively integrate the technology. The paper calls for experimentation on the ground to enhance professional development and to work these tools into existing curricula. The teachers' desire to 'explore with guidance' underscores a recurring

theme: technology does not replace the teacher, but it does increase the demand for highly skilled, adaptable pedagogy.

Complementing this is Cuong Huy Pham and Duyen Nguyen Thien Ngo's study. Focusing on the platform Quizizz, the authors find that gamification does more than just make learning fun; it has an effect on inclusion and affect. The study reports that gamified elements reduced anxiety and fostered a community of practice among adult learners. However, the authors are careful to note that there are also drawbacks to report, as learners can face technical issues and are sometimes unfamiliar with the tools and approaches of a gamified task, which can result in some of them feeling left out or anxious to use it. This reminds us that digital tools can be double-edged swords for inclusion if not scaffolded correctly (Peeters, 2022).

Perhaps the most counter-intuitive finding comes from Thao Dao and Ha Nguyen's mixed-methods study. In an era where students routinely use translation tools, educators often fear that their language skills will deteriorate. However, the study found no statistically significant difference in error frequency or word count between essays written with and without Google Translate. The implication may be that the tool itself is not a magic bullet for quality, nor is it necessarily the cheating crutch some fear it to be. Instead, the qualitative data reveals that the experience of writing changes; students' attitudes vary based on their past experiences with the tool and whether it has been successful in previous tasks, whether their peers were using it, or how confident they felt when starting to use the technology. The study urges us to move beyond banning or blindly accepting these tools, and instead to understand how they impact our learners' cognitive and emotional processes of writing.

Language learning: Anxiety, identity, and investment

The final major theme of this issue concerns the psychological dimensions of language education.

Neil Curry and Ward Peeters present an intervention study in foreign language settings. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a well-documented barrier to second language acquisition, but few studies offer concrete interventions to remedy it. Building on their earlier findings (Curry et al., 2020), the authors adapted Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) techniques, such as challenging negative assumptions and contextualising fears, to show how teachers can actively help students reframe their self-image. Through the CBT interventions, this study found that students can develop a more positive view of their speaking abilities, which suggests that, ideally, the modern TESOL classroom should be able to double as a space for psychological resilience-building.

This focus on overcoming learning challenges is echoed in a case study conducted by Mehdi Moharami, Anne Keary, and Alex Kostogriz. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2016) model (which updates the concept of motivation to include power, identity, and capital), the paper

explores how learners in Iran navigate their desire to learn English amidst complex political and cultural challenges. The study highlights that the decision to learn English is never just about grammar; it is an investment in a hoped-for identity, in this case pursued against a backdrop of societal ambivalence toward the language.

Curriculum and assessment

Finally, the issue closes with contributions that tackle the nuts and bolts of curriculum and assessment, viewing them through the lens of identity and teaching practice.

Haeng A Kim's paper on profiling the dynamics among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy examines how a tutor's language assessment literacy and personal identity tend to shape their teaching. It argues that assessment is not an objective yardstick but a practice deeply influenced by who the teacher is. Similarly, Anne-Coleman Webre and Darrell Allen's paper on supporting assessment of EAL/D student writing provides a concrete example of using genre-based feedback in pre-service teacher education. By equipping new teachers with the metalanguage to explain why a text works (rather than just correcting errors), they can be empowered to support students more effectively. In a similar vein, Stella Giorgou Tzampazi argues that different types of instruction can yield different results in a classroom and have to be embedded properly. The paper contributes to the foundational debate on how to best instruct our learners, exemplifying the impact of deductive vs. inductive grammar instruction. The paper also offers empirical data to the perennial question of how best to teach form.

Concluding remarks

Volume 34, Number 1 of *TESOL in Context* leaves us with a complex picture of the field. On the one hand, we face challenges as our professional standing in policy frameworks is questioned. On the other hand, we see a profession that is vibrant with innovation, harnessing AI, adapting new approaches to help our students excel, and decentring advocacy to empower local voices.

The thread that connects these diverse papers is the agency of the TESOL practitioner. Whether it is teachers in Australia navigating new policy landscapes, lecturers in Vietnam gamifying grammar, or tutors in Iran understanding their students' investment, the central figure is the educator who mediates between policy, technology, and the human needs of the learner.

As editors, we hope this issue inspires you to engage with these tensions. We encourage you to read up on the history of policy to be ready for the future, to consider the technological studies as invitations to experiment critically, and to reflect on the psychological studies as a reminder of the vulnerability and courage students and teachers bring to the classroom every day.

We extend our gratitude to the authors for their contributions and to the reviewers who helped shape this volume.

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'Displacement by design': From broadbanding to disbanding English as a Second language provision in Australian school education policy

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Abstract

The Commonwealth-funded school English as a Second language (ESL) program used to be seen by the ESL profession as an essential educational access and equity provision responding to Australia's migrant and humanitarian intakes and its growing linguistically diverse population. In the decades before and after the turn of the century, however, Commonwealth education 'reforms' involving literacy, broadbanding, federal relations and school funding progressively displaced and dismantled ESL as a tied-funded, specific-purpose program. In the first of three articles examining Australian schools policy and its impacts on English as an additional language/dialect provision, this study draws on Kingdon's policy streams and New Public Management frameworks to explain how national education policy agendas displacing ESL got up and got done. The article offers a selective historical account how and why successive Commonwealth Governments developed specific-purpose ESL provision in the 1980s, broadbanded it in the 1990s, and finally disbanded it in the noughties. In so doing, it aims to foster policy literacy among TESOL educators and researchers.

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Introduction

Australia's success as a multicultural society owes much to its national English as a Second Language (ESL) Program which supported educational access and equity for immigrants and refugees. This program was underpinned by earmarked Commonwealth funding to State and Territory Governments as Specific Purpose Payments under Section 96 of the Australian Constitution. By the 1980s, this dedicated funding enabled the development of a structured and coherent approach to ESL provision, addressing both immediate and long-term English learning needs of migrant and refugee students in schools by providing intensive and post-intensive instruction with targeted funding and program-specific accountability. This national program structure was replicated in special administrative and professional support structures in state and territory education systems and schools, which in turn, drove developments in key areas of ESL curriculum and assessment, professional practice and support, and teacher education. Crucially, it established the specialist role of the ESL teacher in schools, providing the basis for specialist staffing, assessment, pedagogy, professional development and research (Davison, 2014). The term ESL education has been used to describe the comprehensive nature of this specialist educational provision.

This article offers a selective historical account how and why this specific-purpose ESL provision was developed by successive Commonwealth Governments in the 1980s, broadbanded in the 1990s and finally disbanded in 2008. It presents an alternate account to Oliver et al.'s (2017) 'chequered history', with a focus on the key institutional contexts, policy actors and agendas that have shaped EAL/D education nationally.[1] Essential to understanding changes to ESL/EAL/D policy in Australia is an understanding of key processes beyond education such as Commonwealth-state federal relations and related institutions that provide the political arenas where national education policies were formulated and decided. In this regard, "language policy research needs to engage with other policies' central concerns, rather than treating these as mere background, and to track the processes by which these concerns play into language issues" (Moore, 2007, p. 581). The policy streams and NPM frameworks below provide key analytical perspectives in tracing the Commonwealth's policy enchantments displacing ESL provision.

Frameworks for ESL policy analysis

Moore's (1991) notion of 'policy enchantments' and 'displacements' highlights the simultaneous motivating and marginalising power of new policy agendas affecting ESL Whereas 'enchantments' describe the imagined futures, faith and fantasies that underpin the policy directions and assumptions of policy actors, 'displacements' identify the consequential impacts of those enchantments on existing policies and programs. In other words, policy enchantments and policy displacements are two sides of the same policy coin. A recurring theme in this three-part policy history is that policy displacements affecting ESL were not

accidental but, like the policy enchantments that drove them, were intentional, planned and 'by design'.

This three-part account of ESL/EAL/D policy therefore aims to foster a 'policy literacy' among TESOL educators and researchers in understanding, critiquing, and influencing policy (Lo Bianco, 2001). The following literature on policy streams and New Public Management provides key policy analysis frameworks that elucidate the dynamic interaction of national policy actors and their policy enchantment/displacement agendas and trajectories that have affected ESL/EAL/D education nationally over past decades.

Kingdon's Multiple Policy Streams

Inspired by the 'garbage can' model of non-rational policy decision-making in which policy solutions and actors chase policy problems (Cohen et al, 1972), Kingdon's field-defining work, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (1984, 1995) outlined a multiple streams model of policy-making in which three independent but potentially intersecting flows of problems, policies and political processes converge at critical times to place a particular issue on a government's decision agenda. The *problem stream* describes the process of problem recognition where government, media and public attention is captured by a set of issues arising from dramatic focusing events (such as crises or disasters), system indicators, or negative feedback from existing policies. Operating concurrently, the *politics stream* explains the relative prominence of issues on the official agenda. The vicissitudes of public opinion, the balance of organised political forces, and events within government itself are all processes which influence the agenda status of a particular policy issue within this stream. The *policy stream* describes the generation and specification of policy solutions drawn from a larger set of policy options being considered and debated by the policy community of specialists, academics and groups both within and outside government. Kingdon's model describes how each stream follows its own rules and dynamics, but when they converge, the policy status quo is disrupted and a *policy window* for change briefly opens up, creating opportunities for a new policy settlement. In this account, key convergence of problem, politics and policy streams affecting developments in ESL provision are identified as *policy turning points.* A comprehensive timeline of key ESL policy events, streams and turning points is outlined in Appendix A.

New Public Management

First used by Hood (1991) to describe characteristic 'all-purpose' policy elements evident in public sector reforms emergent in OECD Anglophone countries during the 1980s, New Public Management (NPM) describes the constellation of management ideals and methods that applied neoliberal, 'economic rationalist' thinking to the sphere of public administration (e.g., Christensen & Lægreid, 2001; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004; Haque, 2004) including education (Connell, 2013; Reid, 2020; Tolofari, 2005). Valorising the

efficiencies of ‘small government’ and seeking to re-make public services after its own business image, NPM was embraced as a means of public sector reform particularly in Anglophone OECD counties, with USA, Australia and the UK being enthusiastic early adopters (McLaughlin et al., 2002).

NPM reflects core values of efficiency and frugality (parsimony of resource use, doing ‘more with less’), disaggregated cost centre structures, and cost-cutting (Hood, 1991; Laegreid, 2015). In tracing the ascendancy of NPM in public policymaking in Western countries since the 1980s, Pollitt (2003) identified key elements as:

- a focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than inputs and processes;
- use of contracts, creating ‘purchaser’/ ‘provider’ relationships;
- deployment of markets or market-type mechanisms for the delivery of public services; and
- an emphasis on measurement using ‘performance indicators’ and explicit ‘standards’.

NPM elements constitute policy dispositions, formulas and strategies that privilege private enterprise values, strategies, and agency at the expense of public ones, marking a profound revaluing of new activities and a devaluing of old ones. Applied to education, NPM policies emphasise human capital formation – developing skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce – with outcomes measured by market and/or test performance, recasting educational processes and learning processes as educational products or commodities. In this context, NPM is characteristically suspicious of professionals, viewing them as ‘vested interests’ that promote ‘producer capture’ and sidelines them in favour of ‘objectively measured’ ‘evidence-based’ results. NPM, therefore, devalues altruistic motivations central to the educational enterprise, such as moral purpose, professional ethos, and commitment, and gives them little or no place in the educational reform process. The design of test-based accountability systems represents the systemic application of NPM nostrums to the sphere of education and reflects faith in the ‘transparent’ audit accountability as an instrument of output or quality control and ‘value for money’ efficiency. Table 1 summarises the different policy outlook between New Public Management and former ‘old’ public administration.

Table 1. New and ‘old’ public management.

Management Elements	**New Public Management**	**‘Old’ Public Management**
Management	• management, governance structures • regulation/deregulation • ‘steering not rowing’ • incentivation, reward for results • 'agencification’, agency accountability	• legality, obligations, bureaucracy • public values ethos • public, collective, administrative accountability
Outputs/inputs focus	• specification of outputs, outcomes, standards, KPIs • efficiency economy, productivity • human capital formation • cost containment, cost recovery • targeting of resources	• multiple, complex, conflicting goals • inputs, resources, process focus • impartiality, integrity, justice, equality values

Purchaser/ provider relationship	• purchase/provider split • principle-agent relations • contracting out, privatisation • regulations, roles, responsibilities • 'evidence-based' practice • 'vested interests', 'provider capture'	• trust in professional knowledge, expertise, • professional preparation, accreditation, recognition
Service delivery	• market/quasi-market mechanisms • internal market, user pay charges • competition, market discipline, incentives, contestability, transparency, efficiency • consumer choice, rational self-interest • devolved service design and delivery • profit centres, non-subsidisation	• social goods, outcomes • citizen social entitlement • universal service provision • special needs provision
Evaluation	• performance measurement, monitoring and reporting, external auditing • specification of standards, targets, KPIs • agent rewards and sanctions	• system wide evaluation, planning, resourcing, implementation support

Under NPM, delivery of public services is restructured around loose-tight organisational structures. In education, this 'steering from a distance' means that "schools are being tied more tightly into a system of *remote* control, operated by funding mechanisms, testing systems, certification, audit and surveillance mechanisms" (Connell, 2013, p. 108, original italics). Fitzgerald and Rainnie (2012, p. 167) provide a comprehensive summary of the 'bureau-shaping' enchantments of NPM, worth quoting at length:

> An essential prescription of NPM is that the public sector must "steer rather than row", meaning that it should seek alternatives to direct public provision of services. This is to be facilitated by privatisation, marketisation, decentralisation and contracting out, attacking what are taken to be highly centralised bureaucratic public service organisations.
>
> Management is thus decentralised through the use of external contracts and, within the public sector itself, through the devolution of responsibility to front line managers and the formation of executive agencies. Surveillance and control is maintained through the creation and extension of audit approaches, performance indicators and customer satisfaction surveys. That is, NPM is associated with an audit culture that stresses autonomy but distrusts professionals.

Characterised as 'a loose assembly of globally circulating discourses and situated practices and normative commitments' (Wilkins et al., 2019, p. 148), NPM is a ready-made, generic, discursive template for constructing policy 'problems' and advancing policy 'solutions.' It has been variously described as a policy 'paradigm' (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012), an 'assemblage' (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011; Wilkins et al., 2024), or an ideology (Kapucu, 2007), all of which highlight its discursive utility as a 'content free' public sector policy framework 'for all seasons'(Hood, 1991). In terms of the multiple streams framework outlined above, NPM itself can be seen as a *policy stream* (a set of proposed solutions) addressing a *problem stream* (a putative unresponsive, inefficient bureaucracy) having gained ascendancy via a *political*

stream (i.e., a coalition of ideologies/movements such as Thatcherism, Reaganomics and Hawke's economic restructuring; neoliberalism, corporate managerialism).

Even after some forty years, NPM remains the dominant policy stream shaping Australian school education policies and structures. Key NPM elements are evident in the policy architecture of the Commonwealth's National Partnership Programs (devolved service delivery), NAPLAN (performance measurement), MySchool Website (market/quasi-market mechanisms), Commonwealth-state funding agreements (purchaser/provider), and ongoing departmental restructuring and cost-cutting. As an assemblage of loosely-coupled policy elements, NPM strategies have been flexibly implemented at different times and places, giving it a certain 're-programmability', adaptability, and resilience that continues to this day (Lapsley & Miller, 2024). As will be evident from this and later accounts, core elements of NPM – devolved decision-making, deregulation of resource inputs, performance measurement, competing self-managing schools and flexible resource management have dominated the education policy agenda over past decades and are key drivers in the displacement and dismantling of ESL as a specific-purpose access and equity program in schools.

Specific Purpose Programs: From national policy solution to national policy problem

The fate and fortunes of Australia's ESL Program can only be understood in the context of the fundamental problem of the division of Commonwealth-State powers in Australia's federal system. On the one hand, under Section 96 of the Australian Constitution, the Commonwealth can grant money to the States with or without conditions[2]. On the other hand, States are responsible, by default, for whatever is not named in the Constitution as a Commonwealth power, notably, education. Policy and provision specifically for child migrants, including refugees, is further complicated by the fact that, under the Constitution, the Commonwealth is responsible for immigration (Section 51 xxvii). This situation allows the States to argue that the Commonwealth should bear the cost burden created in schools by immigration intakes but to resist being accountable for any additional funding or policy direction coming from the Commonwealth.

Since the second World War, the Commonwealth has increasingly attempted to use its grant powers to exert pressure on States in pursuit of various policy agendas in the domains where the States hold residual powers. In the late 1960s in the face of the pressure of immigration on schools (and other services), tied grant, Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs) were made under Section 96 of the Constitution to work around the problem of the Commonwealth's constrained powers to intervene in schooling. Starting with the Menzies Government's direct SPP funding to non-government schools for science laboratories and technical training equipment in 1964, the Commonwealth Government used SPPs to implement particular national initiatives in school education. SPPs thus began as a *policy solution* addressing the *underlying federal problem* of the Commonwealth's constrained powers in state educational provision.

National earmarked SPP funding for migrant-background English language learners began within the Child Migrant Education Program (CMEP) in 1970 under the Gorton Coalition Government. In response to a growing *political stream* of community concern about the increasing disruption to schools caused by large numbers of non-English speaking background migrant students (Martin, 2020/1978), the Commonwealth ESL program was established to provide direct funding for above-establishment ESL teachers in state government schools[3]. The Whitlam Government expanded Commonwealth involvement in school education through SPPs, including increasing ESL provision. In 1977, in response to large intakes of Indo-Chinese refugees, the Fraser Government established the Refugee Contingency Program. A major *turning point* for the ESL program (among other multicultural initiatives) was the *Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants* (Galbally, 1978) in that it acknowledged for the first time that migration was and would be a permanent feature of Australia's growing population so an ongoing, stable funding response was needed. The review transformed the CMEP into New Arrivals and General Support Element Programs, legitimated stable ESL provision within state teacher employment structures and enabled development of the ESL teaching profession. In 1982, the Refugee Contingency Program was put on a permanent footing as the New Arrivals Program (AIMA, 1982).

By the time the Hawke Government took office in 1983, SPPs that underpinned ESL had become a *policy problem.* In a context of high inflation, rising unemployment and global recession, a *NPM policy stream* was adopted as a new policy solution to reform the public service, consolidate and focus SPPs, constrain spending, and redirect financial responsibility back to the States. In this context, the 1985 review of specific purpose programs ('Quality and Equity' Report, 1985) was a further major *turning point* for ESL policy. The Report established a 'value for money' efficiency, effectiveness and accountability agenda for specific purpose programs, including ESL, and emphasised the need to shift from resource inputs to education outcomes. It recommended the reduction and mainstreaming of many existing specific purpose program funds with the key objective of these former programs becoming part of formal negotiated agreements. The review thus marked the ascendancy of a NPM *policy stream* to wind back SPPs, including that underpinning ESL provision.

In 1986, in line with the Quality and Equity Report and its retreat from SPPs, the Hawke Government cut funding to the General Support Element by 47 per cent, shifting responsibility for child migrant English language learners to the States. This policy decision was strongly contested by a concerted national campaign by ethnic communities, teachers and teacher unions. In response to this *counter political stream*, ESL funding was subsequently restored in 1988 by increased (doubled) funding for the ESL New Arrivals Program component, which enabled extended intensive English language support and allowed the General Support funding to be used for ongoing ESL support (Harrison-Mattley, 1987; Lo Bianco, 1990). This major policy *about-turn* established a comprehensive national specific-purpose ESL provision, underpinned by a national policy settlement under the 1987 *National Agenda for Multiculturalism* (OMA, 1987) and 1987 *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987a, 1987b) until its displacement by a renewed and intensified NPM broadbanding agenda in the 1990s.

Over this decade then, SPPs changed from being a *policy stream solution* which enabled the Commonwealth to overcome the problem of its constrained powers under the Constitution to intervene in schooling, to a *policy stream problem* requiring the adoption of *new NPM policy stream solutions* to wind back 'costly' SPP interventions within the underlying constraints of the division of Commonwealth-State powers. A strong community *political stream* was crucial in starting this SPP policy trajectory and later countering its reversal under the new *NPM policy stream*.

ESL as a specific-purpose program: Broad-banded literacy as policy solution

During the 1990s, successive Australian Governments resumed the *NPM policy stream* agenda and pursued program broad-banding policies aimed at limiting SPP tied grant ESL funding and expanding flexibility in the use of this funding. The ESL General Support Element of the ESL Program was a conspicuous target for broadbanding as its substantial tied funds represented a long-term resourcing commitment linked to the Commonwealth's immigration responsibility (see Michell, 1999, for a detailed account of ESL broadbanding during this period). As shown in Figure 1 below, program broadbanding enacted NPM policy stream tenets of increased specification of educational 'outputs' and reduced specification of tied resource 'inputs'.

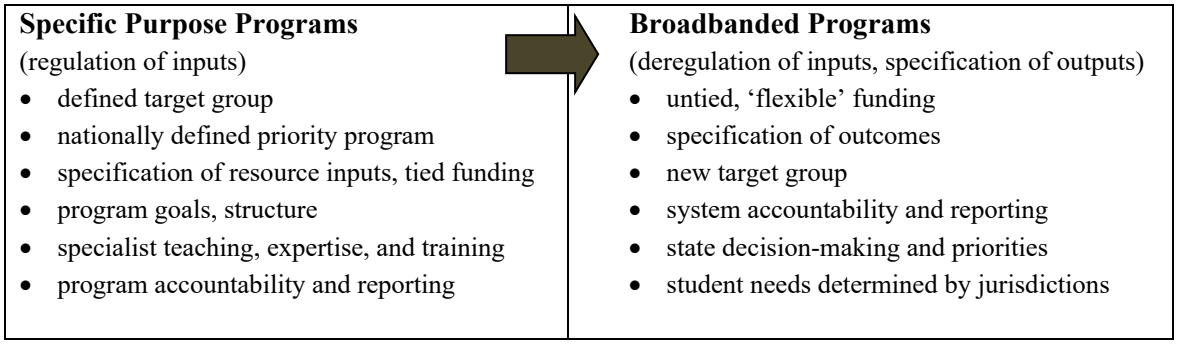

Figure 1. The new paradigm – untied, broad-banded programs.

Broadbanding ESL under "literacy" was foreshadowed in Dawkin's 1990 Literacy Green Paper (DEET, 1990) and Australian Language and Literacy Policy (DEET, 1991). This rhetorical rather than administrative change was a major *turning point* which effectively negated the language pluralism of the 1987 *National Policy on Languages* and, within it, the distinct role of ESL provision and instruction (Moore, 1995). At this time, recognition of the special nature of ESL learning and teaching was a key driving force behind professional advocacy and development of an ESL proficiency measure flagged in the Australian Language and Literacy policy. By 1994, this *policy window* resulted in the development of two national ESL proficiency scales, each reflecting different constructs of ESL difference in schooling: the ESL Bandscales (NLLIA, 1994) describing English second language development in school in terms of *need*, and the ESL Scales (AEC, 1994), supplementing national curriculum profiles, describing school English second language development in terms of outcome *achievement*.[4]

In 1993, the Labor Government attempted to broadband the ESL General Support element as a socioeconomic disadvantaged equity program. The result was the retention of the ESL New Arrivals and General Support programs under a loose administrative umbrella of the National Equity Program (NEPS) that recognised ESL as a national equity and access program (Cahill, 1996). In 1997, however, the newly elected Howard Government intensified and extended Labor's 1991 literacy policy by broadbanding over 40 specific-purpose programs, including subsuming the General Support element into a consolidated literacy grants program under its 1997–2000 Commonwealth Programs for Schools (DEET, 1997). The program streamlined forty Commonwealth programs into five priority areas to give education authorities greater flexibility to 'direct Commonwealth funds to meet emerging priorities and areas of greatest need' (DEET, 1997). Under the new Literacy program, the ESL and DSP funding indices on which the former programs were resourced were to be replaced by a single allocative mechanism based on literacy outcomes data.

This *policy turn* was intensified by a national standards agenda focused on national benchmark testing of students' literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. In 1998, amid a confected media crisis around basic literacy skills, the Commonwealth Education Minister released *Literacy for All* Policy (DEETYA, 1998). Central to the policy was a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan with a national goal agreed by all State and Territory education Ministers which included that every child commencing school from 1998 would achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years. Student achievement would be reported against these benchmarks in years 3, 5, 7, and 9.[5]

The move toward national literacy and numeracy benchmarking sidelined ESL as a specific-purpose equity and access program. The new literacy rhetoric promoted a displacement discourse whereby equity = literacy, disadvantage = low literacy outcomes, disadvantaged target group = students assessed as underperforming, new target group = new priority for literacy intervention (Hammond, 1999). By their nature, generic literacy benchmarks rendered ESL needs invisible and ESL pedagogy indistinct (Cross, 2009; Davison, 1999; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999). Literacy benchmark reporting positioned ESL students as failing literacy learners rather than developing learners of English and threatened to reframe ESL teaching as remedial literacy (Cross, 2012; Lo Bianco, 1998, 2002; Michell, 1999). The broad Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) category introduced to report non-English speaking background students' test results effectively made the ESL student target group invisible. This target group displacement, erasure and misrepresentation would continue in subsequent NAPLAN reporting (ACTA, 2016; Creagh, 2014a, 2016), and foster eroded ESL provision in schools (Creagh, 2014b; Lingard et al, 2012). From this point on, the ESL student cohort disappeared in national education policy, planning, programs, and reporting.[6]

With the introduction of the national literacy and benchmarking program, the Commonwealth accomplished an effective 'exit strategy' from all responsibility for post intensive ESL and avoided a *political stream* backlash from direct program cuts faced by the Hawke Government in 1986. By amalgamating ESL within the broadbanded literacy program, it managed to restrict its commitment to 'one off' per capita funding for intensive ESL provision, while at the same

time effectively devolving responsibility for ongoing ESL provision to the States and Territories, allowing it to 'wither on the literacy vine' (Michell, 1999). The only obstacle preventing States and Territories from redirecting their funding away from the 'sunset' ESL General Support Program was either the strength of their own commitment to the program or the strength of the state-based constituency supporting retention of the provision. Table 2 provides an overview of the serial broadbanding of the ESL General Support Program throughout the 1990s and the final disbanding of the remnant ESL New Arrivals Program under the Rudd Labor Government. As outlined in the next section, the government built on the Coalition's NPM broadbanding agenda but extended it by broadbanding the SPPs themselves.

Table 2. ESL in Australia - from broadbanding to disbanding.

Program design elements	**National Equity Program (NEP) 1994 - 1996**	**Targeted and National Priority Programs 1997 - 2007**	**Schools SPP, National Partnerships 2008 – 2013**
Focus	English skills for full participation in the English medium curriculum	improving the literacy outcomes of disadvantaged students	improving the literacy outcomes of disadvantaged students
Target Group	ESL students	schools with concentrations of disadvantaged students	schools with concentrations of disadvantaged students
Program Structure	ESL NAP & GS components linked	ESL NAP component separated. ESL GS amalgamated with Disadvantaged & Early Learning components	ESL NAP separated Gov/non-Gov. ESL NAP Gov amalgamated with Schools SSPs (low SES, Literacy & Numeracy NPs)
Funding Mechanism	tied grants**,** NAP per capita grant, ESL GS index	new single formula based on literacy performance data, broad-banded ESL GS funding	ESL NAP funding disbanded
Program Delivery	ongoing targeted in-school support	whole school intervention	whole-school intervention
Reporting And Accountability Requirements	NEP Agreements, ESL student reporting ESL financial acquittals	no ESL specific reporting, state/national literacy testing, literacy benchmarks	no ESL specific reporting, student literacy performance, NAPLAN, *My*School

Disbanding ESL: Broadbanded specific-purpose programs

Concurrent with the broadbanding agenda outlined above, Commonwealth funding to State and Territory Governments and associated intergovernmental relations reflected a dominant *political stream* in Australia's federal system. SPPs were a long-standing issue of contention between Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments at the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG).[7] State and Territory Governments considered the conditionality of the SPPs as an infringement of 'states' rights' as they restricted jurisdictions' autonomy and

flexibility in the use of Commonwealth funds (Anderson, 2010; Rimmer, 2010). COAG's critique of SPPs thus fed into the national *problem stream* and boosted the NPM *policy stream* move away from input-controlled policy towards outcome-focused policy (Duckett & Swerissen, 1996):

> The COAG reform agenda emphasises the achievement of outcomes and outputs in areas of policy collaboration, *rather than detailed prescriptions* by the Commonwealth on how the States will deliver services. Prior to the COAG reform agenda and the accompanying institutional reforms, the *States had expressed frustration at the large number of highly prescriptive Commonwealth Specific Purpose Payments to the States. These payments often attached detailed conditions in return for funding, which could hinder States from setting their own priorities in policy and service delivery*. (Rimmer, 2010, p. 232, author italics)

Rudd's 2007 federal election policies addressed COAG's *political, problem and policy streams* by promising to bring in a new era in federal financial relations and end the Howard Government's 'coercive federalism' and 'blame game' (Anderson & Parkin, 2010; O'Loughlin, 2011; Reid, 2009) with a 'cooperative federalism' (Anderson, 2010) in the areas of Schools, Healthcare, Skills and Workforce Development Disability Services and Affordable Housing.[8] Broadbanding these areas as SPPs would be central to reforming Commonwealth state relations and addressing COAG's problem stream:

> The core part of the reform program will be the *reform of Special Purpose Payments….they are the source of frustration at multiple levels, given the multiplicity of them and the way in which they have been designed*. Now we intend to take a different view. We want to see our SPPs rationalised in the future. We want to see that SPPs… increasingly reflect a combination of outcomes and outputs so that people can measure whether the money which is being invested is actually delivering real and improved service for the Australian community. (Rudd, 2007, author italics)

The subsequent COAG Meeting Communique of 26/03/2008 marked a significant *policy turning point* with renewed national commitment to NPM-inspired reform of Commonwealth-State financial relations through rationalised broadbanded SPPs.

> *A New Reform Framework*
>
> Critical to the partnership approach is the reform of the architecture of Commonwealth-State financial relations…..
>
> The new financial framework will result in a significant rationalisation of SPPs, primarily through combining many into a smaller number of new national SPP agreements, without a reduction in total Commonwealth funding for these activities. This reform will see a reduction from the current 92 SPPs to five or six new national agreements for delivery of core government services – health, affordable housing, early childhood and schools, vocational education and training, and disability services.

> The new agreements will focus on agreed outputs and outcomes, providing greater flexibility for jurisdictions to allocate resources to areas where they will produce the best outcomes for the community. (COAG, 2008a)

The collaborative COAG agenda extended to national education policy through support for Rudd's National Education Agreement (NEA) within a new, reconceptualised Schools SPP. The NEA incorporated detailed bilateral agreements, with NPM type plans, performance indicators and benchmarks around National Partnerships which addressed national educational priorities of low SES school communities, literacy and numeracy, quality teaching, early childhood education, and Indigenous early childhood development and youth attainment and transitions (COAG, 2008b). The COAG Fact Sheet on the National Education Agreement (COAG, 2008c) emphasises familiar NPM outcome enchantments of this 'new deal':

> **What will change?**
>
> Under the NEA, the focus in school education has moved away from the input controls which characterised previous funding arrangements towards an emphasis on delivering high quality outcomes. The NEA includes a greater focus on accountability and reporting for three key reasons: to increase accountability to students, parents, carers and community; to provide public accountability in support of COAG outcomes; and to improve the evidence base to support future policy reforms and system improvements including the aim of better directed resources. (p. 2)

Rudd's 'education revolution': Policy design and dismantling

Understanding the final demise of the national ESL program requires examination of how the COAG *political stream* informed the overall design of Rudd's education reform within which it was located and finally disbanded. Badged as Australia's 'education revolution', the Schools SPP reform was carefully designed as a national policy 'package deal' (Howlett & Rayner, 2013) to win state and territory government support by offering an optimal balance between appeal to jurisdictional interests and their Commonwealth obligations. As shown in Figure 2, three 'carrots' of increased education funding were offered: a) direct 'inducements', b) National Partnership 'co-investments' and c) increased discretionary control over Commonwealth funds through new 'flexibility' in use of former SPP program funding. New funding, provided to resolve outstanding issues of infrastructure costs associated with the national computer roll-out in secondary schools, and rectify historical disparities between the primary and secondary school funding levels, acted as 'sweeteners' or inducements to state and territory government support for the National Education Agreement (NEA). The NEA was therefore crafted as a *policy bargain,* whereby states and territories would agree to implement a national service reform agenda, with increased accountability for broad measurable improvements in service delivery, in return for a) a major reduction of SPPs (Anderson, 2010; Reid, 2009), b) "greater freedom in how they spent the funds received as Specific Purpose Payments under Section 96 of the Constitution" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2), and c) additional, incentive and matched partnership funding.

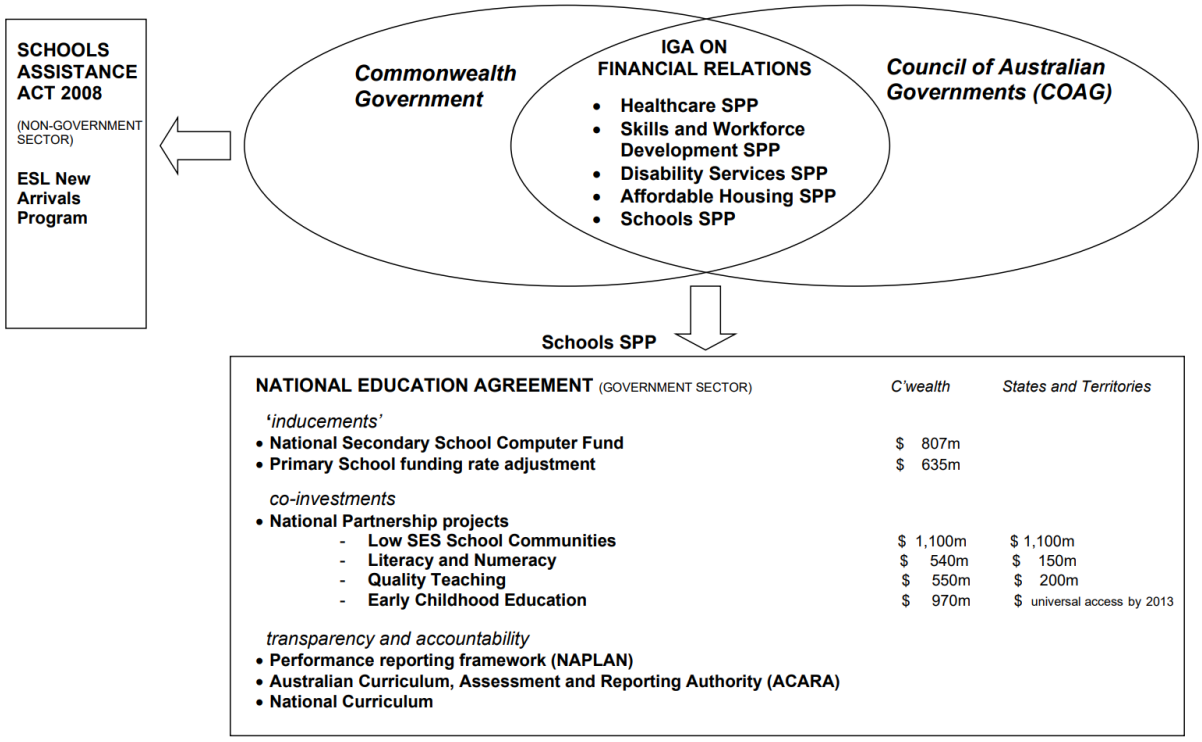

Figure 2. Australia's 'Education Revolution' – Policy architecture.

In essence, the NEA was a broad accountability-driven service reform contract embodying and operationalising NPM strategies and values. NPM principles of "steering not rowing", human capital productivity and national comparative performance benchmarking (Dawkins. 2010; O'Loughlin, 2010; Rimmer, 2010) moved to the centre stage of national policymaking. Commonwealth state relations were effectively reconfigured into 'purchaser/provider' contract relations (Brennan, 2011; Yeatman, 1996). Under the NEA, contract-type agreements became the key policy instrument governing intergovernmental activity in education. The COAG agenda comprised a series of 'cascading contracts' (Yeatmen, 1996, p. 285), encompassing the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), the National Education Agreement (NEA), detailed bilateral agreements and plans around National Partnership Programs. Schools, in turn, were embedded in state/Commonwealth contract relations and obligations as 'end providers' and were therefore subject to the logic of market contract accountability. If 'corporate federalism' (Lingard, 1991) characterised the Hawke-Keating Labor Government's NPM approach to Commonwealth policymaking for schools in the early 1990s, the Rudd Labor Government's NPM approach in the first decade of the twenty first century is aptly described as 'contract federalism' (Brennan, 2011; Spahn, 2015).

Rudd's 'education revolution' was framed and sold as an economic and intergovernmental rather than an educational reform designed to address the COAG *problem and political streams* around state service delivery and Commonwealth state financial relations in school education. Consequently, COAG rather than education ministers formed the prime collaborative decision-making forum for the reforms. The reform architecture institutionalised state and territory backing for a national curriculum together with a transparency and accountability system of

NAPLAN and MySchool website reporting, supported by a new national educational accountability coordination body, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The design of the Low SES School Communities and Literacy and Numeracy National Partnerships reflected 'policy borrowing' (Lingard, 2010) from the Blair Labor Government's 'Third Way' education reforms of Action Zones (Power et al., 2004; Reid & Brain, 2003) and National Literacy Strategy (Kayrooz & Parker, 2010; Savage, 2020). While the revolutionary nature of the 'education revolution's' curriculum and assessment structures is questionable (Brenan, 2011; Reid, 2009), the real revolution of the reform lay in the total assemblage or "architecture of the whole" (Reid, 2009, p. 4) of its NPM structures which established a transformed national education policy ecosystem that endures to this day (Savage, 2020).

The major casualty of the reform was the 'orphaned' Commonwealth ESL New Arrivals Program which had no place in the new national policy framework. The New Arrivals Program SPP within the government school sector was disbanded along with other tied programs, bringing to an end Australia's frontline school education response to its immigration program since its inception in 1982. At the same time, however, a 'special deal' on ESL New Arrivals Program was made with the non-government school sector to honour Rudd's promise that the sector would be 'no worse off' as result of any policy change. To preserve continuation of tied ESL New Arrivals funding and allay the non-government sector's concerns that it would not suffer with the move to the anticipated school funding reforms, Rudd enacted special legislation to maintain tied ESL New Arrivals Program funding arrangements, along with recently enhanced and differentiated per capita funding for regular and humanitarian students.[9] Learning from Labor's electorally disastrous attempts to cut funding to non-government schools in 1984 and 2004, this policy carve-out for Catholic and Independent schools, negotiated and legislated in 2008 and implemented in 2009, reflected the reemergence of a *political stream* solution to the historic problem of Commonwealth funding to non-government schools.

The design of Rudd's 'education revolution' as a broadbanded school SPP national agreement finally ended the long period of the Commonwealth Government using SPPs as a *policy stream* solution to deal with the underlying problem of divided Commonwealth-State powers over schooling. This policy solution involved the reassertion of the *NPM policy stream*, enacted as Agreements, to establish the national policy framework that currently erodes EAL/D provision. The reform's termination of the 'orphaned' ESL New Arrivals Program was historic as it marked a clear *policy turning point* in the Commonwealth's abandonment of any obligation for English language provision arising from its national responsibility for immigration.

Conclusion

This policy history of ESL in Australia in the decades before and the decade after the turn of the century highlights how changes to the nation's ESL program were caused by convergence

of *problem, politics, and policy streams* around Commonwealth Specific Purpose Payments. With one notable exception, these policy stream convergences involved adoption of NPM and broadbanding as 'enchanting' policy solutions to the underlying constitutional problem of the Commonwealth's constrained powers in education within the federal system and marked *policy turning points* in the progressive displacement of ESL as a tied, specific-purpose funding program. This account also draws attention to the nature of such policy change as one which could be characterised as 'punctuated disequilibrium' where periods of policy settlement or inertia are followed by rapid policy change resulting in a new policy status quo.

From this account, it is evident that ESL is seldom the subject of policy deliberation but is commonly an addendum and casualty of larger national policy streams and agendas. Critical ESL policy studies therefore require TESOL educators and researchers to go beyond TESOL and educational fields in applying relevant policy analytical tools to understand the broader institutional contexts, policy actors, agendas, and trajectories that crucially shape ESL provision and instruction.

Glossary

AEC – Australian Education Council

ACARA - Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority

ACTA - Australian Council of TESOL Associations

COAG - Council of Australian Governments

DEET – Department of Employment, Education and Training

DEETYA - Department of Employment Education, Training and Youth Affairs

DSP – Disadvantaged Schools Program

EAL/D or **EALD –** English as an Additional Language or Dialect

ESL - English as a Second Language

IGA - Intergovernmental Agreement

LBOTE - Language Backgrounds Other Than English

MCEETYA – Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

NAPLAN - National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NEA – National Education Agreement

NLLIA – National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

NPM - New Public Management

NSRA - National Schools Reform Agreement

SPP – Specific Purpose Payments, Specific Purpose Program

TESOL - Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Appendix A: ESL/EAL/D education – National policy timeline

Note: **Bold text** indicates an EAL/D policy turning point.

Year	Policy Event	Significance
1970	**The Commonwealth funds ESL teachers as an SPP under the Child Migrant Education Program,**	Response to community concerns about the increasing disruption to schools caused by large numbers of migrant students due to Commonwealth immigration policies.
1972-82	Expansion of SPPs under Whitlam and Fraser	
1977	Refugee Contingency Program established.	Program established in response to substantial Indo-Chinese refugee intakes.
1978	**Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants (Galbally Review)**	Migration recognised was a permanent feature of Australia's population, so an ongoing, stable funding response needed. Assurance of stability through the SPPs of the New Arrivals Program and General Support Element, which allowed the establishment of the ESL profession.
1982	New Arrivals Program replaces Refugee Contingency Program.	Recognition of the Commonwealth's role in child migrant education and resettlement and the need to put on-arrival ESL support on a permanent footing.
1984–85	**Review of Commonwealth Schools Programs (Quality of Education Review)**	The beginning of NPM reforms in the Australian Public Service and policy. The first attempt to wind back SPPs.
1986	**The Hawke Government's 47 per cent budget cuts to the ESL General Support Program component.**	Implementation of NPM and QERC review agenda
1987	**National Agenda for Multiculturalism.**	Recognised ESL education as an essential equity provision in and for a multicultural society after ESL program cuts
1987	**The National Languages Policy.**	Recognised ESL education as a necessary specific-purpose language program within a linguistically diverse society.
1988	**Funding for the ESL New Arrivals Program restored (doubled) in the 1988 budget.**	A major policy about-turn ESL after national campaign by ethnic communities, teachers and teacher unions. Extended intensive English language support allowed General Support Element funding to be used for ongoing ESL support.
1990 - 1991	**Dawkin's Literacy Green Paper and White Paper, Australia's language: the Australian language and literacy policy.**	A major turning point negating the language pluralism of the 1989 National Policy on Languages and the distinct role of ESL provision and instruction.
1993	Labor Government attempts to broadband the ESL General Support component of the ESL program as an equity program.	Interest group consultation rejected this broadbanding.
1994	**NLLIA *ESL Bandscales* published.** **AEC *ESL Scales* published**	These ESL assessment frameworks underpinned distinct focus of ESL teaching. Different states and territory education systems adopted different tools for use in schools.
1997	**Broadbanding of the ESL General Support Element within literacy.**	Howard Coalition Government carried forward Labor policy literacy broadbanding agenda.
1997-2000	**National literacy and numeracy benchmark testing.**	National testing system developed. Language Background Other than English (LBOTE) category used in national reporting.
2003 - 2007	**National literacy and numeracy benchmark testing mandated.**	Implementation of national testing system. A forerunner of NAPLAN.
Dec, 2007	Rudd wins the federal election on an education reform agenda.	COAG engaged in reforming Commonwealth-State financial relations through an IGA on Federal Financial Relations with a focus on broadbanding SPPs.
2008	MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce Discussion Paper Funding for English Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Students	Modelled and proposed enhanced and differentiated ESL New Arrivals per capita grants for refugee and non-refugee students.
2008	**Bilateral agreements and plans under the National Education Agreements (NEA), 'Education Revolution'**	Rudd Government carried forward Labor NPM and SPP broadbanding policy agenda. Broadbanded School SPP displaced ESL as a SPP.
2008	**New Arrivals Program SPP disbanded in the government school sector.**	The rolling of New Arrivals funding into other funding categories brought an end to Australia's frontline school

		education response to its immigration program since its inception in 1982.
2009	Special legislation enacted to maintain tied ESL New Arrivals Program funding for Catholic and Independent school sectors.	Included enhanced and differentiated per capita funding for regular and humanitarian students recommended by MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce Discussion Paper.
2010	MCEETYA endorses AITSL *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*	Specialist EAL/D teaching not recognised. Instead, teachers required to demonstrate knowledge and strategies to support students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
2011	**ACARA English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Learning Progression and teacher resource published.**	Recognised EAL/D learners as a specific group needing differentiated teaching and assessment. Supported inclusive implementation of the Australian Curriculum.
Dec, 2011	**Review of Funding for Schooling Final (Gonski) Report handed to government.**	Proposed Resource Allocation Model (RAM) consisted of a per student base amount (the School Resource Standard – SRS) and six additional 'disadvantage' loadings, one of which was the low English language proficiency loading for students with limited English.
2012 - 2014	**The Gillard Labor Government implements nationally funded seeding project, Empowering Local Schools. Roll-out of school autonomy programs in states and territories.**	Focus on devolved school-based flexible resource management through one-line school budgets, and management of the school staffing profile, including support staff, to determine the right mix of staff, recruitment and staff selection.
June, 2013	Gonski funding reforms legislated.	ESL New Arrivals funding incorporated into the new School Resourcing Standard.
2014	National Plan for School Improvement.	Commitments to quality teaching, quality learning, empowered school leadership, meeting student needs, and greater transparency and accountability. No reference to EAL/D learning needs or learners.
2015	ACTA's EAL/D Elaborations of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.	Developed as a supplementary framework to the AITSL professional teaching standards. See ACTA website for document.
2016	ACTA's State of EAL/D Education in Australia survey.	Widespread erosion of EAL/D programs due to school autonomy policies reported by ESL teachers
2016	Productivity Commission Review of National Education evidence Base	Presented a possible policy window for improving national ESL data systems. See ACTA website for submission
2018	Through Growth to Achievement (Gonski 2.0 Report).	Presented a possible policy window for responsive education to EAL/D learning needs. No reference to EAL/D learning needs or learners. See ACTA website for submission.
Oct, 2021	ACTA report on the number of EAL/D students enrolled in Government and Catholic schools across Australia in 2018-19	ACTA investigation to fill this major gap in publicly available information. See ACTA website for report.
May, 2022	ACTA National Roadmap for EAL/D Education in Schools.	Proposed repair and reform strategies for EAL/D education in the context of the National School Reform Agreement. See ACTA website for document.
June, 2022	**Productivity Commission's review of the National School Reform Agreement**	Presented a possible policy window for making recommendations on National School Reform Agreement. See ACTA website for submission.
Nov, 2022	**Productivity Commission's Interim Report on the Review of The National School Reform Agreement**	Presented a possible policy window for making recommendations on National School Reform Agreement. See ACTA website for submission.
July, 2023	**Review to inform a better and fairer education system consultation paper**	Presented a possible policy window for making recommendations on a better and fairer education system. No reference to EAL/D learning needs or learners. Further advice provided. See ACTA website for submission.
Dec, 2023	**Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, 'Improving Outcomes for All' Report.**	Recommended that EAL/D be made a priority cohort for data collection and measurement under the National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA). See ACTA website for submission.
Nov, 2024	**Senate Education Inquiry into the Better and Fairer Schools Bill**	No reference to EAL/D learning needs or learners. Further advice provided. See ACTA website for submission.

2025	**Better and Fairer Schools Agreements signed between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments 2025-2034**	Includes review of how governments measure and report nationally on student achievement. Currently, no reference to EAL/D learning needs or learners.

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Notes

[1] The term 'English as a Second language (ESL)' was replaced by 'English as an Additional Language or Dialect' (EAL/D) after the publication of the *ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression* in 2011 to include Aboriginal language or dialect speakers learning English as an additional language. This article refers to ESL before 2011 and EAL/D afterwards. The article focuses on policy affecting migrant and refugee English language learners as it has always targeted those from migrant backgrounds and has been kept entirely separate from policy for First Nations students.

[2] Section 96 of the Australian Constitution states that 'the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit'.

[3] Thus began the "broom cupboard" era of ESL provision whereby unqualified, retired or underperforming classroom teachers worked in makeshift teaching settings teaching children withdrawn from mainstream classes.

[4] It is arguable that these ESL assessment frameworks, and their state-based derivatives, played a major role in differentiating and maintaining ESL teaching and learning in the context of a hegemonic literacy agenda in the 1990s and beyond. For example, as part of its state literacy strategy, the NSW Department of Education produced a series of ESL follow-up teaching resources to Year 3, 5 ,7 and 9 literacy tests identifying the ESL difficulty of test items against the ESL Scales and illustrating appropriate teaching strategies.

[5] Concerned at the Commonwealth Government's coercive, 'zero tolerance' approach to state and territory implementation of literacy policy and its impact on ESL provision, MCEETYA established a national ESL taskforce of Chief Education Officers to develop a national ESL policy framework aimed at reaffirming ESL as a national priority within literacy by the end of the Commonwealth Programs for Schools quadrennium (1997–2000). The objective afforded by this policy window was not achieved, however, due to lack of state and territory agreement around a measureable national ESL goal.

[6] The 1989 Hobart, 1999 Adelaide, 2008 Melbourne and 2019 Alice Springs Declarations on National Goals for Schooling make no reference to EAL/D learners or learning needs.

[7] In 1992 the Labor Government established the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as Australia's peak intergovernmental body comprising all State and Territory Premiers and the Prime Minister to manage governmental relations within Australia's federal system and coordinate federal and state/territorial government activities around matters of national importance. COAG was replaced by National Cabinet in May 2020.

[8] Between 2003 and 2007, the Howard Coalition Government mandated state and territory implementation of disparate curriculum initiatives such as literacy and numeracy benchmark testing, that all schools have a functioning flagpole and a values statement in the school foyer, A-E reporting, performance pay for teachers, and compulsory Australian history in years 9 and 10. See Reid (2009).

[9] Although enrolling only 5 per cent of newly arrived students, non-government schools received the full benefit of enhanced and differentiated ESL New Arrivals per capita grants for regular and refugee students announced before the 2008 election by the then Education Minister, Julie Bishop. The enhanced ESL New Arrivals per capita funding was based on the *MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce Discussion Paper Funding for English Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Students. See* MCEETYA (2006).

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BOOK REVIEW

Reynolds, K. M., Mendoza Chirinos, G. M., Suarez, D., Effiong, O., & Kormpas, G. (Eds.). (2024). *Decentering advocacy in English language teaching: Global perspectives and local practices*. University of Michigan Press.

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In recent decades, along with the emerging inquiry into the social and political dimensions of language education (e.g., Crookes, 2022), advocacy in English language teaching (ELT) – efforts on behalf of English language learners to promote social justice language education (Linville & Whiting, 2019) – has received growing attention. While there is growing global interest in ELT advocacy, the majority of published studies are situated within the Global North (e.g., United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia); advocacy research in postcolonial and/or underrepresented regions remains limited (Guerrero Nieto, 2020). *Decentering advocacy in English language teaching: Global perspectives and local practices* contributes to this body of work through the narratives of advocacy efforts within 11 diverse geopolitical and educational contexts in Africa (Nigeria, Cameroon), Central America (Belize, El Salvador), Asia (Vietnam, Laos), Middle East (Türkiye, Israeli and Palestinian Territories), and South America (Paraguay, Uruguay), each documented and reflected upon by the advocates themselves. It serves as a valuable resource for educational professionals working within the space of ELT advocacy, or students and researchers learning about current ELT advocacy efforts in the global context.

The book begins with an introduction that outlines its purpose and previews each chapter. The core content comprises 11 chapters showcasing individual advocacy projects within a unique context. The concluding chapter synthesizes key patterns of advocacy emerging across the volume. Rather than summarising each chapter individually, this review discusses the chapters thematically across three broad areas: student-focused (Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7), educator-

focused (Chapters 2, 6, 8, 10, and 11), and social issues-focused (Chapter 9). This structure reflects the varied loci of advocacy addressed in the volume and allows for a more meaningful synthesis of the book's contributions.

Advocacy efforts centred on students in this volume align with what has been described in the literature as learner- or learning-oriented advocacy (e.g., Dubetz & de Jong, 2011) and materials-oriented advocacy (e.g., Harrison & McIlwain, 2020), wherein educators advocate learners' rights to equitable and contextually relevant language instruction and tangible learning resources. Chapter 1 details efforts to integrate computer-assisted language learning in a rural Nigerian school with limited infrastructure to improve students' listening comprehension, while Chapter 4 describes an online high school initiative for incarcerated youth in Belize. Notably, many ELT advocacy efforts, such as those in Chapters 3, 5, and 7, organically expanded from the delivery of English language instruction to include life skills, computer literacy, and entrepreneurial and leadership training, positioning English not only as a communicative tool but as a gateway to socio-economic mobility. The value of these chapters lies in their practical examples of how ELT can be adapted to meet broader needs within the community. In doing so, they exemplify how advocacy can be decentred – grounded not in Western models but in locally responsive initiatives which challenge inequities within specific socioeconomical contexts.

Chapters 2, 6, 8, 10, and 11 focus on advocating for the professional development, agency, and empowerment of English language teachers. A range of cultural, societal, and political challenges are addressed, including gender challenges faced by female teachers in Cameroon (Chapter 2), systemic and cultural barriers preventing English language teachers from advocating for their students in Vietnam (Chapter 6), a lack of interactive, communicative language teaching for young learners along with a lack of authentic practicum environment for student teachers in Türkiye (Chapter 8), challenges to fostering an environment for teachers' professional development amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Paraguay (Chapter 10), and raising educators' awareness of issues of inequality within a newly mandated curriculum in Uruguay (Chapter 11). Although the narratives within the aforementioned chapters focus primarily on supporting English language teachers in the professional contexts, it is evident that many of these efforts also positively impacted on students' learning. These chapters offer important insights for ELT researchers and practitioners, highlighting how ELT advocacy is decentred through challenging Western-centric, top-down models of reform with teacher-led, grounded, and locally driven strategies.

Finally, Chapter 9 documents engagement with the sociopolitical dimensions of ELT. This chapter explores EFL classrooms as spaces influenced by history and sociopolitical realities within the broader context of the "intractable conflict" in the Israeli and Palestinian Territories. The chapter puts forward three guidelines for ELT practices (Reynolds et al., 2024, p. 14): (1) emphasizing appropriateness alongside correctness; (2) deconstructing binary thinking; and (3) acknowledging societal inequities while maintaining high academic standards and promoting the use of learners' multilingual repertoires. This chapter exemplifies decentring by

decolonising ELT through negotiating and respecting the multiple social and linguistic identities of the learners and their communities.

Throughout the volume, the educator-advocates' narratives reveal a deep sense of selflessness, commitment, courage, and a high degree of reflexivity. Most of these projects were self-initiated, self-funded, and facilitated with the support from volunteers within local communities. For instance, in Chapter 4, the educator-advocate, with an accountant and a lawyer from her professional networks, covered the initial costs of establishing an online educational program and volunteered their expertise in registering a company. Despite being explicitly told that no government funding would be available, the team remained undiscouraged and continued to move ahead with their plans. Beyond constraints in finance and resources, which were a common thread across many chapters, the educators also faced cultural and institutional barriers. Within specific cultural contexts in which social hierarchy is highly valued, advocating for their own students through challenging higher authorities might lead to educators being professionally marginalised (e.g., Chapter 6). Yet, these educators not only persisted but demonstrated critical self-awareness in reflecting on the unintended consequences of their advocacy. For example, in Chapter 3, the author acknowledged how well-intentioned decisions, such as establishing a dress code to teaching students to dress and groom properly, and creating an online mobile messaging group, inadvertently alienated some students despite her strong awareness of their socioeconomic conditions. These reflections highlight the complexity of grassroots ELT advocacy and the continuous negotiation between intention, impact, and equity.

In my view, in addition to the advocacy efforts documented in this volume, a few areas are worth exploring to further advance the field and support ELT practitioners. One possible extension of this volume would be empirical studies documenting and measuring the impact of advocacy initiatives. Studies demonstrating the impact of existing advocacy efforts could serve to strengthen applications for much-needed funding and resources to sustain and further develop grassroots projects. A second area for future exploration may be context-sensitive revisions to the definitions or frameworks of advocacy. Such theoretical developments could further contribute to decentring dominant paradigms surrounding ELT advocacy practices. Finally, as several chapters imply, engagement with policymakers is essential to initiating or sustaining advocacy work. Given that navigating policy discourse is not typically part of educators' or researchers' training or professional experience, it would be of great practical value for future work to systematically document the strategies, obstacles, and successful approaches to policy engagement.

To conclude, this volume represents a valuable step toward shifting the focus of ELT advocacy literature beyond predominantly Western perspectives and showcasing educator-advocates' voices in underrepresented contexts. It portrays advocacy as a situated, everyday practice shaped by educators' resilience, ingenuity, and critical reflection within their specific contexts. It also presents debates about several challenges and implications across different social and geographical settings and invites future research on the (re)conceptualisation and impact of ELT advocacy practices. This volume will be of particular interest to English language

education professionals who are interested in, or committed to, the intersection of ELT and advocacy. Teacher educators and program designers may also find the chapters valuable as reflective tools or case studies that illustrate how advocacy can be integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher education and training. Furthermore, the volume will appeal to applied linguists, education researchers, and policymakers interested in critical and contextually embedded approaches to English language education.

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Developing countries don't need saving: They *may* need support

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Abstract

This article challenges the paternalistic mindset often embedded in international development discourse, arguing that developing countries require respectful support rather than saving. Drawing on the author's personal experiences in Eswatini and other contexts, alongside scholarly insights, it explores the complex realities faced by local communities and highlights the transformative role of education in fostering sustainable development that goes beyond the saving mentality. Central to this argument is the cultivation of intercultural competence and critical thinking in both developing and developed contexts. Education can bridge cultural divides, promote empathy, and empower communities to pursue change while maintaining autonomy. The paper contends that English language teaching, beyond its linguistic goals, holds significant potential to advance these aims by facilitating dialogue, reshaping attitudes, and encouraging context-sensitive perspectives. To enable such transformative practice, educators must engage with authentic voices both inside and outside the classroom and be supported with appropriate resources and training.

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ISMO (2024)[1], the 'funniest person in the world in the year 2014', has a story about his saving the African children:

> *My whole relationship with food has always been weird. When I was a kid, my mum always told me, "You have to eat all the food that is on your plate, because there is starvation in Africa," and then I ate all the food. And then I grew a bit older, and I started to think how have I helped the situation in Africa!!! I am now a little bit overweight. I hope they are happy. I have done my best. I am still expecting a thank you card or something. If I ever go to Africa and they look at my belly, I would say, "I did it for you."*

Introduction

A few years ago, we moved to a small country in the southern part of the African continent. We live in the capital, in a modern house with a big garden. Almost every day, groups of vervet monkeys cross our property. For the first three years, I found them delightful and was overwhelmed simply by the fact that wild animals roamed so freely near our home. I took numerous photos and videos to share with friends and family around the world, who were equally amazed. However, my local friends were less impressed and even found my fascination unusual.

The monkeys have enjoyed the fruit and vegetables in our garden, destroying many items along the way. Initially, I did not mind, perhaps because my livelihood did not depend on my vegetables and living alongside them was a unique experience. Recently, however, I learned that monkeys could carry diseases harmful to humans, and by now, these monkeys are so unafraid of us that they freely make a mess in our garden. This has shifted my perspective. I now empathise with locals whose livelihoods depend on their crops. I still find them cute, but I would prefer them to be out of my house. And now I assume that I better understand some similar perspectives, such as the case of Uganda's baboons, redtail monkeys, and chimpanzees that ate all the maize and bananas (Naughton-Treves et al., 1998).

Similarly, baby elephants are undeniably adorable. With their oversized ears and clumsy movements, they appear playful and endearing. However, adult elephants, as majestic as they are, pose significant ecological challenges. Overpopulated elephant herds in many African countries, including South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, damage flora and fauna by destroying trees and vegetation (Blanc et al., 2007; Monadjem & Unwin, 2023). These behaviours impact not just the ecosystem but also human communities reliant on these environments (Western & Maitumo, 2004). The countries affected are looking for solutions to this major problem.

[1] Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZK7N_aGoQY

A while ago, while visiting a country with a higher level of poverty than many, I left two tablespoons of leftover rice on the ground for the birds. I was pleased with myself for having tried to feed the animals. To my surprise, the locals working nearby looked horrified. At the time, I did not understand the reason. Later, I realised that they were likely prioritising their own survival over concern for animals. Sen (1981) underscores this kind of experience, arguing that in situations of food insecurity, people's primary focus is on survival rather than peripheral concerns such as feeding wildlife.

And these are only a few scenarios that I have witnessed and probably would have judged before living in these places. And there are many more similar issues about societal values, reasons for poverty, behavioural patterns, and so on. To many outsiders, even considering some ways to control the number of elephants or not feeding hungry monkeys or birds is unacceptable and immoral. They would judge the people who do not share the same values, perhaps feel a moral obligation to voice their concern or even act in these cases to *rescue* the animals and in many other cases to *rescue* the people from what they may consider unacceptable beliefs and behaviour.

Having acknowledged these examples, it becomes clear that such differences in perception are not merely about animals or local practices, but about deeper worldviews shaped by culture, experience, and circumstance.

In this critical reflection, I examine paternalism in development and education through a critical lens, synthesising theory with personal observations and practical implications for English language teaching (ELT). I critique existing power dynamics, question assumptions, and recommend alternative attitudes and practices based on my own experiences as an educator in developing contexts, focusing on ELT and how it can contribute to enhancing intercultural skills. The article emphasises that educators both inside and outside the borders of developing countries need support to be able to acquire the knowledge to suspend judgment, recognise alternative value systems, and reflect critically on own assumptions to help their students do the same.

Moving beyond the "saving" mentality

A top-down look at nations, the feel-good stories of heroes who save, and the oversimplification of issues of the people and societies that are considered less privileged are in many cases leading to solutions that are disconnected from the actual needs. The idea of "saving" others and the environment can be emotionally rewarding, creating a sense of purpose or self-worth, which can overshadow the need for long-term, sustainable support strategies. Despite some humanistic intentions, this paternalistic mindset persists in some modern attitudes, framing developing nations as incapable of self-reliance and offering solutions that are not sustainable or necessarily helpful even with the best of intentions (Oloruntoba, 2020). Financial aids alone cannot save countries in need (Bauer, 1972; Easterly, 2006, 2009). At the

same time, looking at nations in crisis through foreign lenses and addressing their needs with that perspective cannot make drastic changes to the situation. For example, assuming that since a country has a parliament or presidential elections it is democratic and that votes of people count can lead to faulty assumptions about certain nations, their demands, and how they may need support. Or assuming that certain traditions are unacceptable simply because the Western world does not believe in them is mostly immature. And for the same reasons importing knowledge does not necessarily help.

ISMO's humour, introduced at the outset, reflects a genuine mindset relating to what might be called a "saviour" mentality, and, in Fraser's (2000) terms, a form of "misrecognition" that can contribute to global injustice. In educational contexts, this mentality often appears in oversimplified narratives presented in charity drives or even in textbooks. These materials may intentionally or unintentionally promote paternalistic worldviews, suggesting that the goodwill of a more affluent or powerful group of nations can solve global problems. Such perspectives overlook two critical points: first, that some perceived "problems" may in fact represent different ways of life rather than deficiencies, and second, that genuine problems often have roots in historical exploitation. Simplistic solutions usually do not help.

The role of education in producing relevant knowledge

As Sen (1999) argues in *Development as Freedom*, education should empower individuals to critically assess their problems and devise feasible solutions. This education must consider cultural and environmental contexts, as emphasised by Freire (1970), who advocates for empowering people to transform their realities through learning. Quality education is needed for all the world. Based on extensive literature review Barret et al. (2006) have put forward five components for quality education that have been referred to by various scholars: effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance, and sustainability. External effectiveness, which refers to "the degree to which the education system meets the needs of individuals and society as a whole" (p. 13) is one major side of effective education. Relevance is mainly concerned with "the relationship between education and development and the central question of the purposes of education" (p. 14). This side of education is what the current paper is most concerned about. It can be a reminder that *knowledge* and *information* are not the same. Despite the need for sharing information, education should be about learning how to use that information and that is what knowledge is. Samoff and Stromquist (2001) explain that "where knowledge is equated to information and understood as a static collection of what are usually called 'facts', knowledge becomes a set of discrete entities that can be labelled, categorised, stored, distributed, even bought and sold (p. 638).

Contextualising learning needs

Educational priorities differ across contexts. For example, individuals raised close to nature may regard flora and fauna primarily as resources for survival, while urban learners may view them as sources of beauty or recreation. Effective education must recognise these differences and align learning with local realities. Addressing global issues such as air pollution may be less relevant in regions where such challenges do not exist, and it could risk disengaging learners.

In less affluent nations, an overreliance on imported knowledge or external charity fosters dependency rather than development. Quality education should instead be locally grounded, equipping learners to think critically, solve problems, and use available resources effectively (Coetzee, 2023). Importantly, education should build autonomy, ensuring that communities maintain agency when engaging with external support.

Tradition, critical thinking, and progress

While education must value cultural traditions, it should also provide tools for recognising when certain beliefs impede development. For instance, belief in witchcraft continues to shape decision-making in some African contexts, often with harmful consequences (Kakwata, 2018; Saani & Laryea, 2025). As external actors may lack the cultural understanding to address such issues, solutions must emerge from within, supported by critical and reflective education.

Quality education thus serves as the foundation for sustainable development, enabling individuals and communities to question assumptions, confront biases, and make informed decisions. As Ryan (2016) notes, meaning making is strongly shaped by nationality, social identity, and geography. By fostering critical awareness, education equips people to navigate these influences and make choices that balance local relevance with global adaptability.

Moving beyond external intervention

The assumption that external intervention alone can resolve the challenges of developing countries is misguided. Meaningful progress requires empathy, respect, and critical engagement with cultural difference rather than judgment (Appiah, 2006; Hofstede, 1984). This does not imply uncritical acceptance of every tradition; rather, it entails the capacity to evaluate practices thoughtfully, maintain respect in disagreement, and engage in dialogue. Such an approach supports sustainable, context-sensitive solutions rooted in local ownership.

The perspectives of educators and learners in the "receiving nations"

Learners may, consciously or subconsciously, prefer to remain receivers of knowledge rather than engage actively in analysing and applying information. Several factors contribute to this tendency, including long-standing educational traditions and expectations, assessment systems that reward memorisation over application, and cultural norms in which questioning information is perceived as challenging authority. Moreover, the immediate goals of many learners—including passing examinations, fulfilling visa requirements, or securing basic employment—may make critical thinking or application tasks appear less relevant in the short term. In many contexts, education has been characterised by teacher-centred practices in which teachers are regarded as unquestionable authorities, and learners' primary responsibility is to listen, memorise, and reproduce. Transitioning to a more participatory, student-centred model can therefore feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable (Smith et al., 2018). Compounding this issue, some teachers may have limited exposure to pedagogical concepts such as learner autonomy or critical thinking or may be reluctant to relinquish control in the classroom (Kashinidi, 2020). These dynamics reinforce a cycle where learners are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active users, underscoring the need for ELT to foster pedagogies that build confidence, autonomy, and critical engagement.

There is yet another perspective to consider: educators in developing countries who, for various reasons, resist drawing on the experiences of external experts. Some may be reluctant to change, preferring to maintain traditional methods that feel familiar and culturally grounded. Others may remain sceptical of external advice, perceiving it as biased or misaligned with their local realities, regardless of the intentions behind it.

Intercultural competence and language teaching and learning

As highlighted above, in the globalised world of today, education should foster global cultural awareness. With intercultural competence, people develop the ability "to see from others' perspectives" (Deardorff, 2007, p. 68). It encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that enable individuals to understand, respect, and navigate cultural differences in various social, professional, and personal contexts. By cultivating intercultural competence, individuals can contribute to creating environments that are equitable, harmonious, and conducive to shared success. Intercultural competence is an ongoing process.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the role of culture and its importance have been highlighted in language teaching and learning. According to Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence enables learners to appreciate cultural diversity while maintaining critical awareness. Meaningful understanding comes from learning about the underlying reasons behind certain ways of life, which can challenge and broaden our perspectives. As Huang (2023) puts it, "IC [intercultural competence] development does not just happen through learning about cultural knowledge and practicing related skills" (p. 3). It involves

understanding that, for example, for someone facing extreme poverty, immediate survival often takes precedence over environmental concerns. Or that the love and support extended families can provide in some communities is not necessarily interfering with the lives of younger members and can in fact be an advantage.

Modern language classes, where communication is the key to developing language skills, seem to be one of the best places to concentrate on empathy, diversity, and the role that culture can play (Barany, 2016). Both inside and outside the borders of less fortunate communities, people should study the cultures of people from different nations and communities, including immigrants to their own countries (Banks, 2008). Educating people about the cultures and lives beyond the local boundaries of (Western) countries should be revisited. Intercultural competence aims to foster empathy and understanding, not judgment, of both fortunate and less fortunate communities. People should learn to appreciate diversity and approach differences with open minds. What is considered unacceptable in one part of the world may be common practice in another—and sometimes for good reasons. They should understand the variety of cultures, contexts, needs, and priorities, and they need to be encouraged to provide support without imposing the way of life they think is better. Sharma (2019) suggests that people should learn to think interculturally. Kramsch (1993) similarly emphasises that cultural awareness in education is not about imposing values but about understanding and respecting different ways of life. Even the very process of learning a new language can encourage individuals to "think" outside the box, gaining insights into how speakers of that language perceive and interpret the world. Dreams that may be aspirational in one environment—such as home or car ownership—may hold little value in another. People's priorities differ.

Language teachers and intercultural competence

Theories relating to intercultural competence highlight that the world needs to become a better place; however, still there seem to be many grey areas when it comes to practicing them even in our classes. Language teachers are often encouraged to cultivate cultural awareness and develop intercultural competence in their classrooms. Nevertheless, to achieve that teachers should learn to have an open mind to be able to foster that open-mindedness into their classes. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to navigate cultural differences respectfully and try to help their students learn that as well. Both teachers and students need to listen to the experiences of people in other countries. Teachers need specialised training and continuous professional development to effectively teach intercultural competence. They must also have extensive experience and sensitivity to the cultural implications associated with the language being taught (Achieng, 2023). And where ready-made materials are scarce, teachers should also be supported in adapting or creating resources suited to their learners' contexts. Empowered teachers are essential for guiding learners from passive reception toward critical engagement, intercultural understanding, and independent problem-solving.

In *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society*, Kumaravadivelu (2012) outlines five interrelated global perspectives: postnational, postmodern, postcolonial, post-transmission, and

postmethod. He argues that these "must be taken together if we are serious about designing comprehensive teacher preparation programs" (p. 11). These perspectives directly challenge narrow, one-size-fits-all models of education, instead urging teachers to recognise the complexities of identity, culture, and power that shape language learning. For example, a postcolonial perspective reminds educators to question paternalistic attitudes and resist imposing external values on local contexts, while a post-transmission approach rejects the traditional "banking model" of education (Freire, 1970) in favour of dialogic and participatory learning. To translate these perspectives into practice, Kumaravadivelu introduces three parameters of language teacher education: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity stresses that pedagogy must be rooted in the specific social, cultural, and political realities of learners rather than borrowed wholesale from other contexts. Practicality highlights the need for teachers to critically reflect on their own classroom practices and generate context-sensitive pedagogical knowledge. Possibility calls on teachers to envision education as a tool for empowerment, helping learners cultivate agency, critical thinking, and the capacity to challenge inequities. Taken together, these principles align closely with the call for ELT to move beyond the passive transfer of information, instead preparing teachers to nurture intercultural competence, critical engagement, and learner autonomy in ways that are both globally informed and locally grounded.

Cochran-Smith (2020, p. 50) also explains teachers need to "Learn to teach for social justice," and sometimes to do so, in addition to the knowledge and skill they gain, they need to "unlearn their own long-held and largely invisible ideas, beliefs, and practices related to race and equity" (p. 52). This applies to many other aspects of teaching. In order to promote moral education, educators need to be well-resourced, and the findings of several studies suggest that more needs to be done in this regard (Fernández & Salazar, 2019; Özışık et al., 2019). Teachers should believe in the need for intercultural competence and its value, and then they should learn how to deal with it. They should revisit their values, constantly reflect, and develop their skills and knowledge in dealing with it. They should become aware that it is a never-ending task. Teachers should be educated to firstly understand and then to teach it to their students that intercultural competence does not mean that everybody always should appreciate all cultural values of all nations. The idea is to be able to talk about them, invite others to talk about them and try to understand and learn. This is not equal to everybody agreeing with all rites and rituals.

In addition, the materials and teaching resources should help teachers to provide the required support. Coursebooks, curricula and supporting materials can make a difference in the ways teachers approach cultures and nation and help their students to talk about them. Currently, technology can be an aid to teachers, which requires that teachers learn how to take advantage of it in the best possible ways.

To sum up, as Jiang et al. (2021) put it, teachers "need to be adequately equipped – through thorough and rigorous training – before they are able to respond to their students' needs at a level which would truly allow them to develop and reach their full potential" (p. 9).

Scaffolding toward active learning of intercultural competence

In her work on moral education, Noddings (1998, 2002, 2005, 2008) highlights dialogue and genuine encounters as key to fostering mutual respect. Diller (1993) extends this into the concepts of coexploration and coenjoyment, where learners discover shared values and find enjoyment in the process of dialogue itself. Language classrooms, therefore, become spaces where intercultural communicative competence can naturally emerge (Lee, 2012). In this way, ELT directly counters paternalistic "saviour mindsets" by equipping learners to engage with global challenges through humility, respect, and recognition of mutual agency.

Certain tasks and activities such as critical incidents, project-based learning, and reflective activities in the classroom can facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence. Short, real, or fictional accounts of cross-cultural misunderstandings, for example, invite learners to analyse situations, identify perspectives, and propose culturally sensitive responses. Such activities foster not only linguistic development but also empathy, adaptability, and perspective-taking. Student learning outcomes in these contexts can include:

- interpreting cultural behaviours without premature judgment
- articulating multiple cultural perspectives on an issue
- proposing locally appropriate solutions
- recognising personal cultural assumptions
- demonstrating greater willingness to engage in intercultural dialogue.

Embedding these practices within language learning ensures that intercultural competence is developed as an actionable skill rather than an abstract goal.

Practical empirical evidence in ELT

To help learners transition from passively receiving knowledge to actively using information, ELT teachers can begin with small, structured tasks that build confidence without overwhelming students. Research from Namibian ESL classrooms shows that while critical thinking sometimes arises incidentally, explicit lesson planning and clearly aligned objectives are essential for systematically cultivating these skills (Rittmann & Mpofu, 2024). Similarly, with proper training, peer scaffolding – where learners support and challenge each other – has been shown to enhance reading comprehension and learner autonomy in EFL settings, as demonstrated in a study among Thai students (Yawiloeng, 2021). By integrating teacher-led scaffolding with peer-driven collaboration, learners are encouraged to progressively engage with information, strengthening both analytical capacity and collaborative agency.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, I relocated to a small African country where I was offered a position teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to first-year university students. This role presented unique challenges, as I had limited time to familiarise myself with the local

culture and educational practices. Before my first class, I sought clarity on classroom norms, including appropriate forms of address, materials used, and assessment systems. Despite my more than 30 years of teaching experience, it quickly became apparent that this new context required navigating a host of unfamiliar questions.

The country differed considerably from the places I had lived previously. The largest city had a population of about 90,000, and according to the World Bank, 76% of the population resided in rural areas. Life moved at a slower pace, and nature was deeply woven into daily life. Experiences common elsewhere – pollution, traffic congestion, and busy rush hours – were largely absent here. While the country had much to offer, the contrasts with my previous contexts were striking.

Cultural differences soon became evident in everyday interactions. In my home culture, requests for favours are typically subtle, and refusal carries negative connotations. Here, requests were made openly, and refusals did not appear to cause offense. Similarly, in other places where I had lived, new acquaintances – especially foreigners – were often met with curiosity. In this setting, people displayed little overt interest in who I was or why I had come. These contrasts highlighted aspects of my own culture that I had previously taken for granted and made me increasingly aware of both major and minor differences.

These differences carried into the classroom. On the first day, I expected questions about myself, my background, and my reasons for being there. Over 300 students attended the session, yet none asked questions, despite my visible status as a newcomer and the only white person on campus. Even when prompted, students remained silent. I later learned that this reluctance reflected cultural traditions regarding the teacher–student relationship, but I continued to wonder whether it was also related to ethnicity or to broader norms of interaction. While I had hoped for curiosity and engagement, students' silence often left me frustrated.

Selecting course content proved equally complex. My review of several EAP textbooks revealed topics that were either irrelevant or poorly aligned with students' lived experiences. Some local materials addressed African issues such as ghosting, depression, or modern slavery, which I did not always find appropriate for EAP purposes. Conversely, widely used international EAP textbooks featured topics such as airports, nuclear families, fast food, urbanisation, or air and noise pollution. These themes, often assumed to be "universal", resonated little with my students.

For example, coursebook sentences such as "*My parents won't let me stay out later than midnight. They're such fascists!*" or "*More people should ride bicycles into town*" bore little relevance to my students' realities. Many did not own cars or bicycles but walked. Fertile soil meant genetically modified foods were unnecessary. Access to clean water remained a more pressing concern than fast food culture. Nightlife was uncommon, as students typically supported their families after class. Seasons were not marked by snow or autumn leaves, but by a hot, rainy summer and a cold, dry winter. Textbooks did not reflect these experiences, and

visuals rarely represented local ethnicities. This disjuncture revealed that international assessment topics often overlooked the lived realities of students in such contexts.

At the same time, my students' world was rich with other realities – delicious avocados and bananas, breathtaking scenery, iconic wildlife, and remarkable creativity in art produced with limited resources. These differences made teaching both challenging and rewarding, creating opportunities for mutual learning but also highlighting uncertainty about content choices. Should I focus on global perspectives or prioritise local issues? Their reluctance to voice opinions compounded this dilemma, leaving me unsure whether to follow colleagues' established practices or expand beyond them.

Ultimately, I concluded that the available materials were often irrelevant or unhelpful. International assessment topics bore little connection to the lives of many of my students, and without living in the country myself, I would not have recognised these nuances. Local teachers, in many cases, may be better placed to address such gaps, though this does not absolve them from the responsibility of selecting content thoughtfully and critically. In my classes, I eventually opted for themes such as time management, gender roles, culture, youth empowerment, health and well-being, and the environment – topics that struck a balance between global relevance and local resonance.

Sampedro and Hillyard (2004), in their book *Global Issues*, argue for the integration of global themes into English language lessons in ways that stimulate critical and creative thinking. Crucially, they emphasise that activity selection must take into account the geographical, social, educational, and political context of the learners. And once again for this to occur, teachers require appropriate training and ongoing professional development. They need to be reminded that students must learn without being judged, that not all global issues carry equal significance for all learners, and that transmitting information is only one part of education. Equally important is equipping students with the ability to retrieve, evaluate, and apply knowledge effectively.

Sample ELT activities

To address the gap between global themes and students' lived experiences, the following activities are samples of what can be done to stimulate critical reflection while remaining relevant to the learners' immediate contexts. Here are some examples of the topics that are relevant to the context of Eswatini where I am working:

- Should taking advantage of solar energy be a priority in your country and should investments be made for that? Instead of focusing on global concerns such as urban air pollution, which is an issue largely absent in this country, students could explore the potential of solar energy. The global relevance of renewable energy and then shifting to whether solar panels should be a national priority would be a suitable discussion and reading point. Students then weigh advantages and disadvantages, and more

importantly, consider if such technology aligns with their country's immediate needs and resources or resources had better be allocated in other areas to satisfy the immediate or long-term needs of the country.

- How can water be managed and conserved? Given that access to clean water remains a pressing issue, students might examine how seasonal rainfall is managed. For instance, during the rainy season, large amounts of water are often lost. A task could involve brainstorming practical strategies for capturing and conserving rainwater, followed by a comparison with international examples of water management.
- Can your country be a touristic attraction? Why or why not? If your answer is yes, then how? Tourism provides another contextually relevant theme. Students first learn about attractions that draw visitors to other countries, then reflect on their own country's unique cultural and natural assets. The activity could culminate in reflecting about their countries assets without neglecting the attractions of other countries.

These types of activities not only encourage students to connect global issues with local realities but also develop higher-order skills such as evaluation, problem-solving, and contextualised communication skills, which are central to EAP. These are among the examples that demonstrate how critically analysing the information received can contribute to better learning.

More or less, the same topics can be assigned to the classes of more affluent communities. And if the resources are well-selected and the teacher is well-trained, the discussions could lead the students to learn that in some contexts solar energy may not the priority or tourism can take many forms and each country/region can offer something unique that is worth learning about and possibly visiting.

Conclusion

The overarching message is clear: no country in the world needs to be *saved*; what they need is *support*. In an interconnected world, the challenges faced by one nation inevitably affect others. At the same time, development is not a matter of imitation or "rescue". In many cases, people may lack exposure to alternative lifestyles or the resources to pursue what they already know they want. While good intentions and urgent interventions can play a role, the prevailing *attitude* requires transformation. Paternalistic assumptions emphasising that the less privileged are ignorant, incapable, or in need of saving, must give way to a recognition that every community possesses valuable skills, knowledge, and life experiences. What the world needs is not heroes who impose solutions, but knowledgeable individuals who care, listen, and collaborate.

Within this context, language teaching has a unique responsibility. Language classrooms are not only spaces for linguistic development but also for fostering intercultural understanding and critical engagement. Language teachers can help learners from diverse communities move

beyond passively receiving knowledge toward actively analysing and using information, equipping them to navigate global issues through the lens of their own realities. To do so, however, teachers require support: appropriate training, adequate resources, and materials that are both locally relevant and globally informed. This aligns with calls to "decolonise ELT materials", not merely treating textbooks as content to deliver, but as "springboards" for relational, context-sensitive learning that validates learners' lived experiences (Kim, 2023).

Curriculum developers should ensure that syllabi reflect local priorities alongside international perspectives, balancing the global with the particular. Coursebook writers need to avoid one-size-fits-all content, instead providing adaptable materials that acknowledge diverse cultural, social, and environmental realities. Policymakers must invest in teacher training, professional development, and the creation of resources that empower educators to facilitate critical, reflective, and transformative learning. And most importantly, for practitioners, this means designing lessons that encourage learners to reflect on their lived experiences while engaging with global themes in context-sensitive ways. To be able to do these, language teachers need support, training, and relevant resources.

In sum, the role of ELT and TESOL in today's world is not to "save" but to *support*: to create conditions where learners are empowered to think critically, draw on their own cultural and experiential knowledge, and engage meaningfully with both local and global challenges. Future research should explore how context-sensitive approaches to materials design, teacher education, and assessment can better align with the lived realities of learners in diverse educational settings.

While transformative change at the macro level may seem distant, education has the power to improve lives through each class, each teacher, and each student.

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How EAL teachers harness a bespoke artificial intelligence tool to achieve personalised learning: A qualitative classroom-based study

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Abstract

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have led to a surge in AI-powered English language tutoring applications, with promising features integrated into teaching and learning. This article reports on a qualitative study of teachers' leveraging AI to support pedagogical outcomes for adult learners of English as an additional language (EAL). The study involved five teachers from a Melbourne-based EAL provider, focusing on their use of a bespoke AI-powered application (app) in their superdiverse classrooms of adult migrant and refugee background students. Through classroom observations and teacher reflective conversations, the study examined how teachers were incorporating the app's features into curriculum through their lesson plans and scaffolded activities. Findings reveal that despite various challenges, EAL teachers want to explore with guidance more of the app's advanced features and expand their pedagogical use of the app to achieve and enhance personalised learning for students. This calls for increased opportunities for teachers to engage in classroom-based experimentation with the app and for professional development that boosts teachers' confidence and agency to use AI teaching assistance with adult students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence in education (AIED) continues to be a much-anticipated research field unfolding the affordances and challenges of AI (including Generative AI, or GAI) for teaching and learning in tertiary education. Within this wide scope of literature, studies in the field of English language teaching (ELT) have been a welcome addition, particularly those that encompass teachers' roles and competence for teaching with AI. Such studies have predicted that AI tools for learning English will bring pedagogic benefits to both teachers and students along with challenges (Al-khresheh, 2024; Creely, 2024). As for teachers of English as an additional language (EAL) in Australia, an increasing "superdiversity" (Steele et al, 2023, p. 110) in their classrooms creates additional challenges to an already significant digital divide (Tour et al., 2022) amongst adult EAL learners. Nevertheless, the adult EAL sector is often under-represented in AIED research in Australia. There is a scarcity of classroom-based research (e.g., Slaughter et al., 2020; Steele et al., 2023; Tour et al., 2020) that foregrounds the day-to-day challenges of an EAL classroom in the digital era of AI. In cognisance of this gap, the present study investigated how teachers were using an AI-powered English learning app in adult EAL classrooms and how this AI-integrated practice may bring out the best pedagogical affordances of AI, such as personalised learning.

Grounded in a qualitative exploratory approach, this study was conducted at the end of 2024 with a small group of teachers at AMES Australia (AMES) who were attempting to integrate an AI-powered English learning application called MyAMES Chat (the app) in their culturally and linguistically diverse adult EAL classrooms. The adult students in these classrooms were from up to14 different first language backgrounds with varying levels of digital and linguistic literacy.

The app was developed as an AI English learning and communication coaching tool by a Melbourne-based start-up, GetMee, whose immigrant-background founder envisioned that AI had the potential to increase EAL learners' connection to and engagement with their learning. This is achieved through the app's tailored vocabulary, pronunciation practice and feedback, and role-play job interviews that are accessible to the students both in and out of the classroom. As such, a key affordance of the app is its potential to offer personalised learning support and individualised content and feedback, leading to improved students' digital competence and linguistic proficiency.

Since its launch in July 2023, the app had been used by around 4,000 students by the time of data collection of this study. Students' effective use of the app relies on their regular use which triggers the app to curate tailored vocabulary and pronunciation tasks based on students' performance on the tasks. This regular and effective use on students' part relies on teachers' readiness and skills to incorporate the app to supplement or augment curriculum content and to differentiate teaching by drawing on the AI personalised feedback to students' work.

One unique strength of the app is its administration dashboard where teachers can access and create new tasks for students, adjust performance thresholds, and generate data reports on students' task performance and completion. To make the best use of these teacher-facing features to support students' effective use of the app, teachers therefore need to not only be knowledgeable about how the AI works but also hone the practical skills to bring out the personalised affordances of the app.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the developer provided regular app awareness sessions and training presentation for the teachers to help them navigate the app's administration functions. These practical sessions included the developer visiting each campus to support students and teachers to get started with the app. AMES also prioritised a series of AI training for teachers within their regular suite of professional development days (one day per term), curriculum meetings (one per term) and network meetings (twice per term). At these sessions, teachers were able to share their experiences of using the app.

Set amidst this unique case of the MyAMES Chat app, the study asks: How do EAL teachers use an AI-powered language teaching and learning application to differentiate teaching and personalise learning to accommodate the diverse linguistic and cultural diversity of adult migrant and refugee background students? Findings of the study reveal that supporting teachers' AI teaching agency is crucial to enlivening student's learner agency to use the app for personalisation benefits afforded by AI technology. This supports our argument that increasing expectations of teaching with AI are likely to be out of step with teachers' slower development of AI literacy and pedagogy. To mediate such discrepancy, we recommend tailored professional development designed through teacher-research collaboration that empowers teachers' AI experimentation and their confidence with exploring the more advanced pedagogical functions of the app with their students across EAL classrooms.

Literature review

The impact of AI on teachers, students, and classrooms

A wide range of academic journals have been publishing research on the use of Artificial intelligence in education (AIED) since the early 1990s. With the 2022 launch of ChatGPT, new research interest has sprung up about the impact that a more powerful content-generating version of AI, namely generative AI (GAI), will have on education. The focus of this new interest has expanded from exploring the affordances, risks and challenges for teaching and learning with AI to theory- and practice-based studies that reveal how GAI is being used in the real-world of classroom teaching. This includes research in English language teaching (ELT) and second language acquisition fields examining the significant impact of GAI on how English and second languages are taught and learnt (e.g., Creely, 2024). While the scope of these studies encompasses a wide range of ELT contexts, only a small number are now being published about EAL teachers (e.g., Barnes & Tour, 2025).

Within the literature of AI in ELT, there is debate about AI integration in terms of its pedagogical quality for ELT (Al-khresheh, 2024; Hockly, 2023). GPTs are argued to have benefits for generating content for conversation practice (Kohnke, 2024; Moorhouse et al., 2024; Xin, 2024) and fluency and communicative competence (Mabuan, 2024). These benefits are also accompanied by risks. For example, teachers need to be aware that AI's hallucinations, bias, and data privacy issues may impact negatively on students (Xin, 2024). The pedagogic uses of AI and GAI in ELT place teachers in a new instrumental role of ensuring that AI-powered apps and tools not only meet pedagogic and curriculum goals but protect their students from unwanted risks. As noted by Sankey (2020), it is the underlying belief whether pedagogy is driving technology or vice versa that may influence teachers' perceptions about the 'usefulness' of educational technology.

These findings underline the importance of understanding teachers' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours for teaching effectively with AI. Nevertheless, despite a focus on AI teaching efficacy, there has been limited attention given to the role of teacher agency as an enabler of efficacy. Therefore, the remaining part of the literature review goes beyond affordances of AI to look into the various factors that may affect teachers' integration of AI technologies in teaching practice, and the implications of these factors for teachers' professional development.

Expectations on teachers in transitioning to teaching with AI.

The impact of AI in education is often described in terms of a transformation. Teachers' role in this transformation is speculated to involve making a transition from traditional teaching to emerging models of teaching and learning with AI technologies (Al-khresheh, 2024). Teachers are expected to develop their knowledge of AI-driven educational technologies and incorporate them in their teaching (Liu & Chang, 2024), suggesting a pressing need for training and professional development. This perception of unavoidability (Moylan et al., 2024) is leading to a focus in the existing literature on teacher (re-)training (Chiu et al., 2024; Duan et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2023) with a concomitant demand for future empirical research centring on teachers' practical use of AI technologies in classrooms (e.g., Chou et al., 2023; Liang & Law, 2023; Prestridge et al., 2024). This demand has given impetus to our study investigating how the teachers were adjusting to a teaching transition involving a potentially transformative AI-powered app in their classrooms.

Teachers' AI literacy and competence affecting their AI teaching efficacy.

Digital literacy and competence requirements for using AI are likely to be of a higher level than for earlier educational digital technologies. Mishra et al. (2023) believe that teachers will need to be able to skilfully graft both their digital and AI competencies to their pedagogical and content knowledges to effectively use and integrate AI technologies in the classroom. In the meanwhile, teachers must have the knowledge to teach their students about ethical risks

and social and cultural impacts of using GAI technologies (Lodge, et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). Because of these new demands on teachers, Mouta and colleagues (2024) argue that teachers' beliefs and attitudes also need to be considered when constructing professional development to increase their AI teaching efficacy. Additionally, teaching experience, age and qualifications may affect teachers' adoption of AI technologies. Teachers' preference for traditional or face-to-face teaching (Duan et al., 2023) may also be a factor of long teaching experience or because of discipline specific requirements (Prestridge et al., 2024). Thus, teaching with AI may conflict with teaching beliefs and manifest as change resistance.

Teacher agency and professional development

Facing the above factors, institutions are therefore expected to better prepare teachers by developing their AI-centred pedagogical knowledge (Al-khresheh, 2024), while also reassuring teachers that the transition to teaching with these tools will be carefully managed to assuage any concerns they have (Mouta et al., 2024). This will require thoughtfully designed professional development that is supportive, incremental, and adapted to the characteristics of their teachers. These research insights have informed our study that we should first attempt to ascertain how teachers responded to the AI-powered app's use in their classroom and what they believed they still needed to learn to use it effectively.

Considering the variations among teachers in responding to teaching with AI, researchers may need to recognise how teachers connect their "professional agency and… professional digital competence" (Moylan et al., 2024, p. 3). This recognition can be used as a precursor to teachers' professional development that upskills them for teaching with AI which requires both digital and AI literacy and competence. As such, flexible research designs using small-scale qualitative or mixed methods prioritising collaborations with teachers (e.g., Liu & Chang, 2024; Moylan et al., 2024) are promising. This is because such flexible designs can delve deeper into teachers' unique teaching environment when exploring the most effective professional development solutions for teachers to harness the pedagogical affordances of AI. This has informed the design of the present study as small-scale qualitative research in collaboration with teachers to examine their own experiences of teaching with AI in their specific classroom contexts.

Research design

The study reported in this article is part of a longitudinal case study exploring the implications for EAL teachers' professional development arising out of their use of an AI-powered English learning application (the app). We conducted this study with EAL teachers at AMES in September and October 2024 to understand teachers' pedagogical use of the app. The study serves as a precursor to a larger study involving co-design of professional development with the teachers.

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study explores how the teachers were using the app in classroom settings via two main data collection methods, classroom observation and reflective conversation with the teachers. We chose the classroom observation method as we wanted to be able to "see directly" rather than rely on what teachers reported (Spada, 2009, p. 192). The observations were guided by a purposefully developed checklist to record how the teachers incorporated different app features (pronunciation, reading, audio recording, AI feedback) into the lesson plan through pre-class or in-class activities or homework assignments. The checklist also captured the skills and strategies employed by the teacher, examples of student learning, and the way materials or resources were used to support learning objectives. The study collected examples of teaching that incorporated some of the personalised learning features of the app that might demonstrate how teachers used the app to differentiate their teaching for their students.

The purpose of conducting reflective conversations with the teachers was to give the teachers time to reflect on the approach they had taken to incorporate the app in a lesson and to allow the researcher to follow up issues from the classroom observations. The researcher used a semi-structured question design to allow for a free-flowing interactive conversation that led to a more natural environment where the teachers felt at ease to generate their own reflections (Rose et al., 2019). The conversation with each teacher was conducted and recorded on the Microsoft Teams platform and lasted for approximately one hour under the guidance of an interview protocol. The protocol set clear guidelines for the conduct of reflective conversations along with questions which were to be asked to the EAL teacher participants (Patton, 2015). Guidelines included for example, asking the teachers to respond to the same questions to ensure consistency even though follow-up questions may differ due to the spontaneity and emerging nature of teachers' responses. Main questions in the protocol included:

- What were the learning objectives or purpose of the task you created for the app?
- What did you expect to achieve by creating a task for the app?
- What type of students was the task suited for?
- What were the results of the task or the outcomes of the session involving the task and app?
- Did the students complete any pre- or post- tasks? If not, why do you think that was?
- What feedback did you receive from the students?
- How did the app help you to teach the students?
- What worked/didn't work well in the classroom using the app?

Although the questions were not pilot tested with the target population, they were pre-tested and modified using expert reviews (Creswell & Poth, 2024) from academic researchers and practitioners to enhance feasibility, validity, and reliability. Recordings of reflective conversations were transcribed into word documents, from which the identifiable information was removed before storage and data analysis.

Participants

At the time of this study, about 40% of the teacher workforce at AMES (i.e., 25-30 teachers) had made some attempt to use the app with students, however, only a few felt confident enough to use the app in the classroom. For this reason, our purposive sampling strategy yielded a small sample exclusive source of information (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This sample comprise the five teachers who felt confident enough to design and deliver a lesson that incorporated the app's vocabulary and pronunciation practice features. This sampling approach was the only logical and practical technique in this specific research context. It enabled us to enlist teachers as 'rich informants' (Patton, 2015) for this research who could provide deep knowledge and experience about the practical issues and challenges for using the app in diverse EAL classrooms. We were aware of the limitation of this small sample in that findings from this study may not be generalisable to the whole EAL teacher population. Nevertheless, being a small-scale qualitative study, we were able to limit disruption to classroom teaching and learning by conducting the study towards the end of Term 3, 2024 but before assessment deadlines became too pressing for the teachers. Anonymous tags (e.g., Teacher 1) were assigned to each participant as per Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers and their classroom details.

Teacher #	EAL Level	Classroom size	Students using app %
1	1	≈30	≈80
2	2	≈20	≈25
3	3	≈20	≈100
4	2	≈30	≈100
5	2	≈25	≈100

EAL levels: Level 1 (beginner), Level 2 (intermediate) and Level 3 (advanced).

Ethical clearance of this study was obtained from the researchers' university ethics committee prior to recruitment of the participants. Informed consent was provided by each teacher participant before data collection. To ensure confidentiality and data security, identifiable information was removed from the raw data before data storage and analysis. The ethics clearance recognised that students would be in the classroom during teacher observations but that no direct data would be collected from them. The teachers may have included student feedback about students' accessibility to the app when providing their reflective feedback on the lesson.

Findings

Classroom observations

The classroom observations revealed that four (of the five) teachers conducted an in-class activity using one or more features of the app, with three teachers identifying the app as a resource in their lesson plan linked to the curriculum topic of that week– e.g., numeracy and

transport. All the teachers encouraged students to use the app by providing reminders at key stages (when moving between activities and towards the end of class). Table 2 summarises how the teachers were observed to scaffold (i.e., Colum S) the app into the lesson plan at various intervals and integrate the use of the app with curriculum (i.e., Column C) or through pre-class (PC) or in-class (I-C) activities or homework (H) practice tasks. Each teacher's integration of the app is delineated in the next section.

Table 2. App usage during the classroom observation.

Teacher #	EAL level	S	C	PC	I-C	H
1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	2				✓	✓
3	3		✓		✓	✓
4	2	✓	✓		✓	✓
5	2	✓			✓	✓

Individual teacher's use of the app

Teacher 1 – EAL Level 1 Class – Week 9, Term 3 – numeracy topic.

The teacher emailed the students before the class to remind them of the numeracy topic and basic vocabulary they had already covered in previous classes. For this class, the teacher planned to expand students' vocabulary about money by using curriculum materials based on an internet resource for common vocabulary and idioms to talk about prices. The students practised pronouncing the new vocabulary under the teacher's guidance and modelling. Students then repeated the words, idioms, and their associated sentences as a group before practising on their own by using the app on their phone to record their pronunciation. Some of the words and sentences from the internet resource were difficult for the students to master, so the teacher wrote up simpler alternatives on the whiteboard (e.g., 'many' for 'numerous;' 'other shops' for 'competitors') they could practise on the app. The app provided feedback (Figure 1) by highlighting (and underlining) in red words that were pronounced incorrectly, which the student could click on to obtain tips for how to improve their pronunciation. In this example, the student achieved 62% for their pronunciation of the phrase 'it costs an arm and a leg'.

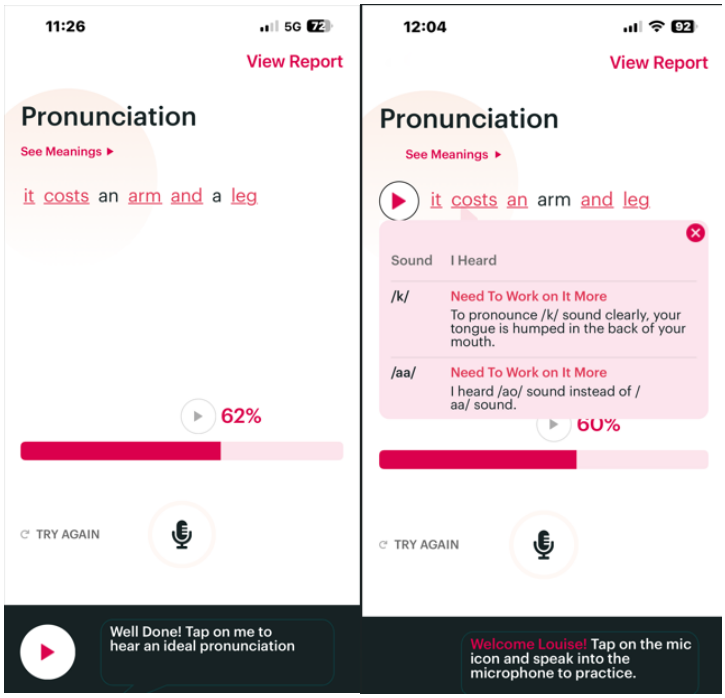

Figure 1. Feedback examples highlighting incorrect pronunciation in Teacher 1's classroom.

Although the app provides multilingual translation of instructions (in Chinese, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Spanish), the teacher preferred to provide instructions in both English and Chinese (as the class was mainly Chinese students) and translate idioms into their Chinese counterparts. The teacher also used two other technologies to help students practice: Google pronunciation, and WeChat. The latter is a Chinese instant messaging social media app on which students were asked to post new sentences using the vocabulary or idioms which would be then corrected by the teacher after the class. The teacher's choice of Google in this instance was prompted by preference for a visual illustration that showed a short video about where to place the tongue in the mouth (Figure 2), whereas the app provides a text description of pronunciation tips (as shown in Figure 1).

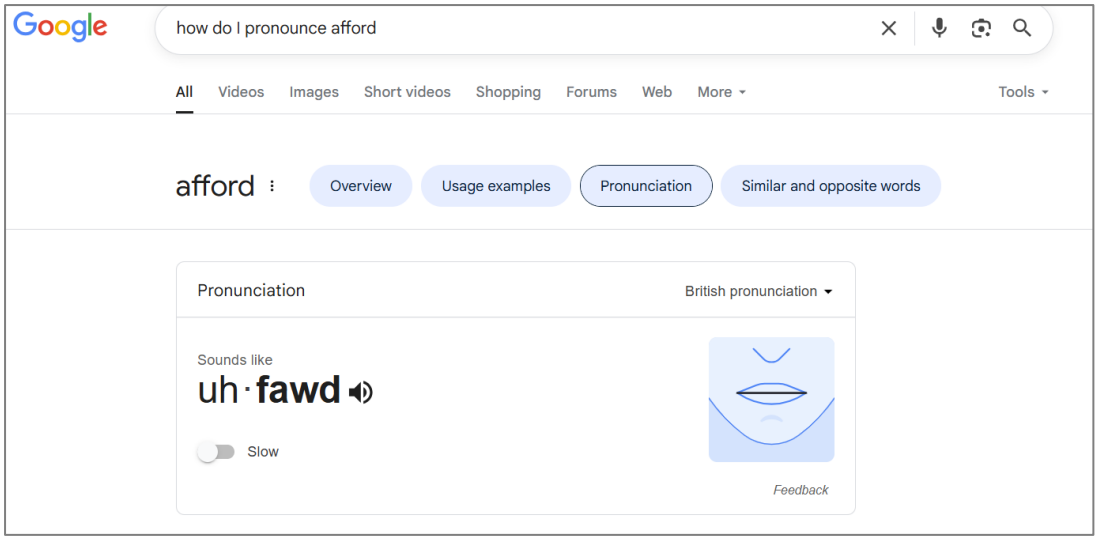

Figure 2. Google: "How do I pronounce?".

Teacher 2 – EAL Level 2 Class – Week 10, Term 3 – assessment task.

Teacher 2's class had the least number of students using the app at the time of data collection, because they were focused on completing an end of term assessment task. Although the teacher could have used the app to create a practice quiz, they preferred to use Quizlet (a proprietary quiz app) because of student familiarity with it. The students had previously expressed concern that the AI app could not recognise their "Asian" accent, therefore, the teacher was reluctant to try using the app without more preparation to build the students' acceptance of the app.

Teacher 3 – EAL Level 3 Class– Week 10, Term 3 – numeracy assessment.

The teacher created their own task for the app using the 'create task' feature on teacher administration dashboard (Figure 3).

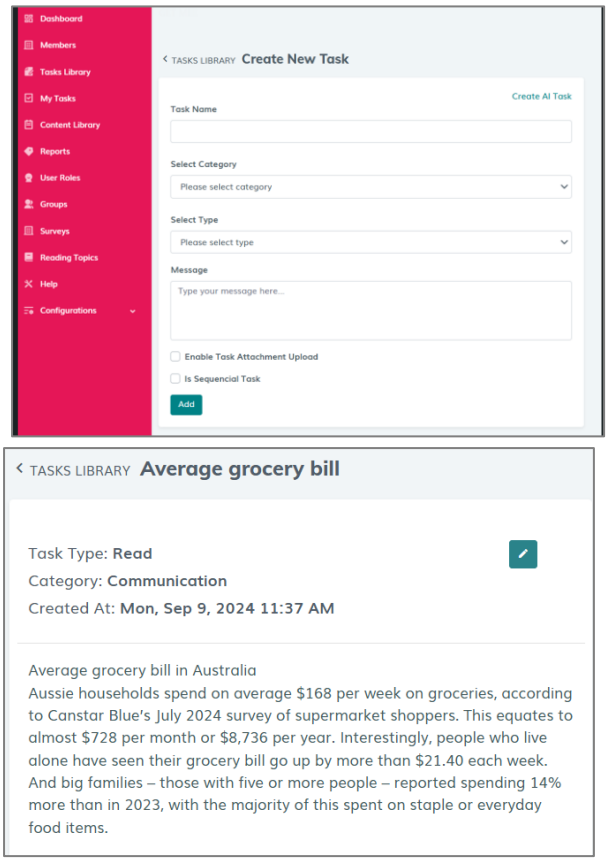

Figure 3. Task creation on teacher administration dashboard by Teacher 3.

Using this feature, the teacher was able to assign a task to the students which then appeared in the student's My Tasks section on the app. The task comprised a short passage of text for the students to practise reading aloud, record themselves reading it and then submit for feedback when they were happy with their performance. However, most of the students were unable to submit as their pronunciation accuracy did not reach the required level of 80%. This

is a default setting which teachers must change before assigning the task in the teacher administration dashboard, however, on this occasion, the teacher did not know how to do this. If the threshold level is too high for the students, the assigned task cannot be submitted to the teacher for review and feedback, even though the students may have attempted the task many times. Nevertheless, for each attempt, AI feedback is given (as shown in Figure 4).

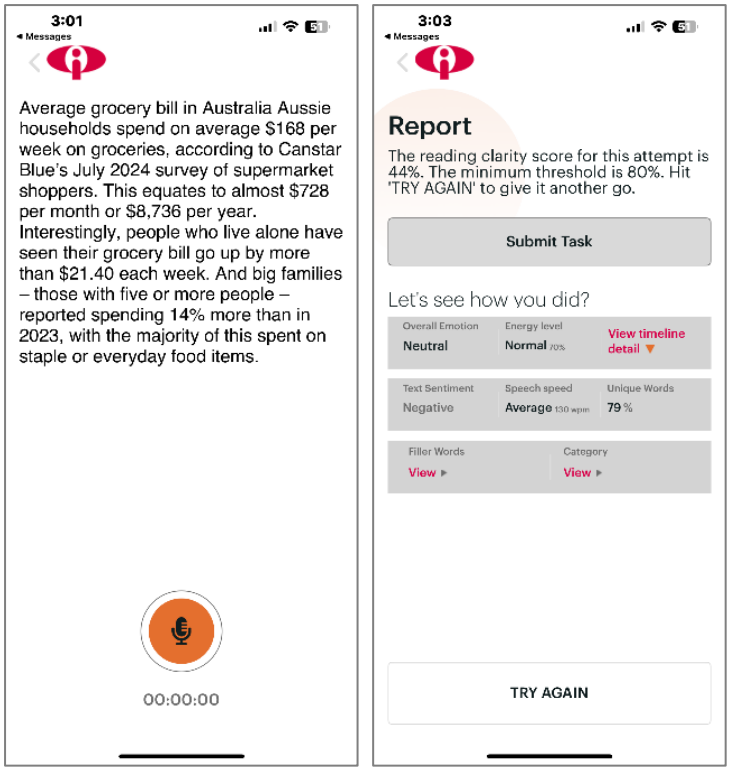

Figure 4. Task created in My Tasks folder in the app by Teacher 3.

Teacher 4 – EAL Level 2 Class – Week 10, Term 3 – Transport.

As can be seen in the lesson plan below (Figure 5), Teacher 4 purposefully integrated students' use of the app in the learning objectives and activities for the class.

Lesson Objectives:

- Students (Ss) can expand their vocabulary and understand the reading text on the topic of "Transport."
- Ss are able to use the MyAMES Chat App as a useful tool for improving pronunciation and fluency.

Lesson Plan:

1. **Warm-up Questions:** Ask Ss how they often travel in Melbourne/their country.
2. **Vocabulary Teaching:** Have Ss work in groups to answer questions using their existing knowledge and vocabulary. The teacher (T) writes the words on the board and has them repeat the words to reinforce meaning and pronunciation.
3. **Pronunciation Practice:** T asks Ss to use the MyAMES Chat app and select "Pronunciation" to practice all new words from the game. T monitors and provides help to Ss.
4. **Reading Text:** T asks Ss to look at the reading text and listen to the recording. T explains new words if asked.
5. **Comprehensibility Check:** T asks Ss to use the MyAMES Chat app again to read one sentence from the text to check comprehensibility and fluency.
6. **App Functions Summary:** T summarizes the functions of the app and encourages Ss to use the app at home.
7. **Reading Questions:** T asks Ss to continue with the reading and answer the reading questions, then T checks the answers.
8. **Speaking Practice:** T asks Ss to form two lines and gives each student different questions. They start to ask and answer the questions.

Figure 5. Example of Teacher 4 integrating the app into a lesson plan.

Working in small groups of 5-7 students, the students used the app to practice vocabulary and sentences about transport. The teacher strategically distributed at least one student with more experience (with the app) to each group of students so that students newer to the class (and the app) were able to get help from a more experienced student. This differentiation-based personalised lesson design made efficient use of the teacher's time and effort to maximise the pedagogical benefits of the app. There were a few words (e.g., motorist and pedestrian) where the app had difficulty understanding the student's accent. However, the teacher reminded students to speak slowly and clearly and also take turns in the group to avoid any incidental noise interference which sometimes occurs if the app overhears another student speak.

Teacher 5 – EAL Level 2 Class – Week 10, term 3 – Racism.

Teacher 5 used a different feature of the app that provides feedback on speaking tone and energy level, which the app defines as a mix of pitch, intonation, voice vitality, volume, and pace. In this scaffolded task, the students read an initial passage of text (Figure 6) as context for a video they would later watch in class (projected on an interactive white board).

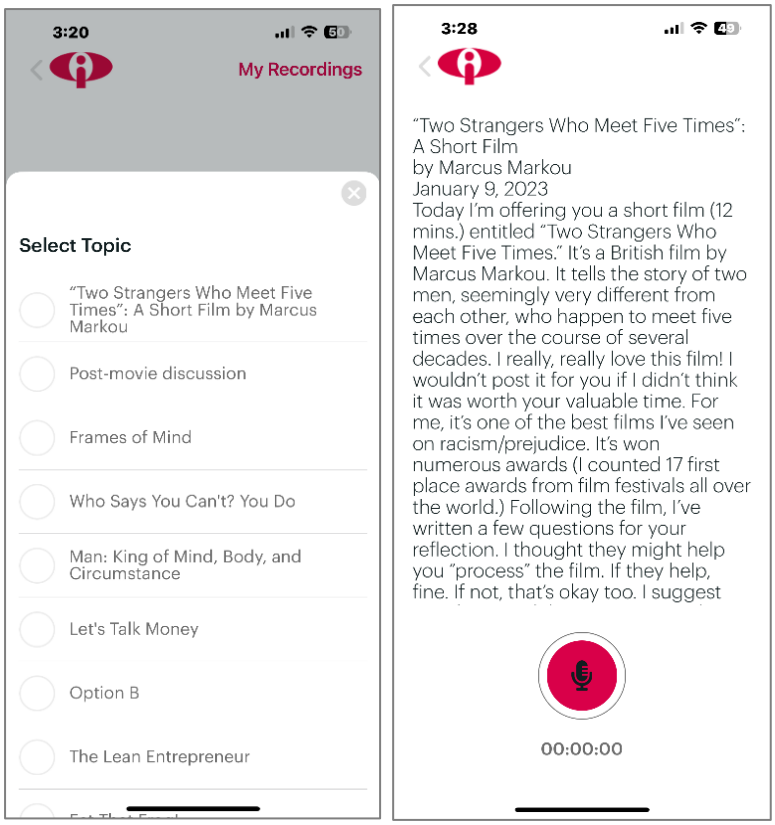

Figure 6. Teacher 5's scaffolded reading task.

After watching the video, the students moved to the post-movie discussion (See Figure 6, second option) to read a second passage of text (Figure 6, second screenshot) and answer some questions (see Figure 7).

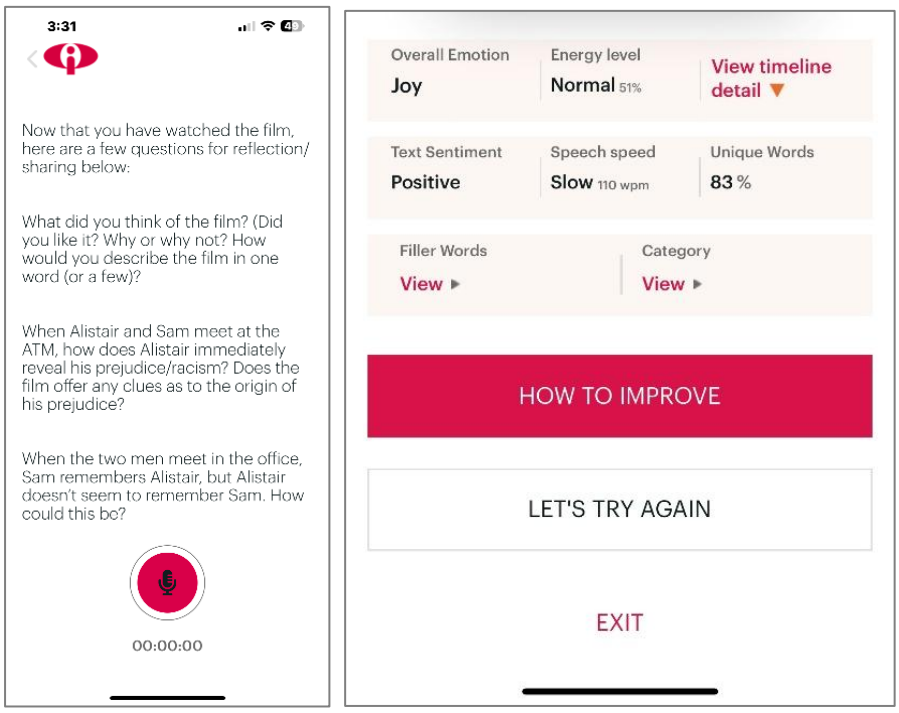

Figure 7. Reading task created by Teacher 5.

The teacher asked for volunteers to read the text aloud into the app in front of the class to demonstrate how the task is done using the app. This reading aloud practice feature of the app includes a function which provides AI feedback on the students' energy level, tone, and use of filler words (as shown in the second screen shot of Figure 7). This enables the student to receive personalised feedback about their speech which goes beyond just pronunciation. In this instance, the teacher used this function to demonstrate to the students how the app can help them to improve their speech by adjusting the tone and timing of their speech when speaking to different audiences (e.g., a large group of people, work colleagues or in an interview).

Reflective conversations

The second data source comprises de-identified transcripts of teacher-researcher conversations which were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved an inductive approach to the analysis where a codebook was created based on patterns and themes as they emerged from the conversations, rather than a deductive approach requiring a pre-existing set of themes in mind. Our thematic analysis resulted in 72 individual coded items, adopting Braun and Clarke (2006) recommendation to "code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible …as you never know what may be interesting later" (p. 89). After checking for relationships or similarities, the coded items were categorised into six preliminary groups (as shown in Figure 8).

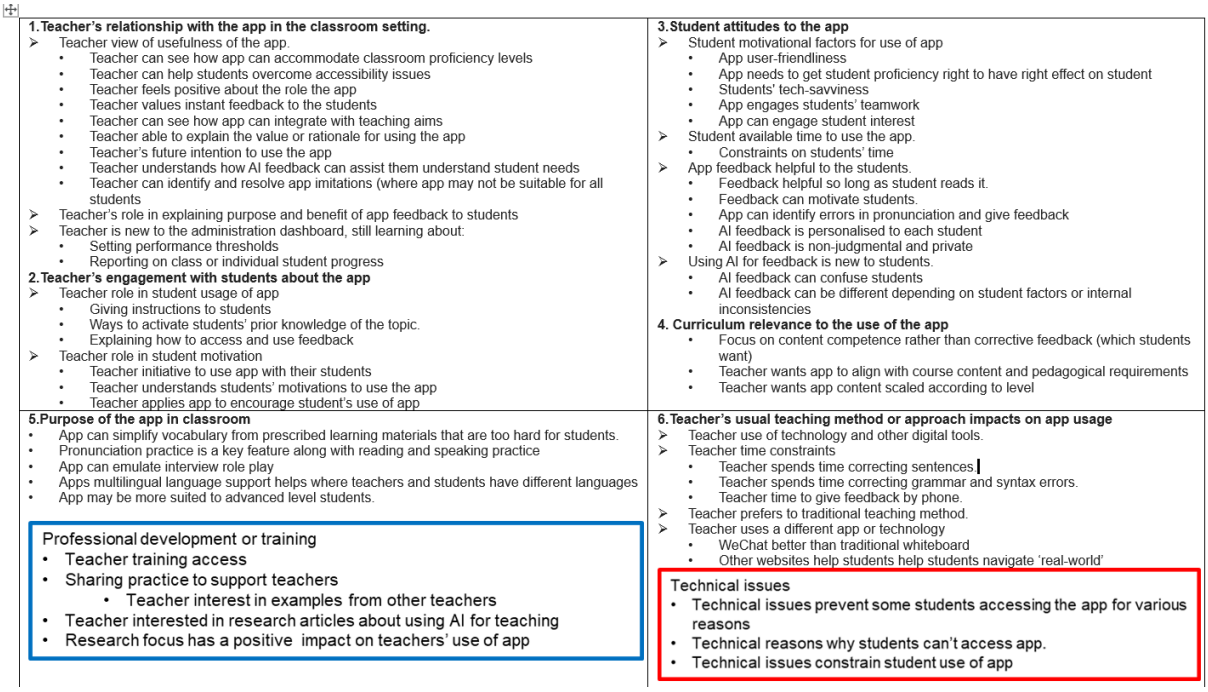

Figure 8. Thematic analysis of teacher interview transcripts.

The second author reviewed the coding and validated the coding and categorising, after which a check was conducted for "internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity" (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This resulted in further fine-tuning that resulted in five main themes of findings: 1) Pedagogical application of AI, 2) Role of teachers in AI teaching, 3) Student acceptance and accessibility of AI, 4) Motivation – teacher and student agentic relationship, and 5) Feedback – how AI-powered feedback works for personalised learning. Each theme of findings is presented below.

Pedagogical application of AI.

This theme represented the teachers' use of the AI app in the classroom to practice pronunciation that aligned with lesson objectives and topic content. Teachers reported that they could see how using the app could enhance, not replace, their usual teaching and assessment practices, with one teacher commenting:

> *"The app ... complemented my teaching, and it allowed me to provide interactive lessons and engage students in [a] more dynamic way…it wasn't a complete replacement for traditional instruction, but rather an enhancement."* (Teacher 1)

The teachers often commented on the app functioning as a teaching assistant, enabling their students to have more opportunities for timely and personalised feedback. This would not be possible with one teacher in a classroom of adult EAL learners with up to 14 nationalities and a wide range of language and digital literacy and proficiency. For example,

> *"Without this app, the students will have to wait for their turns. This will take a long time because we can only get one student to read at a time."* (Teacher 5)

Role of teachers in AI teaching.

The second theme describes how teachers were grappling with their responsibility for the use of the app in the classroom. Some teachers chose to integrate the app meaningfully in their lesson to augment teaching and learning, whereas others employed the app as an additional assistive technology which was not dissimilar to their use of other apps such as Google. The extent of teachers' use of the app in the classroom was found influential to students' use of the app both in and outside the classroom, as illustrated by the comment below.

> *"The good thing here is my students were really engaged in using the app and it's really established the habits…it's increased the participation and engagement of the [students]…"* (Teacher 4)

Supporting students' use of AI in a diverse classroom.

This theme reflects that managing a very diverse classroom can be a major challenge for the teachers. With ongoing and continuous enrolment throughout the term, new students could join classes where the app had already been introduced and practiced before. These students, often less linguistically or digitally literate than their classmates, may then request differentiated, personalised support from the teachers at different points of time so as to catch up with their potentially more advanced peers. This feature of 'superdiversity' generated considerable reflection from the teachers about the challenges of teaching with an AI app:

> *"In my class, there are students who are a bit older. They find it difficult to use the app because of their phone…[which] affects their experience when using the [app]."* (Teacher 4)

> *"Using the app for the students who are weaker, less familiar with new technology. They need a lot of help, and we can't provide that level of help to them right in that sort of environment."* (Teacher 5)

Motivation – teacher and student agentic relationships.

Teachers expressed strong motivations to help their students learn independently to counterbalance a reliance on teacher instructions and guidance. Teachers reflected that they were constantly seeking ways to increase their students' agency over their own learning:

> *"…teacher's initiative and teacher's encouragement [to use the app] … if we don't constantly remind them [students] or make them use it in the classroom, they are less likely…to use it at home."* (Teacher 5)

The teachers also believed that their own professional and human agency played an integral part in engaging the students' learner agency to make the best use of the app and achieve better learning outcomes:

> *"This app is helpful to students who want to practise more at home but not those who are not motivated to use it at home."* (Teacher 5)

This theme highlights that the quality of the teachers' agentic relationship with both the students and the app makes a significant contribution to the success of the app. It also illustrates that the use of AI as teaching assistance may require new forms of human teacher agency.

AI-powered feedback for personalised learning.

An emerging issue from the data related to the algorithmic, profiling, and prediction power of AI, in particular, the app's capacity to create individualised content and tailored feedback for each student. In the face of this new form of AI-empowered feedback, teachers were expected to educate students to develop AI literacy, for example, to help students unpack, decode or interpret the AI feedback, so they can make better sense and then better use of the feedback for their learning. One teacher acknowledged the app's advantage of providing objective and personalised feedback, which was private, thus reducing any embarrassment to the student. In contrast, teacher's feedback tends to be more generic and factors in students' feelings in the classroom setting, as the teacher commented:

> *"The…feedback [from the app]is very analytical. The feedback doesn't care about how the student might lose face in the classroom if the feedback's being given in the classroom in front of everyone…"* (Teacher 5)

The teachers also reflected that this new form of feedback can have significant benefits for their students. Nevertheless, for these benefits to happen, students need to know how to access, understand and take on board the AI feedback. For example,

> *"I feel like the feedback helps the students…if they read the feedback, some of the students just jump the feedback part."* (Teacher 1)

> *"[feedback] can encourage them to practice more."* (Teacher 1)

Discussion

This study collected and analysed data from classroom observations and teacher reflective conversations to identify how EAL teachers were using an AI-powered app with their adult migrant and refugee students. Being able to interweave digital and AI competencies with pedagogy and content knowledge is a necessary step to teaching with AI (Mouta, et al., 2024; Moylan et al., 2024). While we found that the teachers in this study were willing to experiment with the app as a digital tool, their weaving together of these competencies and knowledge was still at an early stage. Teachers were still 'finding their feet' with using the AI app even after one year of the app being launched. A low level of teacher AI literacy can diminish teachers' confidence to guide their students' use of the app (Liu & Change, 2024). This was evident when teachers were not confident to change app settings (such as performance thresholds) or extract, analyse and use the diagnostic data on students' performance provided by the app for additional personalisation benefits for students. Teachers' attempts to connect in-class session topics with students' self-directed learning using the app were not always successful, as this type of app use amongst students was still at an early stage. However, future efforts to link the app to curriculum or course requirements on their learning management

platform would support teachers' more effective use of the app for pre- and post-class learning. Nevertheless, the teachers reported broad satisfaction with their attempts to achieve other pedagogical affordances of the app, for example, linking their use of the app in the lesson to the week's course topic through substitution or augmentation of teaching resources they had sourced from their learning platform or the internet. They saw this as a manageable way to integrate the app in an in-class, face-to-face teaching mode to 'enhance' their teaching practice with their current level of AI competence.

It is clear from the findings that the EAL teachers' pedagogical use of the app was limited to the basic features of the app. This suggests a pressing need of building teacher confidence and skills in utilising the more advanced features of the app. Notably, teachers may perceive advanced use of the app as an additional or highly demanding task, which may then affect their agency in experimenting with the more advanced features of the app on their own without institutional support including training and professional development. Due to hard-wired teaching beliefs and practices (Prestridge et al., 2024), it is little wonder that some of the teachers in this study reverted to their usual teaching methods and app preferences when faced with challenges using the app. Consequently, training, and professional development that is practically oriented and tailored to the needs of specific teaching contexts (Mouta et al., 2024) is essential. This equips teachers with skills and self-efficacy to fully explore and use the pedagogical affordances of AI, especially in culturally and linguistically diverse EAL classrooms.

Furthermore, the EAL teachers' limited use of the AI app was also greatly affected by their students' perception and use of the app. This issue dominated their asides to the researcher during the observations and in their post-classroom reflection interviews. Teachers conjectured that low technology acceptance among some students was caused by their mature age, low language and digital literacy levels, motivation, and need, which aligns with findings from earlier EAL studies (e.g., Veliz et al., 2024). On the other hand, some students were observed in the classroom to be content with simple feedback responses from the app (e.g., the percentage showing their approximation to native English). Like Creely's (2024) prediction, these students appreciated the personalised content they could access over the more generalised whole-of-classroom level feedback that is more typical in the EAL classroom. However, there are additional feedback and tips on the app including an AI-generated individualised report of which students (and teachers) were often not aware. The observed disparity among students' perception and use of the AI app suggests a critical role for teachers to learn about and teach students how to make effective use of the app, particularly how to generate personalised learning for themselves.

Unsurprisingly, teachers' frustrations with technical glitches and teething problems may have overshadowed the potential administrative affordances (Creely, 2024) and productivity gains (Prestridge et al., 2024) of using the AI app in this study. At this early stage of teaching with AI, teachers may still lack a full understanding of how their effective use of the app can elevate their students' experience of the app. This is particularly true when it comes to bringing out the pedagogical benefits of receiving AI-powered instantaneous feedback and customised

learning (Al-khresheh, 2024). This insight signals a priority of improving EAL teachers' ability and agency to apply their pedagogical knowledge to the AI-powered app. This involves exploring how teachers can support students with low or no language or digital literacy to use the app. Targeted professional development centring on peer mentoring and microlearning (Kohnke, 2024), as well as sharing each other's experience in experimenting with the AI app for best practices in classrooms might be a practical way to achieve this priority.

Conclusion

The present qualitative study was designed to better understand how EAL teachers were using an AI English learning app to achieve differentiated and personalised learning while accommodating the cultural and linguistic diversity of their adult migrant and refugee background students. Teaching adult students to learn English with the support of an AI-powered app represented a considerable change in perception and practice for these EAL teachers. This is partly due to the 'superdiversity' (Steele et al., 2023) of EAL classrooms that needs to be factored into any transition between traditional teaching modes and teaching with an AI tool. Little wonder that the EAL teachers in this study were found to be slowly developing their AI literacy and pedagogy despite increasing expectation of a future that involves more teaching with AI. In addition, the identified technological challenges using the AI app in classrooms further discouraged the teachers from exploring the more advanced pedagogical functions of the app with the students. These findings suggest that supporting teachers' AI teaching agency development is crucial to enlivening student's learner agency to achieve personalisation benefits afforded by AI technology. This in turn will require additional support and resources that factor in the 'superdiversity' of the EAL sector in future professional development for these teachers.

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The role of gamification in fostering inclusivity for Vietnamese adult EFL learners in continued education

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Abstract

As adult learners may encounter various challenges and constraints in continued education, it is important to maintain their engagement and resilience in their academic pursuit. This article explores the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity for Vietnamese adult learners undertaking a second degree program in English linguistics. Drawing on a narrative frame and semi-structured interviews with nine professionals aged 22-47, the present study examined the impacts of incorporating gamified elements into an English grammar course. The findings highlighted that gamification effectively catered to the diverse learning needs and styles of adult learners, enhancing their confidence, engagement, and motivation while reducing anxiety. The collaborative nature of gamified activities promoted social connections and a community of practice. However, some learners experienced certain challenges in gamified environments concerning technical issues and their unfamiliarity with platform functionality. This study presents important implications for teachers and curriculum developers in employing gamification to provide a more inclusive and engaging environment for adult learners.

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Introduction

Globalization and the escalating role of English as a lingua franca have resulted in a rising population of adult EFL learners seeking better educational and occupational mobility (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012). Adult learners are typically characterized as independent and self-directed, but they are confronted with various difficulties in balancing their responsibilities and overcoming anxieties about learning and social interaction (Mei et al., 2023). Since adult learners' educational needs and preferred learning styles differ significantly from those of younger learners, their learning journeys can be further complicated by life and family obligations. The increased integration of technology into language education may further challenge adults' learning experiences (Azman & Yunus, 2019). In this regard, gamification has become a promising technology for fostering inclusivity and engagement in classrooms (Alsawaier, 2018; Tan, 2018). The use of gamification aligns with the evolving educational landscape in which technology is utilized to enhance learning experience and efficiency (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Gamification promotes self-directed learning by empowering learners to manage their learning processes, particularly through mobile applications and online platforms that reinforce learner autonomy and flexibility (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021).

The positive effects of gamification on learners' motivation and engagement in language education have been well documented (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). The interactive, game-based activities, such as quizzes, leaderboards, challenges, and reward systems, foster enjoyment and reduce anxiety, thereby promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for learners, regardless of their background or prior experiences (Mufidah, 2016). Gamification creates a stimulating and rewarding learning environment that inspires active participation, collaboration, and fun competition. These elements are the driving force behind adult learners' engagement, boosting their performance in educational settings (Ardi & Rianita, 2022; Huang et al., 2020). The flexibility and adaptability of gamified activities allow teachers to cater to different learning styles, preferences, and proficiency levels.

In the context of higher education in Vietnam, the population of professionals pursuing continued language education by taking a second degree program in English linguistics has increased significantly (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). However, they are entangled in multiple roles and responsibilities that present barriers to their academic commitment and impede their language learning experiences. The lack of time and distractions due to workplace and personal commitments, as well as limited prior exposure to English, result in the low levels of self-confidence in learning English among most adult learners (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). Although contemporary literature confirms the positive effects of gamification on motivation and engagement, adult EFL learners' needs for inclusivity and the challenges they encounter have been relatively underexplored (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Lin et al., 2018).

Literature review

Inclusivity in language education for adults

Inclusive education is a comprehensive approach that aims to provide equal opportunities for all learners regardless of their differences in abilities, cultural backgrounds, or socioeconomic status (Oranga et al., 2024). It involves altering educational content and instructional methods to harmonize with learners' varying needs and age ranges. Being inclusive involves recognizing and valuing learners' idiosyncrasies within a supportive learning environment that promotes and celebrates diversity (Ojong & Addo, 2024). Inclusivity encompasses the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Kaur & Jaiswal, 2024). Inclusive education is crucial for making learning enjoyable and welcoming for all learners, emphasising the need for collaboration among stakeholders to build a stronger and more inclusive community of practice (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019). In addition, Wakat et al. (2023) highlight that creating an inclusive environment involves more than technology integration; it requires teacher-mediated strategies that actively adapt curricular content and instructional practices to learners' diverse identities and foster open dialogue for learners to share their unique perspectives. In adult education, inclusivity is particularly critical due to their diverse experiences, professionally oriented needs, and personal circumstances. Teachers are expected to tailor their instructional strategies and classroom activities to respond to learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds (Ulla et al., 2025). These involve creating learning spaces and classroom environments that foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support among learners. Such collaborative interactions enable them to actively engage in their learning process and achieve their goals (Kaur & Jaiswal, 2024).

Gamified grammar instruction

Gamification has been increasingly employed in grammar instruction, particularly due to the digitization of educational tools and platforms (Hong et al., 2022; Pham, 2023). Gamification transforms non-game educational contexts into engaging learning experiences by integrating game design elements (Kapp, 2012). Several studies have examined the effectiveness of gamification in grammar instruction. For instance, Zainuddin et al. (2020) investigate the impact of gamified e-quizzes on student learning and engagement. Their study, involving 112 undergraduate Malaysian students using gamified formative assessments, reveals that gamification significantly enhanced student engagement and classroom interaction, demonstrating its potential to improve learning outcomes and promote a more engaging environment. Similarly, Ardi and Rianita (2022) examine the implementation of gamification in EFL grammar courses to improve student involvement. This quasi-experimental study with the participation of 68 students indicates that gamification made grammar training more intriguing, therefore enhancing retention and performance. Similarly, Pham (2023) employs Quizizz to teach grammar, showing that gamified learning improved grammar performance

among ESL learners and raised their readiness to participate actively in grammar tasks. These studies highlight the efficiency of gamification in providing diverse and interactive opportunities for grammar practice. However, they tend to overlook its role in fostering learner inclusivity, especially among adult learners who may have differing learning styles.

Gamification as a contributor to inclusivity

The implications of gamification in inclusive language education are far-reaching, addressing the discrepancies in competencies and learning styles, especially among adult learners (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021). Gamified activities provide a source of incentives, driving them to be more proactive in classroom participation, making learning a more enjoyable and rewarding process and resulting in a sense of achievement (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). Gamification facilitates personalized learning by allowing learners to progress at their own pace and concentrate on their language weaknesses. Gamified platforms accommodate a wide range of adult learning styles and preferences, increase peer interaction and support, and foster a sense of belonging in the classroom (Ardi & Rianita, 2022). They cater to adult learners' specific needs by easing their anxiety and elevating their confidence. The playful and non-threatening nature of gamified activities reduces the fear of making mistakes, which is a major barrier for many adult learners (Mei et al., 2023). In gamified classrooms, adult learners can seize the opportunities for instant feedback and self-assessment that shape their learning progress and enable them to develop their own learning plans (Huang et al., 2020).

Klock et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review on gamification and equity, diversity, and inclusivity. The findings reveal that gamification can improve performance, enrich experiences, and foster change, but it requires careful consideration of factors such as gender, age, and disability to ensure inclusivity. In relation to grammar instruction, Fadhilawati (2024) explored the use of Quizizz in paper mode to enhance grammar mastery among 10th-grade students at a senior high school in Indonesia. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments to measure grammar mastery of 64 students. Findings suggest that Quizizz effectively promoted engagement and interaction among students, leading to improved grammar mastery. This research emphasizes the potential of Quizizz, even in paper mode, to enhance learning outcomes and cater to diverse learning environments. These studies highlight the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity by providing personalized learning experiences and reducing anxiety among learners with diverse needs and backgrounds.

Despite these promising findings, a research gap remains regarding the nuanced exploration of how gamification specifically contributes to fostering inclusivity and accommodating adult EFL learners' idiosyncratic needs in continuing education contexts. This study examines the value of gamification in promoting an inclusive learning environment for adult learners taking an English grammar course in continued education. The research question guiding the present research is: What is the impact of gamification on enhancing inclusivity in an English grammar classroom for adult EFL learners in continued education?

Methodology

Setting and participants

This study was conducted at a multidisciplinary public university in Vietnam that offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs in social sciences and humanities. The student body consists of different groups, including full-time students (four-year degrees) and professionals in continued education who pursue second degree programs (two-year degrees). Nine Vietnamese adult learners who were halfway through their two-year bachelor's program in English Linguistics were invited to join this research. The second author was responsible for their grammar course. The grammar lessons were delivered through an intervention utilizing Quizizz, an interactive, gamified platform. The instructional slides were integrated directly into the Quizizz interface, enabling seamless transitions between instructional content and interactive exercises. These exercises included various question types such as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, open-ended questions, and word clouds, providing students diverse opportunities for immediate practice and discussion. These activities were not simply in a reading mode but also included audio and visual elements. Students could earn points and badges as rewards for correct answers and active participation. To maintain anonymity and reduce anxiety, students participated using nicknames. High-performing students, identifiable through the platform's leaderboard feature, were eligible to receive additional bonuses and recognition from the teacher. Additionally, collaborative learning was fostered through group-based activities in which students were randomly assigned into groups by Quizizz for discussions, collaborative writing, and debates. For out-of-class practice, students worked on assignments on Quizizz independently and at their own pace. These assignments offered unlimited attempts through the mastery mode feature, encouraging students to engage with the materials until they became familiar with the grammar points they were learning. Further, the platform's automated feedback mechanism identified specific areas of difficulty, offering targeted recommendations for additional practice. A class leaderboard was also available for out-of-class assignments, helping students track their progress and fostering sustained engagement through visible achievements.

Participation in this investigation was voluntary, and the researchers made a firm commitment to their confidentiality and anonymity. They could withdraw from the research at any point or refuse to respond to any questions they considered personal or irrelevant. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' information.*

Participants	Age	Gender	Learning goals	Job title
Participant 1	22	Female	Career change	Office staff
Participant 2	24	Female	Career advancement	Editor
Participant 3	30	Male	Career advancement	Office staff
Participant 4	31	Female	Personal development	Teacher
Participant 5	33	Female	Personal interest	Office staff

Participant 6	35	Male	Career advancement	Businessman
Participant 7	39	Male	Career advancement	Laboratory staff
Participant 8	45	Female	Personal development	Accountant
Participant 9	47	Male	Professional development	Teacher

As Table 1 shows, the participants varied in their age, ranging from 22 to 47, occupational backgrounds, and career goals. This diversity in age and professional experiences contributed to a rich exploration of the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity. A key motivator for pursuing continued education was their desire to improve career mobility. The participants recognized the importance of English proficiency in the globalized job market and sought to enhance their employability through this program.

Instruments

This study employed a two-stage qualitative research design, utilizing a narrative frame and semi-structured interviews as the primary instruments for gathering data. The participants' mother tongue, namely, Vietnamese, was used in all materials and discussions to facilitate their responses. In the first stage, a narrative frame was used to capture participants' personal experiences and reflections on gamified grammar instruction. A narrative frame aims to encourage participants to draw on their experiences in developing a written reflective account of their lifeworld by filling in a story-based template with incomplete sentence prompts and blank spaces (Barkhuizen, 2011). This tool is particularly effective in eliciting rich and highly descriptive data (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2014; Pham, 2024), thus providing in-depth insights into the participants' perspectives on the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity. Drawing on contemporary literature on the interplay between gamification and inclusivity (Fadhilawati, 2024; Klock et al., 2024; Mekler et al., 2017; Mufidah, 2016), the five main themes guiding the narrative frame include (1) responding to diverse learning needs and styles, (2) fostering engagement and motivation, (3) reducing anxiety and building confidence, (4) promoting collaboration, and (5) the challenges and negative impacts of gamification (see Appendix A). The second author distributed a printed copy of the narrative frame to the participants and invited them to complete it within two weeks. Each participant worked on the narrative frame independently at their convenience and handed it back to her when they met in class.

The second stage involved semi-structured interviews designed to gain further insights into the issues emerging from the narratives. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed based on the findings from the first stage to gather more specific information on how gamification fostered inclusivity in grammar classes. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing participants' responses while ensuring consistency in addressing key themes relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interviews provided an opportunity to delve deeper into the participants' experiences and gather examples of how gamification impacted their learning process and sense of inclusivity. The second author set up appointments with the participants to interview them offline at their convenience. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes and was recorded with the interviewees' permission.

Data analysis

The qualitative data from both the narrative frame and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using deductive content analysis (Bingham et al., 2022), drawing on the five themes identified in the *instruments* section. The researchers read through the narrative accounts and interview transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. Then, segments of text relevant to the prescribed themes were highlighted and chosen for analysis. Only selected excerpts were translated from Vietnamese into English and the translation was cross-checked between the two authors, who were fluent in both languages. The narrative and interview data were labelled as "*nar*" and "*int*" respectively to differentiate between these two types of data. In the writing-up stage, the researchers synthesized the findings by opting for excerpts of data from multiple participants that best illustrated each of the themes.

Results

Responding to adult learners' diverse learning needs and styles

Gamification demonstrated a significant capacity to address the diverse learning needs and styles of Vietnamese adult EFL learners through their control over learning content and pace. The data revealed that the majority of participants found the topic selection (seven learners, 77.78%) and replay features (eight learners, 88.89%) beneficial for addressing their learning needs. They pointed out that the gamified activities facilitated their interaction during grammar lessons in ways that aligned with their preferred learning approaches, enabling them to select grammar topics aligned with their learning goals [Excerpts 01-02] and replay exercises targeting their own weaknesses [Excerpt 03].

> Excerpt 01: *I do not need to do all the practices at a time. I can choose the lesson that I am weak at and practice with that first. Besides, there is also the mock test or the review practices that combine different topics. (Participant 3_int)*

> Excerpt 02: *The platform also allowed me to choose which topics to focus on and when to work on them. This helped me to target areas where I needed more practice and review. (Participant 7_nar)*

> Excerpt 03: *I liked being able to choose which activities to do first. It made me feel more in control of my learning. I can prioritize practicing the topics that I do not understand or remember well. Repeated practices allow me to improve my weaknesses. (Participant 9_int)*

For these adult learners, having control over their learning experience was crucial as they had specific goals and preferences. The gamified activities supported autonomous learning by allowing them to make choices according to the task types and levels of difficulty [Excerpts

04-05]. In addition, Quizizz's "mastery mode" allowed multiple attempts, helping learners to focus on personal gaps without time pressure [Excerpt 06].

> Excerpt 04: *I found it really good that I could choose which grammar points I wanted to work on. (Participant 4_int)*

> Excerpt 05: *With the set of assigned homework on online gamified platforms, I could easily choose the one I wanted to review or practice more at home. (Participant 9_int)*

> Excerpt 06: *We had limited time for the activities in class. However, the teacher assigned a link to games for us to practice more at home. I could play according to my preferences and replay them many times. The mastery mode is very helpful, so I can redo the wrong questions. (Participant 9_int)*

Seven participants (77.78 %) considered that the gamified platform supported the multimodal learning styles with interactive activities such as word clouds and audio-visual quizzes, which could cater to visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners [Excerpts 07-08].

> Excerpt 07: *The gamified activities provided various activities that appealed to my preference for visual and audio learning. I enjoyed the interactive exercises and the opportunity to apply grammar rules in a game-like setting. (Participant 1_nar)*

> Excerpt 08: *Having word clouds and audio-visual quizzes helped me see and hear the rules in action. It was more than just reading from a book. I could actually engage with the material in different ways, which made it much easier to understand. (Participant 2_nar)*

Eight participants (88.89%) valued the independence in progressing at their own pace, ensuring that both beginners and more advanced learners could engage with the material without feeling overwhelmed or bored in the mixed-level classroom, which was essential for maintaining inclusivity and engagement [Excerpts 09-10].

> Excerpt 09: *I could move on at my own pace as the game would adjust to my level, so I didn't feel left behind. (Participant 7_int)*

> Excerpt 10: *I liked how the platform adjusted to our levels. If the exercises were too easy, I could move on quickly; if they were challenging, I could repeat them until I got it right. That way, I never felt bored, and my classmates who needed more practice didn't feel overwhelmed. (Participant 8_int)*

Evidently, gamification effectively addressed adult EFL learners' varied needs by prioritizing autonomy and multimodal approaches, transforming grammar study into a learner-centered

process. Learners could select topics, set their own pace, and repeat exercises to target weaknesses, fostering inclusivity across proficiency levels.

Fostering engagement and motivation

Gamification cultivated engagement and motivation among adult learners by integrating goal-oriented mechanisms and interactive challenges, transforming passive grammar instruction into a dynamic, achievement-driven process. Seven participants (77.78%) identified specific gamified elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards as powerful external drivers [Excerpts 11-13]. They provided tangible milestones that fostered friendly competition and real-time progress visibility, as unveiled in Excerpts 11-13.

> Excerpt 11: *The points and levels encouraged me because I could see my progress in real time, and this challenged me to improve. (Participant 2_nar)*

> Excerpt 12: *Of course, knowing that after each round I have a higher score encourages me further. (Participant 4_int)*

> *Excerpt 13: It is fun and motivating as a game and because we use nicknames to play, it is fine if I fail. It is not so serious if I am at the bottom of the leaderboards. (Participant 8_int)*

Such features reinforced ongoing practice and endeavours for higher scores, reflecting their desire for continuous improvement [Excerpt 14]. These participants highlighted that Quizizz's leaderboard used anonymized nicknames, reducing peer confrontation while preserving the incentive to "win":

> Excerpt 14: *It is playing and competing in the game at the same time. Of course, as the gamer, I always want to win. Therefore, I need to review and practise at home a lot, knowing that I can compete with my other classmates. (Participant 8_int)*

This design balanced competition and inclusivity, ensuring that learners of various proficiency levels remained motivated without feeling isolated. Alongside extrinsic rewards, participants emphasized personal goals and the sense of achievement as major intrinsic motivators. Many reported a shift from rote learning to purposeful grammar practice [Excerpts 15-16].

> Excerpt 15: *It is not always rote learning, but it is like a goal I have to accomplish. The sense of achievement pushes me more. (Participant 1_nar)*

> Excerpt 16: *I found the gamified activities to be more engaging and motivating than traditional grammar instruction because they were interactive and*

> *challenging. I felt like I was actively participating in my learning rather than just passively listening to a lecture. (Participant 9_nar)*

Consequently, the interactive nature of gamified tasks through quizzes, timed challenges, and collaborative elements further heightened students' engagement [Excerpt 17].

> Excerpt 17: *The timed quizzes and group challenges transformed our grammar lessons into an engaging, interactive experience. Instead of passively memorizing rules, I was actively solving problems and discussing ideas with classmates, which made learning both dynamic and enjoyable. (Participant 11_int)*

By combining extrinsic and intrinsic motivators with interactive activities, gamification transformed conventional grammar instruction into a dynamic, achievement-driven process. While intrinsic drivers such as goal-setting and the enjoyment of overcoming obstacles encouraged personal commitment to learning, the extrinsic rewards such as points and badges provided tangible milestones and friendly competition that spurred continuous improvement.

Reducing anxiety and building confidence

The study indicated that gamification played a pivotal role in reducing anxiety and boosting confidence among eight participants (88.89%) by creating a low-stakes environment where mistakes were normalized. This emotionally safe space allowed them to focus on progress rather than fear, thereby enhancing both confidence and overall language learning success. Anonymous participation minimized criticism and reduced hierarchical pressure [Excerpt 18].

> Excerpt 18: *I am quite afraid of making mistakes; however, being anonymous in the games makes me feel so comfortable. (Participant 3_int)*

In addition, immediate, non-penalizing feedback transformed errors into opportunities for growth [Excerpt 19]. Automated corrections and post-quiz reports further ensured that errors were deemed natural steps in the learning process, reinforcing a positive attitude toward learning.

> Excerpt 19: *The gamified environment helped me feel more comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes in grammar because it provided a safe space to experiment and learn from my errors. The game mechanics made it clear that mistakes were part of the learning process, so I didn't feel penalized for making them. (Participant 8_nar)*

Seven participants (77.78%) indicated that incremental achievements such as level completions, and the accumulation of points validated learners' competence and boosted their confidence. This steady progress not only enhanced self-efficacy but also provided tangible

evidence of improvement, vital for maintaining motivation [Excerpt 20]. Progress tracking through features such as anonymized leaderboards ensured that achievements were celebrated without fostering undue competition. Such an inclusive design was beneficial for learners with limited prior exposure to English, ensuring that all participants felt valued and empowered to take risks without fear of embarrassment [Excerpt 21].

> Excerpt 20: *Every time I finish a level or earn points, I feel more confident. It's like I'm proving to myself that I can actually do this. (Participant 5_int)*

> Excerpt 21: *With the set of games on Quizizz to review and practice at home, I have the report of my progress and points. It also shows the ranks in my class. I feel really happy and satisfied with what I achieved. (Participant 8_int)*

As such, gamification reduced anxiety and built self-efficacy by establishing a low-stakes, emotionally supportive learning environment. Features such as anonymous participation, immediate error-friendly feedback, and progress-driven milestones not only normalized mistakes but also empowered learners to build confidence in their language abilities.

Promoting collaboration

The integration of gamified activities significantly enhanced collaboration and social connection among the participants during grammar lessons. Seven learners (77.78%) viewed group challenges and team-centred competitions as catalysts for peer interaction, thus cultivating a supportive learning environment. They bridged gaps between learners of varying proficiency levels, creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment [Excerpts 22-23].

> Excerpt 22: *During our team challenges, we broke down complex grammar tasks together. I was impressed by how our group pooled ideas and supported one another, making the learning process both engaging and effective. For example, when we had the challenge to write a story using the second conditional, the members were very supportive and helpful. If I worked alone, I could not complete that. (Participant 4_int)*

> Excerpt 23: *Working on collaborative grammar puzzles allowed us to share diverse perspectives and strategies. Sometimes, I could not remember the grammar points exactly. Working in a team helps remind me of that. It is also fun to have rotating teams and partners each time. I always wait for this part. (Participant 7_int)*

The interactive and anonymous nature of gamified activities promoted a sense of friendliness and shared goals among eight participants (88.89%). This environment fostered peer support and established a community of practice where learners could learn collectively [Excerpt 24].

> Excerpt 24: *The interactive and anonymous design of the gamified activities allowed me to speak freely without any fear of judgment. This not only made the class feel friendly and supportive but also created a real sense of shared purpose, as we all worked together and learned collectively. It is ok if I beat someone on the leaderboards, as we were all anonymous. (Participant 8_nar)*

These excerpts show that group activities and team-focused competitions in gamified platforms motivated the participants to work together to reach their common goals. They offered opportunities for the learners to interact and feel more connected, thus elevating a sense of social cohesion and inclusivity.

Challenges and negative impacts

Despite predominantly positive feedback, some learners reported challenges associated with the gamified materials and platform functionality. Three participants (33.33%) highlighted occasional technical issues, such as lagging interfaces or slow response times, causing minor disruptions to their engagement during class activities [Excerpts 25-26]:

> Excerpt 25: *Sometimes the game was slow, and the screen froze. It interrupted my practice and made me lose motivation at that moment. (Participant 3_int)*

> Excerpt 26: *There were a few times the app responded slowly, especially during class quizzes, which made me worried I would fall behind. (Participant 6_int)*

Furthermore, two learners (22.22%) encountered difficulties navigating the Quizizz user interface, particularly older students or those less familiar with technology, which initially impacted their user experience and confidence [Excerpts 27-28]:

> Excerpt 27: *At first, it was confusing because I am not good with technology. I needed extra time to understand how to use the app properly. (Participant 4_nar)*

> Excerpt 28: *I am older than most classmates, and it took me a while to get used to Quizizz. Initially, I felt a bit stressed figuring out how to participate. (Participant 7_int)*

Additionally, while anonymity reduced anxiety for many, the competitive aspects of gamification, such as leaderboards and scoring systems, occasionally heightened pressure or stress for two other participants (22.22 %) [Excerpts 29-30].

> Excerpt 29: *Seeing my name at the bottom of the leaderboard sometimes made me anxious. I felt pressure to improve quickly. (Participant 5_int)*

> Excerpt 30: *I liked the games, but sometimes competing made me nervous, especially if I made mistakes in front of classmates. (Participant 8_nar)*

Despite these minor figures, the reflections from the learners, to some extent, underscored the importance of addressing potential limitations related to technical accessibility, familiarity with the platform interface, and learners' emotional responses when implementing gamified approaches.

Discussion

It is evident from this study that gamified grammar instruction contributed to enhancing inclusivity for adult EFL learners by addressing their diverse needs and circumstances. Firstly, the platform's design features, such as "mastery mode" with unlimited attempts and flexible, out-of-class assignments, afforded learners the autonomy to control their pace and tailor their practice to their specific weaknesses. This level of autonomy is especially critical for adult learners juggling professional and personal responsibilities, echoing findings by Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) and Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) that emphasize the importance of flexible learning modalities in overcoming time constraints. In contrast to earlier studies that focused primarily on younger populations (Zainuddin et al., 2020), the results highlight that when adult learners are given control over their learning progress, gamification effectively bridges traditional classroom constraints and provides equitable access to learning opportunities.

Secondly, the integration of gamified elements, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, transformed rote grammar drills into goal-oriented tasks that bolstered both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. By using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity, the platform reduced the pressure associated with public performance, thus lowering anxiety and promoting a willingness to take risks in language use. These results align with previous research by Mufidah (2016) and Huang et al. (2020) in which gamification can create a low-stakes environment conducive to self-improvement. The present study extends these findings by showing that such motivational strategies are particularly effective for adult learners, who benefit from both tangible progress markers and the psychological safety provided by anonymous participation in gamified classrooms.

Thirdly, the embedded collaborative components in gamified grammar lessons, such as randomized group challenges and team-based tasks, fostered peer interaction and the development of a community of practice. The opportunity for learners to share knowledge, exchange feedback, and collaboratively solve grammatical problems enhanced their learning experiences and strengthened classroom cohesion. This observation is consistent with Awang-Hashim et al. (2019) and Wakat et al. (2023) in that inclusive classrooms are marked by strong social connections and mutual support. The results further demonstrate that structured, collaborative, gamified activities can break down social barriers, ensuring that learners of varying proficiency levels feel supported and valued, a critical factor in maintaining an inclusive educational environment.

Fourthly, technological flexibility and accessibility played a pivotal role in the feasibility of gamified learning spaces. Mobile compatibility and asynchronous practice options allowed learners to engage with the content anytime and anywhere, thereby overcoming the technical challenges typically faced by adult learners. This finding supports previous studies (Azman & Yunus, 2019; Godwin-Jones, 2011; Mekler et al., 2017; Pham, 2023) that underscore the benefits of mobile learning while also extending the literature by showing how such flexibility directly translates into enhanced inclusivity for professionals with limited time. The platform's ability to deliver content outside of fixed classroom hours ensured that learners from remote or resource-limited settings could participate equally, thereby reinforcing the equitable nature of the intervention.

Finally, the participants reported occasional technical disruptions and heightened pressure that hindered engagement, particularly during time-sensitive activities. These challenges are consistent with those identified by Azman and Yunus (2019) in that technological instability may disproportionately affect adult learners' performance. While many found anonymity less stressful in gamified environments, competitive features like leaderboards unintentionally caused tension for learners with low levels of language proficiency. This subscribes to the findings by Klock et al. (2024) that psychological safety should be prioritised during gamified activities to avoid alienating technologically challenged or low-achieving learners. These results reiterate the necessity of addressing affective dimensions in continued education for adult EFL learners to foster inclusivity (Huang et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study provides in-depth insights into the ways in which gamification contributes to enhancing inclusivity among EFL professionals in the context of a grammar course in Vietnam. The findings proffer a strong approach to creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for adult learners with various language learning backgrounds, levels of proficiency, experiences, and preferences. As such, gamification serves as a useful tool to augment inclusivity by accounting for various learning styles, promoting collaboration, and fostering positive learning attitudes. The narrative and interview data provided concrete examples and recommendations for integrating gamification into EFL classrooms for adult learners. The incorporation of gamified elements and other game mechanisms creates opportunities for personalized learning experiences, caters to different learning styles, and induces more interaction and collaboration among learners. However, it is important to empower adult learners with technical readiness through digital literacy training, restructure competitive features to promote cooperation, and infuse flexibility into gamified workflows. Pre-training courses that cater to learners' varying degrees of digital literacy might acquaint them with platform navigation, thus easing their access to technically laden environments. Simplified interface designs, assisted tutorials, and peer mentoring systems would also help to further lower entrance obstacles. These practical strategies contribute to redressing the

challenges and negative impacts in gamified activities and promoting inclusivity in language classrooms for adult learners.

Some limitations of this study pertain to the small sample size and a rather narrow context of a grammar course for EFL professionals taking a second degree program in English Linguistics. Future research can explore the effects of gamification on adult learners' cognitive, affective, behavioural, and social engagement and their language achievement in a broader setting of language learning across multiple learning spaces within and beyond classrooms. Further research on best inclusivity practices with adult learners that draw on different dimensions of gamification is also recommended.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Narrative frame (for two sample themes)

Theme 1: Responding to diverse learning needs and styles

The gamified activities _____ (cater/ did not cater) to my individual learning style by _____.
The gamified approach _____ (accommodate /did not accommodate) my specific learning needs because _____.
Gamification _____(contributed/ did not contribute) to a more inclusive learning experience for me in the following ways: _____.

Theme 2: Fostering engagement and motivation

I found the gamified activities to be _____ (more/less) engaging and motivating than traditional grammar instruction because _____.
The specific game elements or features that contributed to my engagement and motivation were _____.
Gamification _____(helped /did not help) me stay focused on my grammar learning goals because _____.

Appendix B: Sample interview questions

Theme 3: Reducing anxiety and building confidence

- Did you feel more comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes during gamified grammar activities? How did this environment affect your confidence in using grammar?
- How did the gamified setting create a supportive atmosphere for practicing and experimenting with grammar? Did it provide a safe space for learning?

Theme 4: Fostering collaboration

- How did gamified activities encourage collaboration and interaction with your classmates? Were there opportunities to engage with peers with whom you wouldn't normally interact?
- Did gamification contribute to creating a more inclusive learning experience? In what ways did it foster collaboration among diverse learners?

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Does Google Translate enhance English writing skills? A mixed methods study of essay quantity and quality in Vietnamese higher education

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of Google Translate (GT) on the quantity and quality of essays written by Vietnamese students in academic settings. As GT use becomes increasingly common among L2 writers, its role in English essay tasks warrants closer investigation. Using a mixed methods design, 30 English majors from a public university in Southern Vietnam wrote two timed essays (250 words), one with GT assistance and one without, using a shared prompt unrelated to regular coursework. The writing processes were recorded using screen-recording technology, and follow-up interviews were conducted to explore student attitudes towards the use of Google Translate in essay writing and the factors influencing their utilization of the tool. A paired-samples *t*-test showed no statistically significant difference between the two essays in terms of word count or error frequency. Qualitative data revealed diverse attitudes towards the GT use, shaped by enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological or affective states. These findings contribute to our understanding of the impact and students' perceptions of using Google Translate in the writing process.

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Introduction

English is widely recognized as the global language of communication (Hoang, 2020). In Vietnam, it is compulsory from grade 3 to 12 under Prime Minister's Decisions 1400 and 2080 and the national English curriculum (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2018). At universities, students must master Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing—with writing being especially critical for academic tasks like essays. Yet, writing is challenging due to required subskills such as vocabulary selection and essay coherence (Mantasiah, 2020).

Vietnamese candidates consistently score lowest in Writing and Speaking in exams like IELTS, with 2024–2025 band scores at 6.5 (Listening), 6.4 (Reading), 6.1 (Writing), and 5.6 (Speaking) (Test taker performance, 2024). At the study's university, English majors must reach a 6.5 overall IELTS score before graduating, contributing to stress and test anxiety. Consequently, students increasingly use tools like machine translation to support writing development (Faradiba & Aini, 2024; Ismail et al., 2013; Kruk & Kałużna, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Rahman & Unsiah, 2025; Santosa et al., 2024).

Machine translation tools simplify learning by enabling direct translation from L1 to English (Aliliche & Yakoubi, 2020). Among these tools, Google Translate (GT) is the most used due to its speed, accessibility across devices, and intuitive interface (Garcia & Pena, 2011; Wirantaka & Fijanah, 2021). However, GT's limitations surface in academic contexts where writing quality and quantity matter (Chung & Ahn, 2022).

Previous studies assessing GT's impact have relied primarily on holistic scoring (Abraham, 2009; Garcia & Pena, 2011; O'Neill, 2019). While these studies have contributed useful insights, their focus on overall writing quality rather than specific linguistic features limits their diagnostic value for classroom instruction, where detailed feedback is of utmost importance.

Despite growing interest, few studies explore GT's impact using metrics like error frequency or user behavior, especially in higher education settings with graduation-linked writing requirements. Addressing this limitation, this study adopts an error analysis approach to measure the improvement in students' writing with the assistance of GT, helping them identify areas that need further development. Additionally, the study investigates learners' attitudes towards GT usage and explores the factors influencing their decisions to use the tool.

Literature review

Theoretical frameworks

The study employed the Tri-component Attitude Model (Pickens, 2005), Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977), and literature on machine translation in language learning (e.g., Aliliche & Yakoubi, 2020; Fredholm, 2014; Garcia & Pena, 2011; Kol et al., 2018; Tsai, 2019) to examine students' attitudes towards GT, factors influencing its use in essays, and its impact on writing quantity and quality.

The Tri-Component Attitude Model describes attitudes through three dimensions: behavior (frequency of GT use), cognition (beliefs about GT's benefits), and affect (emotional responses toward GT) (See Figure 1).

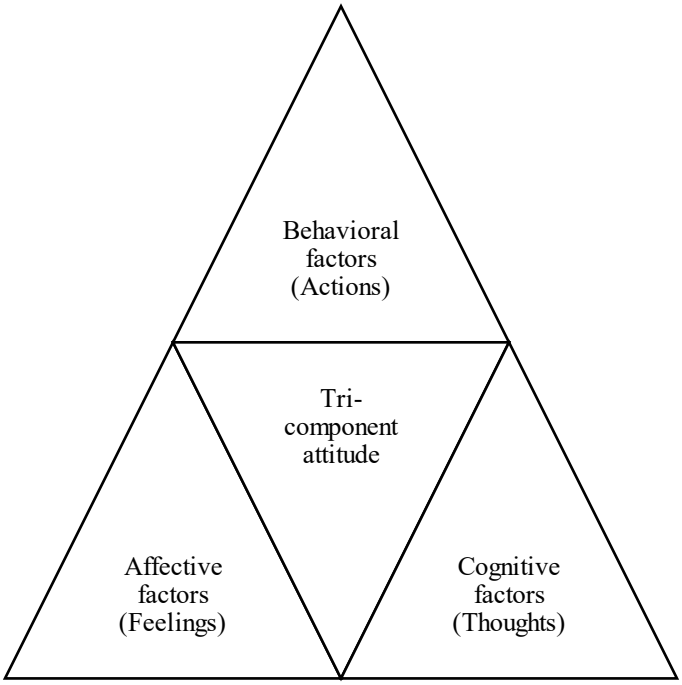

Figure 1. *The Tri-Component Attitude Model (Pickens, 2005).*

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their capacity to perform tasks, such as using GT in academic writing. Four key sources shape self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological or affective states (Bandura, 1977; Pintrich, 1999). These factors inform students' motivation and use of GT, as shown in Figure 2 and Table 1 (Appendix A).

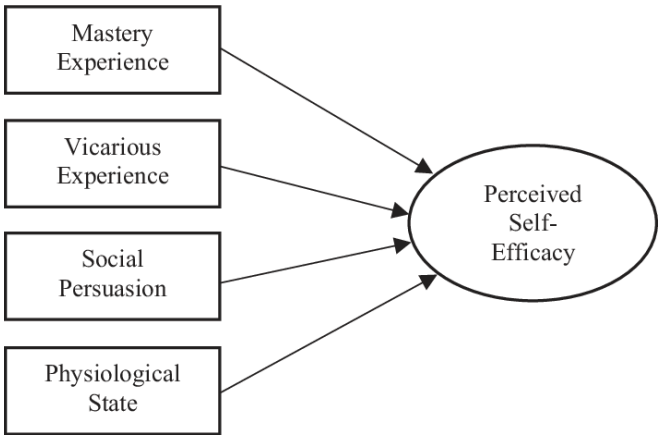

Figure 2. *Bandura's (1977) Model of the Sources of Self-efficacy.*

In addition to these behavioral, affective, cognitive lenses, and sources of self-efficacy, it is essential to situate GT within the broader context of machine translation in higher education settings, where technological tools are increasingly used to scaffold writing development.

Machine translation

Machine translation involves using software-based translation between languages (Liu & Zhang, 2015). Among these tools, GT is widely used and provides support across various languages (Bahri & Mahadi, 2016). Despite its utility, GT faces limitations such as grammatical errors when translating longer texts and incomplete linguistic coverage, which can disadvantage learners from underrepresented language groups (Hampshire & Salvia, 2010; Bozorgian & Azadmanesh, 2015). Notably, in 2024, GT expanded to include 110 new languages—such as Afar, Cantonese, Manx, NKo, Tamazight, and Tok Pisin—marking progress toward linguistic inclusivity (Caswell, 2024).

Google Translate in essay writing process.

GT is frequently used by students during essays, but opinions about its effectiveness vary. While some experts express skepticism and discourage its use due to inconsistencies (Clifford et al., 2013; Davis, 2006), others cite benefits such as increased writing confidence, lexical support, and informational access (Sukkhwan, 2014; Valijärvi & Tarsoly, 2012). Classroom integration yields mixed outcomes: Kol et al. (2018) observed growth in writing quantity but no corresponding improvement in scores, underscoring the complex interplay between GT usage, proficiency, text length, and students' attitudes (Aliliche & Yakoubi, 2020; Garcia & Pena, 2011; Tsai, 2019).

The role of Google Translate in writing.

GT can serve as a scaffolding tool, aiding beginners in writing and allowing for better and longer texts (Garcia & Pena, 2011). However, it should not replace human translation (Turovsky, 2016). Aliliche and Yakoubi (2020), in their study of Algerian English majors, found that students use GT to address vocabulary gaps and time pressure. However, many voiced frustrations over lack of contextual precision and recurrent errors. Most participants saw GT as a time-saving tool with limited writing support, advocating for cautious use and emphasizing the need for post-editing proficiency. The study focused primarily on student perceptions, and while it did not include teacher perspectives, it highlighted the pedagogical implications of student overreliance on machine translation in academic writing.

These findings reveal a tension: while GT facilitates aspects of writing fluency, it often fails to support depth and accuracy. The literature highlights the pedagogical risks of student overreliance and invites deeper inquiry into GT's impact on writing performance.

Writing quantity and writing quality

Writing is a vital form of communication that goes beyond mere formatting and organization (Zamel, 1982). It has evolved into a widespread mode of communication, thereby reflecting an individual's unique thought process (Coulmas, 2013; Sadiku, 2015). Unlike spoken languages, writing is a learned technology that requires consistent training and experience (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014). However, academic writing poses significant challenges for many students, who often struggle with limited background knowledge, restricted vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, difficulties in organizing ideas, and spelling issues (Dang et al., 2020). Consequently, they often rely on machine translation tools like GT to aid them in vocabulary selection and idea arrangement, which can be detrimental to their writing development (Clifford et al., 2013; Ngoc, 2016).

Writing quantity.

Writing quantity refers to the total number of words or syllables produced within a specific timeframe, often measured by word count or idea units (Dujsik, 2008; Li, 1990; Shafiee et al., 2015; Yaghi, 1994). In this study, writing quantity is operationalized as the number of words per essay. For Vietnamese students, limited vocabulary and difficulty articulating ideas may suppress output; GT can provide lexical scaffolding that encourages longer texts.

Writing quality.

Writing quality includes elements such as spelling, grammar, organization, coherence, cohesion, rhetorical structure, lexical analysis, creative language use, and lexical variety

(Breland & Jones, 1984; Grobe, 1981; Louis, 2013; McNamara et al., 2010). It can be evaluated through reader-based measures (considering overall characteristics) or text-based measures (error counts) (Spencer & Fitzgerald, 1993; Veal & Hudson, 1983). GT may support surface-level corrections, but its effect on deeper rhetorical and linguistic skills remains contested. A number of studies have examined the impact of GT on student writing, yielding mixed findings in terms of output quantity, linguistic accuracy, and learner perceptions.

Several studies have suggested that GT can enhance both the quantity and perceived quality of learner's writing. For instance, Garcia and Pena (2011) found that online translators, including GT, acted as scaffolding tools for beginner Spanish learners, increasing both output length and confidence. Tsai (2019) likewise reported that GT-assisted texts among Chinese EFL students were longer and had fewer grammar and spelling errors than self-written texts. However, both studies focus on beginner or intermediate learners, and Tsai's design presupposes linear L1-to-L2 transfer, limiting generalizability to academic L2 composition contexts.

While the studies above highlight GT's potential benefits, other research has reported that the tool increases text quantity but does not necessarily enhance overall quality. For example, Kol et al. (2018) showed that while GT significantly increased word count among Israeli students, it had no measurable effect on writing scores. Moreover, the use of handheld dictionaries in the control task complicates interpretation of GT's unique contribution.

In contrast to the previously mentioned findings, several studies have reported mixed or inconsistent effects of GT on learners' writing performance. Aliliche and Yakoubi (2020)'s study found minor improvements in spelling and article use but reported no gains in grammar or vocabulary. Similarly, Fredholm (2014) concluded that GT did not significantly affect writing quality in L2 classrooms.

While these studies offer valuable insights, most rely on holistic scoring, reader perception, or focus on beginning language learners. Few studies apply error-based analysis to advanced EFL essays or examine how students' attitudes and self-efficacy shape GT use. For instance, Abraham (2009) examined how Spanish learners collaboratively identified translation errors but did not analyze specific grammar or vocabulary issues. Garcia and Pena (2011) compared compositions written with and without GT, focusing on word count and perceived quality. O'Neill (2019) assessed 1,113 essays under five conditions (e.g., with/without online dictionary/translation training) using a 30-point rubric on content and language quality. Though holistic scoring aids consistency, it lacks diagnostic value for classroom instruction, where detailed feedback is key. To address these limitations, this study aims to examine the impact of GT on students' essay quantity and quality, explore their attitudes towards GT use and the reasons influencing its adoption. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

RQ1: Does GT influence the quantity and quality of essays among English major students?
RQ2: What are the attitudes of English major students towards GT use in essay writing?
RQ3: What are the reasons influencing the English major students' use of GT?

Materials and method

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to examine the influence of GT on essay quantity and quality, as well as students' attitudes and reasons for using GT. Quantitative results informed the qualitative phase, enabling deeper contextual interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Combining both data types strengthened the validity and reliability of the results.

Participants

Thirty undergraduate English majors from a public university in Southern Vietnam voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were recruited through departmental emails and word-of-mouth and were not randomly assigned, as the study employed a within-subject design. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, anonymity, and withdrawal rights. Each participant completed both GT-assisted and non-assisted writing tasks. All students had completed Writing 4—the final writing course in their program—and were familiar with Google Translate, particularly its reverse translation function.

Of the 30 participants, 21 were female, aged 21–22. English proficiency was self-assessed according to CEFR levels, with most reporting upper-intermediate (B2) proficiency, and a smaller portion identifying as intermediate (B1) or advanced (C1). Detailed demographic information is provided in Table 2 (Appendix B).

Data sources

Collated data came from the writing tasks, observation, Grammarly, and interview. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of students' GT use in writing essays.

The writing tasks.

Each student wrote two 250-word argumentative essays on the same topic: one GT-assisted, one self-written. Groups alternated task order, with a one-week interval between sessions to counter fatigue and familiarity. Each essay was timed for 40 minutes, consistent with IELTS Task 2 standards (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Observation.

Participants' writing behaviors were observed through screen-recorded sessions using QuickTime Player, which captured both on-screen activity and facial expressions during the GT-assisted writing task. This approach was to enhance the quality of data collection in the online environment, helping to ensure the integrity of the assessment process (e.g., by preventing cheating or unauthorized assistance).

Additionally, we conducted a detailed analysis of participants' facial expressions and their interactions with the computer (e.g., utilizing GT for synonym generation, conducting searches for meaning, and monitoring any pauses in their work). These observations were further validated during individual interview sessions with each participant.

Grammarly.

Grammarly was used post-task to detect surface-level errors (grammar, mechanics, and word choice). Students did not receive Grammarly feedback during writing. The tool's efficiency facilitated comparison between essays (Figure 3). Higher-order traits like content and structure were excluded. To enhance reliability, all Grammarly-generated outputs were manually reviewed using the adapted Keshavarz (2012) error analysis framework. This allowed for correction of potential false positives or omissions produced by the software and ensured alignment between automated results and human judgement.

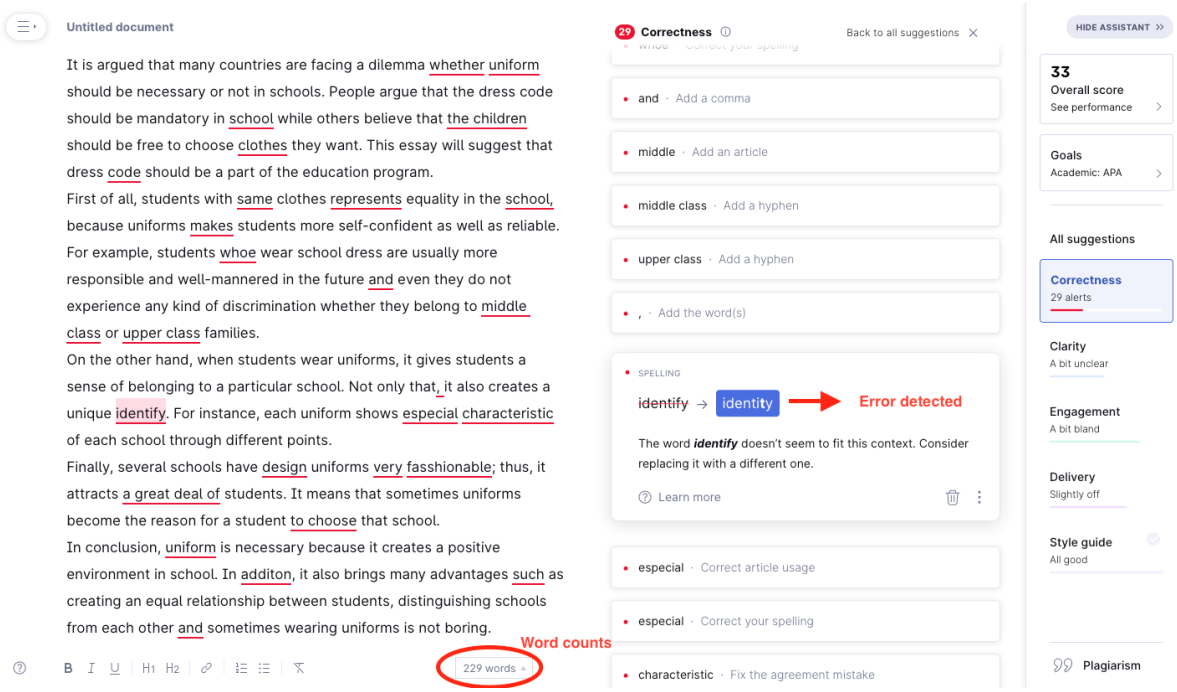

Figure 3. *Example of Original Report from Grammarly Software.*

Semi-structured interview.

All participants completed 15–30-minute phone interviews, conducted by one researcher for consistency. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and guided by a protocol adapted from Tursina et al. (2021) and Tjora (2012), which included English-Vietnamese translation support. Students reviewed clips from their GT sessions to support reflection. Interviews were thematically analyzed and triangulated with quantitative data.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 29 with descriptive statistics and paired samples *t*-tests. Writing quality was assessed via text-based error analysis—categorizing grammar, structure, and cohesion issues. Higher-order features like organization and creativity were excluded due to the study's scope, allowing for a focused comparison between GT-assisted and non-GT-assisted tasks.

Qualitative data were coded using Saldaña's (2016) Codes-to-Theory Model (Figure 4). Initial codes reflected Bandura's self-efficacy sources and Pickens' tri-component attitude model, with emergent themes added inductively. The final codebook condensed the categories into efficacy themes and attitude components (See Appendix D). The sequential mixed methods design shaped the coding process by allowing themes from the quantitative findings - such as changes in writing performance – to inform the categorization of qualitative codes. Interview responses were analyzed with attention to patterns that could help explain statistical trends, such as varying GT usage among proficiency levels.

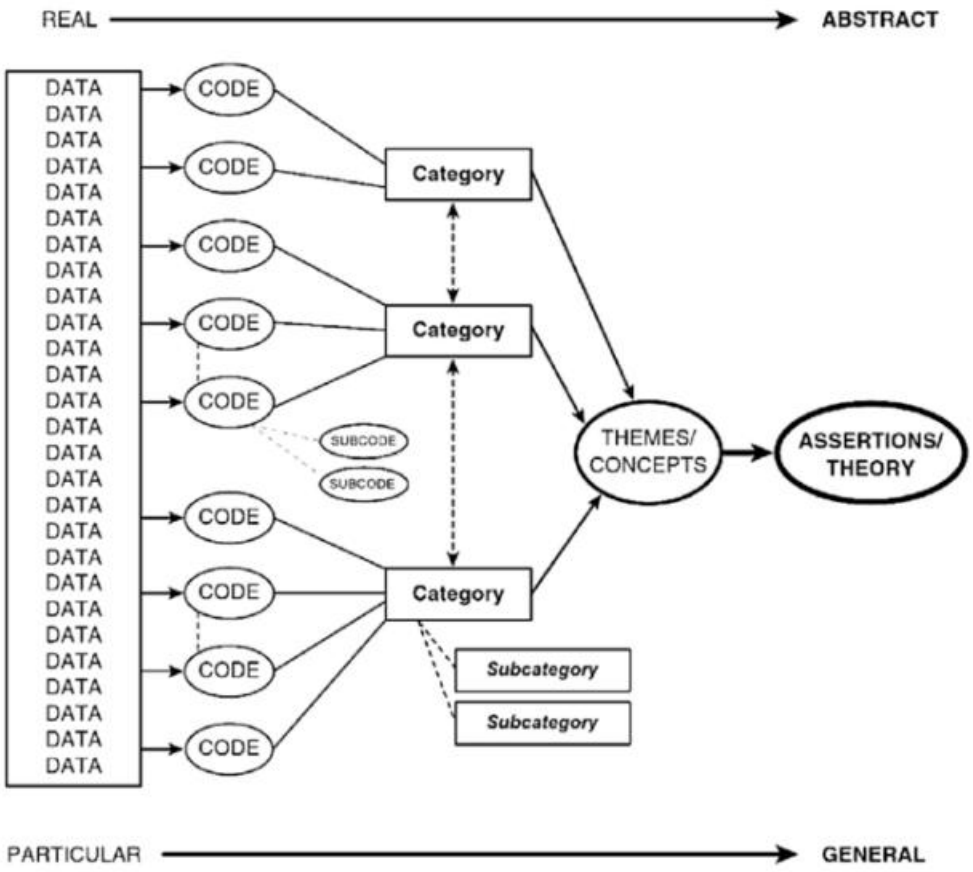

Figure 4. *A Streamlined Codes-to-Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry.*

Results

This study addressed three research questions: (1) To what extent does GT affect the quantity and quality of essays written by English major students? (2) What are the attitudes of English major students towards using GT in essay writing? (3) What factors influence the use of GT among English major students? The study yielded three main findings that provide insights into these research questions.

GT's insignificant influence on the quantity and quality of essays

Prior to examining GT's influence, the researchers investigated whether the writing task order affected the writing quantity and quality of students' essays by conducting a paired-samples *t*-test on two groups: the first group received GT after the self-written task, while the second group received GT before the self-written task. The results of the paired *t*-test showed that the task order did not significantly influence writing quantity or quality ($p > .05$).

Subsequently, two additional paired-samples *t*-tests were performed to assess GT influence on writing quantity and quality. Regarding writing quantity, the self-written (SW) task had a mean word count of 259.30 (*SD* = 42.79) while the GT task had a mean word count of 262.53 (*SD* = 51.21). A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the means of the two groups, $t(29) = 0.44$, $p > .05$, which means there was no statistically significant difference between the SW task and GT task mean word counts.

Concerning writing quality, the SW task had a mean error of 14.00 (*SD* = 1.52) while the GT task had a mean error of 14.70 (*SD* =1.85). A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the means of the two groups, $t(29) = 0.42$, $p > .05$, which means no statistically significant difference was found between the SW task and GT task mean errors. The results from both paired-samples *t*-tests supported the null hypothesis, suggesting that GT had no influence on writing quantity and quality.

To further examine the nature of writing quality, error types were analyzed using a modified version of Keshavarz's (2012) error analysis model. While Keshavarz's original framework classified surface-level errors as substitution, omission, addition, and permutation, in this study the categories were adapted to align with the operationalized dimensions of writing quality, namely grammar, structure, and cohesion. Specifically, addition and omission were treated as indicators of grammatical accuracy, permutation reflected syntactic and structural errors, and substitution captured cohesion-related issues that interfered with lexical consistency. This study focused exclusively on production-based errors. Errors were identified directly from final essays and verified through screen recordings to ensure they occurred during the drafting process rather than subsequent revision.

The analysis revealed that substitutions error accounted for the highest percentage with 51% followed by omission at (27%), addition (19%), and permutation (3%) (See Figure 5). These distributions indicate that lexical and cohesive inaccuracies were the most frequent problem areas among the participants. For example, substitution errors were exemplified by sentences such as "Pragmatics is different from sociolinguistics," in which the preposition "with" should have been replaced with "from." Similarly, omission errors appeared in "I am study English now," where the missing "-ing" inflection disrupted grammatical accuracy.

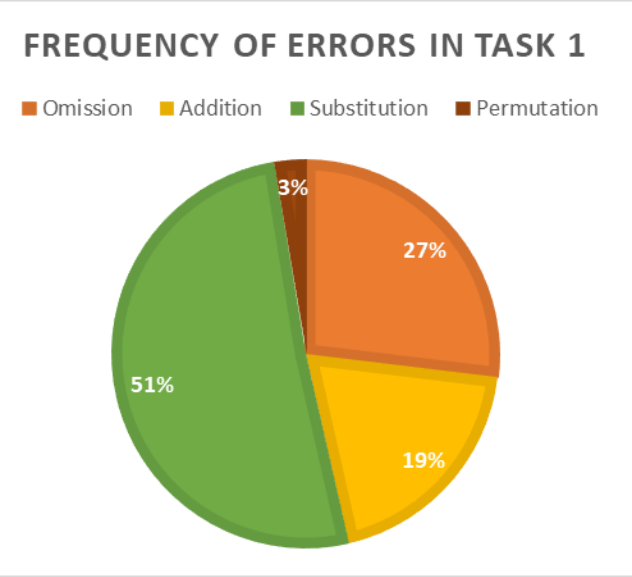

Figure 5. *Frequency of Errors in Task 1 (SW task).*

Likewise, in the GT version, substitution and omission errors were observed as the most frequent, accounting for 51% and 30% respectively (See Figure 6). The results suggest that the predominant error in students' essay was substitution, while permutation errors were the least commonly made.

Collectively, these findings indicate that while GT did not significantly improve students' written performance quantitively or qualitatively, it did not introduce additional errors either. This suggest that GT's influence on writing output among English majors were largely neutral, neither enhancing nor worsening core aspects of writing quality, including grammar, structure, and cohesion.

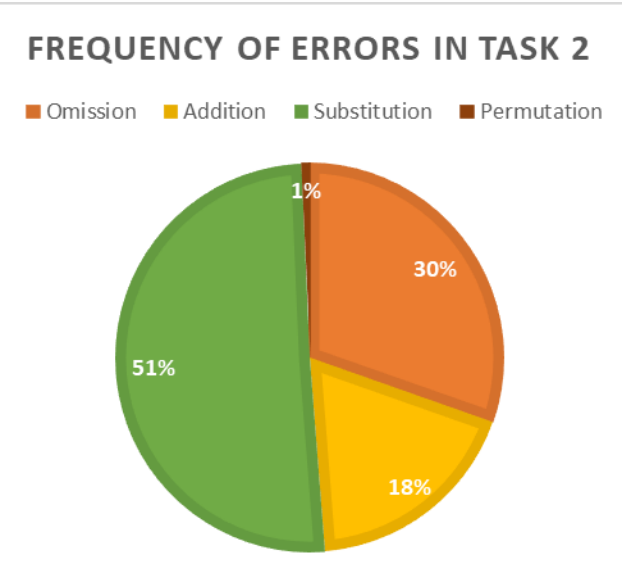

Figure 6. *Frequency of Errors in Task 2 (GT task).*

Students' attitudes towards GT use

Behavioral attitude.

Interview data revealed that more than 85% of the participants used GT on a word level, primarily for checking the meaning of unknown words, spelling, and searching for synonyms and antonyms. To provide specific examples, the study revealed that 26 out of 30 respondents utilized GT to clarify the meanings of unfamiliar words. Additionally, 17 participants used GT to verify the spelling of words, while 13 respondents relied on it to search for synonyms and antonyms. In terms of collocations, five participants acknowledged using GT for this purpose, whereas only two respondents utilized GT to check word usage. On a broader discourse level, nine participants employed GT for sentence translation. It is worth noting that due to time constraints, only one participant resorted to GT to translate an entire paragraph. Checking grammar (20% of the participants) and sentence structures (6.7% of the participants) using GT was not common among the participants. Five students also mentioned that they would double-check GT suggestions with other dictionaries (e.g., Cambridge, Oxford, or Macmillan).

Some participants distinguished their use of GT by purpose: GT was used more confidently for everyday or non-English tasks (e.g., French, Korean), while academic essay writing prompted greater caution or reliance on personal writing skills. For Huyen, Phuong, and Hien, using GT for studying English, particularly in writing essays, was not a common practice. Phuong mentioned using GT for "other languages, not English." Similarly, Hien expressed a preference for using it when studying French rather than for translating Vietnamese to English and vice versa.

Participants' behavioral choices appeared to relate to proficiency level more than age or gender. For instance, Duy and Hy (self-identified CEFR levels B2–C1) did not prioritize GT when writing academic essays. Hy explained that he wanted to challenge himself by relying on his existing knowledge, so he did not normally use GT. Similarly, Duy stated that he preferred writing essays on his own and would turn to online dictionaries like Cambridge or Oxford to check meanings or spellings, rather than relying on GT. These individual experiences highlight the diverse perspectives and behaviors towards GT among the participants.

Cognitive attitude.

Participants had mixed opinions about GT's usefulness in writing essays. More than half of the students found GT helpful because it was easy to use, saved time, improved lexical knowledge, and helped avoid spelling mistakes. To illustrate, around 36% of the participants acknowledged that GT contributed to the improvement of their lexical knowledge, nine out of 30 respondents (30%) expressed that GT was beneficial in preventing spelling errors in their essays. Notably, students with lower proficiency levels (e.g., CEFR A2–B1) tended to rate GT's accuracy more favorably than higher-proficiency peers, suggesting that perceived benefits may vary according to writing ability. Furthermore, approximately 26% of the participants believed that GT played

a role in enhancing their vocabulary knowledge. A small percentage (6.7% of the participants) also highlighted the usefulness of GT in assisting with word usage, ensuring grammatical accuracy, and providing high-quality translation output in various languages beyond English.

However, others found GT unhelpful due to its low-quality translation output, potential for technology dependence, and concerns about losing the ability to think critically and recall knowledge. Out of the participants, a significant majority (70%) expressed the belief that GT often provided translations of low quality, characterized by word-by-word translation, out-of-context translation, grammatical errors, and simplistic and informal translations. Interestingly, 40% of the participants raised concerns about the potential for technology dependence when using GT in academic writing. They felt that relying too heavily on GT could hinder their own cognitive engagement in composing even the simplest writing tasks. Furthermore, 6.7% of the students expressed the concern that regular use of GT might facilitate "cheating," as GT could be accessed anytime and anywhere, including during closed-book exams, providing an opportunity for dishonest behavior among mischievous students.

Some participants believed that GT was neither helpful nor unhelpful, as they considered it unnecessary or believed that the quality of their essays depended on their own efforts. To illustrate, Lam, a fourth-year student, expressed that GT was not a necessary tool for writing essays. He believed that students could produce error-free essays if they proofread their work carefully. According to Lam, if a student made mistakes, it was their own responsibility because GT was simply a tool. He concluded by stating, "And if you do not use it, nothing *[sic]* much changes" and "It is best to write on your own." Similarly, Lan Anh shared her perspective, stating that GT was useful as a translation tool, but writing an academic essay required more than just translating ideas. She emphasized that the quality of an essay depended on the individual writer's abilities. On the other hand, Ngoc believed that GT was primarily helpful for communication in daily life.

Affective attitude.

The participants had diverse emotional responses regarding the use of GT in writing essays. Approximately one third of the respondents felt "confident" when utilizing GT. Thao explained, "Of course you feel more confident compared to when you have to write it yourself." One fifth of the participants expressed a "so-so" feeling, perceiving GT solely as a translation tool that was neither exceptionally good nor bad. Some participants felt "doubtful" about the translations produced by GT, causing uncertainty in their reliance on the tool. Disappointment arose from the poor-quality translation output generated by GT. Interestingly, three students admitted to feeling "guilty" when using GT, as they were English major students expected to write independently, and utilizing GT made them feel like they were cheating. Han, a fourth-year student, felt "worried" about relying too heavily on GT assistance, fearing excessive dependence on the tool. These varied emotional responses shed light on the complex attitudes and concerns associated with the use of GT in essay writing.

Factors influencing GT use

Enactive mastery experience.

The information from the database was gathered using three categories related to enactive mastery experiences: Google Translate experience, Exam, and Practice. These categories helped to capture the participants' experiences and insights regarding their usage of GT and its impact on their writing abilities.

In relation to the first category, the responses revealed that the perceived success or failure of past experiences with GT had an influence on students' use of GT in this study. Some students expressed hesitancy to rely on GT for their future writing assignments due to negative past experiences. For example, Hien stated, "I feel like I can still write without GT, maybe because I have had some not so good experience with GT before, so I do not expect too much while using it." However, Hien balanced the impact of negative experiences by acknowledging that GT still provided some help to some extent. Similarly, Hao and Tai addressed the limitations of GT by making adjustments to the translation output or cross-checking with dictionaries like Oxford or Cambridge. Hao mentioned, "Although sometimes it is not able to give us 100% perfect results... we can adjust with another word after receiving the translation outcome from Google Translate and have the perfect essay eventfully *[sic]*." Tai also explained, "Though I still get the general gist, it is still funny *[sic]* when I read the suggested translations sometimes... I have to recheck *[sic]* it with *[sic]* Cambridge or Oxford dictionary to ensure it *[sic]* is correct."

Regarding exams, Hoa and Han felt less confident before approaching writing assignments and sought GT assistance due to their previous poor performance on exams. Hoa expressed, "I was shocked when I received my paper back and the whole essay was crossed out because I wrote too bad *[sic]*... I do not know how to express my idea *[sic]* in English." Similarly, Han stated, "I feel like my vocabularies [sic] and grammars [sic] are not enough to provide a good essay and score highly in exam."

In contrast, students who had experienced success with writing assignments in the past displayed higher self-efficacy, which explained their decision not to rely on GT for writing. Among the participants, Phuong appeared exceptionally confident about her writing abilities. When being asked to rate her writing proficiency based on the CEFR level, she confidently stated, "C1... I feel confident about writing." This confidence likely stemmed from her previous successful experiences both within and outside of school. Phuong achieved a remarkable score of 8.9 in her Writing 4 course and an overall IELTS score of 8.0. Consequently, she mentioned, "I use GT for other languages, not English" and clarified, "I only use *[sic]* it for this study because it was allowed."

Likewise, perceived success or failure during practice had an impact on students' inclination to use GT. Tram shared her experience, stating, "Actually I spend like hours struggling with writing topics like this but with the help of GT, I think I can complete it in a much quicker way *[sic]*."

Vicarious experience.

The category of vicarious experience encompassed the observation of others, particularly the influence of peers. One participant noted the impact of observing her friends using GT for their writing assignments, which heightened her own motivation to utilize the tool. Thao exemplified this by stating, "Many of my friends at school use GT to help them with their writing assignments, so why not use *[sic]* it?"

Verbal persuasion.

One motivating factor for students to use GT was the encouragement they received from university lecturers. Yen, for example, highlighted that some lecturers at her university actively promote the use of GT as a means to achieve optimal results in their final scores.

Physical or affective states.

The students' confidence in writing was directly influenced by their writing apprehension, which subsequently contributed to their reliance on GT during the writing process. Ngan, for instance, expressed feeling nervous and fearful of making word choice and grammar errors when practicing writing. In a time-constrained situation, she resorted to using GT to translate an entire paragraph from Vietnamese to English due to a sense of panic, even though it was not an actual test.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate three research questions: (1) Does GT impact the quantity and quality of essays among English major students? (2) What are the attitudes of English major students towards the use of GT in essay writing? (3) What factors influence the use of GT among English major students? The following section provides a comprehensive discussion of the research findings pertaining to these three research questions.

First and foremost, the study findings indicate that GT does not have a significant influence on the writing quantity and quality of students' essays, which aligns with the findings of Fredholm (2014). This contrasts with previous reports that suggested an increase in both writing quantity (Tsai, 2019) and quality (Aliliche & Yakoubi, 2020) with the use of GT. However, the interview results shed light on this discrepancy, revealing that students primarily utilize GT as a dictionary to search for words and synonyms rather than relying on it for checking grammatical accuracy.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the writing task involving GT was conducted one week after the task without GT. It is plausible to assume that the one-week timeframe may not have been sufficient for GT to have a discernible effect on students' essays. Although improvements in vocabulary and spelling may positively influence writing outcomes, our error analysis showed that the most frequent issues such as substitution and omission were grammatical in nature. These errors are more likely to compromise clarity, coherence, and syntactic accuracy, which are essential to academic essay quality. Given our participants' context – English majors in a Vietnamese higher education setting, grammar challenges and L1 transfer effects (e.g., direct translation from Vietnamese to English) were common. These structural issues were not reliably addressed by GT, especially when the tool was used primarily at the word level. Hence, grammatical accuracy was prioritized in our assessment as a more sensitive indicator of writing performance.

Secondly, the findings align meaningfully with Pickens' (2005) tri-component attitude model. Behaviorally, students relied on GT to look up words or synonyms – reflecting its function as a word-level tool. Cognitively, they viewed GT as efficient but unreliable at correcting grammar (Jin & Deifell, 2013), especially for longer texts, which influenced their selective use (Rensburg et al., 2012). Affective responses ranged from confidence and convenience to guilt and skepticism, reflecting the emotional tension between tool reliance and perceived academic integrity.

Furthermore, when it comes to essay writing, students expressed a preference for consulting dictionaries over relying on GT, whether in the form of hard-copy or digital versions. This preference is rooted in the belief that traditional dictionaries are compiled by language experts and considered authoritative, while GT, driven by artificial intelligence, has faced criticism for its grammatical inaccuracies (Koehn, 2009). Interestingly, students who achieved high scores in Writing 4 exhibited less frequent use of GT for learning English but instead utilized it for other foreign language courses, such as Chinese or French, which are part of their program of study. This suggests that writing proficiency wields a certain influence on shaping students' attitudes towards GT.

Regarding cognitive attitude, the majority of students, irrespective of their proficiency levels, acknowledge that GT has both benefits and drawbacks in the context of essay writing. They generally agree on the quickness of translation and its convenience, highlighting its time-saving and accessible nature, which aligns with the findings of Aliliche and Yakoubi (2020). Interestingly, students with lower proficiency levels tend to rate the application higher in terms of accuracy compared to their counterparts with higher proficiency levels. This finding can be attributed to the fact that less proficient writers may not be as aware of the accuracy issues since they themselves require assistance with English writing.

Concerning affective attitude, the majority of respondents exhibit increased confidence when using GT, as it serves as a writing assistant when needed. This finding aligns with previous literature, specifically Sukkhwan (2014). Some participants express a neutral feeling towards the application, perceiving GT as merely a machine that cannot surpass human intelligence.

Additionally, a sense of guilt is observed among students, as they believe that excessive reliance on GT can be seen as a form of cheating. One plausible interpretation of these findings is that the participants in this study are English language majors, and relying too heavily on GT may undermine their ability to write independently.

Thirdly, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory further explains students' strategic use of GT. Past success encouraged repeated use, while writing anxiety led lower-proficiency students to rely on GT more frequently. Although prior studies reported teacher resistance (Clifford et al., 2013; Davis, 2006; White & Heidrich, 2013), our findings show that teacher endorsement boosted student motivation. Overall, self-efficacy shaped students' confidence and GT engagement.

The study is subject to several potential limitations. Firstly, the small sample size limits the statistical power of inferential analysis. Future research could involve larger and more diverse participant groups, including non-English majors, multilingual learners, or international students, to investigate how GT use varies across disciplines and linguistic backgrounds. Studies could also explore the role of digital literacy and GT training in shaping usage behavior.

Another limitation involves the use of identical writing prompts across both tasks, which may have introduced recall bias. Participants could have remembered content from the first test, potentially increasing performance or masking the effects of GT use. Additionally, the short one-week interval between tasks may not have allowed students enough time to internalize tool-based learning strategies. To address both issues, future research should adopt a longitudinal design with varied but comparable prompts, allowing for repeated exposure to GT and a more accurate assessment of its influence on writing development over time.

Moreover, owing to certain constraints, our quantitative analysis was limited to word count and the number of errors within participants' essays, in conjunction with the qualitative analysis. In future research endeavors, there is room to expand the scope by incorporating additional quantitative and qualitative measures, such as analyzing word-level attributes, grammatical structures, lexical density, or incorporating assessments from raters to gain a more comprehensive understanding of participants' writing performance, both with and without the use of Google Translate. Finally, participant proficiency levels were self-reported and not directly controlled. Although the study's design mitigates variability, proficiency differences may have affected writing performance and GT engagement.

Based on the findings, we also recommend that tools like GT be refined for academic writing support. Specifically, GT could benefit from enhancements that allow learners to toggle between simplified and formal language registers, flag grammatical inconsistencies, and offer context-sensitive feedback on usage patterns. For learners who are less inclined to use GT – often due to perceived inaccuracies or limited awareness of its functions, integrating a brief guided walkthrough or examples for academic writing tasks may improve usability and trust.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the use of GT in academic writing and its impact on students' attitudes and writing performance. The study reveals that GT had no statistically significant impact on the quantity and quality of students' essays. This indicates that English major students are not overly dependent on GT for writing. It is essential for educators and curriculum designers to recognize that integrating technology like GT into language learning may not compromise students' writing abilities. Instead, there is a need to strike a balance between leveraging technology as a supportive tool and nurturing independent writing skills.

Moreover, the study sheds light on the diverse attitudes students hold towards GT, influenced by factors such as their proficiency level and confidence in using the tool. Educators should acknowledge this diversity and tailor their guidance to meet individual student needs. Engaging students in discussions regarding the responsible and appropriate use of technology in academic work is vital.

Additionally, the research underscores the significant impact of students' past experiences, peer influence, teacher encouragement, and emotional states on their GT usage. Educators should acknowledge the importance of these factors and explore ways to assist students in navigating their experiences with GT more effectively. Providing guidance on when and how to use GT and offering strategies to manage writing anxiety can prove to be beneficial.

In summary, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the integration of technology in language learning, particularly in the context of English writing. It underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of students' attitudes and experiences with GT. These findings can serve as a valuable framework for future research endeavors aimed at effectively incorporating technology tools into language learning and writing instruction. As the field continues to evolve, further research should consider the potential implications and limitations of AI technology, such as GT, in language learning contexts, and explore additional factors that may influence students' GT usage to gain a comprehensive understanding of its impact.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 1. *The Sources of Mathematics Self-efficacy with Examples (Usher & Pajares, 2009).*

Source	Description	Sample items
Enactive mastery experience	The interpreted result of personal previous attainments. "Success builds a robust belief in one's efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially in earlier phases of self-development" (Bandura, 1999, p. 181).	I have always been successful with math. Even when I study very hard, I do poorly in math.
Vicarious experience	Observation of similar others performing the same task. "If people see others like themselves succeed by sustained effort, they come to believe that they, too, have the capacity to succeed" (Bandura, 1999, p. 181).	When I see how my math teacher solves a problem, I can picture myself solving the problem in the same way. Seeing kids do better than me in math push me to do better.
Verbal persuasion	Encouragement from important people, such as parents, teachers, and friends. "If people are persuaded that they have what it takes to succeed, they exert more effort and are more perseverant than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise" (Bandura, 1999, p. 181).	My math teachers have told me that I am good at learning math. Adults in my family have told me what a good math student I am.
Physiological state	Students interpret their physiological arousal as an indicator of personal efficacy. "They read their tension, anxiety and depression as signs of personal deficiency" (Bandura, 1999, p. 181).	Just being in math class makes me feel stressed and nervous. I get depressed when I think about learning math.

Appendix B

Table 2. *Participants' Demographic Information.*

Characteristics		**n**	**%**
Age			
	21	9	30%
	22	21	70%
Gender			
	Female	21	70%
	Male	9	30%
Student status			
	Junior	9	30%
	Senior	21	70%
Final Writing 4 course grade			
	6.0-6.9	1	3.3%
	7.0-7.9	18	60%
	8.0-8.9	11	36.7%
Self-assessment of English proficiency level (based on CEFR)			
	A2	1	3.3%
	B1	9	30%
	B2	17	56.7%
	C1	3	10%

Appendix C

The writing prompt.

Some people believe that students should come in uniforms, while others believe it is not necessary to do so. What is your opinion?

You should write at least 250 words within 40 minutes.

Appendix D

Table 3. *Finalized Codebook.*

Codes	Definitions
Enactive mastery experience	Self-efficacy information derived from performance of the given task
Google Translate experience	Previous experiences with GT that was perceived to be successful or unsuccessful
Exam	Previous experiences in exam that was perceived to be successful or unsuccessful
Practice	Previous experiences in practice that was perceived to be successful or unsuccessful
Vicarious experience	Self-efficacy information derived from observation
Observation of others	Observations of others' success or failure with using GT
Verbal persuasion	Self-efficacy information derived from social influence and appraisal
Encouragement	Encouragement from important people to use GT
Physiological or affective state	Self-efficacy information derived from physical and emotional and states
Writing apprehension	Writing anxiety that inhibits performance
Behavioral attitude	A behavior or an action towards the use of GT in essay writing
Cognitive attitude	A belief or thought about the use of GT in essay writing
Affective attitude	An emotional reaction or feeling towards the use of GT in essay writing

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Using cognitive behaviour therapy-based techniques for decreasing foreign language speaking anxiety and increasing confidence among EFL students: An intervention study

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Abstract

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is a common and proven way to treat anxiety. In language learning settings, CBT has been shown to remedy students' anxiety and help them actively engage with a new language. However, research is inconclusive on how to best approach CBT-based interventions for language learning, and how to cater to students' specific needs. To determine how to best develop CBT-based activities for the foreign language classroom, this study adapted a number of validated tools and activities to a Japanese university context to determine how students experience foreign language anxiety (FLA), and how a CBT-based intervention can remedy it. This qualitative intervention study describes the use of a questionnaire which includes scenarios that gauge how students experience FLA, and how they describe and manage their emotions. CBT-inspired activities were then implemented as an intervention with 87 students in 4 classes to help them reduce FLA, feel more positive about their skills, and become more confident about speaking English in class. At the beginning of the courses, a majority of respondents (N=69) reported having negative emotions regarding the questionnaire scenarios. After the CBT-based intervention, reflection journal questions and a final questionnaire showed that the intervention helped students develop a more positive view of their speaking abilities, especially with regard to making mistakes. This study shows how CBT activities can be developed and adapted to specific language learning contexts and provides recommendations for future practice.

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Introduction

The exploration of foreign language anxiety (FLA) continues to be an important area of study in language acquisition research as it informs classroom practice, curriculum design and the support mechanisms that can be put in place for foreign language learners (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). FLA is a barrier to language learners fulfilling their full potential as effective speakers; it "can become a distraction that prevents them from enjoying speaking and interferes with their attention" (Maher & King, 2022a, p. 138). Addressing it directly enables students to gain confidence and motivation while learning to reflect and think critically about their own language skills and learning processes. FLA has been extensively investigated and has been found to be a frequent occurrence in the language classroom (Fattahi & Cuocci, 2022). It is recommended that teachers address it as a matter of routine at an early stage of a student's learning trajectory. Being a successful language learner entails mastery of not only linguistic skills but also other factors, including self-directed learning skills such as goal setting, study planning, and time management (Peeters & Mynard, 2023). Learning how to manage confidence and FLA is another such skill. Therefore, if learners are shy or anxious to speak, it is important to understand the reasons and identify potential solutions. Tailored activities can positively impact many students' learning experiences while informing learning design and curriculum development and introducing clear reflection and FLA activities into the language learning curriculum.

This study is a continuation of the research initiated by the authors in 2018. A data-collection tool was developed for discovering what emotions students described in situations where FLA was expected to be prevalent. Based on Gkonou and Oxford's (2016) 'Managing Your Emotions' (MYE) for language learning, the tool, a scenario-based questionnaire, was used to confirm (a) which communicative situations cause high FLA, (b) what emotions and thoughts students described in these situations and the reasons for feeling them, (c) what situational factors might be involved, and (d) whether the students utilised any coping strategies. It was found that students attributed the highest number of negative emotions to situations where they wanted to speak, but felt they could not, such as during a class discussion. This was often due to the worry of making mistakes or being misunderstood. They subsequently described emotions of frustration, shame, and insecurity. The most influential situational factor was found to be 'frequency' (how often anxiety was felt in that situation), with students rating the situation as increasingly negative the more it occurred.

These findings were used to develop practical activities drawn from cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), using its principles as a framework to improve teaching and learning. The current paper describes the application of the newly developed activities and presents an 'intervention study' (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021), using the MYE tool and CBT-based activities to help students reduce FLA and become more confident about speaking in their foreign language (FL – in this case it refers to English). Previously, it was shown that particular scenarios caused FLA, and that students used a range of coping strategies to cope with this anxiety (Curry et al., 2020). In the current study, interventions were designed based on these

findings. To track possible effects of these interventions, students' FLA experiences were measured and compared.

The aim of the research was to implement CBT-based activities to increase students' speaking confidence and develop more positive thoughts about their speaking abilities. Through the analysis of journal reflections and a final questionnaire, it could be determined whether less FLA was reported than that was at the beginning of the course. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: How do feelings of anxiety and confidence change through in-class confidence interventions based on cognitive behaviour therapy techniques?
RQ2: Which factors related to the intervention do students identify when they report on confidence changes?

Literature review

The complex nature of FLA

Understanding how and why FLA occurs in the classroom is necessary to justify why it should be dealt with directly by educators. Horwitz et al (1986) define FLA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). This definition emphasises the complexity of the condition; students can have a variety of emotions generated by diverse beliefs and experiences, but many of these emotions constrain them from expressing themselves in their FL. Curry et al. (2020) found that students experience FLA as (a) lacking the linguistic skills to effectively communicate their thoughts, (b) lacking confidence to speak, (c) fearing being negatively evaluated if they made mistakes, (d) lacking ability to study, and (e) generally feeling that they are not able to communicate. Mora et al. (2024) have found that task complexity can heighten speaking anxiety in L2 learners too, and that it can impair the quality of students' speech performance, particularly fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and perceived accentedness. Designing appropriate tasks is therefore a critical need to address anxiety in pedagogical approaches to oral language development.

It is important to note that FLA should not be viewed as simply an individual problem. To address it, we must consider the social context in which it occurs, which justifies both an individual and group approach to its alleviation. MacIntyre (2017) states that FLA "has both internal and social dimensions" (p. 28); it "is influenced by internal physiological processes, cognition, and emotional states along with the demands of the situation and the presence of other people, among other things, considered over multiple timescales" (pp. 27-28). The importance of the social dimension is raised by Kitano (2001), King (2014), and King and Smith (2017), who discuss the role of social anxiety in FLA, emphasising concerns that students feel they are constantly being evaluated by others. Sufferers of social anxiety

"typically hold false assumptions about their perceived inability to behave in an appropriate manner in front of others and tend to be highly critical of their social performance" (King, 2014, p. 233). The classroom as a social context plays a major role in the development of our students' personalities, and so they are highly conscious of their peers and the need to be accepted by them. Therefore, "anxious learners can develop an acute awareness of interpersonal dynamics between themselves and their peers, causing them to moderate their behaviour" (Maher & King, 2023, p. 106) and generally take a more passive role in class, not actively trying to improve their skills (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Understanding anxious learners

To demonstrate why a CBT-based approach for alleviating FLA can be effective, it is helpful to refer to Aveni's (2005) study on how individuals construct their self-image as speakers of FLs when studying abroad. Language forms part of our identity; how we use it tells the world something about who we are, and so it contributes to how we are perceived and understood by others. This self-image is continuously undergoing "definition and reinterpretation by the audience to whom the individual plays" (Aveni, 2005, p. 12). It is articulated both through spoken language and through non-verbal communication, and responses contribute to the further formation of the self-image. Cultural influences also shape the self and how the individual perceives the world, all parts of a dialectic process in which language plays a pivotal constructive role (Peeters, 2020). For a student learning a new language in a different country, where norms may differ, additional challenges might occur. Unfamiliarity with norms and language can lead to a communication barrier, "and only an altered picture of the self, one filtered through this new, incomplete language, is projected by the learner" (Aveni, 2005, p. 14).

Though Aveni (2005) is discussing students on a study abroad experience, and most of the students in this study are not in a foreign country; they are still in an environment where the foreign language is expected to be used, and the student is expected to have some level of proficiency. Lacking that proficiency, or more crucially *believing* that they lack it, leaves students unable to express their true selves. They are not truly in 'their' culture, especially when initially they are in a class consisting mostly of strangers. Maintaining self-image becomes problematic when one cannot express what one truly wants to communicate. Therefore, as using an FL is a risk, avoiding it becomes a safety strategy, which Aveni noted was occurring among her subjects. To use an FL successfully, learners need to "remain secure in the social hierarchy by maintaining an appropriate *status* among the interaction participants, as well as a feeling of *control* over the interaction and their own destiny" (Aveni, 2005, p. 19).

Activities which challenge the beliefs, assumptions, and behaviours of anxious learners, as noted by King (2014), can help them negate the risk to the self (Aveni, 2005), and help learners to objectively evaluate linguistic performance. This is especially relevant with learners of a cultural background in which "socially reticent, reserved behaviour is culturally acceptable" (King, 2014, p. 234) as it is in Japan. Silence is often used as an avoidance strategy to avoid

potential error and subsequent embarrassment (King & Smith, 2017), leading students to 'withdraw' from the class (Maher & King, 2022b). In turn, student silence can inhibit peers; "if their classmates do not speak, they may feel expected to remain silent too or feel reluctant to act differently" (Maher & King, p. 217), thus increasing FLA amongst others.

King and Smith (2017) note the prevalence of the fear of negative evaluation in the Japanese university FL classroom; "participants spoke about always feeling scrutinised and judged by peers while lessons were in progress, and a number of learners made references to the 'eyes' they felt were always around them" (p. 100), which can lead some learners to care more about peer evaluations than the official evaluations (Maher & King, 2022a). Yoneyama (2007), in her discussion of silent behaviour in high school classes, notes that students feel obliged not to draw attention to themselves, and teachers also expect students to be silent (Maher, 2020). Such experiences must therefore play a role in how students are socialised to behave in a learning environment. Another factor affecting FLA in Japan can be the transition to a communicative language teaching style where students are expected to be full contributors, from a school environment where spoken English may not have been used throughout (Shachter, 2018). Students may use their first language accordingly. Maher and King (2022) suggest that this is also a form of 'silence' as it avoids the target language.

Lastly, there is the influence of perfectionist thinking and the fear of being negatively evaluated. Students can hold the belief that an utterance must be perfect in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The link between FLA and perfectionism has been confirmed by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) and Dewaele (2017). According to Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), "rather than demonstrating less-than perfect language skills and exposing themselves to the possible negative reactions of others, perfectionist language learners would likely prefer to remain silent, waiting until they were certain of how to express their thoughts" (p. 563). In this and previous studies (Curry et al., 2020), there are numerous examples of students who avoided speaking because of a perceived lack of language skills. Another similar and oft-expressed belief was a lack of ability to study, meaning that even when the student studied and prepared, they still did not feel their skills were good enough. The result is that "learners who hold negative attitudes toward their own L2 skills or who are unable to predict a positive outcome of their anticipated L2 use are more likely to feel socially anxious" (Aveni, 2005, p. 69). Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious and non-anxious students both seem to recognise when their performance is flawed but vary in how they respond to mistakes. They also observed that anxious students frequently linked mistakes to their anxiety. Thus, anxious students are aware that their anxiety impedes their learning. What may help them is learning how to react to errors in a more emotionally healthy and objective way, which is what CBT-derived activities attempt to do.

CBT and FLA reduction activities

CBT's core principle is that a person's emotions and the behaviour that results are influenced by their thoughts and beliefs (Westbrook et al., 2011). Simply stated, beliefs affect feelings and

subsequently the course of action taken. This is referred to as the cognitive cycle. Cognitive cycles can be both positive and negative, depending on the nature of the cognition. If a belief is dysfunctional, the emotions which result will probably result in a detrimental action, as exemplified in Figure 1.

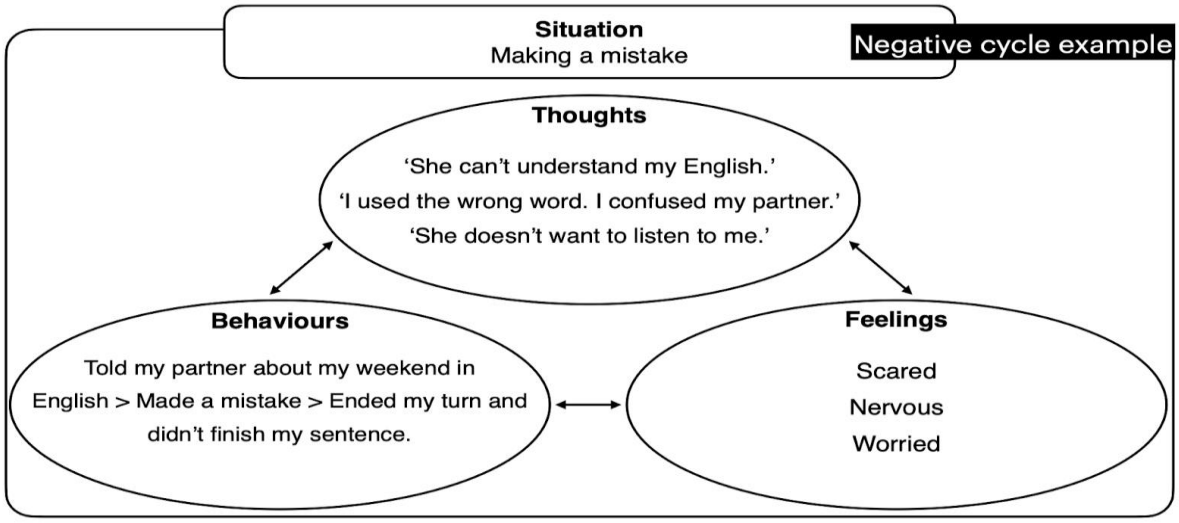

Figure 1. *Example of negative cognitive cycle (Maher, 2024, p. 135).*

Beliefs may result from direct experience, but they may also be based on assumptions, what Maher and King (2022a) refer to as 'feared predictions' which can cause negative actions such as silent behaviour. Through CBT interventions, a client learns how to identify anxiety-causing cognitions and replace them with more objective and functional thoughts (Stallard, 2019).

There are three kinds of cognition, which we hope the present intervention activity can account for. They occur at different levels, roughly analogous to levels of depth as demonstrated in Figure 2 below.

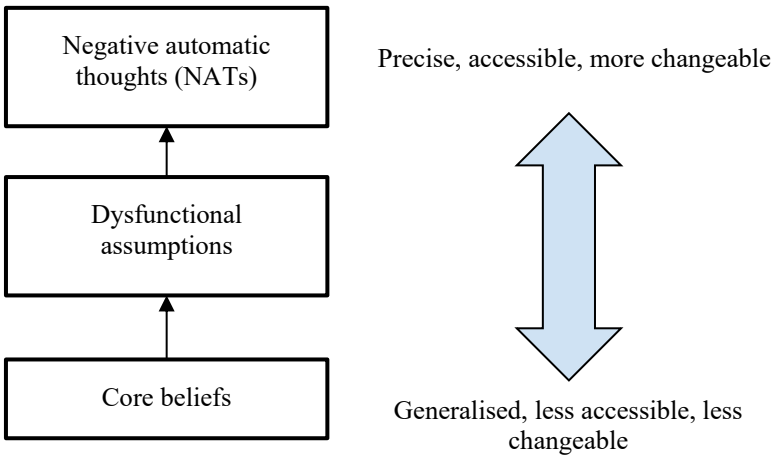

Figure 2. *Levels of cognition (adapted from Westbrook et al., 2011, p.11).*

Negative automatic thoughts, as the term implies, arise without conscious effort, and are often taken as a direct representation of reality, when in fact they are often just assumptions or opinions with no basis in rational fact (Westbrook et al., 2011). CBT training involves becoming conscious of these thoughts occurring, and learning how to objectively challenge them, as they can be considered as existing at the 'surface' level. Dysfunctional assumptions occur at the 'mid-level', linking the other two cognitions. They tend to take the form of over-generalised conditional statements to rationalise core beliefs. They are problematic in that they are overly rigid, making dealing with difficulties more complicated. Lastly, core beliefs are central to an individual's worldview, and "manifest as general and absolute statements" (Westbrook et al, 2011, p. 10). Because of this, they are harder to change in the short term. An aim of the current intervention activities was to help students address FLA at these three cognitive levels, through helping them in the first stage to recognise that their current thinking about their lack of confidence might be misplaced, to a longer-term process of examining their core beliefs through reflecting on their learning.

Although Curry (2014) and Maher (2020) describe using CBT-derived activities with learners on an individual basis in a self-access setting, this may not be possible for many educators, and it is advantageous for both teachers and students to deal with the issue by bringing the intervention to them. However, there are also other reasons why a group-based approach is effective in addressing FLA. Allowing students to share their thoughts and feelings regarding FLA can help them create empathy and positive emotions regarding themselves and each other (Mercer, 2016). Creating positive relationships by removing FLA and concern about the possible negative perceptions of peers is necessary to succeed in learning; "ultimately, communication is about understanding how another person might interpret or misinterpret an act of communication and requires you to put yourself into the mind of the other to some degree" (Mercer, 2016, p. 100). Discovering that classmates often share the same worries can help learners realise that they have much in common with each other and possibly lead to less negative comparisons being made. A positive class atmosphere can lead to more enjoyment of learning, increased self-confidence and less anxiety about speaking (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Integrating tailored incentives, activities, and prompts for learners has been found to facilitate this positive atmosphere, while also enabling them to develop affective and emotive learning skills (Viberg et al, 2023). The students in Dewaele and MacIntyre's study (2016) describe being part of a familiar and comfortable group in which they can relax. So, an FLA intervention activity is a means of making such a group as it breaks down barriers between students, making them confront their assumptions about each other's thinking, and helping to remove the barriers which prevent enjoyment of the class. It creates a sense of 'commonality' or a shared feeling or experience, the benefit being that "learners often feel better understood and appreciated by interlocutors who have experiences and attitudes in common with them" (Aveni, 2005, p. 103).

Group-based CBT and similar rational-emotive therapy-based techniques have already been demonstrated to be effective in alleviating FLA. The activities in this paper are influenced by Foss and Reitzel (1988) who take a rational emotive approach, concentrating on having students confront their fears about speaking their FL to show that they are "grounded in

irrational and unproductive assumptions" (Foss & Reitzel, 1988, p. 446). Students use a set of questions which ask for evidence to justify beliefs. Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) also base their study on a rational-emotive approach using three elements; (a) cognitive-affective talk, whereby students share their FLA with each other in their L1 and gain advice from peers and the teacher, (b) reflective self-talk, involving translation of the written expression of their FLA into their L2, and (c) positive self-talk, re-writing FLA statements to make them positive. All these activities oblige students to think more rationally about their FLA and were beneficial in helping to alleviate it. Maher (2024) describes a CBT-based activity that can be used for individuals and classes which helps students to recognise what triggers their FLA and subsequently make appropriate coping strategies for it.

The study

Context and participants

The study took place at a mid-sized private university in Chiba, Japan, which specialises in second language learning. The intervention activity formed part of the regular course activities, and so was integrated into the curriculum. The course itself was named 'Peer-supported self-directed learning' and was co-taught by the first author and a colleague. Its goal was to introduce self-directed learning skills and increase students' ability to learn autonomously. To that purpose, the curriculum covered activities that involved goal-setting, planning, and choosing learning resources and strategies, but also affective skills such as managing motivation and confidence. Students would choose their own learning goal for the semester and make and share a plan with the teachers for their individual study. Subsequently, students with similar goals were grouped together. This approach worked well for autonomous learning as students often reported on how much it motivated them, and how they could learn about new strategies and resources from their peers. After making study plans, the students carried them out for the rest of the semester, adjusting them as necessary. Throughout this stage, they used learning journals to record their activities and reflect on progress and matters related to learning, with question prompts. Our intention was to create a 'reflective dialogue' (Kato & Mynard, 2016), leading to an exchange in which the student can be guided to think more deeply and critically about how they are learning. It was in these journals that the students answered the questions for this study, pertaining to their confidence in speaking.

A total of four different classes took part in the study, one per 15-week academic semester. The classes met bi-weekly for 90 minutes. Each class consisted of approximately 20-23 students, mostly from the 3rd and 4th grades (N=87). The age range was 20-22, and the majority (approximately 85%) of the students were female. Almost all the students were Japanese nationals with that language as their L1; a handful (6) were Chinese citizens residing in Japan. Although the CBT-based activities were completed by all students as part of class content, they were given the option of consenting to not allowing their data to be collected. Names have been removed and replaced by codes. Everyone was assigned a letter, with a number corresponding

to one of the four classes: for example, Student 2L is from Class 2 (Fall 2021 class), and Student 3N is from Class 3 (Spring 2022 class). The number of respondents for each stage varies due to absences and students not completing tasks.

CBT confidence-building activities

This section describes the content, sequence, and structure of the intervention activities (Table 1). Student data was gathered at each stage apart from the actual class activity (Stage 2).

Table 1. *Intervention activity sequence*

Stage	Week	Description
1. MYE-based scenario questionnaire (see Appendix A)	1 / 2	Initial data gathering, students were asked about their feelings in communicative situations
2. Class CBT-based activity	5 / 6	Lecture and activity on gaining speaking confidence
3. Reflection question 1	5 / 6	Asking students how confident they feel speaking
4. Reflection question 2	13	Asking students if feelings have changed since initial questionnaire
5. Final questionnaire & reflections (see Appendix B)	15	Summary of students' feelings at end of course

MYE-based questionnaire.

Curry et al. (2020) describes the MYE-based questionnaire in detail. As stated above, its primary purpose here was to establish how students felt in specific communicative situations and serve as a basis by which they would be able to compare their feelings at a later point. It establishes awareness of how they feel and acts as a 'starting point'. The communicative situations students reflected on include:

> Scenario 1: *You want to say something in your foreign language in class, but you don't.*
>
> Scenario 2: *There is another student in your class who you think is a better speaker than you. You have to do a speaking activity together.*
>
> Scenario 3: *You make a mistake during a classroom speaking activity, and you receive, or perceive, criticism from another student.*
>
> Scenario 4: *You make a mistake during a classroom speaking activity, and you receive, or perceive, criticism from the teacher.*

Class CBT-derived activity.

a) Students discuss why it is important to consider emotions in language learning. When calling for their thoughts, the teacher is often met with silence for the reasons described above. The purpose of the class is explained - their thoughts and feelings about speaking can be managed, and they can actively develop positive thoughts.

b) A scenario is introduced to work on in small groups: *Shigeru has an opportunity to speak English in class, but he feels he can't*.

   The students answer the following questions:
   - Why might he feel this way?
   - What problems could be caused by his feelings?
   - What could he do to overcome his situation and feel better? Can you make any suggestions?

   The purpose here is for students to identify sources of anxiety and link them to dysfunctional assumptions and behaviours. The idea is that students start identifying the problem: *Shigeru will likely not talk and therefore not improve his skills*. They are prompted to make the connection between thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Typically though, students are often not able to provide advice with much clarity; for example, statements such as "he should talk more" or "he should be more confident" have been encountered. As Curry et al. (2020) showed, the majority of students surveyed did not have sufficient coping strategies for FLA, which is why training is necessary.

c) Students now discuss "Is there anything that you're worried about when speaking in class, or using your foreign language?" This allows them to share their thoughts, and to see that many others feel a similar way. More confident students can also have an opportunity to express why they do not feel any FLA or share any coping strategies. As an example, some of the worries shared by the Fall 2022 class include grammar or vocabulary mistakes, not knowing if a response to the other person is correct, and feeling nervous, embarrassed, or anxious.

d) The next part consists of what Stallard (2019) refers to as 'psychoeducation'; the class is introduced to the cognitive cycle and the connection that exists between their cognitions, emotions and actions. They consider the difference between 'facts' and 'beliefs', namely that the former relies on evidence, whereas the latter is subjective and may or may not be true. The classes discuss statements such as 'Japan is an island country' and 'Japan is a small country' and decide whether they are beliefs or facts, and how we determine so. For the latter statement, the inclusion of the qualifier 'small' means that we have to define what we mean by the term; what criteria do we use to measure 'small' in this case? This concept is to make students think more deeply about the validity of 'all or nothing' thinking for their own abilities; for example, regarding statements such as 'I can't speak English', how do they measure their own skills? What criteria do they use?

This idea is given context with the next statements:
- I'm bad at speaking English.
- People will think badly of me if I make mistakes.
- I need to speak English perfectly when I talk.

The students are asked whether any of these statements are facts or beliefs in their cases, and how they would measure them, and what criteria they would use. Additionally, they must consider whether, if they are in fact beliefs, how useful or helpful is it for their progress to have them? They can change their beliefs, so perhaps they could make new, more positive ones that more accurately reflect their objective reality. Here, it is hoped that they will begin to critically examine any core beliefs they have about their skills.

e) In pairs, students take turns asking and answering conversational questions on topics such as travel (e.g. '*Which country do you most want to visit?*'). Afterwards, they analyse the conversation with questions designed to make them reflect on their performance in a positive and objective way, looking for evidence that the conversation was both enjoyable and mutually understandable (see Appendix B).

Responses invariably demonstrate that although mistakes were made, the conversations were still mutually intelligible and fun, and that errors do not in fact lead to embarrassment and a breakdown in conversation, the realisation of which can help them to challenge their dysfunctional assumptions about speaking. Students are encouraged to always make this kind of reflective analysis after every speaking opportunity, in order to build a realistic and positive appreciation of their skills. It also demonstrates to those with perfectionist traits that they can be successful communicators even if their grammar or vocabulary is less than flawless.

Journal reflection question 1.

The question is *'How confident do you feel about speaking in English? Why?'.* This is used to see what proportion of students are still suffering FLA at this stage, and to determine whether there is evidence that the CBT-inspired activity may have influenced their thinking and helped them to reassess any negative core beliefs.

Journal reflection question 2.

The question is *'Please look back at the 外国語を話す時に感じる感情についてのアンケート* (questionnaire) *you completed at the start of the course. Look at the scenario which made you feel the least confident and what your feelings were. Have you changed your feelings since you completed the questionnaire? Why?'.* This is used to see the extent to which feelings,

negative thoughts and core beliefs may have changed, and whether there is any more evidence that the CBT-based activity had any effect.

Final questionnaire.

This is used to discover how much (if anything) the students remembered of the activity, and what effect it had on their FLA and negative core beliefs; also, to find out if they were using any strategies, if they were still worried, and whether their thinking about making mistakes had changed.

Results

Initial questionnaire

The MYE questionnaire (described in the above section) was written in Japanese, with the students given the option of completing it in that language or in English. For the 2021 classes it was done on paper, then switched to Google Forms in 2022. Translations were provided by administrative colleagues and a student research assistant with a high level of English.

Table 2 below shows which scenarios were rated as the most anxiety-inducing. Scenario 1 was rated the highest for Classes 1-3, while Scenario 3 was rated highest for Class 4, with Scenario 1 being a close second.

Table 2. *Student ratings on the different scenarios presented across four classes on a 10-point scale.*

	Scenario	**Average**	**Std. Dev.**	**Respondents**
Class 1 (Spring 2021) 22 participants	1	7.45	2.31	20
	2	4.58	2.89	19
	3	4.06	3.08	18
	4	3.06	2.94	18
	Scenario	**Average**	**Std. Dev.**	**Respondents**
Class 2 (Fall 2021) 19 participants	1	6.69	2.21	16
	2	6.31	2.63	16
	3	5.00	2.73	15
	4	3.23	2.55	13
	Scenario	**Average**	**Std. Dev.**	**Respondents**
Class 3 (Spring 2022) 18 participants	1	6.83	1.98	15
	2	4.44	3.61	16
	3	5.24	2.33	17
	4	3.47	2.35	17

	Scenario	Average	Std. Dev.	Respondents
Class 4 (Fall 2022) 20 participants	1	6.65	2.28	20
	2	4.30	3.05	20
	3	6.70	2.87	20
	4	4.70	2.49	20

Note: The scenarios that were rated the most difficult are marked in red.

Table 3 demonstrates the most common feelings expressed in the scenarios (responses to Questions 2, 9, 16, 24; '*Describe one or more of the emotions you feel when you do this*'). A wide range of emotions was recorded as students often described more than one. Rather than display the total range of feelings, those most frequently seen have been selected. It is clear that negative feelings predominate in the top-rated scenarios.

Table 3. *Most common positive and negative feelings recorded for each scenario across four classes (frequency of mentions in brackets).*

	Scenario	Most common positive feelings (number of mentions)	Most common negative feelings (number of mentions)
Class 1 (Spring 2021) 22 participants	1 (Q2)	I want to talk more (1) Calm (1)	Frustrated (6) No confidence (6) Pitiful (4)
	2 (Q9)	Happy (5) Fun (4) Motivated (2)	No confidence (6) Anxious / Anxiety (5) Nervous (3)
	3 (Q16)	Grateful (6) Happy (5) Opportunity for mistakes to be pointed out (2)	Embarrassed (6) Frustrated (2) Disappointed (2) Distressed (2)
	4 (Q24)	Happy (4) Grateful (4) Motivated (4)	Embarrassed (5) Nervous (2)
Class 2 (Fall 2021) 19 participants	1 (Q2)	Happy (1) Whatever (1)	Frustrated (6) Nervous (6) No confidence (6)
	2 (Q9)	Happy (3)	Nervous (7) Embarrassed (5) No confidence / Lose confidence (4)
	3 (Q16)	Grateful (7)	Embarrassed / Shamed (7)
	4 (Q24)	Grateful (6)	Embarrassed (3)
Class 3 (Spring 2022) 18 participants	1 (Q2)	Feel nothing particularly (1)	Nervous / scared (6) Frustrating (5) Anxious (5)
	2 (Q9)	Respect (2) Opportunity (2)	Nervous (3)
	3 (Q16)	Glad (3) Grateful (3)	Ashamed (7)

	4 (Q24)	Appreciative / Gratitude (6)	Ashamed (3)
Class 4 (Fall 2022) 20 participants	1 (Q2)	Wanting to do my best (1)	Frustrated (6) Anxiety (4)
	2 (Q9)	Happy (3)	Anxious (1) What if I drag them down? (1) Shy (1) Low spirits (1) Tough (1) Sense of inferiority (1)
	3 (Q16)	Grateful (3)	Embarrassment (4) Frustrating (3)
	4 (Q24)	Good / Positive (2)	Shame / Embarrassment (5)

Table 4 summarises the reasons for the feelings individual students expressed in the scenario questionnaire (Questions 3, 10, 17, 24) in which they gave their highest score from 0 (positive) to 10 (negative) (Questions 1, 8, 15, 22). Some students gave equal scores for more than one scenario, so both have been included. Sentiment analysis included categorising positive and negative expressions for every relevant statement students made in their reflections. The most common belief at this point is that students lack the linguistic skills to make themselves properly understood (29 students), which supports the points made by Aveni (2005) and Gregersen and Horwitz (2002). Student 1F provides a good example of this thinking with their reason; *"I came to uni to study English, but I can't speak"*, which was of course not true. We can also see that mistakes are a large source of concern. The next largest category is fear of making mistakes and being embarrassed (18); *"It's because I lose my confidence in my English skills by thinking that I would be laughed at by classmates if I make mistakes, and they would talk behind my back"* (Student 3H), with a further 8 students specifically concerned about having their mistakes pointed out (8).

Table 4. *Codes on feelings reported on by participants during the scenario questionnaire (Week 1 / 2), the first reflection (Week 5 / 6) and the second reflection (Week 13).*

Code	**Scenario questionnaire** (75 participants)	**First reflection** (73 participants)	**Second reflection** (65 participants)
Lacking confidence	**11**	**3**	**0**
Existing confidence	**0**	**1**	**0**
Okay to make mistakes	**2**	**6**	**19**
Lack ability	**29**	**19**	**4**
Mistakes pointed out by others	**7**	**0**	**0**
Fear of mistakes / embarrassment	**18**	**6**	**3**

Concerned about others' perceptions / thoughts, conscious of others	**4**	**3**	**2**
Negative comparison	**9**	**2**	**6**
Looking to improve	**1**	**4**	**0**
Learning opportunity	**3**	**0**	**4**
Missed opportunity	**1**	**0**	**0**
Doesn't happen much	**1**	**0**	**0**
Becoming more positive / confident	**0**	**4**	**10**
Positive / confident	**0**	**14**	**6**
Not positive / not confident	**0**	**2**	**0**
Active participation / strategy use	**0**	**20**	**10**
Referring to confidence class	**0**	**9**	**22**
Positive influence of others	**0**	**6**	**6**
Future-focused	**0**	**9**	**6**

First reflection question

'How confident do you feel about speaking in English? Why?'

When analysing the student responses, there has been a great increase in positive beliefs, and new codes were introduced to reflect this, as shown in Table 4. The largest category is Active participation / Strategy use (20), where students are describing how they changed their perceptions through active participation in conversations, and the use of strategies for getting confidence and speaking and studying more effectively; for example *"I sometimes was passive when I talked in English but I am trying to ask questions to carry on a conversation through this activity, so I think I can be more active"* (Student 2E). The impression here is of people who feel more in control in communicative situations and have gained personal agency. Additionally, the codes 'Future-focussed' and 'Looking to improve' are evidence of students adopting a more goal-oriented mindset; "*Sometimes words and phrases don't come out right away, and sometimes I can't tell what I want to say at once. If I can overcome it, I think I will gradually gain confidence"* (Student 2O). The emergence of these strands of thinking may be because of the class content focussing on self-directed learning and autonomy. Additionally, some students refer to the confidence class in helping them gain a more positive perspective.

> *"Last Friday, we learned about confidence on class. Thanks to it, I could change my mind. When I made mistakes, no one laugh at me. Mistakes are natural. I*

> *can't tell anything and improve skills without good and bad experiences. I remembered that it is the most important to move before thinking. I don't want to forget it anymore".* (Student 1P)

Second reflection question

'Please look back at the 外国語を話す時に感じる感情についてのアンケート (MYE-based questionnaire) *you completed at the start of the course. Look at the scenario which made you feel the least confident and what your feelings were. Have you changed your feelings since you completed the questionnaire? Why?'*

At this point the majority of students are demonstrating more positive feelings regarding the FLA scenario they chose at the beginning of the course, although there are still many who continue to exhibit anxiety, as shown in Table 4. Points to note include the largest code category of referring to the confidence class, showing that it had directly contributed to a reduction of FLA:

> *"Before taking this class. I didn't speak up my idea in class. However, in this class, we thought why we can't say our opinion and the most answers are afraid of mistake. I changed my mind. The mistakes are not ashamed so I could speak up my idea sometimes. I think I have changed my feeling".* (Student 1J)

Another code category that is likely in reference to the FLA reduction activities are the students who make reference to negative comparisons, but who now state that they no longer do this.

> *"I was not confident when others around me spoke English very fluently. However, through this class, I have come to realize that I need to face myself, not compare with others".* (Student 4C)

However, the number of students who are still afraid of mistakes / embarrassment is still relatively high.

To visualise the changes in beliefs described by the participants, we selected the most frequent codes and looked at their progress, as shown in Figure 3. Intervals represent the MYE-based scenario questionnaire (1), and both reflection questions (2-3). Having a more positive outlook on making mistakes, becoming more positive / confident and acknowledging the positive influence of others were the feelings that steadily increased over the weeks. Other feelings like engaging in active participation / strategy use, feeling positive / confident in general and focussing on the future were fluctuating, but overall improved compared to the first-time participants reported on them.

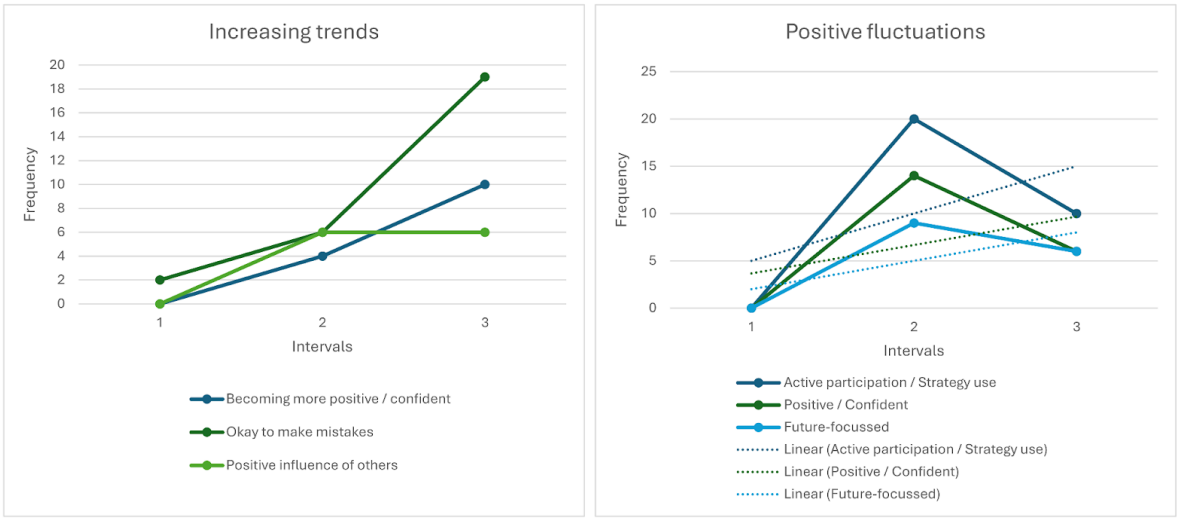

Figure 3. *Positive trends and fluctuations of participants' feelings in the language classroom, based on the number of mentions in students' responses (frequency).*

The positive trends mainly revolve around positive feelings and emotions. On the other hand, negative feelings and emotions were also reported, but saw a consistent decrease in numbers, as shown in Figure 4. Here, it can be observed how feelings of incompetence or fear of the perceptions of others steadily decline.

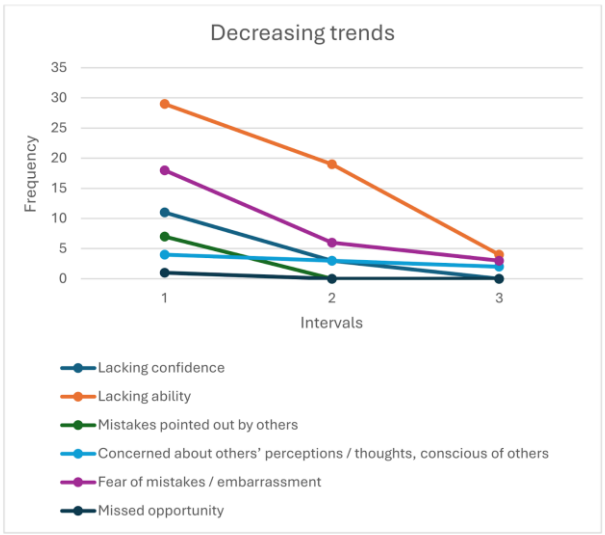

Figure 4. *Negative trends of participants' feelings in the language classroom, based on the number of mentions in students' responses (frequency).*

Final questionnaire

82 responses – the last data collection activity was a feedback questionnaire consisting of initially five questions to determine the following:

- Whether the students remembered the confidence activity, and if so, what ideas it had given them (*Question 1. Do you remember about the class we had about confidence and negative emotions? Write whatever you remember*).
- If the activity had helped them feel more confident about speaking in and outside of class (*Question 2. How are you feeling about speaking English in class since we talked about confidence? Question 3. How about speaking English outside of class?*).
- What kind of worries might still be present, and how they approached challenges to their speaking confidence (*Question 4. Are there any worries or negative thoughts about speaking in English that you have learnt to manage? If so, how?*).
- What strategies they use for managing FLA (*Question 5. If you feel nervous about speaking English in class now, what do you do?*).
- The last question was added from the second class onwards to specifically address what students now thought about making mistakes (*Question 6. Has your thinking or belief about making mistakes when you speak changed this semester?*).

For Question 1, 42 students responded that they remembered the confidence activity, while 18 replied in the negative. A further 16 responses were disregarded for being unclear or for not answering the question. There was a great variety in terms of what the students could remember, but the largest response (16) concerned making mistakes, specifically that the students felt that they no longer had to fear this; *"Making mistakes is not bad thing, and every classmates will not consider and laughing at the mistakes we make"* (Student 2A), which is in line with observations made in Figure 3.

In their responses to Question 2, students often also stated how the class had helped them. For example, 19 students said that they felt more confident than before, including with their speaking; *"I'm more confident with speaking English now because my way of thinking has changed little by little. I don't think I have to be perfect now, so I can relax when I speak English"* (Student 1A). 14 students specifically mentioned that they no longer had to fear mistakes, while six said that they could now speak without hesitation. In total, 45 respondents indicated they became more positive, seven were not positive, two remained as positive as before, and 28 did not respond.

Although the data indicates that the students largely grew in confidence, there are still a large number who retain worries about their speaking as shown by the responses to Question 4 in Table 5. In total, 45 students were not worried, 32 were still worried, and five did not respond.

Table 5. *Worries reported by participants*.

Worry	**Frequency**
Grammar	4

Pronunciation	5
Lacking vocabulary	4
Feeling bad when can't speak well	1
Motivation	1
Fluency	4
Lack skills	1
Being understood	5
Concern about others	2
Mistakes	3
Comparing with others	1
Using academic vocabulary	1

Only seven students mentioned using some kind of strategy for managing their feelings. These included noticing the reactions of conversation partners (two students) and having a positive attitude and thinking positively (one student each). Other mentions were reflected by writing a diary, creating opportunities to speak (thereby attempting to control the situation), and practising more.

In contrast, for Question 5, 60 students report using strategies for managing their FLA, with the most popular (11 students) involving taking a different, more relaxed view about making mistakes: *"I will remember that making mistake is not bad thing"* (Student 2A). The next most numerous strategy (seven students) was students making themselves speak even though they still might feel nervous: *"Anyway, I will speak what I have to say and share*" (Student 2L).

Lastly, in response to Question 6 – *Has your thinking or belief about making mistakes when you speak changed this semester?* (52 responses), we were able to see that a large proportion of the students had developed more positive mindsets; only three stated that they had not changed. Although not all students gave a particular reason, some of the responses related to ideas brought up during the CBT-based confidence activity. For example, some students noticed the reaction of conversation partners as evidence that they did not have to be concerned about mistakes now; "*When I talk with international students and I made mistakes, they were so kind. So I am no longer afraid to make mistakes"* (Student 4E) and "*Yes. I noticed that everyone make mistakes and they don't take care of it. From this thought, I could enjoy talking"* (Student 4B). Others stated that they realised that mistakes are part of the learning process and have adopted a more balanced view: *"Yes it has. I make mistakes when I speak even Japanese. Making mistakes provide learners weakness and strength, then you can fix it!"* (Student 2E).

Other reflections gave students the opportunity to share their thoughts on how their beliefs had changed. In their final reports where they looked back on what they considered to be the most important things they had perceived about themselves as learners during the course, several

students wrote about their new perspectives on confidence. Student 2L referred to the importance of her friends, showing how class bonding is so vital:

> *"I think it is good to actually talk to my friend and output what I've learned. The more I speak English, the more I learn and the more I find out how I can speak in English. Not being afraid of making mistakes and talking is good to improve my speaking skills and I can get confidence to speak. Working with aspiring and positive members was efficient because it could change my inner self and environment. I agree with (teacher) that friends are a very valuable resource. This was really motivating for me".*

In another example, Student 2G related how she had developed a more positive view of herself due to the confidence class:

> *"Finally I'm going to tell you what I learned about the importance of "don't compare with others", I think this is the most important thing in common with the two previously mentioned. No matter how much I improve my time management and speaking skills, if I compare them with others, I will become negative and lose confidence. As I said before, I have a lot of opportunities to communicate with my teacher in this lesson, and I understand that it is important to understand whether I am growing up compared to myself in the past through learning journals and one-on-one conversations. I often underestimated myself in any situation, so this had a pretty big impact on me".*

Both examples clearly demonstrate the impact of talking directly about FLA and confidence to students, and how the CBT-inspired approach enables a shift in thinking to a much more positive and productive view of themselves in relation to their speaking skills.

Discussion

CBT-based approaches can form the cornerstone of a structured awareness-raising curriculum for FL learning and teaching (Kato & Mynard, 2015). Introducing students to different coping strategies, linked to particular learning goals such as speaking, while making them aware of resources and examples of good practice could be integrated in such a curriculum. Peeters and Mynard (2023) discussed such a curriculum design, where they prove how it can encourage students to further develop their own learning strategies, get opportunities to apply them to their own learning, and are encouraged to evaluate the application and effectiveness of the strategy in order to make future decisions about their own learning trajectory. This curriculum design is additionally supported by interactions with a learning advisor, which has been found to be a positive factor in further lowering the threshold for managing FLA inducing activities in the learning process (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). The first step of such a curriculum,

however, would be awareness raising to make students conscious of their own skills, FLA, and contextual factors that might influence their anxiety.

From the data above, it is clear that the CBT-based activity used in this study was effective at helping to decrease the FLA felt by the students involved. The large majority of students in all four classes began the course with high FLA and lacked confidence, with only three indicating that they felt positive about the scenarios. The negative feelings displayed were largely arising from beliefs that they lack linguistic skills for effective communication, and a fear of making mistakes. Previous research has shown similar trends among FL learners in higher education, as they became very careful not to make any errors out of fear to lose face, or to lose any self-esteem they have (Salim et al., 2017), which resulted in them being over-cautious and anxious to communicate. In the present study, however, over the course of the semester there appeared to be both a reduction in FLA, particularly regarding making mistakes, and an increase in confidence. Many participants had a much more balanced or positive view on the matter, indicating that their core beliefs had changed, although FLA was still present with some individuals.

One important data point regards the 'Refers to confidence class' code which increased from nine mentions in the first reflection to 22 in the second. Here, students mentioned how their perspectives changed and linked it to what they had learned from the intervention. This increase is likely due to the fact that the task required them to compare their feelings, prompting them to think about what the course itself contributed. Creating opportunities to raise this kind of awareness has proven effective in other studies, where explicit instruction has prompted students to develop metacognitive strategies, thinking about how they are performing in class and how they relate to other students (Peeters, 2015; Peeters & Ito Maitland, 2024). The present study, therefore, illustrated how reflection, structured by the teacher, can be a vital part of interventions like this. Reflection can 'transform' learning; students can turn "awareness into action and eventually experience fundamental shifts in beliefs that inform their continued practices (Mynard, 2023, p. 31). It further illustrated the importance of follow-up intervention activities, as such intervention activities are likely to be less effective if only conducted once. Further studies could also possibly examine more explicitly at what level of cognition changes occur, as well as the reasons why some students still demonstrate FLA.

It is important to acknowledge though that other factors which the study cannot account for may have also contributed to the overall decrease in FLA. Students are invariably more nervous and less confident when beginning a new course with unfamiliar peers but often become accustomed as the course progresses (Gkonou et al., 2017). The focus of this course on creating autonomous peer groups to study for shared goals undoubtedly played a role in helping students relax with each other, and the activity of having them reflect each week on their learning helped them to realise the progress they were making with their linguistic skills.

For courses in which students are not being explicitly encouraged to be autonomous, teachers may be more limited in introducing CBT-type activities. Nevertheless, integrating awareness-raising activities or reflection exercises can already lay the groundwork for growth. Teachers

in these settings could still integrate short reflection prompts or structured group discussions to raise awareness about anxiety and coping strategies. While this study's findings highlight the benefits of tailored CBT-based activities, scaffolding shorter CBT-informed practices like the ones mentioned above can be successfully adapted to other educational settings to mitigate FLA.

A particular limitation of the study is that due to absences and students not completing assignments, there are some gaps in the data. Additionally, the reliance on questionnaires for collecting participants' thoughts meant that ambiguous statements occurred. Additionally, it is important to note that the fluctuations seen in the coding trends do not necessarily mean that students ceased to think in a certain way about their confidence or FLA, but simply that at that particular point, they were choosing to reflect on something different.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated how a CBT-based intervention can be successful in helping to alleviate FLA in an English as a second language classroom. Regarding the first research question – *'How do feelings of confidence change through in-class confidence interventions based on CBT techniques?'*, students displayed a much higher degree of confidence and other positive emotions compared to the start of the course. While other factors may have influenced this change, it is clear from the students' responses that for many of them, the CBT-derived intervention was instrumental. Students were able to question their dysfunctional assumptions, both through reflection with the instructor and each other.

In response to the second research question – *'Which factors do students identify when they report on confidence changes?'*, students described more goal-oriented thinking and use of strategies in dealing with anxiety-provoking situations. Learning that they shared very similar concerns, and that their peers did not necessarily judge them negatively for it, was an important step in helping them to transform their self-images and achieving a sense of commonality. The classroom, thus, became more of a shared space where all the students could strive to improve their skills. This contrasts with the image a lot of them had, as they feared they might be singled out for not being able to do something correctly. Also, the conversation activity is important in demonstrating to each other and themselves that the students are in fact effective communicators. Learning to look for evidence of their successes enabled the students to be objective and rational in appreciating their abilities. Again, this is important when we see the initial extent in the questionnaire results to which the students believed themselves to be lacking ability to communicate. The students overall became far more relaxed about making mistakes, demonstrating a reduction in perfectionist thinking.

From an educator's perspective, seeing students lose their fear of speaking their FL together can be highly gratifying. Actively teaching them that there is no need to hold a belief if it is preventing them from achieving their potential is empowering and adds an important skill for

the regulation of emotion. This is essential in achieving autonomy and is a life-long learning skill applicable to situations beyond the language classroom. The course described in the study is dedicated to teaching self-directed learning skills, allowing us to give a great deal of attention to affective factors in learning, which may not be available to educators with less opportunity to deviate from their coursebook or syllabus. However, if it is possible to make such a positive impact on our students, we should make the opportunity to do so, "for the better students feel about themselves and others, the more likely they are to achieve" (Moskowitz, 1999, p. 178).

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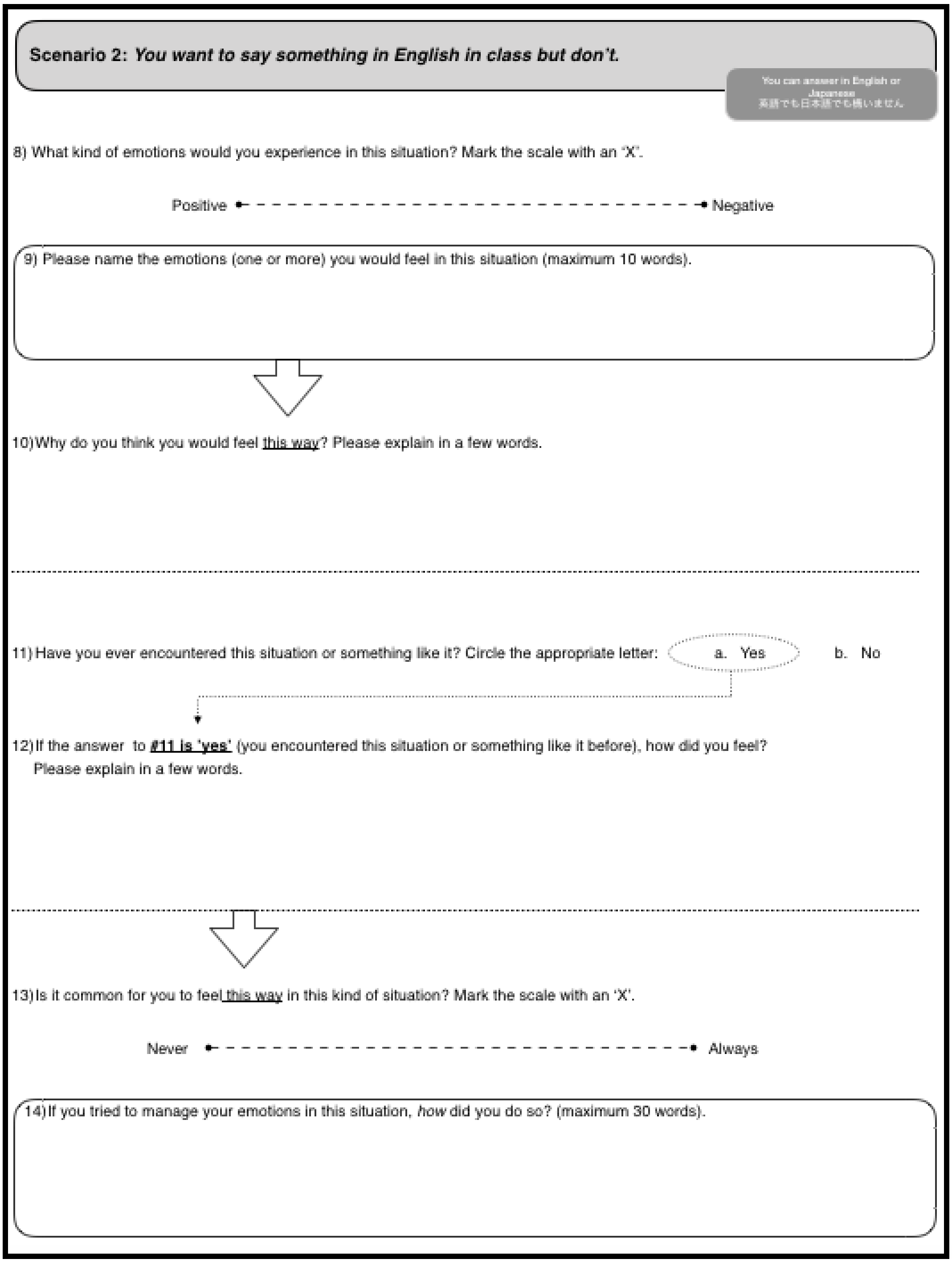
Appendices

Appendix A: Example of scenario from MYE-based questionnaire



Scenario 2: *You want to say something in English in class but don't.*

You can answer in English or Japanese
英語でも日本語でも構いません

8) What kind of emotions would you experience in this situation? Mark the scale with an 'X'.

Positive ←– →Negative

9) Please name the emotions (one or more) you would feel in this situation (maximum 10 words).

10) Why do you think you would feel <u>this way</u>? Please explain in a few words.

11) Have you ever encountered this situation or something like it? Circle the appropriate letter: a. Yes b. No

12) If the answer to **<u>#11 is 'yes'</u>** (you encountered this situation or something like it before), how did you feel? Please explain in a few words.

13) Is it common for you to feel <u>this way</u> in this kind of situation? Mark the scale with an 'X'.

Never ←– →Always

14) If you tried to manage your emotions in this situation, *how* did you do so? (maximum 30 words).

Appendix B: Conversation analysis questions for CBT-based class activity

- Did you make a mistake?
- Did anyone laugh because you made a mistake? If so, was it because your mistake was funny?
- Did anyone else make a mistake?
- Did you laugh because they made a mistake?
- If others make a mistake, do you think they are stupid?
- Could your partner understand you?
- How do you feel about the conversation you just had?
- Do you think your partner enjoyed it?

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Investment in English language learning by adult Iranians

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Abstract

This paper investigates how Iranian learners invest in English language education amid various cultural and societal influences. Recently, Iranian authorities have expressed concern about the impact of English on society and culture. The first author interviewed eight adult learners in Iran to explore their perceptions of learners' investment in English language learning, drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2016) model. The findings reveal a complex interplay between local and global factors affecting language learning and identity formation. Despite government policies aimed at preserving traditional values, learners express personal and societal benefits from acquiring English. The research highlights that learners' motivations stem more from this interplay of benefits, rather than just globalisation, which Iranian authorities often view as a threat. This underscores the resilience of Iranian learners as they navigate their linguistic and cultural identities, demonstrating that they see English not only as a foreign language but as a tool for personal and societal advancement. This study contributes to the understanding of how Iranian learners navigate and invest in English language education, shedding light on the cultural and societal factors that shape their perceptions and motivations.

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Introduction

The growing popularity of English language learning among Iranians has raised concerns among Iranian authorities. The precise number of language schools in Iran is unclear due to the existence of unregistered institutions throughout the country (Moharami & Daneshfar, 2021). In 2016, the Iranian supreme leader's criticism of the foreign language education approach further intensified the political condemnation of learning English in the country. As a result, Iranian officials have been implementing changes in language policy to manage the increasing interest in English language learning. This paper aims to examine adult Iranians' investment in English language learning and its implications for cultural practices within Iran's contested sociopolitical landscape.

Islam and its ideologies have formed the bedrock of Iranian education for more than 40 years. Today, Islamic values are woven into Iranian culture, with Islamic ideologies present in every aspect of everyday life. However, over the past decade, authorities have been challenged by the presence of the English language and its impact on learners' culture and social identity (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2024).

In 2011, in an attempt to strengthen Islamic values and counter the influence of Western ideologies associated with the globalisation of the English language, Iranian authorities implemented a significant overhaul of the educational system (Malekzadeh, 2011). The new curriculum, titled the "Fundamental Transformation of Education", aimed to promote a pro-Islamic ideology and replace the previous curriculum influenced by the Pahlavi regime. Currently, according to educational policy, secondary school students have the option to learn English or other approved foreign languages, in addition to compulsory Arabic instruction. However, due to the lack of educational materials and teachers of other foreign languages, alongside the widespread presence of private English language schools, the English language remains one of the most studied languages in the country (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016).

Recent reforms in Iran's education system have sought to align higher education with Islamic values while countering Western influence. This 'purification' aims to establish a knowledge framework that prioritises local over global paradigms, reflecting the state's ideological stance (Bazoobandi, 2024). Morady Moghaddam and Murray (2019) note the government's attempts to balance globalisation with Islamic values, revealing tensions in language instruction, particularly regarding the status of English. Iranmehr et al. (2024) analysed English language education strategies in Iran and Saudi Arabia, noting significant differences: Iran's anti-imperialist policies lead to limited access and localised teaching, whereas Saudi Arabia's neoliberal framework promotes early English learning and communicative methods, enhancing classroom integration. These contrasting approaches reflect the substantial influence of political, cultural, and economic factors on language education in both nations. Ultimately, these reforms illustrate the complexities of navigating modernisation while adhering to traditional values in the Iranian educational landscape.

This study explores how adult Iranians invest in learning English and examines the broader implications of English language learning on Iranian cultural practices within the context of globalisation.

Policy changes and Iranians' investment in learning English

Language policy extends beyond the realm of language itself (Bouchard & Glasgow, 2019), as it explores the relationship between language variables and non-language variables (Spolsky, 2004). This allows politicians and ideologists to manipulate the language situation to reform society and shape identity (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). Iranian authorities view the learning of English and its globalisation as a perceived threat to Iranian culture, with allegations of a 'vicious plot' by the West to suppress Iranian identity (Moharami, 2021).

The contested nature of English language learning in post-revolutionary Iran has resulted in significant changes to the country's language policy, with politicians utilising language policy as a means to reinforce their intended values and maintain control over people's perceptions, practices, and values. Iranian policymakers primarily aim to preserve national solidarity and promote an Iranian-Islamic identity (Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021).

Despite political ideologies and policies, Iranian language learners recognise the value of English as a form of capital and remain committed to learning the language (Moharami et al., 2022). Research by Pierce (1995) has shown that learners' backgrounds and societal influences play a crucial role in investment in language learning and practice, highlighting the complex relationship between learners and their social environment. Exploring learners' investment and commitment to language learning enables an understanding of power relationships in various contexts (Darvin & Norton, 2016). Language learning is not merely a means of communication but a pathway through which learners come to understand themselves, their communities, and their histories (Norton, 2020; Norton & Toohey, 2004).

The concept of investment explains Iranian language learners' imaginary engagement with a new group of people who have no tangible contact with each other and form an imagined community with English language speakers. Norton (2013) claims that language learning offers a wider range of symbolic and material resources for learners. The change in learners' access to resources shifts their cultural capital, altering their imagined future. Norton (2013) writes that "the value of language learners' cultural capital increases, so learners' sense of themselves, their hopes for the future, and their imagined identities are reassessed" (p. 6). Learners, through learning English, create an imaginary world and future (Norton, 2015). Language learners' commitment to the language is based on their inclination toward a particular (imaginary or real) group, society or community (Norton, 2020). Imagination allows language learners to create multiple images of the world that they wish to be part of. Learners in their imaginations form relationships with others and define themselves in another world that they have not experienced.

Norton and Toohey (2001) state that language learners "exercise human agency to work on their entry into the social networks, so they can practice and improve their competence in the target language" (p. 256). In this study, agency refers to learners' capacity to act purposefully and make strategic choices in navigating social structures (Norton, 2013). Therefore, language learning is an ongoing process of decision-making based on what learners have experienced and understood from their environment. The commitment and investment in language learning by Iranian learners offer access to symbolic and material resources, reshaping their cultural capital and influencing their imagined future (Norton, 2013). Through the process of learning English, learners create an imaginary world and future, establishing connections with others and defining themselves within a world they have yet to experience (Norton, 2015). This explains Iranian language learners' imaginative engagement with an imagined community of English language speakers, where they exercise agency to enter social networks and enhance their language proficiency.

Agency plays a crucial role in influencing adult Iranian language learners' decision to learn English, as it allows them to engage with their imagined communities and shape their imagined identities (Tajeddin et al., 2021). Learners' experiences and investments in learning English contribute to the construction of their imagined identities, highlighting the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learners and the languages they learn, ultimately impacting their objectives for language learning and cultural practices.

The concept of investment, as developed by Pierce (1995), Norton (2013) and extended by Darvin and Norton (2015), provides a lens to examine the dynamic relationship between language learners' identities, access to capital, and the ideological structures they navigate. Investment differs from motivation in that it foregrounds the socially and historically constructed relationship between learners and the target language, acknowledging power relations that shape learning opportunities. Darvin and Norton's (2016) model integrates three components—identity, capital, and ideology—offering a comprehensive framework for situating learner experiences within broader sociopolitical contexts.

Research on investment in restrictive sociopolitical environments highlights the tension between learners' aspirations and state control (e.g., Gao et al., 2014; Kubota & Mckay, 2011). In the Iranian context, studies by Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) and Rashidi and Hosseini (2019) reveal how language policies attempt to limit English while learners pursue it as a means of cultural and economic mobility. Yet, empirical work focusing specifically on adult learners' investment in English remains scarce.

This study adopts Darvin and Norton's (2016) investment model, which conceptualises investment as a nexus of identity, capital, and ideology. Identity refers to the constantly changing sense of self shaped through social interaction. Capital encompasses economic, cultural, and social resources that can be gained or exchanged through language learning. Ideology concerns the belief systems and power relations that regulate access to these resources. By mapping learners' experiences against these three dimensions, this study addresses a gap in existing research on the investment of adult Iranian learners in English.

Agency as a concept complements this framework by describing learners' active decision-making and strategic use of English to enhance their imagined identities. In practice, learners invest in English not only to acquire linguistic skills but also to gain economic, cultural, and social capital while negotiating ideological constraints. Investment explains the 'why' of learners' motivations and imagined futures, while agency explains the 'how', the purposeful actions and choices learners take to realise these outcomes. Integrating both concepts provides a nuanced understanding of adult Iranian learners' commitment to English.

Methodology

This paper utilises data from a larger mixed-method study, which involved 105 voluntary adult language learners who were studying or teaching in various language schools in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. The participants completed an online qualitative survey at the initial stage of the study. Subsequently, based on the primary data analysis and the design of interview questions (see Appendix A), the first author conducted semi-structured interviews of 30–45 minutes with 14 purposefully selected volunteers, consisting of seven males and seven females. The selection of interview participants was based on factors such as their experience with language learning, age, occupation, education, and major of study. For this paper, the focus is on the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, and the findings are reported as a case study.

A case study is an empirical qualitative research design that allows for the examination of one or multiple cases within their natural context (Yin, 2015). By conducting a case study, the complexities of the phenomenon can be explored in-depth, and the inclusion of multiple cases offers the opportunity to examine the research subject from various perspectives (Thomas, 2021). Reporting the findings as a case study helps to narrow down the study's focus and delve into the views of participants who share similar perspectives. In this study, the insights provided by eight participants (five males and three females) were purposefully selected to reflect diverse experiences and perspectives; as a case study, the aim was depth rather than statistical representativeness. Their individual experiences and perspectives on language learning in Iran provided valuable and comprehensive knowledge regarding its impact on cultural practices.

Author 1 conducted the data collection and interviewed the volunteers separately in a mutually agreed location. Popular Iranian names are used to protect the privacy of participants (see Table 1). Interviews were recorded, and author 1 referred to his reflective journal to enhance the data analysis.

Table 1
Interview participants' profile

No.	Name	Sex	Profile
1	Amir	Male	Amir is an 18-year-old high school graduate who intends to take the Iranian national university entrance exam soon which includes English knowledge. He wants to be an English teacher in the future.
2	Amirhossein	Male	Amirhossein is very confident in his English knowledge and proud of his polished British accent that he acquired from movies and British podcasts. He is 18 years old and a final-year high school student.
3	Bahram	Male	Bahram holds a BA degree in business administration and teaches English. He is 26 years old and enjoys reading Persian books, studying a range of subjects that are outside his field of expertise.
4	Mahdi	Male	Mahdi is 20 years old and besides studying English for six years in a private language school, he studies accounting at a university. He is practising for the IELTS test to find better international opportunities in future.
5	Mohammad-Reza	Male	Mohammad-Reza is studying political science at a local university. He is 21 years old and encourages people around him to learn English.
6	Hanieh	Female	Hanieh is 24 years old and married. She is currently studying her BA in English translation and teaches English to adult advanced level students.
7	Shirin	Female	Shirin studies her BA in executive management in a newly established university, near to her home. She is 24 years old and single.
8	Behnaz	Female	Behnaz is a high school graduate and passionate about learning English. She is 20 years old and married. She views education and English as a pathway to a better life.

The authors of this paper embraced the concept of reflexivity, which holds significant importance in qualitative research (Cooper & Rogers, 2014). Reflexivity focuses on researchers' personal experiences and their relationships with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Author 1 shares the participants' cultural background and prior professional context. This fostered trust with the participants but also required constant reflexive attention to power dynamics. During the data collection process, author 1 developed a significant relationship as a critical friend of the participants and was mindful of power dynamics and power imbalances. Understanding and addressing this power relationship is crucial for maintaining the integrity of a study (Leavy, 2017). Author 1 was aware of both shared understandings and the potential for bias. For example, in interviews with former students, prior teacher–learner dynamics occasionally shifted the tone of responses, either fostering openness or creating hesitancy. To address this, Author 1 explicitly framed interviews in a manner that encouraged participants to challenge his interpretations and conducted follow-up questions to clarify meaning.

Author 1 transcribed the recorded interviews and conducted a thematic analysis following Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) five-step analysis process. This process involved familiarisation with the data, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. After the initial analysis, authors 2 and 3 contributed to the interpretation of key findings and their connection to relevant literature.

The involvement of multiple researchers with distinct roles allowed for the utilisation of three out of four of Brookfield's (1995) critical reflexive lenses. This facilitated the management of researchers' subjectivity and ensured the preservation of the study's structural integrity. Following Brookfield's model of reflection, author 1 maintained a reflective journal to document personal self-reflection and engaged with the other authors for peer reflection and further understanding. Authors 2 and 3, experienced researchers, assumed outsider roles, observing the data collection process and participating in the in-depth thematic analysis stage.

Analysis and findings

This study explores adult Iranian language learners' investment in English language learning against the current Iranian political climate. The authors identified the dynamics of global and local factors influencing learners' commitment toward English language learning. Participants, in their words, established their investment in English language learning considering local factors and interactions with global sources. These local factors included the significance of English as added value in the real-time needs of Iranian language learners, the integration of English with current technological and global developments, and its role in communication with the international world. These factors go hand in hand with the global benefits of learning English, and it is argued affect adult Iranians' cultural practices in various ways.

Factors shaping adult Iranian language learners

Adult Iranian language learners' investment is shaped by interlinked factors, including parental influence, socio-economic conditions, technological access, globalisation, and the perceived status of English as a global language. As stated earlier, investment in English language learning among Iranian language learners is influenced by a combination of local and global factors. The data revealed that these factors include cultural and societal influences, socio-economic environment, globalisation and international communication, and access to resources. These influencing factors are interconnected and dynamic.

The interviews highlighted the impact of family and parental influence on learners' investment in English and its societal importance. Bourdieu (1977) contends that environmental influences such as parents and family dispositions toward English language learning inform learners' perceptions and appreciation of a language. Participants' parents played a significant role in shaping participants' outlook towards English, emphasising its relevance for future career prospects. For instance, Mohammad-Reza's mother, despite not having studied English herself, recognised the value of learning English and encouraged him to learn it. Mohammad-Reza speculated on her mother's reasons, saying, "*I think it is because of her experience, she knows that if I learn English, it is useful in future, and now I think she is right*". For a range of reasons parents viewed the learning of English in a positive way and as benefiting the future lives of their children. Mahdi and Amir described their parents' views on learning English as their

parents wanting them to be prepared for the future and learn English to enhance their career pathway. Mahdi believes his father knew the importance of English and supported his learning of the language. Amir commented that his "*parents are not educated, but they care about English, and they say it's good for your future. My brother says you can find a better job, and you can be a teacher and get higher salaries*".

The accumulation of capital, as defined by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) as resources obtained through networks of relationships, also plays a role in Iranian language learners' motivations to learn English. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). Participants, such as Amir, Mohammad-Reza, and Mahdi, identified various purposes for learning English, such as travelling, career advancement, immigration, and adapting to economic conditions in the country. Learning English is perceived to acquire desirable social capital in Iranian society, offering broader lifestyle opportunities and employment prospects compared to other languages. Bourdieu's (1977) definition of capital can be drawn on to explain reasons for learning English, which involve providing Iranians with a broader lifestyle and employment opportunities that are not available through the learning of other languages. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is accessible to individuals who actively strive to acquire, and they work to achieve that power or status.

Socio-economic factors also influenced Iranian adults' commitment to learning English. The participants (Amir, Mahdi, and Amirhossein) acknowledged the impact of Iran's political and economic circumstances on their considerations of immigration, which in turn led them to invest time and money in English language learning. "*The current financial situation, the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar, and the perceived low quality of life in Iran*" were highlighted by Amir as socio-economic factors contributing to his motivation to learn English. Norton's investment theory emphasises the role of the learner as an agent in language learning (Pierce, 1995). Amir's comment highlights the influence of socio-economic considerations on language learners' decision-making process (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

As an international language, English provides the participants with external perspectives on the world, expanding their cosmopolitan outlook. Additionally, it supports their understanding of their own society. Hanieh perceives learning English as a way to enter a broader world, stating, "*you know it's like you are living in a small place, then your world will be bigger, you will see everything more clearly*". Amirhossein and Hanieh shared their appreciation for learning English as a means to learn about Iran and access information that is not available in Persian. Amirhossein mentioned, "*I have connected [dots about religion] with each other, and some English sources have helped me to be atheist ... as we do not have Persian sources for this [atheism], it is a religious fact and having no freedom*". He openly declared his atheism and believed that English knowledge enables Iranians to gain a better understanding of the situation they are living in.

English has become closely associated with technology and computer science in Iranian society due to the influence of mass media, the internet, and social networks (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2018). Proficiency in English and computer science is considered essential for career development, as expressed by participants like Shirin and Mahdi. Mahdi remarked how "*nowadays, when you are an accountant, you should work with computers, computers are in English and can solve issues*". These participants view English and digital literacy as interconnected and crucial for self-improvement and professional growth.

The participants unanimously recognised the importance of English for communication with individuals from outside Iran. Learning English was perceived as a survival skill for international relationships (Dolati & Mikaili, 2011) and a gateway to a better life and access to the modern world (Nishanthi, 2018). Bahram clearly stated, "*as you know, English is the international language and the only language that simply solves most of your problems when it comes to communication, reading and learning more so*". English proficiency was seen as crucial for addressing local needs and for using computers and the Internet.

Learning English was also seen as a means to engage in social and political discussions and to challenge inequalities, both within Iran and on the international stage, according to Mohammad-Reza, Amir, and Mahdi. Participants like Amirhossein employ English to share political messages and express their opinions on social inequalities and unfair sanctions. Amirhossein talked about his communication experience with American and English-speaking people through social media. "*We speak a lot about politics … for example, I have a friend in America, Washington DC … and he says a lot about Trump, he says a lot about America and their problems … I say about our economic problems*". Sanctions not only involve governments but also affect people's daily lives.

English and how it is used need to be separated. Smith (2013) notes the requirement, "to distinguish between a language itself and the way that its speakers use it" (p. 10). The participants acknowledged English as an international language with a dominant role in global commerce and communication. Bahram stated,

> "*No matter what we think about this language, this language is the international one. So, we are going to need this, and it has a dominant language in world commerce and let us say a computer or the internet*." (Bahram)

The participants emphasised the necessity of learning English for international communication, travel, business, and academic purposes. According to Behnaz, English was perceived as the most widely used international language, surpassing other Western languages in terms of its value and practicality. Mohammad-Reza shared a similar view with Behnaz, arguing:

> "*[English] is the international language; you have to know it, and it is not optional. I think when you want to travel to other countries, you should be able to communicate, and English is a good way to do that. Travelling, business, lots of things, it is the international language. Nowadays, if you want to write an*

> *article, you should write it in English so the world could see it*." (Mohammad-Reza)

This recognition of English as a global language aligns with the current dominance of English in business contexts and higher education (Sung, 2019). While participants recognised English as a global language, they differentiated it from the broader forces of globalisation. For them, English was primarily a linguistic resource, whereas globalisation encompassed political, economic, and cultural dimensions that sometimes provokes resistance. Baker and Fang (2021) highlight the strong link between English and students' sense of intercultural citizenship. These understandings shape participants' perceptions and beliefs about English language learning, reflecting the significance of the English language around the world.

In addition, the process of globalised English language learning sparks curiosity among learners. Hanieh shared her curiosity about foreign religions and how English played a crucial role in satisfying her curiosity. She explained that when there were no Persian-language resources available, she had to rely on English to access unique versions of the information she wanted to learn. She further stressed that English was indispensable when there were no Iranian versions of the subjects she wanted to explore. English, therefore, serves not only as an international language for learning about other countries but also as a means for participants to gain a deeper understanding of Iran and their own circumstances by expanding their perspectives.

Furthermore, English's popularity for international communication and business purposes, coupled with its historical roots in Iran, reinforces the perception among Iranians that English is a powerful language. For instance, Mahdi, who foregrounded the connection between English and his career, commented on how learning English has benefited him:

> "*Learning English has had numerous advantages in my life. The first one is my job … the second one is the power of communicating with other people and understanding others. [To understand] what's going on around me, understanding movies, music … the power of communication is the most important part when you want to travel overseas or abroad, you have to communicate with other people*." (Mahdi)

Guerrero (2010) describes language learning as providing individuals with automatic and limitless access to economic benefits, creating a sense of belonging to an imagined community, and granting equality and knowledge. The findings indicate that the participants consider English as more than just a linguistic exercise; they view it as an integral part of preparing for the future. These findings highlight the diverse motivations of Iranian language learners for studying English and underscore its impact on Iranian culture and society.

In summary, investment in English language learning among Iranian language learners is shaped by a combination of factors, including parental influence, socio-economic considerations, technology, and the global status of English. The influence of family and

parents, the pursuit of capital, socio-economic factors, technological associations, and the recognition of English as an international language all contribute to the motivations and beliefs of Iranian language learners regarding English language learning. Although participants acknowledged English as a global language, they distinguished it from the wider influences of globalisation. English was viewed as a linguistic tool for communication and knowledge access, whereas globalisation was associated with political and economic shifts, some of which were met with scepticism or resistance.

Acting purposively (Agency)

Agency in this study emerged as learners' capacity to make strategic choices in the face of structural constraints. For example, Amirhossein deliberately used English in online political forums to address international audiences: "*I want them to know what's happening here, directly from us, not from the news*". Such purposeful action reflects the interplay between identity construction and access to global communicative spaces. Mohamad Reza stated, "*I am learning English for travelling and to immigrate to a foreign country; to live and use English for a job, business and pass my exams in both university and high school*". English language learning can invoke learners' curiosity. Hanieh spoke of her endeavour to learn about foreign religions, "*I was curious but there were no books, there were no sources in Persian, so I had to use my English, and it helped me a lot because there were some unique versions of that thing that I wanted to learn*" (Hanieh). She expanded "*sometimes when I want to learn something … when there are not Iranian versions of that thing that I am going to learn, I use English*". English is not just an international language to learn about other countries. The participants suggested that learning and using English helped them to gain a better understanding of their own country and situation by expanding their worldviews.

According to Holland et al. (1998), learners construct their identities through contemplations and interactions with others in a dialogic and dialectic manner. Drawing upon the views of Bakhtin and Vygotsky, Holland et al. (1998) argue that our existence is rooted in practice, and we continually author the meaning of our actions. However, this process of meaning-making is influenced by our surroundings, as we engage with pre-existing materials in the world and negotiate with both internal and external voices. Language learning, as a new resource for self-dialogue, significantly impacts identity formation. Voloshinov emphasises the importance of considering external factors that shape the word and its meaning for a comprehensive analysis of language (Parrington, 1997). This holds true for Iranians learning English or any other language, as language cannot be detached from its cultural and contextual aspects.

Examining the effects of learning and practising English sheds light on how language can influence identity work and learners' development. Scholars adopting a dialogical approach inspired by Bakhtin's Circle describe learners' development as a process of acquiring diverse ways of perceiving the world (Dufva et al., 2014). In the context of this study, learning English and learners' investment in the language engage Iranian language learners in dialogues with others and themselves, leading to the formation of new understandings, perspectives, and the

reproduction of existing ideologies. Learning about different cultures is often a contradictory and ambivalent experience, characterised by varying degrees of identity transformation.

Discussion

The findings of this study are interpreted through Darvin and Norton's (2016) investment model, which conceptualises identity, capital, and ideology as interconnected dimensions influencing language learning. In the Iranian context, these factors operated simultaneously, shaping and being shaped by learners' investment in English.

Learners' identities appeared dynamic and negotiable, moving between local cultural affiliations and global aspirations. English functioned as a tool for imagining new social roles, such as being a global citizen, professional specialist, or political advocate, while also reinforcing aspects of Iranian cultural identity. This fluidity aligns with Norton's (2013) notion that identity is multiple and constantly evolving depending on context. Participants' narratives revealed that English could both challenge and affirm their sense of belonging depending on the situation and interlocutors.

Participants also pursued various forms of capital through their engagement with English. Economic capital was linked to career opportunities and access to international markets; cultural capital was gained through exposure to global knowledge and media; social capital expanded through networks of friends, colleagues, and online communities. These motivations persisted despite restrictive policy environments, supporting Bourdieu's (1991) idea of language as symbolic capital convertible into broader resources.

Government discourses that portrayed English as a threat to cultural and ideological integrity created a contested learning space. Although some participants acknowledged these narratives, most resisted by redefining English as a means of empowerment and global engagement. This ideological negotiation demonstrates learners' active agency in challenging dominant language ideologies to claim ownership over their learning (Moharami, 2021).

Overall, identity, capital, and ideology interacted to shape learners' investment in English. Shifts in identity were often linked with acquiring new forms of capital, while ideological beliefs influenced both identity and the perceived value of English. Recognising this complex interplay helps explain how learners navigate structural constraints while exercising agency, highlighting the importance of educational and policy frameworks that address the nuanced realities of language investment in politically restrictive contexts.

The implications for Iranian society

Learners recognised that using English on a global scale brings numerous benefits and practical applications, even within Iran. The interview data revealed that learning English can serve as

a valuable resource for Iranians to connect with the international community. Motivated by the belief in the advantages it brings, the participants are actively engaged in learning English. These advantages can be both materialistic, such as job opportunities, education, and skill development, as well as non-materialistic, such as enjoying movies, music, reading books, and exploring new perspectives.

Numerous studies highlight that English is viewed by most Iranians as a means to distance themselves from an unsatisfactory socio-economic environment (Ghorbani & Khajavy, 2023; Moharami, 2024). This perspective reflects a power dynamic between language learners and their local needs. Iranians have come to perceive the English language as a pathway to a better life, both financially and socially. The current economic conditions and imposed sanctions on Iran further emphasise the symbolic power of English, as described by Bourdieu (1991), whereby English holds economic dominance over other languages within Iranian society. The participants, including Mahdi, Shirin, Bahram, and Mohammad-Reza, echo this sentiment, illustrating the contrast between Iranian doctrine and the social life of Iranians. English has become an integral part of Iranian society, underscoring the fact that mere policy changes and regulations are insufficient to compel language learning if the language cannot be effectively integrated into daily life.

The English language has deeply permeated various aspects of the participants' lives, presenting lifelong opportunities. Iranian language learners encounter dynamic local and global forces that foster the learning of English and enable their integration into a broader community. The experience of learning English shapes their local and global perspectives. According to the participants, proficiency in English facilitates inclusion in a global society and provides a means to express their voices on a global scale. The desire to be heard and to become part of a larger community is not solely a consequence of the globalisation of English in Iran but is also influenced by their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds, as well as their activities, which shape their perception of English and its associated benefits in Iran.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how adult Iranians invest in English language learning and the associated cultural and societal factors. Using a case study approach, factors were identified that play a crucial role in determining language learners' commitment to learning the English language. These factors include the longstanding presence of English in Iran, learners' perceptions shaped by their parents and social environment, the socio-economic environment of the country, the inseparable connection between English and technological development, and the global acceptance of English. The findings demonstrate a dynamic interaction between local and global factors that shape language learners' investment in learning English.

The study explored investment in English language learning for adult Iranians positioning it against the backdrop of English globalisation. The findings of this study elucidate the presence

of English language learners' interests as an interactive process between learners and their environment. The significance of both local and global factors in shaping the motivations of adult Iranians for learning English was discussed. These local factors influence participants' perceptions and investment in the language.

The study reveals that Iranian English language learners possess an understanding of and connection with their environment, which informs their interest in learning English. Each participant had distinct purposes for learning English driven by their individual needs, perceptions of the language, and its benefits in Iranian society. Examining learners' views and motivations for learning English reflects their imagined advantages of incorporating English into their lives. Imagination allows participants to envision themselves in a world that brings new opportunities and meanings (Wenger, 2010). Therefore, the increased interest of Iranian language learners in learning English is not solely shaped by the hegemony of English or imposed convergence; rather, local factors play a significant role in shaping the commitment of adult Iranian English learners to the language.

The significance of this study lies in the conceptual approach to language learning and identity formation. Globalisation and the perceived hegemony of English suggest the notion of an external force imposing its power on nations to integrate Western culture and language.

Islam holds a central position in Iranian politics, shaping language learning policies (Rassouli & Osam, 2019), and Iranian officials are concerned about potential shifts in the Iranian-Islamic identity of language learners. The perceived hegemonic influence of English poses a threat to Iranian authorities, who employ language policy to promote specific views, beliefs, and perceptions among Iranians to shape an Iranian society that aligns with their concerns (Rashidi & Hosseini, 2019). This study sheds light on the perceived disconnect between these political expectations regarding the experience of learning English and the everyday needs and desires of the participants. Changes in learners' cultural practices and their interest in learning English, as observed in this study, are influenced by their interaction with the environment and their understanding of languages. As Bahram emphasises, to effectively engage with the local and global environment, "*we are going to need this [English] language*".

Conflict of interest

The authors unequivocally state no conflicts of interest in their article. Additionally, they employ rigorous research tools, such as triangulation, to minimise any potential impact on the reported data. This meticulous approach not only ensures data integrity but also enhances the overall credibility of their study within the academic community.

Ethics approval

This study emanates from a PhD thesis and has received ethical approval from Monash University, Australia. Monash University's ethical approval affirms that the study adheres to rigorous ethical considerations, ensuring the protection and well-being of participants involved.

AI acknowledgment

The authors used ChatGPT and Grammarly Premium solely for language refinement and sentence structuring. AI was not employed for literature review development, data analysis, interpretation, or conceptual framing. Its role was limited to enhancing readability, reducing wordiness, and ensuring clarity in phrasing across the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the final work, which reflects their ideas and upholds academic integrity.

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Appendix

Interview questions

1. Background information: age, university education, job.
2. Could you please tell me about your language-learning experiences and the reason for choosing English as your foreign language?
3. Do your family members support your English language learning?
4. What are the benefits of learning English for you?
5. Do you believe English fluency will assist you with further study or work opportunities? If so, how?
6. Is there any gender segregation in your language school? How does it affect your learning?
7. Where and how often do you use English language knowledge?
8. What are some of the challenges of learning English for you? Are there any social obstacles for your language learning in Iran?
9. Are there any cultural factors affecting your English language learning process?
10. What does being an Iranian mean to you?
11. Do you think English language learning has influenced your understanding of your culture or your worldview?
12. Would you recommend English language learning? To whom? Why?

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She takes an interdisciplinary collaborative approach to research, engaging with other disciplines, universities and a range of industry partners.

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Profiling the dynamics among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy shaped by language tutor identity and language assessment literacy: A reflexive thematic analysis of TESOL in community settings

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Abstract

Language tutor identity and language assessment literacy shape teaching practice. Tutors' roles are especially critical in informal, community-based contexts, where they assist learners in one-on-one settings *without* fixed curricular or assessments. While previous studies have examined tutor identity in these contexts from a sociocultural perspective, little attention has been given to their teaching practices from an assessment standpoint. Therefore, this research aims at exploring how language tutors' identities and their language assessment literacy influence pedagogy through curriculum decisions emerging from unintended assessment practices. This qualitative study employed Kremmel and Harding's (2020) language assessment literacy framework to guide the development of the interview schedule. Methodologically, Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement framework was adhered to, ensuring reliability and validity of the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Ten volunteer tutors from an adult English literacy programme in Australia participated in these interviews, which were analysed using ATLAS.ti following Braun and Clarke's (2020) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The analysis revealed three major themes: (1) 'Interaction as Assessment', (2) 'Assessment as Curriculum', (3) 'Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy'. These findings underscore the importance of language tutor education informing purposeful use of assessment in teaching to cohesively link assessment with curriculum and pedagogy in TESOL in community settings.

Keywords: *Assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy; community-based language education; interaction; language assessment literacy; reflexive thematic analysis; socratic questioning; tutor identity.*

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Introduction

Teaching practice is moulded by language tutors' identity (Morgan, 2017). Curriculum selection is determined by their knowledge of the language and pedagogy (Wahlström, 2022). Assessment use is informed by their language assessment literacy (Delgado, 2022). Collectively, language tutors' identities, knowledge of the language, and language assessment literacy form the foundation of the triad of educational practices: pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. But what happens when there is no curriculum or assessment? How does this absence influence tutors' teaching practices? These questions emerge in informal, community-based language teaching context, where a tutor assists a learner in one-on-one settings without fixed curricular or assessments.

One example is a library-based adult English literacy programme in Australia, where volunteer tutors, typically senior, native English-speaking citizens, support adult migrants in developing literacy for everyday life. Their motivation is social inclusion, positioning themselves not as teachers but as neighbours. Although valuable, their involvement as a neighbour may not be sufficient for guiding learners. To address this, tutor training sessions are provided before tutoring begins, as volunteers are not required to be registered teachers or hold TESOL qualifications. However, these sessions do not include dedicated language assessment literacy training, as standardised assessment is not part of the programme. Considering they are expected to teach without pre-determined curricular or assessments, identifying learning gaps and planning a lesson with appropriate materials would be challenging.

To understand how this volunteer tutor-based programme is operationalised, this study initially aimed to explore volunteer tutors' language assessment literacy through (1) their beliefs about language assessment and (2) their language assessment practices. However, the exploratory nature of the study led to unexpected insights through reflexivity in my dual role as both a practitioner researcher and a tutor in the programme. Therefore, I reorganised the findings into three major overarching themes centred on the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in this article to engage a broader audience. This deliberate reflexive approach allows for the revelation of assessment as a pivotal link between curriculum and pedagogy, offering valuable implications for future TESOL practice and tutor training programmes.

Literature review

Defining language assessment literacy

Studies on language assessment literacy trace back to Stiggins's (1991) seminal paper, which questioned what it means to be assessment-literate. Since then, prominent scholars such as Davies (2008), Taylor (2013), and Kremmel and Harding (2020) have contributed significantly to its *theorisation*. While they propose various dimensions of language assessment literacy, they consistently agree on core elements: *knowledge* and *skills* aligned with sound assessment

principles. Specifically, language assessment literacy can be defined as the competence required by each stakeholder to perform assessment tasks effectively, including designing assessments, interpreting results, and making informed decision in accordance with assessment principles (Inbar-Lourie, 2017).

Another line of research has investigated the *application* of language assessment literacy, focusing mainly on three areas: (1) examining the impact of teachers' language assessment literacy on student learning outcomes (Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Mahapatra, 2015), (2) assessing teachers' language assessment literacy (Berry et al., 2019; Gardner & Galanouli, 2016; Hill & McNamara, 2011; Latif & Wasim, 2022), and (3) identifying teachers' language assessment literacy training needs (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2021; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). These studies affirm the significance of teachers' language assessment literacy while also exposing notable shortcomings in teachers' knowledge, particularly among preservice teachers (Díaz-Larenas et al., 2012; Lam, 2015; López-Mendoza & Bernal-Arandia, 2009; Maclellan, 2004; Volante & Fazio, 2007), thereby emphasising the necessity for more comprehensive teacher training.

Although valuable, most existing studies on language assessment literacy have been conducted within formal education systems, with limited attention to community-based contexts. In addition, previous studies on community or other language educational settings have often focused on cultural connectedness and social inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse adults such as migrants or refugees (Balyasnikova, 2020; Dashwood et al., 2023; Gooch & Stevenson, 2020; Hassemer, 2020), leaving a gap in understanding how tutors use assessment in their teaching. Exploring how tutors understand and enact assessment to inform teaching is essential for broadening current models of language assessment literacy. This enquiry aligns with emerging trends that emphasise learning-oriented assessment integrated with everyday teaching rather than accountability-driven test outcomes (Holroyd, 2000).

Learning-oriented formative assessment aims to promote student learning through personalised instructions by assessing each learner's learning needs and teaching to fill the gaps. This necessitates knowledge in utilising assessment consciously in teaching for student learning and an awareness of assessment's impact. Also, sociocultural knowledge in assessment practices is essential as 'language' assessment literacy, unlike other assessment literacies, requires understanding of language as a social inclusion tool (Piller & Takahashi, 2011, cited in Barkhuisen, 2017, p. 62) to communicate to integrate into a community. All the factors combined, the dimensions of language assessment literacy within formative contexts can be categorised into four: (1) *knowledge of educational philosophies*, (2) *purposeful practices*, (3) *context-dependent practices*, and (4) *educational impact* (Kim, 2023).

Identifying language assessment literacy elements required for teachers

Language assessment literacy covers a broad spectrum, ranging from understanding assessment principles to implementing assessment policy. While complete mastery of all its

aspects would be ideal, stakeholders need only the components relevant to their specific professional roles (Pill & Harding, 2013). As this research addresses the aspects of language assessment literacy most pertinent to teachers, it outlines the key elements necessary for them to be considered assessment-literate. Table 1 provides a summary of the core language assessment literacy components identified in earlier frameworks.

Table 1. Minimal language assessment literacy elements for classroom language teachers (Extracted from Kim, 2023, p. 19).

Davies's 3 aspects of LAL (2008)	Taylor's 8 dimensions of LAL (2013)	Kremmel & Harding's 9 factors of LAL (2020)
Knowledge-based	Dimension 1: Knowledge of theory	Factor 7: Language structure, use and development
	Dimension 2: Technical skills	Factor 1: Developing and administering language assessments
		Factor 5: Statistical and research methods
Skill-based	Dimension 4: Language pedagogy	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy
		Factor 8: Washback and preparation
Principle-based	Dimension 8: Scores and decision making	Factor 9: Scoring and rating
	Dimension 3: Principles and concepts	Factor 6: Assessment principles and interpretation
	Dimension 5: Sociocultural values	Factor 3: Assessment policy and local practices
	Dimension 6: Local practice	
	Dimension 7: Personal beliefs/ attitudes	Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes

The elements in the blue and green boxes represent the essential language assessment literacy elements outlined by Taylor (2013) and Kremmel and Harding (2020), respectively. The solid read outlines indicate the minimal language assessment literacy required for teachers: 'Factor 2. Assessment in language pedagogy', 'Factor 8. Washback and preparation', and 'Factor 4. Personal beliefs and attitudes'.

To clarity the meaning of each element, Kremmel and Harding's (2020) survey items representing each factor are used (Table 2 below).

Table 2. Factor 2, 8, and 4 of LAL and the representing items in the survey (Extracted from Kremmel & Harding, 2020).

Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy	(1) how to use assessments to inform learning or teaching goals
	(5) how to use assessments to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses
	(6) how to use assessments to motivate students learning
	(7) how to use self-assessment
	(8) how to use peer-assessment
	(21) how to give useful feedback on the basis of an assessment
Factor 8: Washback and preparation	(19) how to prepare learners to take language assessment
	(23) how assessments can influence teaching and learning in the classroom
	(24) how assessments can influence teaching and learning materials
	(25) how assessments can influenmce the design of a language course or curriculum
Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes	(45) one's own beliefs/attitudes towards language assessment
	(46) how one's own beliefs/attitudes might influence one's assessment practices
	(47) how one's beliefs/attitudes may conflict with those of other groups involved in assessment
	(48) how one's own knowledge of language assessment might be further developed

For instance, 'Factor 2. Assessment in language pedagogy' encompasses six representing items, ranging from knowledge of using assessment for its intended purposes, skills of using self- and peer-assessment, and practices about giving feedback based on test results. These are tightly connected to (1) *knowledge of educational philosophies* and (2) *purposeful practices.* 'Factor 8. Washback and preparation' contains four items, including knowledge of assessment preparation, awareness of assessment influence in teaching, material, and curriculum, mirroring the recognised language assessment literacy element in formative setting, (4) *educational impact*. Moreover, 'Factor 4. Personal beliefs and attitudes' is comprised of four questions regarding teachers' beliefs and attitudes that might influence their teaching and assessment practices. While ostensibly irrelevant to (3) *context-dependent practices*, this factor reflects how teacher agency shapes their context-sensitive practices and assessment identity (Gardner & Galanouli, 2016; Looney et al., 2018). Essentially, the four language assessment literacy elements in formative contexts can be seen to align with the itemised factors identified Kremmel and Harding's survey items (2020), providing a robust theoretical framework for investigating language teachers' assessment literacy in formative educational settings.

Uncovering language tutors' roles in community-based teaching contexts

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes shape their pedagogical and assessment practices, particularly in informal, community-based contexts where tutors typically design and deliver lessons autonomously in response to learners' individual needs. In one-on-one settings with migrants, language tutors often take on four overlapping roles: (1) language and culture informant, (2) visitor, (3) friend, and (4) social worker (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 64).

The most apparent role is teaching language and informing cultural norms to support learners'

integration into a new society. However, as sessions often occur in learners' homes, tutors may also be seen as visitors, who engage in casual conversation over shared meals. These interactions can evolve into deeper connections, with tutors acting as friends who participate in special occasions or help with everyday tasks (O'Hara, 2005, cited in Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 64). In many cases, they serve informally as social workers, assisting with settlement-related challenges rather than focusing solely on teaching grammar or pronunciation. These language teachers' roles bring about a positive impact on community as evidenced by Mahoney and Siyambalapitiya's (2019) systematic review which revealed that community-based language teaching increases newcomers' social inclusion.

Often involved through volunteering, tutors in community-based language programmes have their own motives, such as doing something meaningful, helping others, or sense of community (Volunteering Australia, 2022, cited in Dashwood et al., 2023, p. 5). These psychological and social motivations of volunteers, along with their four roles, shape how tutors interpret learners' needs, approach lesson planning, and engage in informal assessment. Teaching becomes responsive and grounded in real-life experiences, leading to naturally integrated practices that link curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, often without the tutors' conscious intent. This highlights how tutor identity and relationship-based teaching can play a critical role in shaping assessment literacy in community-based contexts.

Methodology

Research design justification

Unlike methods, which refer to the specific techniques used to collect and analyse data, methodology involves the *justification* behind selecting these methods (Crotty, 2003; Wellington, 2000). Therefore, in this qualitative research, providing a clear rationale for the chosen methods of data collection, analysis, and discussion is crucial to ensuring research rigor and credibility.

Data collection.

I selected qualitative semi-structured one-on-one interviews for data collection in order to explore tutors' experiences, their meaning-making processes, and how they articulate these experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To capture real-time thought processes and reasoning, I also incorporated task-based think-aloud interviews and retrospective verbalisation. As shown below, I developed a diagnostic test sheet, adapted from the current pre-test used by the programme manager before matching a learner with a tutor to inform the tutor of the learner's level. I asked the interviewees to interpret test results through six sub-questions.

Example 1. Task-based think-aloud interview questions.

13. Esther has taken a diagnostic test below and received 25 marks out of 100.

The following article has some spelling and punctuation errors.
Circle as many as you can find.
Write the correct spelling underneath and add punctuation.

Jump a bord the gingerbread train at Yandinya's famos Ginger Factory this Chrismas. Meet Santa in his walkshop, get your Chrismas photoes sorted, take in the massive display and shop for unic Aussy gifts at the iconic ginger gift shop. Dont forget to BYO your camera for some epic shouts with Santa!
When: From 2th to 5th Desember
Where: The Ginger Factory
Cost: Free
For more infomation, call xxx-xxx-xxxx

13-1. What do you think the score means?
13-2. What inference can you draw about Esther's writing skills based on her performance in this test?
13-3. After this test, what would you put on the learner record?
13-4. After this test, what kind of feedback would you give to Esther, and how?
13-5. What do you think about this test? (good-why? Not good-why?)
13-6. This test was designed to assess learner's overall writing skills. To what extent do you think this is an effective or appropriate test for that purpose? Please justify your answer.

While reviewing the test and the learner's answers, they were asked to make senses of the score, 25 out of 100, through think-aloud. This process allowed me to observe and understand their assessment literacy in 'Factor 2. How to use assessment for teaching and learning' (p. 6 above), as well as to capture reflections on their current practices through the questions 13-3 and 13-4.

In addition, I asked retrospective questions about their daily teaching practice shown below.

Example 2. Teaching practice retrospective interview questions.

[Teaching Practice Retrospective Questions]

11. Please talk me through about your one-on-one session procedure.

11-1. How do you start your session?
11-2. What (material and/or content) do you usually teach?
11-3. Who talks more, you or your learner?
11-4. Do you give your learner homework?
11-5. How do you plan for your next class?

The questions are to identify whether they incorporate forms of assessment they might not recognise as such, for example, a small talk for error detection or crossword puzzles. This indirect approach was used after I discovered their fixed definition of assessment and negative perceptions toward it. The aim was to verify their actual teaching and assessment practices. Although they strongly claimed not to use assessment when asked directly, I sought to determine whether their teaching practices suggested otherwise.

Data analysis.

For data analysis, I adopted Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which involves developing themes based on collected data and the researcher's theoretical insights (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Given the exploratory nature of my research, Reflexive Thematic Analysis offered a flexible framework to construct a narrative from individual experiences and sense-making processes. This choice was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2020) four theoretical assumptions: constructionist epistemology, experiential orientation, inductive and deductive analysis, and latent coding. By integrating these methodological principles, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of tutors' perceptions and beliefs, contributing to theoretical, developmental, and practical insights in TESOL in community settings.

Research process explanation

Conducting a semi-structured interview requires meticulous construction of interview questions. I adopted the four-phase Interview Protocol Refinement framework as a methodological framework to ensure the reliability of the interview protocols and the validity-by-design of my semi-structured interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Phase	**Purpose of Phase**
Phase 1: Ensuring interview questions align with research questions	To create an interview protocol matrix to map the interview questions against the research questions
Phase 2: Constructing an enquiry-based conversation	To construct an interview protocol that balances enquiry with conversation
Phase 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocol	To obtain feedback on interview protocol (possible activities include close reading and think-aloud activities)
Phase 4: Piloting the interview protocol	To pilot the interview protocol with a small sample

Interview protocol.

Instrument Development Phase 1. Ensuring interview question align with research questions

In instrument development phase 1, I aligned interview questions with research objectives to avoid information gaps (Patton, 2015). I created a matrix to ensure a balanced distribution of questions across all research questions, based on the theoretical framework from Kremmel and Harding's (2020) survey items. Since this study is exploratory, the framework served as a guiding tool rather than a confirmatory measure, offering a conceptual foundation for interview question formulation. I also used spontaneous follow-up questions during interviews to encourage participants to elaborate on their beliefs and practices, revealing the interplay between assessment beliefs and practices. I organised the interview questions by task type (how to ask) and content focus (what to ask), setting the stage for Phase 2 (see Example 3 below).

[Example 3. Interview Matrix]

Kremmel and Harding's (2020) Survey Items (e.g.) F2(1) = How to use assessments to inform learning and teaching goals (Table 2, p.5)

LAL Factors (Refer to Table 2 p. 5)

Interview Questions	F2 (1)	F2 (5)	F2 (6)	F2 (7)	F2 (8)	F2 (21)	F8 (19)	F8 (23)	F8 (24)	F8 (25)	F4 (45)	F4 (46)	F4 (47)	F4 (48)
Q12-1	V	V	V							V	V	V	V	V
Q12-2	V	V	V			V				V	V	V		
Q12-3		V	V	V		V				V	V	V		
Q13-1	V	V						V	V	V	V		V	V
Q13-2	V	V				V		V	V	V	V		V	V
Q13-3			V	V		V		V	V	V	V	V		V
Q13-4						V		V	V	V	V	V		V
Q13-5 /6	V	V	V					V	V	V	V	V	V	V

Tasks	Interview Questions	Research Questions	Core LAL factors that act as a basis for each question
Scenario-based interview questions	*Q12.Participants received a learner profile* Q12-1. How would you assess her proficiency level in writing?	Assessment design : to investigate their BELIEFS about diagnostic assessments : to check their levels of UNDERSTANDING of assessment design for the purpose of identifying learning needs	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy (1), (5), (6), (7), (21) *** As the teaching context is one-on-one situation, "(8) peer-assessment" was excluded.**
	Q12-2. Why do you prefer this approach and/or method?		
	Q12-3. What other methods have you considered and why did you not use them?		
	Q13. Participants were given a test the learner had taken, and the test score Q13-1. What do you think the score means? (25/100)	Score interpretation Uses of test score Test validity : to investigate if assessment results are used in teaching PRACTICES : to check their levels of UNDERSTANDING of test validity for the diagnostic purpose	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy (1), (5), (6), (21) Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes (45), (46), (47), (48) Factor 8: Washback and preparation (23), (24), (25) *** As this task is designing a diagnostic assessment, "(19) how to prepare learners for assessment" was excluded.**
	Q13-2. What inference can you draw about Esther's writing skills based on her performance in this test?		
	Q13-3. After this test, what would you put on the learner record?		
	Q13-4. After this test, what kind of feedback would you give to Esther, and how?		
	Q13-5. What do you think about this test? (good-why? Not good-why?) Q13-6. This test was designed to assess learner's overall writing skills. To what extent do you think this is an effective or appropriate test for that purpose? Please justify your answer.		

Instrument Development Phase 2. Constructing enquiry-based conversation

In Phase 2, I aimed to balance enquiry and conversation by designing an interview protocol that: (1) rephrases research questions into interview-friendly formats, (2) follows the flow of natural conversation, (3) includes a variety of question types, and (4) features prepared follow-up prompts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I structured interview questions as open-ended prompts with follow-up options, maintaining flexibility for clarification and deeper probing based on skills supported by my previous job as a journalist. To build rapport, I started with background questions before moving into research-specific topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A variety of interview tasks ensured comprehensive insights into tutors' assessment beliefs and practices, organised into five sections:

- Background Questions: Exploring personal beliefs and experiences.
- Perceptions of Assessment: Directly investigating definitions and opinions.
- Teaching Practice Retrospectives: Examining beliefs and practices.
- Scenario-Based Questions: Understanding real-world application.
- Sentence Completion: Revealing underlying perceptions and beliefs.

This approach facilitated rich, meaningful conversations, capturing diverse perspectives on assessment practices. Below are scenario-based interview questions to assess their language assessment literacy in using assessment to inform teaching.

Example 4. Scenario-based Interview questions.

12. You have been assigned a new learner, Esther, and this is your first session with her.

Learner profile

- Name: Esther Hoffman
- Nationality: Israel
- Previous occupation: Event organiser
- Level of education: Master of Business
- Number of years in Australia: 2 years
- Current job: Volunteering as an event organiser at a community centre on the Sunshine Coast
- Learning goal: English test preparation for permanent residency
- Likes: Listening to music, watching movies
- Dislikes: Memorising vocabulary, reading a book

12-1. How would you assess her proficiency level in writing?
12-2. Why do you prefer this approach and/or method?
12-3. What other methods have you considered and why did you not use them?

Instrument Development Phase 3. Receiving feedback on interview protocol

After composing interview questions, I shared them with my colleague to double check its validity. This process was done twice before and after piloting to confirm a final version of interview questions.

Instrument Development Phase 4. Piloting the interview protocol

I conducted a pilot study with two tutors, evaluating timing (60 minutes, appropriate), clarity (satisfactory), and organization of the interview protocol. I reordered the "Perception Towards Assessment" section from last to second to capture original perceptions before tutors responded to other questions. However, this change revealed that the issue was not question order but rather tutors' unclear understanding of assessment definitions. Despite the adjustment, tutors remained uncertain about the different assessment types and purposes. Rather than as a limitation, I interpreted this as a finding, highlighting the lack of clarity in assessment literacy among tutors, which is not included in this article as the focus on this article is not assessment literacy but assessment practice in class.

Data generation.

Participants

After ethics approval, I recruited ten tutors through emails sent by the programme supervisor and snowball sampling. Out of eleven potential participants, one deferred, leaving ten interviews completed. The participants (3 males, 7 females) were volunteers in the adult literacy programme on the Sunshine Coast, Australia, with 1 to 15 years of experience. As participation was voluntary, participant characteristics were not pre-determined. After the interviews, it was revealed that all were native English speakers, aged 69 to 85, and retired from roles such as nurse, accountant, police officer, marketer, builder, and teacher. Only one participant was a registered secondary English teacher, and three had vocational teaching experiences as a manager in their professional fields, such as police and emergency service, midwifery, and construction.

Instructional context

This research was conducted at a library-based adult English literacy programme run by the Sunshine Coast Council. The programme includes group lessons, such as conversation class or reading class, led by paid teachers for adult migrants and a few first-language speakers with language disorders or limited formal educations. Volunteer tutors, typically senior citizens, assist individual learners during these sessions and also meet them weekly for one-on-one classes outside the group setting.

Without fixed curricular or assessments, tutors act as curriculum designers, assessors, and teachers, tailoring lessons to each learner's needs. Most learners aim to improve English for community integration, often to gain employment or pass tests such as a driver's licence or citizenship exam, resulting in a need-based curriculum.

Semi-structured interviews

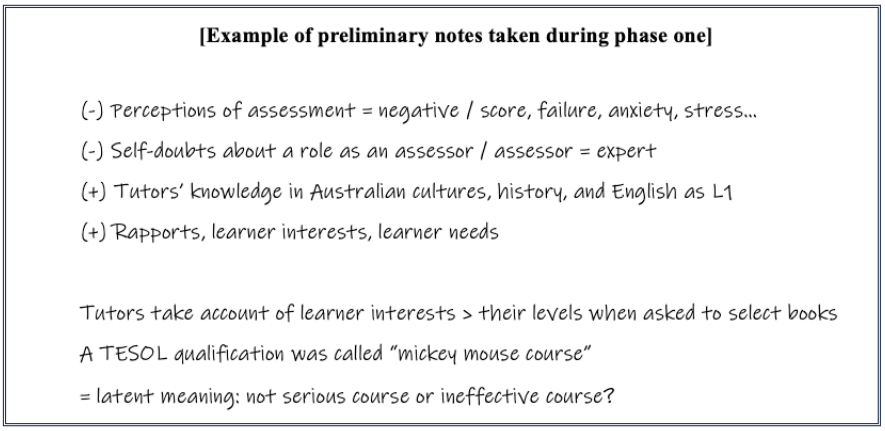
I conducted 60-minute one-on-one interviews with 10 tutors at a library, audio-recording the sessions. The interviews followed the planned questions, with additional prompts when needed for clarification. I manually transcribed the recordings and used YouTube's auto-transcription for cross-checking. From the transcription phase, I started my data analysis based on Reflexive Thematic Analysis through a six-phase process. This methodological framework is recursive and iterative, allowing flexibility to revisit earlier phases as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Data analysis.

Data Analysis Phase 1. Familiarisation with the data

In the initial data analysis phase, I immersed myself in the interview data through repeated readings of the transcripts to identify relevant information for the research questions. I used verbatim transcription, noting pauses, repeated speeches, and gap fillers, and later cleaned up the text for clarity in the results section.

To ensure accuracy, I cross-checked manual transcriptions with YouTube's auto-transcription and sent transcripts to participants for clarification and confidentiality checks. Despite being time-consuming, this process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data without selective filtering (Braun & Clarke, 2020).


[Example of preliminary notes taken during phase one]

(-) Perceptions of assessment = negative / score, failure, anxiety, stress...
(-) Self-doubts about a role as an assessor / assessor = expert
(+) Tutors' knowledge in Australian cultures, history, and English as L1
(+) Rapports, learner interests, learner needs

Tutors take account of learner interests > their levels when asked to select books
A TESOL qualification was called "mickey mouse course"
= latent meaning: not serious course or ineffective course?

I took detailed notes, capturing observations, theoretical connections, research question relevance, and my emotional responses. I also created a summary table of participants' answers, facilitating familiarisation and identifying patterns and differences in responses. This multifaceted approach set a strong foundation for the subsequent phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Data Analysis Phase 2. Generating initial codes

In Phase 2, I generated initial codes as building blocks for theme development (Byrne, 2022) using ATLAS.ti to organise coding systematically. The codes were initially based on Kremmel and Harding's (2020) assessment literacy factors, which generated 38 theory-driven codes (e.g., "score uses for informing goals", "feedback based on assessment") and 21 data-driven codes (e.g., "test validity", "tutors' sociocultural knowledge"), providing a balanced foundation for theme development.

[Example of final initial codes during phase two]

	A	B
1	Code	Comment
2	*Factor 6? principles - practicality	data-driven
3	*Factor2 (2)assessing to check improvement	data-driven
4	*Factor3 (13) culturally insensitive	data-driven
5	*Factor6 (32)test validity	data-driven
6	*Factor6 (43) different purposes	data-driven
7	*Factor6 (44) different forms of assessment -learning needs	data-driven
8	*Factor6 (44) Teaching/Assessment -interaction	data-driven
9	*Factor7 (26)tutor knowledge in English	data-driven
10	*Factor7 (28)tutor knowledge in socioculture	data-driven
11	Factor2 (1)score uses for informing goals	theory-based
12	Factor2 (3) assessing for achievement	theory-based
13	Factor2 (5)comprehension check with speaking	theory-based
14	Factor2 (5)diagnostic assessment	theory-based
15	Factor2 (5)diagnostic assessment design task	theory-based
16	Factor2 (5)what to measure	theory-based
17	Factor2 (6)authentic use of English	theory-based
18	Factor2 (6)learner autonomy	theory-based
19	Factor2 (6)purpose of testing should be	theory-based
20	Factor2 (7)self-assessment	theory-based

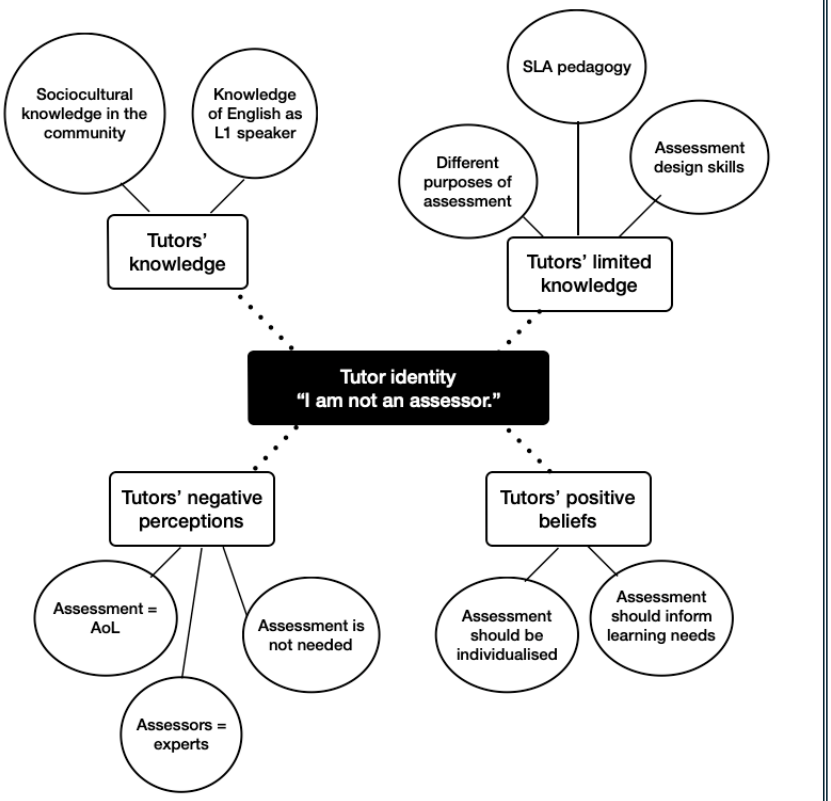
Data Analysis Phase 3. Generating themes

After generating codes, I shifted focus from individual data to aggregated meaning interpretation across the dataset (Byrne, 2022). I merged similar codes, eliminated overly broad or narrow codes, and drew on my familiarity with the data, research questions, and educational assessment theories to shape themes effectively. The themes did not emerge naturally from the data but were actively developed by interpreting relationships among codes.

Five themes were created, including "We don't need assessment in this programme.", "I am not an assessor", "I know her level by just having a conversation.", "I was not assessing her,

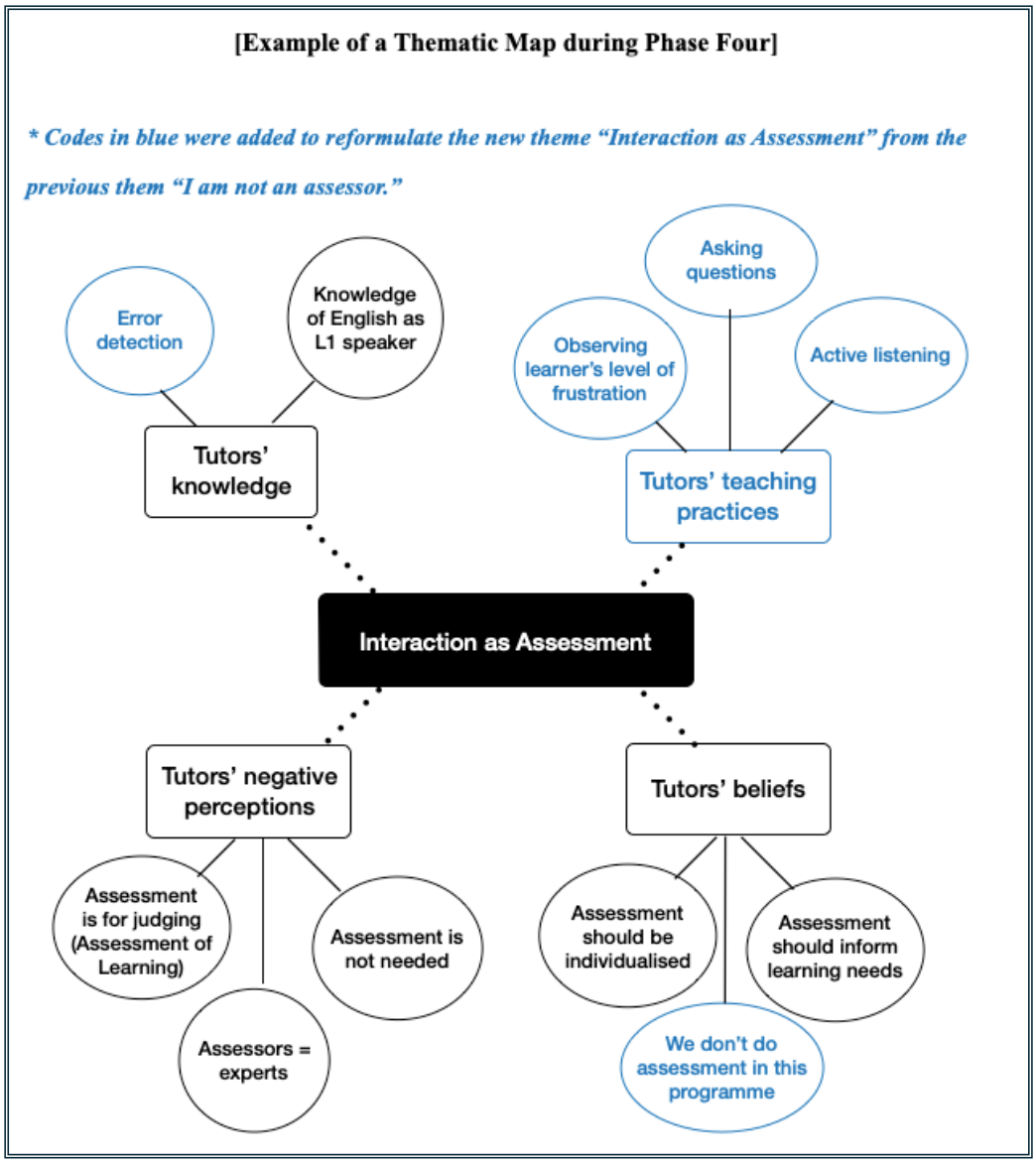
just helping her doing a fill-in-the-blank activity.", and "She had to take a test, so we went through the online modules together.". Illustrated below is among one theme, "I am not an assessor.", that reflects tutors' self-identity based on the combination of their sociocultural understanding of the community, limited knowledge in language teaching, negative perceptions of assessment, and ideal assessment practices.

[Example of a thematic map during phase three]



Data Analysis Phase 4. Reviewing potential themes

The initial focus of this study was to explore tutors' perceptions and assessment practices. However, during data analysis, an unexpected theme emerged, highlighting the dynamic interplay between the programme's non-fixed curriculum and tutors' teaching practices. While examining tutors' teaching practices, I noticed they conduct informal oral assessment to gauge their learners' learning needs, which they think is not an assessment. This showed that their assumed teaching practices are actually assessment in the form of interaction.



I restructured the analysis to let the emerging themes revolve around the interplay among curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, integrating my theoretical knowledge and post-literature review insights. This adaptive approach aligns with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, where the literature review is used not for confirmation but to support exploration after data generation (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Byrne, 2022; Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis Phase 5. Defining and naming themes

Initially, I attempted to follow the guideline provided by Braun and Clarke (2020) by naming themes using positive or negative connotation and incorporating illustrative words from anecdotes. For instance, I named a theme on assessment practices, *'I wasn't assessing her, just helping her doing a fill-in-the-blank activity.'* to show the interviewee's negative connotation around assessment despite its implicit presence in their teaching practices. While this approach

enriches data interpretation, my primary objective was to identify the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy. To ensure clarity and avoid any ambiguity, I opted to rename the theme *'Assessment as Curriculum'* by using precise and explicit wording.

Data Analysis Phase 6. Producing the report

The exploratory qualitative research reporting based on Reflexive Thematic Analysis differs from traditional reporting styles, particularly due to the integration of the literature review into discussion section to emphasise discovery (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Terry et al., 2017). While I acknowledge the rationale behind this approach, I sought to minimise any imbalance that might be caused by omitting a standalone literature review. Therefore, I followed a conventional writing style while reporting my research procedure and methodological justification transparently. This approach allowed me to present my exploratory study in a structured and academically conventional manner.

Findings

This qualitative study explored the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in a community English language programme, where neither curricular nor assessments exist. Three key themes emerged from the data: (1) Interaction as Assessment, (2) Assessment as Curriculum, and (3) Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy.

Each theme is explained based on the overall claim, excerpts with the question asked, and the connection between the excerpts and the claim.

Theme 1. Interaction as Assessment

This theme demonstrates how learner's learning needs are identified through interaction in a context without assessments. Below are the excerpts in response to 'Q4. Can you describe some characteristics of the students you have taught, such as their first language and proficiency levels?' and the follow-up question, 'How do you know your learner's level and their learning needs?'.

> *I've built an understanding of what her level is and as I said it's based on her **reactions**, her levels of frustration where she starts getting bored, I always check, you know, how she **interacts** with the process and also how she relates to the subject matter and that's done through her level of competence shown by answering my questions and by showing interesting questions thrown to me.* [P7]

> *Well, you'd make that decision on just the* ***interaction*** *you have with her and* ***observation****. Actually, I've only recently discovered in the last couple of weeks when we read something together. When I* ***asked*** *her to tell me what she's understood by what we've just read, she spoke perfectly, but then when I asked her to write out as much as she can, her spelling wasn't too bad, but sentence composition was, so you'd soon work out how much or how little she is capable of doing.* [P6]

The tutors mentioned that they can check their learners' proficiency level by observing their learners' responsiveness to the task, such as their level of frustration, answers, and questions they ask back to the tutors. While most tutors responded that they do not need assessment in this programme, hence not practicing any assessment, they actually use observation and interaction to check their learners' level of understanding, which is another form of assessment.

Theme 2. Assessment as Curriculum

This theme shows how tutors select a classroom material and plan their lessons. At the core is assessment that shapes curriculum. The excerpts below were from the responses to teaching practice retrospective questions (Q11.1-5), one of which was 'Which material and/or content do you usually teach?':

> *For instance, with the 'thorough-through-and-though' um I just did a big sheet and took out those words and then she had to put the right writing of the words in the right spots… when we did like crosswords and all sorts of stuff like that she doesn't like it so we did a lot* ***of fill in the blanks or sentences*** *instead… I did not consider it assessment because I wasn't assessing her. She was just doing it with a little bit of help from me and it's just something again it was I would call that extending her vocabulary.* [P9]

> *… "Will you fail the students?" No, so you really have to prepare what the student wants out of this. Just what I was saying about here, you've got to work backwards, you've got to know what you need to do for those students to feel they've achieved from that piece of assessment. Okay, I want them to succeed. I want them to feel they're succeeding.* [P5]

> *My student's had to take* ***this driver's licence*** *so just working through with her all the* ***online modules*** *and helping her understand some of the complexity in the language that would be one of the activities that I do, which is sort of not strictly within the programme, but anything that helps develop her skills and her as a person.* [P10]

> *She needs to get a **Certificate 3 in English** so she can do aged care certificate and she wanted to do that, but she can't do it now because her English isn't good enough. So, we're sort of working towards that and trying to get her to speak more and more, increase her vocabulary, increase her writing skills.* [P6]

> *She just had to take her **citizenship test**, so we went through **the whole book** together, there was 46 pages and it took us four lessons. It's funny because I didn't necessarily want to do it, but she suggested, she said in a few weeks she had to take the test, so I helped her prepare for sure… you know, this is a library literacy programme, so in this context, it should be a cause for really just seeing their improvement in life.* [P9]

The first interviewee's response that they use fill-in-the-blank to help their learners to close the learning gaps indicates that they use assessment for learning materials while denying that it is not an assessment. Furthermore, some tutors said that they adjust their session content based on a learner's requests. As learners are mostly migrants, they need to take summative assessment for a visa, a citizenship test, or even a driver's licence test in English. Although tutors perceive assessment as something negative, they acknowledged the importance of the assessment results for their learners' life in Australia, deciding to help them prepare for the test by going through online modules together as curriculum.

Theme 3. Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy

This theme illustrates how tutors without teaching qualification manage their class. As they lack systematic pedagogy, they rely on asking questions, unintentionally helping their learners think about their thinking process. When asked to talk me through about their one-on-one session procedure (Q11), which includes "How do you start your session?", the tutors said that they started with a small talk, followed by the processes below.

> *… So, I said "Let's go through the instructions first because you've missed some tasks.", "**Why** do you think they are incorrect?", "**What** do you think the word should be?", "Let's write that down and then we'll get on to the ones you've missed."* [P1]

> *.. she brings me article that she wants to write about or actually has written before she posts it, and we actually go through it, "so you wrote this, **what** did you write that I need to understand?" and sometimes ask "Explain the context of what you've done."* [P2]

The first interviewee used a problem-solving strategy, from problem justification ("Why do you think they are incorrect?") to potential solution ("What do you think the word should be?"). The second interviewee focused on pragmatics and contexts of their learner's writing by asking

them to explain the purpose of their writing. These show that they do not teach or provide a direct answer but ask questions, which can help learners reflect on their performance.

Overall, it is uncovered that tutors use interactions to assess learning needs, activities or summative assessment mock tests as curriculum and classroom materials, and Socratic Questioning as pedagogy to allow learners to think about their thinking process, eventually assisting them in engaging in their own learning process.

Discussion

Teaching is an iterative process of filling a learning gap for learners. Therefore, teachers should understand the learners' current level of understanding and the content needed to fill the gap. Without a proper learner evaluation and learning content, the act of teaching is meaningless. At the core of this complete cycle, *assessment-curriculum-pedagogy*, is assessment, one that can inform about the learners and their learning needs to initiate curriculum planning, followed by teaching.

The community-based literacy programme I investigated has no pre-determined assessments or curricular, resulting in distinctive teaching practices. Figure 1 illustrates how assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy are shaped based on tutors' self-identity and their (lack of) language assessment literacy.

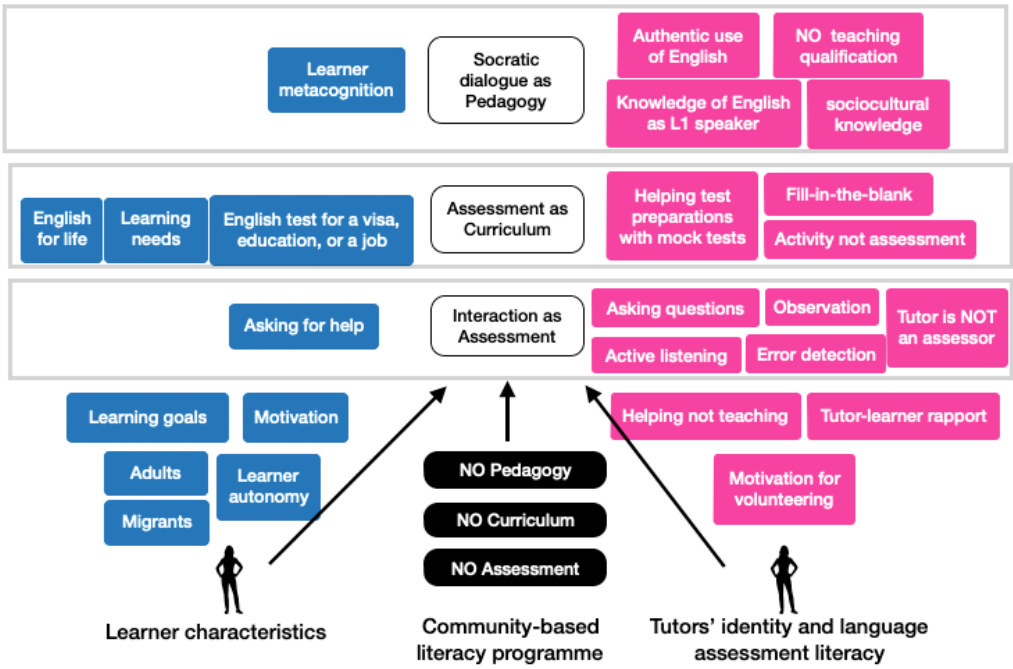


Figure 1. Interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in the community-based literacy programme.

The left side of the figure outlines learners' characteristics in the programme, showing that they

are adult migrants with clear learning goals and motivation to learn English. The right side of the figure shows tutors' identity and (lack of) language assessment literacy. Tutors' motivation for volunteering in this programme is to help newly joined community members to settle in as a welcoming neighbour. Since the programme does not have a fixed assessment or curriculum and tutors are not required to hold teaching qualifications, they often begin first meetings with small talk, extending the conversation to build rapport with their learners. During the conversation, they observe their learners' responsiveness and detect errors through active listening, which acts as **assessments** that inform their learners' proficiency level and learning gaps for them to fill in.

After they identify frequent errors through multiple interactions, this informs the content to teach and they use 'activities' such as fill-in-the-blank tasks or crossword puzzles to fill the gaps, shown as Assessment as Curriculum in the second layer of Figure 1. Due to their lack of assessment literacy and negative perceptions of assessment as a mere judging tool, they often deny their assessment practices, calling them activities. Often, motivated learners with their own learning goals like passing summative assessments (e.g., driver's licence, citizenship, or English proficiency tests) ask for help for test preparations needed for settling in Australia. These goals represent 'authentic learning' using 'authentic items' to enhance real-world English use. As tutors' motivation is to help their learners integrated in the community, they focus on learners' request, test preparations, as a curriculum, integrating assessment items into the **curriculum** (Yan & Boud, 2021).

As investigated by previous studies, tutors in community language education settings provide cultural and social inclusions to adult migrants through their sociocultural knowledge about their community and their identity as a neighbour helping their community members settle in. Interestingly, however, this study revealed that their lack of assessment literacy and teaching qualification actually promote Socratic Questioning by asking questions to allow for learners' metacognitive development, essential strategies for lifelong learning, rather than one-way knowledge transfer, showing positive **pedagogy**. This dynamic and collaborative model demonstrates assessment as the central element connecting curriculum and pedagogy.

Although positive, this interplay is an unintended positive consequence. Also, tutors' negative perceptions of assessment still exist, with lack of understanding of various types and purposes of assessment. Consolidating the positive practice means that practices should align with the intended purpose. Therefore, as highlighted in the previous studies, the needs for comprehensive teacher training, where they can improve their language assessment literacy, should be fulfilled. The question is, which elements of language assessment literacy should be provided in tutor training in the community-based literacy programme.

In the literature review section, four dimensions were identified as language assessment literacy required for tutors in community-based contexts: *(1) knowledge of educational philosophy, (2) purposeful practices, (3) context-dependent practices, and (4) educational impact* (in this article, p.3). As uncovered through this study, their (3) context-dependent practices and (4) educational impact are positive. However, (1) knowledge of educational philosophy, especially

about teaching content, should be incorporated in tutor training. Current practices only involve error detections and corrections, so expanding their knowledge of teaching based on sociocultural theory of learning could help them shape solid teaching practices, such as incorporating dynamic assessment as a systematic assessment, rather than from a small talk. More important is (2) purposeful practices, given their conflict perceptions about assessment as a judging tool (Assessment *of* Learning) while simultaneously using activities, such as quizzes and puzzles, as Assessment *for/as* Learning. Educating this clear demarcation among three -Assessment *of* Learning, Assessment *for* Learning, and Assessment *as* Learning- can help them use appropriate assessment that fits purposes. As much as tutor's use of assessment is core in teaching in community-based language education contexts, tutor training should provide language assessment literacy that can inform them to use assessment with intention in teaching for student learning. Future research can focus on concrete tutor training programme and its impact on learning.

This study offers both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it identifies key language assessment elements required for tutor training in community-based language teaching contexts. Methodologically, it demonstrates meticulous application and transparent documentation of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and employs Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement framework to enhance the reliability of the interview design.

Conclusion

This study revealed how tutors in community language education settings unintentionally integrate assessment into teaching through interaction, curriculum adaptation, and dialogic questioning, fostering learner metacognitive development.

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the retrospective nature of self-report data captured tutors' implicit practices but not their direct impact on learner outcomes. Future research could combine tutor self-reports with observational data from tutoring sessions to compare stated beliefs with enacted practices. Second, collecting data at a single time point limited the ability to track changes over time. Longitudinal studies could explore how tutors' perspectives and practices evolve. Third, the study focused solely on tutors' perspectives so future work could incorporate learner perspectives to understand how the assessment-curriculum-pedagogy relationship is experienced from learners' perspectives.

The findings have several implications for multiple stakeholders. Language tutors in similar contexts can better support their learners by recognising and purposefully applying informal assessment strategies, such as questioning, scaffolded feedback, and task adaptation. For curriculum developers and programme administrators, designing flexible resources and guidelines that embed assessments as curricular into community programmes could help tutors connect informal practices with learning objectives. For teacher educators, integrating language assessment literacy training into tutor preparation courses can help build awareness

of how assessment informs curriculum decisions and teaching strategies by clearly explaining various assessment types and their purposes.

The shift toward assessment-centred pedagogy highlights assessment's new role in shaping curriculum and instruction, challenging the traditional divide between teaching and assessment and offering new opportunities to enhance learning in community-based contexts.

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Supporting assessment of EAL/D student writing: A concrete example of exploring genre-based feedback in pre-service teacher education coursework

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Abstract

Providing useful feedback on student writing is a challenging task, requiring an understanding of the specific language expectations in assignments teachers give students. Studies have shown that teachers are more likely to give corrective feedback on surface-level errors than attend to meaning-making linguistic resources. The question is how to prepare teachers in pre-service teacher education to notice and respond to genre and register expectations. This paper shares one concrete example from an educational linguistics course in a master's degree program in education with a secondary school teaching certification in the United States. Pre-service teachers from five different disciplines were instructed on basic concepts related to systemic functional linguistics and their utility in recognizing and unpacking the norms of disciplinary language. The paper explores how and to what extent nine of the pre-service teachers in the course targeted surface-level or meaning-making writing skills when using a genre-based rubric and when subsequently considering lesson activities. The analysis shows that the pre-service teachers incorporated genre-based ideas in their feedback but struggled to move away from teaching activities that focused on prescriptive, constrained skills. We conclude by discussing what genre-based activities can offer in initial teacher education and argue for the need for more explicit sharing of teacher education instructional strategies.

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Introduction

Educational linguistics classes in teacher education are often a part of programs that train language teachers, where the language is the content to be taught and grammar and linguistics is an expected part of the curriculum. Increasingly, however, language and literacy educators and researchers have advocated for the need for all teachers to understand the language expectations of their content area and support the literacy development of diverse students in the classroom (e.g., Turkan et al., 2014). Teachers in all disciplines are expected to assign students writing tasks and then assess and provide feedback on the assignments (Smagorinsky, 2014). Giving feedback, however, can be a challenging task if teachers are not explicitly aware of the language demands of texts in their content area (e.g., Agbayahoun, 2016). This paper explores how teacher educators can scaffold learning through a rubric to assess student writing for pre-service teachers (PSTs) in different content areas through offering an example from teacher education coursework and exploring how the PSTs engaged with the task.

One of the challenges in training PSTs to assess and give feedback on student writing is that teachers often focus on grammatical 'errors' – syntax, punctuation, spelling, etc. – and not the larger structural and meaning-making resources in a text (Ballock & McQuitty, 2023). In addition, there is a dialect of English privileged in schools (see Schleppegrell, 2001 or 2004 for the linguistic features of "the language of schooling") and students who are learning that dialect of English are often viewed through a deficit lens. Feedback often focuses on what they struggle to do rather than acknowledging the wealth of communicative resources they bring with them (Mallinson, 2024). Research shows PSTs can benefit from opportunities in teacher education programs to question their assumptions and biases about language and communication (Wiese et al., 2015), as well as explicit ways to talk about expectations for texts in their discipline (Schleppegrell, 2020). Wiese et al. (2015), for example, show how a teacher training program that targeted attitudes toward linguistic diversity had a positive effect on the attitude of teachers toward multilingualism and that the effects held several months after the training.

The teacher education course assignment described in this paper used a genre-based approach to draw attention to meaning-making resources in writing and support PSTs from different content areas in identifying aspects of writing to work on with students learning English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D). Using genre-oriented rubrics, the course assignment encourages the PSTs to notice structural and linguistic features of a text that relate to the genre and context. The goal of the assignment was to scaffold an opportunity to provide feedback on more open-ended

writing features. The paper explores what takeaways can be drawn from looking at PSTs work on such an assignment, and what the next steps would be for teacher education and teacher training.

Framing

Teacher feedback and teacher education

Writing assignments given in primary and secondary schools are intended to help students develop communication skills effectively across a range of contexts and feedback can help students "develop their writing voice" (Clements, 2023). School writing assignments address a range of genres and registers across disciplines and through years of schooling, including narratives, recounts, explanations, and discussions (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Learning to write in different genres for classroom assignments offers a space to support students in explicitly understanding what different texts require of them and adjusting their choices for the intended audience and purpose (Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2011).

However, existing research on giving writing feedback documents that teachers are not well-equipped in giving students feedback on their writing and feel underprepared for this teaching task (Ballock et al., 2018; Bhowmik & Kim, 2021). As such, they often rely on corrective feedback on surface-level grammatical and punctuation errors (Ballock et al., 2018; Ballock & McQuitty, 2023; Bhowmik & Kim, 2021). The prevalence of surface-level corrections and the lack of focused training for teachers have additional consequences for EAL/D students. As Chang-Bacon and Pedersen (2023) point out, "multilingual learners in English-dominant contexts, particularly students of color... must contend with underlying deficit assumptions about their competence as language users based on raciolinguistic ideologies" (p. 2). These trends have an impact on the ability of EAL/D students to be successful in the school system, not because of their abilities, but because of the biases about language and the knowledge about language learners that teachers bring to the classroom (Mallinson, 2024). This study describes and investigates one potential way to train teachers in giving feedback to EAL/D students.

One aspect of addressing this problem is offering teachers more information and metalanguage about what language is, how we use language, and what we ask of students when we assign a writing task (Schleppegrell, 2020). A study by Ballock and McQuitty (2023) demonstrates that experienced teachers have implicit ideas about the writing assignments they give students, i.e., internal "expected texts" against which they evaluate how successful the student writing is (p. 68). Similarly, research on teachers' 'noticing' explores which "writing features they notice in the draft and how they reason about those features" (Ballock & McQuitty, 2023, p. 52), as well as how supported practice can help shift what teachers notice (Goldsmith & Seago, 2011). Teacher education that focuses on disciplinary literacy and supporting EAL/D learners can offer

opportunities for such practice and unpacking these expectations within an environment where there are time and space to break down and support teachers in that process. This study offers an example of such practice, prompting PSTs to recognize and respond to broader language features.

SFL and teachers' knowledge about language

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) offers a theory of language with explicit resources (e.g., functional grammar) for conceptualizing and analysing language as choices in meaning-making enacted in social context (Halliday, 1977). *Register*, or context of situation, is actualized in the three social functions of language [field (relating experience), tenor (enact relationships), and mode (organize language)] (Halliday & Hassan, 1985). *Genre*, or context of culture, relates to the communicative purpose of a text and is characterized by expected structural elements to fulfil that purpose (Christie, 2017). Schleppegrell (2001) provides a conceptual foundation to the idea of the register of school language while calling for the recognition of the linguistic challenges apparent in the language of schooling.

With regard to student writing, SFL provides metalanguage for discussing the language resources in assignments and research has consistently found that SFL is useful in supporting teachers and learners and addressing issues of race, equity, and class by recognizing diverse language use as valuable knowledge (e.g. Macken-Horarik, 2005; Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022; Troyan et al., 2022). As Schleppegrell (2020) argues, "by investigating patterns of language in texts and the variation that makes a text the kind of text it is, learners can recognize the linguistic choices they can draw on as they write in different contexts" (p. 6). SFL's ability to inform language choice awareness is relevant for learners developing their meaning-making potential (Mickan, 2022). Recent applications of SFL include applying its explicit analytic tools in combination with a critical framework to explore language choices and ideologies and their role in maintaining inequitable power structures (e.g. Mizell, 2020; Troyan et al., 2022). The uptake of framing language choice through SFL theory in education has important implications for EAL/D learners given the potential for teachers to create spaces responsive to their linguistic needs. Exploration of inequitable power structures, which can be embedded in language choices and ideologies through SFL, can help teachers create spaces where linguistically diverse and/or racialized children can succeed.

The genre-based approach (GBA) recontextualizes concepts from SFL as a basis for how to support teachers' and students' understanding of language choices, norms, and features. GBA is based on the idea that students encounter recurring genres year after year, with identifiable language expectations that can be taught, modelled, and discussed (Derewianka, 2003). Using a target genre as a starting point, a teacher can unpack the expectations for that genre and

strategically plan units that build in opportunities to look at model texts and deconstruct them with students for common structural elements and language features.

Research has demonstrated how SFL's attention to genre, register, and discipline-specific language are useful in teaching students about writing and can strengthen students' genre-specific texts (Schwarz & Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Using GBA as a teacher, however, requires teachers to have specialized knowledge of language and grammar. As Schleppegrell (2020) points out, "explicit attention to language calls for talk about language and meaning, and talking about language and meaning calls for linguistic metalanguage" (p. 6). Matthiessen and Yousefi (2022) review how SFL, given its status as an applicable linguistic approach, has been applied in teacher education and writing development since the 1960s. They conclude that SFL can play a key role in teacher professional development, where SFL-informed programs can train PSTs to become more responsive to multilingual meaning-making and translanguaging practices.

In a study on teacher education, Turgut Dost (2021) examined the impact of a semester-long course for teacher candidates which was informed by SFL and analysed how the teacher candidates took up SFL concepts in participant responses to student-text and published-text. Turgut Dost found that the participants' use of genre-related terms increased, and the teacher candidates used the information to alter teaching strategies; further, they reduced feedback regarding student errors, displaying a shift from mechanics to meaning-making potential. However, developing a deep understanding of linguistics and language patterns is complex. Brisk and Zisselsberger (2011) found that teachers struggled with not presenting genres as a fixed set of rules after weeks of professional development and recommended devoting time to instructing teachers to learn tenets of SFL theory and how to apply it to their teaching. More research is needed to explore which GBA-informed teacher education practices help facilitate a shift in teacher feedback and noticing from the surface level to meaning-making.

Research questions

In the literature on learning how to give writing feedback, research seldom provides concrete examples of the teacher education pedagogy that supports PSTs in developing those skills (Peck & Kavanagh, 2024). A systematic review by Peck and Kavanagh (2024) shows that there is "a paucity of knowledge about what teacher educators do to support novice teachers to apply the socially-situated writing theory from their coursework instead of reifying existing perspectives" (p. 2). The focus in this study is on the teacher education activities and a concrete example of using GBA in a teacher education setting for learning to think about language features in classroom teaching. In particular, PSTs' work from one course assignment that was based on GBA to assess student writing is examined to explore the following two questions:

1. How do pre-service teachers use genre-based rubric prompts in their assessment of student writing?
2. What features of student writing do pre-service teachers identify as a focus for teaching after using a genre-based rubric?

Methods

Context of the study

The context of this study was a master's degree program in education that includes a secondary level teaching certification at a large mid-western university in the United States. The course title was "Educational Linguistics", but as the only required course in the program regarding teaching EAL/D students, it had a split focus between linguistics and general knowledge about teaching language learners in U.S. schools. The linguistic content of the course was integrated with general pedagogical strategies for supporting reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The class aimed to support PSTs across any and all of the five possible content areas one could study in the program: Math, Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts, and World Languages. Using GBA enabled a discussion of the types of texts students often encounter in secondary school settings and different disciplines, either as reading or writing assignments, and supported an understanding about what language features of school texts can make them challenging for students.

One of the authors taught the course. Each week, a new aspect of SFL was taught and the lesson activities provided practice looking for the specific elements or language features from that week in texts from different disciplines. PSTs kept a running notes document where they reflected each week on expectations for those elements or features in genres in their content area and how they could imagine incorporating such knowledge into their teaching. Prior to the assignment in this study, the PSTs had learned about and practiced working with the following content: (1) genres and their stages and phases, (2) register features and how to talk about them with students, (3) nominalizations, dense noun groups, and tracking participants through a text, (4) process types and circumstances in a text, (5) APPRAISAL and MODALITY resources, and (6) cohesion, including transitions and thematic progression.

Study data

This study's participants were PSTs in the Educational Linguistics course in the fall of 2020[1]. The participants were recruited for this study after all course material was graded, the semester was

[1] This course was taught online during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had an effect on the overall structure of the course and ways of interacting with the content and each other, but not on how this assignment was structured.

over, and course grades were submitted and were only then asked whether their assignments could be used in a study exploring how PSTs utilized the task. Nine PSTs from various content areas (see Table 1) agreed to the use of their assignment, which constitutes the data for this study.[2]

Table 1. Participant pseudonyms and respective content areas.

Pseudonyms	**Content Area**
Olivia, Henry, John	Social Studies
Liam, Scarlett	English Language Arts
Theo, Nora	Science
Ava	World Languages
Avery	Math

The data for this study comes from an assignment designed as a natural part of the teaching in the course, not as a research instrument. The assignment was designed with multiple purposes in mind. First, PSTs need to see authentic examples of EAL/D student writing in their content areas at different language levels. The texts came from real classroom examples collected over the years by the instructor and anonymized. Second, PSTs should practice using a rubric that draws their attention to more than surface-level grammatical errors. Third, they should use that assessment to plan instructional activities to address the areas of improvement.

The rubrics were based on the genre-based rubrics developed by Brisk (2014) in *Engaging Students in Academic Literacies* (first edition), where each genre had a two-part rubric. The first part is for analysing the 'purposes, stages, and tenor' and the second part addresses the 'language' typical for that particular genre. When working through the book and exploring all the language features, the rubrics serve as a way for teachers to consider what to unpack with students for any target genre, from structural to linguistic elements.

However, due to the limited time and competing content demands in the educational linguistics course, it was not possible to cover every genre, its purposes, stages and phases, and its language norms. As such, the rubrics were adapted so that the PSTs would fill in the genre for the student text they read, as well as which elements and features they would expect for that genre, based on what had been learned in the course. In part one, on genre, the Purpose, Stages & Phases were removed, and PSTs were asked to fill in the Purpose, Stages & Phases they would expect for that genre. They then used the categories they supplied to assess how well students structured the text. Table 2 shows how one PST, Olivia, filled in the Purpose ('Summarize Information') and the

[2] While demographics like gender, race/ethnicity, age, and language background can be important characteristics in teacher learning, this study does not seek to explore patterns related to these categories.

Stages & Phases (e.g. 'Topic Introduction') for the text she was assessing. For the Register section, they were asked whether the text was appropriate for the context, specifically the audience and the discipline. In part two, the Language Feature section included the SFL-GBA content studied in class (listed in the previous section), but with the question whether those features were utilized appropriately for the genre and register, instead of specifying expectations for each genre, as the original rubrics from Brisk (2014) do. These adaptations made the rubrics genre-neutral, allowing the PSTs to use the same rubric for any text.

Table 2. Example of filled in (in italics) responses for Purpose, Stages & Phases (Olivia).

Purpose
Summarize Information ● Does the student fulfil the purpose?
Stages & Phases
Topic Introduction ● *Topic overview* ● *Main points from the lesson*
Supporting Paragraph ● *Explains first point* ● *Uses examples from the lesson* ● *Appropriate detail*
Supporting Paragraph ● *Explains first point* ● *Uses examples from the lesson* ● *Appropriate detail*
Formatted as a Letter

The rubric had columns to assess the student level for each criterion on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest) and space for a comment. Due to its nature as a course assignment, some PSTs wrote the comments as if they were for the students and others wrote the comments for the course instructor as the target audience. After the rubric was filled in, PSTs were asked to identify two strengths in the student's text and two areas of improvement. From there, they were asked to say what skills they would focus on in a lesson to support the student and to provide examples of an activity they would use for that purpose.

Data analysis

An *a priori* approach was implemented to code the data. The skills PSTs identified in the EAL/D writing assignment rubrics were initially coded as 'constrained' or 'unconstrained'. 'Constrained' corresponds to what others have called surface-level, where learning can be "mastered in a short timeframe and measured in terms of being correct or incorrect" (Chen & Derewianka, 2009, p. 236), whereas 'unconstrained' is more aligned with meaning-making, "the development of which

continues to expand throughout a person's lifetime" (p. 236) and is not easily measured as correct or incorrect. For example, comments on correct/incorrect spelling, punctuation, or grammar were coded as constrained skills. Choice of vocabulary, use of transitions or introductory phrases, or attention to which elements could be included in a stage or phase were recorded as unconstrained skills.

There was also a code for 'unclear', which captured instances where, for example, it appeared a PST was treating an unconstrained skill as correct/incorrect (e.g. Ava: *the student does not use a transitional phrase to suggest a third example, there is the use of a new paragraph, which, to me, signals a new idea*). Similarly, in the section of the rubric that asked the PSTs to identify what skills they would teach and to share lesson ideas, the codes were adapted slightly. 'Constrained' represented classroom activities that either addressed a constrained skill or where the description implied a skill was going to be taught in a constrained manner (i.e. as having a 'correct' answer). 'Unconstrained' in this section of the rubric was coded similarly and 'unclear' was used when we could not determine whether the classroom activity would be taught in a more prescriptive or open-ended manner.

We additionally coded for explicit attention to genre, register, and/or disciplinary language to capture the ways PSTs talked about them in assessing student writing, whether it included specific GBA labels or not. For example, Liam commented: "*The nature of this piece is to interpret the lesson. The student demonstrates the intended thematic moral.*" This attention to the purpose of the text to interpret and provide a moral were coded under 'genre, register, discipline'. A specific content example came from Avery, regarding mathematics: "*[In] math, it's very important to be precise, so variety isn't really important here.*", where 'math' was coded as attention to the discipline.

To ensure cohesion and validity of the coding, interpretation, and analysis, each researcher analysed the data separately and then discussed deviations to come to a consensus. Because of the different number of items in each section of the rubric, ratios of constrained/unconstrained skills were calculated. For example, in the Register section of the rubric there are only two prompts, whereas in the Language Features section, there are eleven. The Purposes, Stages & Phases section varied by how many stages and phases the PST filled in for their genre expectations. We also note that a response to one prompt might contain multiple codes, for example, if a PST mentions both the genre and an unconstrained skill. Therefore, ratios by section allowed us to more accurately capture how much of the PST's noticing was dedicated to various skills than reporting frequencies alone.

Findings

Use of the rubric prompts

In exploring how PSTs use genre-based rubric prompts in their assessment of student writing, interesting patterns emerged across the different sections of the rubric (Purpose, Stages & Phases; Register; Language Features) regarding the degree of attention given to unconstrained and constrained skills. The ratio of unconstrained to constrained skills in the sections on Purpose, Stages & Phases and Register was 11.4:1; in Language Features was 2.8:1. Table 3 provides an example of focusing on unconstrained skills in the Register section and a constrained skill in the Language Features section.

Table 3. Examples from different sections - italics mark what is filled in by the PST.

Example from	**Prompt**	**Response**
Avery	Stages & Phases: *Planning: the "what is your plan for solving the problem" section*	*I would prefer a little more detail in their plan, because they only really describe the first few steps. They explain how they'll write equations, but not what they'll do with them to solve the problem.*
Nora	Language Features: How does the student use verbs? Are they the correct tense for the genre? Is there/should there be variety?	*Switching between present and past tense – unclear which tense was assigned, if any*

However, as the ratio above shows, the attention to unconstrained skills still outnumbered the constrained skills in the Language Features section, perhaps as a result of responding to the prompts. The prompts asked about constrained skills but asked if they were appropriate for the genre (e.g. verb tense in the example in Table 3). In answering the prompts, the PSTs were then evaluating the constrained skill through the expectations of its use in that type of text. Table 4 provides examples of how two PSTs took up the same verb prompt, but their responses connected their evaluation of the constrained skill (tense) with unconstrained skills related to the Genre, Stages or Phrases.

Table 4. Constrained skills in italics, attention to genre/register underlined.

Example from	Prompt	Response
Theo	How does the student use verbs? Are [the verbs in] the correct tense for the genre?	Good use of *past tense verbs* to summarize the article and *present tense* to describe relationship between content and school experience.
John		Student used *past tense* for verbs throughout the entirety of the text which was correct for a historical recount.

With regard to the genre and register codes, the PSTs often took up the language of the prompts, either directly repeating the language of the prompt or indirectly, particularly around appropriateness for the genre/register (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Direct take-up of the prompt, PST response in italics, take-up underlined.

	Prompt	PST response
John	Is the amount of judgment and evaluation appropriate for the genre/purpose?	*I think the amount of judgement and evolution was appropriate in that there isn't much which is proper for a historical recount.*

Table 6. Indirect take-up of the prompt, PST response in italics, take-up underlined.

	Prompt	PST response
Avery	How does the student use verbs? Are [the verbs in] the correct tense for the genre?	*They use a lot of "is" and "have" which are fitting for this problem. They also use verbs like "subtract" that are math specific.*

It is important to acknowledge the role the prompts played in the PST responses and how they limit conclusions we can draw about uptake and learning. The PSTs were ultimately completing a course assignment and answering the questions asked of them. We cannot ignore the effect this had on the number of unconstrained skills they addressed. We cannot know whether they would have noticed and commented on the same aspects of the student writing without the prompts. For more evidence, we turn to the second research question – which features they identified as a focus for teaching after using the rubrics to assess the student writing.

Focus for teaching activities

The areas of improvement and the teaching activities the PSTs identified are also naturally influenced by the features PSTs were prompted to notice in the rubric. However, this part of the assignment opens up space to see what they considered most important to address in the student writing, what they would focus on in a lesson, and how they would teach it. In terms of ratios, the areas of improvement still displayed more unconstrained skills than constrained skills, but with an even lower ratio (2.1:1, unconstrained: constrained). This shift demonstrates that even as the PSTs noticed unconstrained skills related to meaning-making in the genre, they fell back on 'fixing' the constrained skills when identifying what needed improving. Table 7 provides some examples where the PSTs focused on constrained skills.

Table 7. Areas of improvement - constrained skills in italics.

Example from	**Prompt**	**Response**
Henry	What are the areas of improvement in this student's writing?	The student will need extra writing support when using multiple verbs in one sentence. *Grammar* and *punctuation* also need to be worked on. There are many sentences that *run-on or lack a stopping point*.
Liam		-Work on pacing by breaking up events, scenes, or ideas by paragraph. -*Article usage* before nouns and adjectives -*Tense continuity*

For the lesson ideas, each PST was asked to identify two areas of improvement they would plan a lesson around and provide two example lesson ideas, so we had 18 total examples of what they would teach and how[3]. Of those examples, five activities focused clearly on a constrained skill and/or taught it in a constrained manner. For example, in Liam's lesson activity below, he focuses on the use of articles and would have students 'find every accurate article usage' in their own writing:

> *Article usage – The student's text already uses articles appropriately in some places. I think a good activity would be to highlight article usage, give some examples, then have the student find every accurate article usage in their piece. Once they have those compiled, they can go back through and find places before nouns/adjectives where articles are missing.*

[3] Because each example could contain multiple activities, there were often multiple codes for a single example. The number of coded data points, therefore, adds up to more than 18.

However, 12 of the activities described by PSTs focused on unconstrained skills and/or treated them in an unconstrained manner in the sense that they discussed writing skills to be about communicating and meaning-making, as seen in the example below from Avery:

> *I would suggest that they review their conclusion and justification and ask if it really justifies what they did. They describe other methods that wouldn't work as well as their method, but they don't describe their own method as being correct or "the best." I would probably give students some sample work to justify as correct or to point out mistakes in to practice communicating their critiques of mathematical work.*

This example shows Avery thinking about communicating in math writing and considering an important feature of writing in that discipline – justification. She brings in the idea of looking at a mentor text, a common method in genre-based pedagogy for understanding norms of a genre (Brisk, 2014); and discusses how she would have students unpack it.

An additional eight teaching activities could not be clearly identified as treating a language feature as correct/incorrect or an open-ended resource for meaning-making. Depending on how the PST taught the lesson, the language feature could be treated as either unconstrained or constrained. A lesson description from Theo provides an example:

> *I would create a graphic organizer that students use as they read a sample paragraph with all required elements and fill in the graphic organizer with each component.*

If Theo treated the graphic organizer as a support for filling in different choices in writing a text, it would treat the genre as a structured, but flexible piece of writing. Teaching students that a genre has a clear structure, but that some elements are obligatory for that genre, while others are optional, opens up creative space for students to understand both genre expectations and a writer's choices. However, if a graphic organizer is treated as a recipe to simply be filled in 'correctly', it removes student agency as writers and treats structuring text as something with a right and wrong answer. We cannot know from Theo's short description how he would teach using a graphic organizer in the classroom; these types of responses thus fell in the category of 'unclear'.

Discussion

The goal of this paper was to explore how PSTs used a genre-based rubric to give feedback on EAL/D students' writing and the impact of the rubric on their attention to surface-level constrained skills versus meaning-making unconstrained skills. The findings support the argument that using

classroom artifacts in teacher education supports teachers noticing particular features (Goldsmith & Seago, 2011). In this instance, the need to respond to specific rubric prompts likely led to feedback that took up the language connected to genre and register. As the rubrics were left genre-neutral, the PSTs had to consider what they expected for that genre in their discipline and fill in their expectations, even while echoing the prompt language. Therefore, while the finding that PSTs took up language from the prompts in their answers is not surprising, doing so suggests that they had "expected texts" in mind for such an assignment similar to the study on learning to give feedback from Ballock and McQuitty (2023).

The explicit resources afforded by SFL provided PSTs with a means to name those expectations, to "decode or unpack the linguistic features of [their] discipline to build connections between content and meaning" (Turkan et al., 2014, p. 10). The very fact that a genre-based rubric has sections for a text's purpose, its structural elements, and its register can encourage PSTs to provide students with feedback on these meaning-making aspects of writing, as demonstrated in the amount of attention to unconstrained skills in those rubric sections. As such, this particular teacher education assignment supported the PSTs in identifying and responding to the myriad communicative resources students bring to the classroom and not only to surface-level prescriptive grammar features. Such activities support PSTs in learning to recognize that linguistically diverse students' "languages and dialects have a legitimate place in [their] literacy practices" (Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2011, p. 123) and thus can further the goal of GBA to create more equitable classroom spaces for diverse learners through its inclusion of teacher education programs (Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2002).

That the relative number of constrained skills increased in the section on language features is not surprising, as the prompts include more attention to constrained skills. What is of note is that asking the PSTs to consider those skills alongside their appropriateness for the genre and register of the text encouraged them to explain their expectations for grammar with regard to the context. Linking grammar, meaning, and context explicitly is a foundational aspect of SFL (Halliday, 1977). However, the finding that the ratio of constrained skills increased more dramatically when asked to identify areas of improvement and lesson ideas further reinforces what previous research has argued: that the PSTs fell back on what they likely have the most experience with in schools, i.e. surface-level corrective feedback (Smagorinsky, 2010, with reference to the apprenticeship of observation from Lortie, 1975). Unconstrained skills still outnumbered constrained skills overall, but it is clear that PSTs need more support in coming up with lesson ideas that focus on meaning-making at the discourse level in writing.

A next step in using such an assignment in teacher education would be helping PSTs identify specific classroom activities to work on more open-ended writing skills. Similarly, another issue to take up in the teacher education setting would include discussing the lesson activities where it was unclear whether the PST was thinking about them in a constrained or unconstrained manner.

Explicit attention to the difference in such treatment of a skill could be easily incorporated in a course, allowing PSTs to discuss what happens when a lesson positions an activity as choice and meaning-making versus filling in the 'right' elements. The assignment explored in this paper supports PSTs in providing feedback on writing for a particular genre, but more work is needed on how to help PSTs examine the potential impact of different ways teachers talk about language when teaching writing.

Finally, this paper acknowledges that it cannot claim transfer from using a rubric once in a pre-service course to the PSTs' future practice as teachers. Still, Ballock and McQuitty (2023) found that experienced teachers referenced a rubric or set of criteria used in their school or district when asked to assess student writing, even when not explicitly asked to do so. We therefore know that using rubrics regularly can affect noticing, as teachers begin to internalize those criteria as features to recognize. The rubrics teachers referenced were often designed to consider features of a genre or attention to the audience, and the teachers in that study incorporated such ideas in their thinking about the student texts. Therefore, designing genre-based scaffolded feedback activities in pre-service teacher education with authentic student texts provides PSTs practice in assessing student writing for genre and register features they may encounter in future rubrics.

Conclusion

What this paper contributes is a concrete example of a practice in teacher education that targets learning to assess and give feedback on EAL/D student writing, a challenging skill to develop as a teacher and one in which many teachers report feeling underprepared. In particular, this work focuses on using genre-based ideas in an attempt to shift feedback from the prevalence of surface-level features, documented in previous research, to a more holistic approach of considering the multifaceted nature of meaning-making in writing. The paper demonstrates how a genre-based rubric prompts the noticing of particular genre expectations and suggests that when teachers notice unconstrained skills that need work in student writing, they consider addressing those in their teaching practice. While the ratios shifted closer in the Language Feature section of the rubric and in the task to identify areas of improvement and lesson ideas, the number of unconstrained skills still outweighed the focus on constrained skills. To continue improving teacher training in working with EAL/D learners, we need more examples of teacher education pedagogy made explicit and a discussion of what different practices afford PST learners. Only then can we understand how best to support pre-service teachers in learning challenging teaching skills and explore what teacher education practices offer our teacher-learners, with a focus on centring the needs of learners.

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The effects of deductive, inductive, and a combination of both types of grammar instruction in pre-sessional classes in higher education

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate students' grammar performance and attitudes toward inductive and deductive approaches to teaching grammar in English. A mixed-method study in higher education tested the effectiveness of inductive, deductive, and a combination of both approaches on student performance on grammar tests using eight grammatical structures. To collect data, a quasi-experimental control group pretest-posttest design was used, which included interviews, observations, questionnaires, and diaries. As indicated by the results, there were significant differences between the grammar performances of the different groups in favour of the deductive approach. Students' grammar performance was also slightly improved when deductive grammar instruction was used or when both types were combined for university L2 students. Also, the study suggested using inductive instruction with simpler grammatical structures and deductive instruction with more complex grammatical structures. As a result, the study highlights the importance of practicing both types of instruction.

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Introduction

Pre-sessional courses are designed to assist second language (L2) English speakers in preparing for courses in higher education. L2 English students preparing for undergraduate or postgraduate programs undergo intensive language training. Upon starting their programs, they must complete a language evaluation and exam, marking an important milestone in their language development. An important aspect of their preparation is that they focus heavily on grammar as it plays a crucial role in their academic success and effective communication. The mastery of grammar is particularly important in academic writing, where it is essential to communicate precisely and efficiently. Thus, mastering grammar is essential for students to produce quality work that meets academic standards in academic writing and research. This study examined the effects of three main grammar instruction approaches on pre-sessional students of English in higher education focusing on seven grammatical structures.

Teaching grammar involves two main approaches: inductive and deductive. In deductive learning, grammar rules are explained explicitly, followed by examples and practice (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Thornbury, 1999). In the inductive approach, however, the rules are not explicitly stated; instead, students are encouraged to infer, observe, and discover the rules while completing exercises (Ellis, 2002; Tomlinson, 2011). Several studies have examined the effectiveness of inductive or deductive grammar teaching in EFL settings, some of which are presented in this paper. The purpose of this study is to explore the role instructional approaches play in teaching grammar to pre-sessional students in higher education (Benitez-Correa, et.al, 2019; Farwis et al., 2021; Jean & Simard, 2013; Kaur & Niwas, 2016; Nesic & Hamidovic, 2015; Shirav & Nagai, 2022; Toth, 2022).

Literature review

Types of Grammar

Different types of grammar are taught in classroom settings, including pedagogical, prescriptive, descriptive and cognitive grammar. Descriptive grammar refers to how a language is used and understood without establishing its correctness. Thus, it emphasizes that language is alive and changes constantly (Nunan, 2005). Having said that, it is also important to recognize that L2 English speakers comprise an important part of the global population and that their contributions to the evolution of the language should also be considered.

Prescriptive grammar, on the other hand, refers to the dichotomy between correct and incorrect use of language, focused on standard linguistic forms and constructions (Hinkel, 2018). Prescriptive grammar is most prevalent in teaching, testing, editing, and publishing, and it is often used by people with access to social contexts and settings. Generally, prescriptive grammar is in line with deductive grammar instruction and is commonly employed in academic settings (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Hudson, 2001; Thornbury, 1999).

Pedagogical grammar is a set of grammar descriptions, exercises, and resources to facilitate the teaching and learning of a language through the participation of learners and teachers (Newby, 2015). In lesson design, according to Newby (2015), it is vital to establish learning objectives, decide how grammar rules will be presented to learners (either explicitly or inductively), and assess learners' grammatical proficiency. The concept of cognitive grammar was initially introduced by Wittgenstein in 1953, but formally developed by Langacker (1987, 1991) and expanded by Talmy (2000) and Croft & Cruse (2004). Cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008) has not been directly applied in this study but offers useful theoretical insights. The study's emphasis on meaning and form fits with the principles of inductive learning, which the study later finds to be particularly successful.

Research into the effectiveness of inductive and deductive grammar learning

The deductive and inductive approaches to grammar instruction have been extensively researched in the last decades. Krashen (1985) claimed that language acquisition happens naturally before language learning, and Schmidt (2001) highlighted that second language acquisition is driven by learners' conscious awareness to the language. Deductive learning, according to H. Bluedorn and L. Bluedorn (2001), provides clear, understandable, and digestible instructions. Hammerly (1991) provides an alternative perspective that some grammar structures can be taught inductively while others can be taught deductively.

Jean and Simard (2013) examined possible relationships between learning gains, preferences, and learning styles. The results of this study showed that both approaches were equally effective, but students preferred the deductive approach. It was found that different forms of grammar instruction do not correlate with learning.

Eriksson (2014) conducted another study on the effectiveness of the inductive and deductive approaches to teaching word order. According to the study, the deductive method might produce better results among students with lower proficiency, yet the inductive approach should be preferred in the long run.

Similarly, Farwis et al. (2021) examined the effect of using inductive and deductive approaches on SLIATE students' English grammar achievement. Based on the study's findings, the deductive teaching approach to teaching grammar was more effective than an inductive approach. According to the results of the questions, students prefer a deductive approach and are satisfied with the way it was taught.

An examination of students' attitudes toward inductive and deductive approaches to teaching grammar in English as a foreign language was carried out by Nesic and Hamidovic (2015). The results showed that over 70% of students preferred the deductive approach to teaching English grammar, while over 40% acknowledged the implicit approach was also important. It was also

concluded that when these two approaches are combined, English grammar is effectively acquired.

A recent quasi-experimental study was conducted by Shirav and Nagai (2022) to investigate the effectiveness of inductive and deductive types of instruction in the acquisition of passive voice. The results showed that the inductive group performed significantly better than the deductive group. Furthermore, students expressed a preference for the deductive approach due to its traditional nature, and the study suggested using both methods depending on the complexity of the grammar being taught.

A review of recent literature suggests, according to Toth (2022), eight intermediate L2 Spanish classes were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively from three U.S. high schools to document grammatical development using two explicit teaching methods on pronouns: deductive rule presentations and inductive co-construction. Deductive students performed slightly better than co-construction students in quantitative results; however, qualitative evidence suggests that implementing co-construction poses a greater challenge for teachers. Toth (2022) emphasizes the importance of high-quality explicit instruction for L2 development, and the role played by teachers in this process.

The study by Obeidat & Alomari (2020) examined the impact of inductive versus deductive teaching on the achievement of English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduate students at Hashemite University. Their study indicated significant differences between the experimental group (inductive) and the control group (deductive) favouring the inductive approach, with no significant effects based on study year, school type, or gender.

An additional study examined the effectiveness of inductive and deductive methods in teaching English grammar at the elementary level was evaluated by Kaur and Niwas (2016). It was found that teaching via inductive method significantly improved student achievement. The pre-test and post-test scores of the deductive method showed similar results.

Similarly, another study investigated the effectiveness and rapport of two approaches to teaching grammar in EFL class in Ecuador (Benitez-Correa, et.al, 2019). The results showed that the inductive approach to teaching grammar is more effective than the deductive approach when it comes to instruction and rapport in the EFL classroom.

Accuracy, fluency, and complexity

When assessing learners' performance and progress, linguistic researchers must consider three factors: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Complexity is defined by Ellis (2003) as "the extent to which the language produced is elaborate and varied" (p. 340). Alternatively, the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences that contain no errors is accuracy; fluency is defined as "the ability to produce words within a specified time frame,

together with lexical frequency, regardless of spelling and content, as long as the writer's meaning is understood" (Fellner & Apple, 2006, p. 19).

It has been suggested that complexity and accuracy are primarily influenced by the learner's interlanguage knowledge (grammar rules and lexical knowledge of the second language). Fluency, in contrast, is viewed as the ability to access significant L2 information quickly, easily, and efficiently to communicate meaning (Wolfie-Quintero et al., 1998). Cognitive complexity and linguistic complexity are used in L2 acquisition. A further definition of cognitive complexity is the degree to which linguistic features challenge learners to acquire and use L2. The level of cognitive complexity is determined by subjective and objective factors. The subjective factors relate to a learner's attitude, motivation, L1, and educational background, while the objective factors relate to the inherent linguistic complexity. Comparatively, linguistic complexity can be defined both in terms of the learner's interlanguage system and in terms of the individual linguistic elements that create the interlanguage system. Linguistic complexity is determined by the size, elaborateness, richness and diversity of the learner's L2 system in relation to the learner's interlanguage system (Housen & Kuiken, 2009).

The knowledge gap in the literature

In recent decades, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to various types of grammar instruction in EAP contexts. Contradictory results have been found in these studies (Eriksson, 2014; Farwis et al., 2021; H. Bluedorn & L. Bluedorn, 2001; Jean & Simard, 2013; Krashen, 1985; Nesic, 2020; Rivers, 1964; Schmidt, 2001; Shirav & Nagai, 2022; Toth, 2022). In certain studies, deductive grammar instruction was considered to be more useful, whereas inductive grammar instruction proved to be more efficient in regard to performance on grammar tests.

Aims of the study

A study of 100 pre-sessional English students in higher education examined the effects of three different grammar instruction approaches.

Research questions

RQ1: Does inductive, deductive, or a combination of both methods work best to develop grammatical knowledge in university L2 pre-sessional students?

RQ2: How do university L2 pre-sessional students perceive their progress in learning English grammar in the context of inductive and deductive learning methods?

Methods

The research settings and pre-sessional students

Students whose English language requirements do not meet the entry requirements are offered pre-sessional English language classes to develop and improve their English language skills before starting an undergraduate or post-graduate degree. The study took place at an educational institution in the UK, and the students were selected based on their language test scores (between 4.5 - 5.0 on the IELTS scale). The students attended a 12-week program. It is crucial for all pre-sessional students to develop their grammatical knowledge during the course to pass the final ELAS (English Language Assessment Service) test, which contains all the language skills, and progress on their postgraduate course.

Participants

There were 100 participants in the study, but only 91 completed the pre- and post-tests, and 54% were female and 46% were male. The participants were intermediate-level students grouped into different classes according to the month they enrolled at the university.

Research design

For the purposes of the experiment, a quasi-experimental control group pre- and post-test design was employed to test RQ1. Each of the three experimental groups was given a different name: students who were taught grammar deductively were assigned the name *Formal group*. Moreover, those who were taught grammar inductively were categorized as *Naturalistic*, and those who were taught grammar with both approaches were categorized as *Mixed*.

Research instruments

Student performance was assessed using pre-and post-testing. These tests were not part of the study program.

The following target structures were selected to be tested since the L2 pre-sessional students needed to develop their understanding of grammar.

- Active -passive voice
- Subject-verb agreement
- Verb tense consistency
- Conditional sentences
- Countable and uncountable nouns

- Prepositions
- Articles
- Error correction

The pre-post tests were adapted from John Eastwood's *Oxford Guide to English Grammar*, with the error correction exercise designed by the researcher and reviewed by a senior lecturer. The tests were initially piloted to determine appropriate timing and students' feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the pre-post-tests. A comprehensive scoring system was used, which incorporated points for each exercise, including the error correction exercise to determine if significant differences existed between groups in grammatical proficiency. This strategic approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of how various teaching methods affect participants' understanding of grammatical rules and their application. In this way, the study's outcomes were examined holistically, considering the relationship between various teaching techniques and their effects on students' performance.

Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire was to investigate how instructional approaches influence students' perspectives on grammar teaching and learning during the pre-sessional period. There was a mixture of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions, and the reliability of the questions was tested using Cronbach's alpha index. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of closed-ended items, ensuring the items consistently measure the same concept, supporting the validity of the findings. Based on Cronbach's alpha, the reliability test showed a high level of reliability at 0.86.

Interviews

To obtain additional information and viewpoints, interviews were conducted with informants using the same questions of the questionnaire rephrased to assess the reliability of the respondents, cross-reference the data, and strengthen the interpretation. The interview data were analysed through coding.

Observations

As part of this study, non-participant observations were conducted to observe learners' participation during grammar instruction. The observation checklist primarily focused on how the lesson was conducted by inductive, deductive, or mixed methods. On the checklist, the date, time, location, teacher's name, class, and specific activities were listed. Four main categories were included in the checklist: organization, presentation, interaction, and content. Moreover, observation field notes were selected based on the tutor's presentation of deductive,

inductive, and combined grammar instructions, as well as the students' reactions to these grammar instructions. All participants received consent forms explaining the purpose of the observations and the researcher's role prior to the study. A total of 20 grammar lessons (N=20) were observed for approximately 30 and 45 minutes each. Each lesson lasted 3 hours.

Researcher's diary and field notes

Using the researcher's diary, the current study documented how pre-sessional students experienced and reacted to different types of grammar instruction and their experiences while learning grammar. The researcher examined the following criteria to understand which grammar instruction works best for pre-sessional students:

- An overview of the lesson's beginning, middle, and end.
- The impact of different grammar instruction types on teaching and learning activities.
- The methods and strategies used for teaching and how learners engaged and participated in the lesson.
- Which resources are used?
- The way the teacher explained grammatical features.
- The learners' reactions and responses during the lesson.
- How did the researcher feel about the deductive or inductive approach or the combination of both?

Bailey's (1991) suggestions were used to collect, analyze and code the data. In addition, a tally sheet was used to measure learners' participation. Data analysis consisted of reading the entries, observing themes, and identifying recurring patterns. To reduce the data, the researcher discussed the criteria and codes that emerged from the diaries and observational notes with another researcher. To test the reliability of the codes, Miles and Huberman (1994) formula was used. Specifically, 46 codes were examined by the second rater, who agreed with 41 of the categories, resulting in a final reliability of 0.91, which is a high level of inter-rater reliability.

Data analysis

Quantitative results: Pre-post-language tests

The results showed that all groups performed well in the post-tests. To assess students' grammatical knowledge, the researcher decided to use mainly discrete items and a single integrative task (error correction). Inferential statistical analysis was used to determine the significance of the difference between the three groups and to test the research question (RQ1). The t-test revealed that students' grammatical competence was significantly increased by the deductive approach (see Tables 1, 2, and 3).

Table 1. T-tests for Formal group.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Pre-language test	*Post-language test*
Mean	41.17391	48.73913
Variance	161.8775	203.4743
Observations	23	23
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	43	
t Stat	-1.89815	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.032201	
t Critical one-tail	1.681071	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.064402	
t Critical two-tail	2.016692	

Statistically, there was a significant difference between each group's grammar performance at the significance level of 0.10, as shown by the results of the pre- and post-tests. It appears that the Formal group (deductive approach) performed significantly better with t (43) = -1.89, p=0.064, which indicates a statistical trend close enough to the significance threshold of 0.05 (see Table 1).

Nonetheless, when comparing the two groups using a paired samples t-test (see Table 2 for details), the Mixed group performed slightly better [t (72) = -1.734, p = 0.087] than the Naturalistic group, who were taught grammar inductively [t (37) = -0.531, p = 0.597] (see Table 3). A p-value below 0.05 indicates significance, 0.05-0.10 suggests a trend, and above 0.10 means not significant. Thus, the Mixed group's result (p = 0.087) shows a slight trend toward better performance, while the Naturalistic group's result (p = 0.597) shows no significant difference.

Table 2. T-tests for Mixed group.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Pre-language test	*Post-language test*
Mean	52.81081	56.24324
Variance	68.37988	76.46697
Observations	37	37
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	72	
t Stat	-1.7348	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.043528	
t Critical one-tail	1.666294	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.087056	
t Critical two-tail	1.993464	

Table 3. T-tests for Naturalistic group.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Pre-language test	*Post-language test*
Mean	52.80645	54.41935
Variance	157.628	128.0516
Observations	31	31
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	59	
t Stat	-0.53131	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.298599	
t Critical one-tail	1.671093	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.597197	
t Critical two-tail	2.000995	

Results indicate that L2 students who are taught grammar deductively or by combining deductive instruction with inductive instruction performed slightly better than those who are instructed inductively. However, this study was limited to 100 students. Additional research using larger samples, longer timeframes, and examining other variables might provide more insights.

Questionnaire

To analyse the demographic information from the questionnaire, including nationality, gender, and age, frequency analysis was used. The following codes (*practice, exercise, confusion, communication, teacher, example, rules, tenses, environment, monitor grammar, and learners' anxiety*) were examined by a second rater. The second rater agreed with 10 of the categories related to the method of instruction, resulting in a final reliability of 0.90, a high level of inter-rater reliability.

Questionnaire analysis

A written questionnaire was used to learn and understand students' attitudes and feelings toward learning grammar through different methods of grammar instruction. All the participants (p=100) agreed that grammatical knowledge is important when learning a second language for academic purposes (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Is grammar important in academic writing?*

Is grammar important in academic writing?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, very important	99	99.0	99.0	99.0
	Yes, important	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The fourth question was included to provide context for understanding how students perceive grammar, which can impact the way the respond to different instructional approaches. By understanding these attitudes, it is possible to better understand the effectiveness of deductive, inductive, and mixed methods. As far as learners' preferred method of learning and teaching grammar (presenting rules vs. discovering the rules), the majority (69%) preferred to be taught grammar deductively (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Which of these approaches to teaching grammar do you generally prefer?*

Which of these approaches to teaching grammar do you generally prefer?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The teacher presents the rules to the students	69	69.0	69.0	69.0
	Students are guided to work out the rules for themselves	31	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The participants strongly agreed that practicing grammar structures could improve grammatical accuracy (90%) as well (see Table 6). The studying of grammatical rules explicitly could help students make progress in their grammatical competence and perhaps improve their accuracy levels; however, it will take learners some time to absorb, acquire, internalise, and practice all the grammatical structures. A high level of motivation and interest in learning could have long-lasting effects on learners' learning (irrespective of the type of grammar instruction).

Table 6. *I believe that I can improve my grammatical accuracy through practice of grammatical structures.*

I believe that I can improve my grammatical accuracy through practice of grammatical structures.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	9.0	9.0	10.0
	Agree	22	22.0	22.0	32.0
	Strongly agree	68	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The next point worth emphasising is that most of the surveyed participants (80%) agreed that learning grammar through context was also important (see Table 7). However, the use of texts in learning grammar was only perceived as less important by a few participants, indicating that most learners understand the importance of using texts in learning grammar. The inclusion of cognitive grammar in this study does not directly compare it with other frameworks, but it reveals the influence of different perspectives on grammar teaching. The concept of cognitive grammar emphasizes the connection between form, meaning, and usage, which supports inductive approaches that allow learners to identify patterns by using language. It provides a meaningful way to consider how grammar can be taught more effectively than traditional rule-based methods.

Table 7. *Grammar is best taught if it is presented within a complete text.*

Grammar is best taught if it is presented within a complete text.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Disagree	8	8.0	8.0	9.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	11	11.0	11.0	20.0
	Agree	28	28.0	28.0	48.0
	Strongly agree	52	52.0	52.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

In the survey, almost all respondents (92%) said they expect a teacher to explain a grammatical point (see Table 8). The collected data provides illustrative evidence regarding learners' expectations and needs during grammar learning.

Table 8. *I expect my teacher to present and explain grammatic points.*

I expect my teacher to present and explain grammatical points.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	6.0	6.0	8.0
	Agree	33	33.0	33.0	41.0
	Strongly agree	59	59.0	59.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Lastly, using examples to learn grammar rules was another interesting outcome as (93%) stated that they prefer to learn grammar using examples (see Table 9). While the deductive approach to teaching grammar remains popular, pre-sessional students should be exposed to other teaching styles. Although, this study did not aim to compare grammatical theories, but the observed benefits of combining rule explanations with contextual usage align conceptually with cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008), which emphasizes the interconnection between form, meaning, and use (Langacker, 2008). The purpose of this reference is not to claim any grammar model as superior, but rather to illustrate how theoretical insights might help explain why integrated approaches contributed to learner success.

Table 9. *I prefer to learn grammar forms through examples.*

I prefer to learn grammar forms through examples.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	5	5.0	5.0	7.0
	Agree	20	20.0	20.0	27.0
	Strongly agree	73	73.0	73.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Coding analysis

During the current study, coded data were generated from interview transcripts, the researcher's diaries, observations, and open-ended questions. The researcher analyzed, evaluated, and conducted a thematic analysis by identifying themes and codes. By assigning words or phrases to each category, the researcher coded all the textual data systematically (Dey, 1993). Table 10 presents a sample of the analysis of the codes derived from interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaires. The researcher originally generated fifty-five codes but later reduced them to thirty-eight after closer examination. Moreover, a second code-book was developed from diaries and observational notes, with forty-seven provisional codes, but only forty-two were used for the main study. A sample of these codes is presented in Table 12.

Table 10. Coding scheme for interview/questionnaire (open questions) data.

Main Themes	Sub-theme
1. Importance of knowing grammar	Grammar allows learners to describe different situations Complex situations and structures require good grammar
2. Terminology is important	Grammatical terminology is useful The use of tenses is more important not the names
3. Practice and Exercises	Practice grammatical exercises
4. Confidence	Learning grammar deductively could increase confidence
5. Academic writing	Formal writing
6. Writing	Grammar is important for writing Essays + grammatical rules and structures
7. Grammar rules are not important	No link between grammar and real world
8. Terminology not important	Grammatical terminology is not important Not remembering all the tenses Simplify grammar

After identifying the main codes and subcategories, the researcher used examples of participants, and theoretical frameworks to conduct thematic analysis. A sample of the analysis is presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Sample of thematic analysis (Interview/questionnaire).

Category (descriptive code)	**Sub-categories**	**Examples**	**Theory**
Importance of knowing grammar	• Grammar allows learners to describe different situations • Complex situations and structures require good grammar	• *(You need to know how grammar consists of)* • *(Without grammatical rules we cannot structure a sentence)* • *(For me is the most important thing)* • *(There are many different ways in order to express something, another way of thinking)* • *(Tell about a story which is complicated…. we need to use past, future and present)*	-Prescriptive grammar -Grammar servers as a prerequisite for effective communication as it increases accuracy.

Grammar rules are not important	No link between grammar and real world	• *(grammatical rules are not important to me)* • *(it is important but not the most important thing)* • *(grammar is an unimportant thing)* • *(I think it is an unnatural activity)* • *(I did not find anything important and that's why I do not want to study anymore grammar)* • *(there is no a real linkage between grammar and real world)* • *(in real life we do not do grammar, the only thing is to talk and convey meaning)*	**-Teaching grammar inductively** **-Fluency**

Data gathered by coding the interviews indicated that six participants stressed the importance of grammatical knowledge in the context of producing an academic paper. It is therefore consistent with prescriptive grammar theories, which address the correct application of grammar rules (Hinkel, 2018). The study suggests that pre-sessional L2 learners are aware of the importance of constructing sentences syntactically and morphologically, one of the most valuable aspects of higher education. Alternatively, seven respondents viewed grammar as unimportant. This finding is consistent with Krashen's (1985) claim that learners are able to acquire grammatical structures unconsciously through exposure rather than explicit teaching. Despite not directly correlating with cognitive grammar theory (Langacker, 2008), this study raises the possibility of implicit learning and its role in language acquisition. The results further support the notion that fluency refers to the ability of learners to control their linguistic knowledge of the second language. The ability to access significant L2 information quickly, easily, and efficiently is more important than focusing solely on producing accurate forms to communicate meaning (Wolfie-Quintero et al., 1998).

Table 12. Coding scheme for diaries/observational notes.

Inductive Approach	**Deductive Approach**	**Mixed (Inductive/Deductive) Approach**
1. starting, middle and finishing point of the lesson, 2. grammatical explanation and rules, 3. participation 4. terminology, 5. learners, 6. teacher, 7. researcher's feelings and interpretation, 8. mistakes, 9. error correction, 10. atmosphere, 11. confusion,	1. starting, middle and finishing point of the lesson, 2. teaching grammar deductively 3. terminology and rules 4. learners, 5. teacher, 6. researcher's feelings and suggestions, 7. confusion 8. mistakes, 9. course book, 10. atmosphere, 11. motivation and participation 12. pace of the lesson,	1. starting, the middle and finishing point of the lesson, 2. learners and learners' questions, 3. teacher, 4. terminology, rules and explanation, 5. combination of grammatical structure 6. researcher's feelings, 7. mistakes, 8. practice, 9. cognitive ability, 10. confusion, 11. examples 12. atmosphere 13. participation

12. lack of vocabulary, 13. time 14. interesting activities	13. practice, 14. examples 15. time	

Main codes from the researcher's diary on inductive approach.

Based on lessons taught using the inductive approach, the following categories appeared in the teacher's diaries: starting, middle, and ending point of the lesson, explanation, rules, terminology, learners, teacher, researcher's feelings, mistakes, error correction, atmosphere, confusion, a lack of vocabulary, time limit and interesting activities (Table 12). These categories may be correlated with teaching theories of cognitive and linguistic complexity, pedagogical grammar, descriptive and cognitive grammar as well as fluency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Langacker, 1987; Newby, 2015).

Main codes from the researcher's diary on deductive approach.

As a result of the researcher's diaries, the following codes emerged concerning the criteria used to evaluate the lessons delivered using the deductive approach: the beginning, middle and end of the lesson, teaching grammar deductively, learners, teacher, researcher's feelings and suggestions, confusion, mistakes, course book, atmosphere, motivation, pace of the lesson, participation, practice, examples and time (Table 12). In light of the codes above, as well as the nature of the lesson, they appear to be related to theories of cognitive and linguistic complexity, explicit grammar instruction, prescriptive grammar instruction, and accuracy (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Newby, 2015).

Main codes from the researcher's diary based on mixed (inductive/deductive) approach.

Similar codes emerged throughout the data analysis: beginning, middle, and end of the lesson, learners' questions, teacher, terminology, rules, explanations, researcher's feelings, mistakes, practice, participation, combination of grammatical structures cognitive ability, confusion, examples, and atmosphere (Table 12). The codes may be influenced by the theory of cognitive and linguistic complexity, pedagogical grammar, implicit and explicit grammar teaching, descriptive and cognitive grammar (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Langacker, 1987; Newby, 2015).

Summary of observational checklist

Although the Formal group had a good understanding of grammar, they sometimes struggled with accurate language use, likely due to teacher-centred lessons focussing on standard forms. The Naturalist group was continuously guided through the elicitation process to discover

grammar rules but only to a limited extent. This may be due to cognitive and linguistic complexity factors, L1 interference, or interlanguage development (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). The Mixed group was provided with implicit and explicit rules, but they were described briefly. This caused some difficulties for low-level learners to comprehend the rules. It may be due to their limited time, as well as the linguistic and cognitive complexity of certain grammatical structures (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). It appears that learning grammatical structures is influenced by learners' motivation, interests, expectations, and expectations regarding grammatical structures.

Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with those of Farwis et al. (2021) and Toth (2022), which concluded that the deductive approach affected learners' grammar performance. Moreover, these findings provide evidence that a combination of these two approaches may be an appropriate solution to the controversy identified Jean and Simard (2013), Eriksson (2014), Nesic (2020), and Shirav and Nagai (2022). Although it can be argued that learners' involvement is limited when deductive thinking is employed, the teacher, however, should incorporate exercises that promote deep thinking.

The present study provides significant evidence to support the integration of both methods in pre-sessional settings. Some grammar structures can be taught inductively, while others need to be taught deductively. As Hammerly (1991) points out, the deductive approach is more appropriate for teaching active or passive voice because these structures depend on rules and require explicit explanations.

Both types of grammar instruction are effective, relying solely on the inductive approach might be challenging to some extent. The present study also supports the second research question, that methods of teaching can influence the performance of students, as many participants improved their grammatical competence and scored higher on the post-test. Also, most learners preferred explicit grammar explanations with examples and text integration. Combining cognitive grammar with prescriptive grammar could enhance learning (Langacker, 1987).

Field notes revealed that students struggled with prepositions, articles, and countable and uncountable nouns when taught deductively. Teaching grammar inductively also presented difficulties in terms of converting sentences from active to passive and differentiate between *will, going to, and present continuous*. Low-level students may have difficulty learning due to limited time and cognitive and linguistic complexity (Housen & Kuiken, 2009).

While inductive teaching was engaging, learners found it difficult to understand the grammatical rules being introduced. When teaching grammar deductively in pre-sessional classes, certain grammatical structures may need to be explicitly taught along with implicit teaching, such as conditional sentences and passive voice (Hammerly, 1991).

The current study's findings, however, cannot be generalised and interpreted as definitive outside of this specific academic setting because there were only one hundred L2 pre-sessional students. Further research should explore holistic language learning, including authentic language use, cultural knowledge and understanding, motivation, learner autonomy, and diverse instructional approaches. Investigating the linguistic and cultural diversity in grammar instruction could also help develop more effective and inclusive teaching strategies.

Conclusion and limitations

Both grammar instruction types had significant effects on the acquisition of seven grammatical structures in university L2 pre-sessional students. According to the findings of this study, L2 students benefit most from deductive or combined grammar instruction. Even though inductive learning is valuable, it can present challenges for some learners because of their educational backgrounds, learning abilities, and cultural experiences. A deeper exploration of how these factors affect learners' ability to independently discover grammar rules would indeed provide valuable insights into ways to make grammar instruction more effective.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that there are no educators who teach grammar through the inductive method. Combining both types could therefore be the best solution for each learner's needs. The present study also confirms that students' perceptions are correlated to performance, with motivation and teaching methods influencing outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of teaching methods rather than grammatical theories. However, cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008) offers valuable insight into the interaction between form, meaning, and usage. This experiment, however, cannot conclude anything about the relative effectiveness of grammar types because of its design and scope. For future research, examining how cognitive grammar relates to instructional methods will be important.

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ACTA is the national coordinating body representing all teachers of English to speakers of other languages. It aims to promote and strengthen English whilst supporting people's linguistic and cultural heritage. English is the language of public communication and the lingua franca for the many different sociocultural groups in Australia, as well as a major language of international communication. For full and effective participation in education, society, and in the international arena, competence in English is necessary.

TESOL is the teaching of English by specialist teachers to students of language backgrounds other than English in order to develop their skills in spoken and written English communication. At the same time, TESOL teachers strive to be sensitive to the diverse linguistic, cultural, and learning needs of individuals.

TESOL draws on a knowledge of the nature of the English language, first and second language acquisition, crosscultural communication, and appropriate curriculum, materials, and methodology for multicultural contexts. It is an integral part of the broader social, educational, and political context. It can inform and be informed by this context.

As a program, profession, and field of study and research, TESOL shares certain understandings and practices with the subject English as a mother tongue, child and adult literacy, languages other than English (LOTE), and bilingual and multilingual education, but also has distinct characteristics.

ACTA's objectives are

To represent and support the interests of teachers of English to speakers of other languages ACTA is committed to quality teacher training and professional development in TESOL and working conditions and career paths which enable teachers to have the stability and continuity of employment to develop, maintain, and deliver quality programs.

To ensure access to English language instruction for speakers of other languages ACTA is committed to ensuring that all students with ESL needs have access to programs that acknowledge and meet their diverse specific needs.

To encourage the implementation and delivery of quality professional development programs ACTA is committed to the development and maintenance of the highest quality programs for students at pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels that are appropriately funded, resourced and staffed, and articulated in clear pathways.

To promote the study, research, and development of TESOL at state, national, and international levels ACTA is committed to ensuring that TESOL and TESOL related issues are debated and accorded due recognition in state and national policy initiatives as well as in the international community.

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