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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.



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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.

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Tracing contextual realities in TESOL

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Introduction

Every issue of *TESOL in Context* reflects the many places in which our field lives: classrooms, communities, policy environments, digital spaces, and the interpersonal worlds of learners and educators. As we worked through the contributions in this volume, we found ourselves repeatedly drawn to the idea of contextual realities, namely, the histories that shape current practice, the polices that structure opportunity, the instructional choices that influence learner development, and the culturally situated ways in which multilingual individuals communicate. Established research underscores that individual and contextual factors are inextricably intertwined in language learning and teaching (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2022), and the current issue brings that insight into vivid relief.

To honour the coherence of these contributions, this editorial groups them into several thematic clusters. These are not fixed categories but points of resonance that help trace the dynamics of TESOL's evolving landscape.

Histories, policies, and the conditions that shape learning

A meaningful understanding of TESOL requires attention to the conditions under which language education is enabled, supported, or constrained. The historical account of multilingual and multicultural work in regional Australia demonstrates how sustained collaboration and

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community commitment can produce decades of innovation far from metropolitan centres (*Feez and co-authors*). This regional history offers more than a retrospective; it reminds us that TESOL's intellectual foundations are distributed, relational, and deeply contextual.

In contrast, another contribution turns towards national educational policy and reveals how recent funding and governance reforms have reshaped specialist EAL/D provision in schools (*Michell*). The insights resonate with broader critiques in language policy studies, particularly analyses of decentralisation and its impact on equity and specialist services (Howard, 2024). Taken together, these works highlight that historical legacies and policy contexts function as structural determinants of what teaching and learning can become.

Writing, feedback, and the development of academic voice

A second cluster in this issue draws our attention to writing as a space where learners negotiate identity, accuracy, disciplinary expectations, and rhetorical control. Research comparing mediation-based interaction and direct corrective feedback provides nuanced perspectives on how different methods support different dimensions of writing development (*Özturan & Uysal*). This complexity mirrors recent observations on feedback literacy, which emphasise learners' ability to interpret, engage with, and act upon feedback as critical to improvement (Lu et al., 2024).

Similarly, another study in this issue investigates how multilingual secondary students adjust their writing in response to disciplinary purposes and teacher expectations (*Yaylali*). Such work aligns with contemporary perspectives in L2 writing research that consider writing as socially and contextually situated rather than merely an accumulation of skills (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2022). By analysing how learners mobilise linguistic resources to meet contextual demands, the study articulates the need for teacher capacity building that supports both linguistic and disciplinary awareness.

Altogether, these works foreground a central contextual reality of TESOL: writing is both cognitive and social. It develops not only through feedback techniques but through the interplay of genre, audience, identity, and participation in disciplinary worlds.

Pragmatics, intercultural communication, and learner agency

A third thematic cluster extends notions of context into intercultural communication, focusing on how learners navigate meaning when cultural norms and communicative intentions intersect. The comparative exploration of Vietnamese and Japanese university students' pragmatic strategies shows that learners rely on culturally grounded preferences for directness, indirectness, clarity, or *face-saving* in ways that evince their identities (*Koseki & Nguyen*). This framing aligns with some important research on L2 pragmatics that examine the integration of

pragmatic understanding into language teaching and the need to recognise learner agency (Attardo & Pickering, 2021).

More broadly, studies on technology-enhanced pragmatic development note that digital tools can enhance pragmatic competence when embedded in appropriate social and cultural settings, yet also present challenges when contextual cues are limited (Qi & Chen, 2025). These results reinforce the idea that successful communication is inseparable from the contexts in which it unfolds.

Digital practices and the realities of 21st-century learning

The final thematic cluster switches to digital learning contexts, specifically for adult migrants with interrupted formal education. The study reported by Julie Choi and Yvette Slaughter looking into how such learners engage with digital technologies, uncovers that access to digital tools does not guarantee meaningful linguistic development. Learners variously resort to speech-to-text tools, translation functions, and other affordances, sometimes in ways that bypass deeper language learning processes.

This echoes broader work in digital literacies, which suggests that digital literacy involves critical understanding and purposeful use of tools rather than just access (Darvin & Hafner, 2022). More recent studies in SLA confirm that learning environments, including digital ones, fundamentally inform what learners can achieve and how they participate in communicative practices (Howard, 2024). While viewed through this lens, digital engagement becomes another contextual reality that educators must work out with careful pedagogical design.

Reconsidering foundational concepts in TESOL

The issue wraps up with a review of a recently published collection on authenticity (*Sarkeshikian*). Instead of defining authenticity through static notions of “real-worldness”, the reviewed work positions authenticity as a negotiated, identity-driven, and context-dependent concept. This reconceptualisation is consistent with current research in translanguaging, which underscores dynamic, context-sensitive communication practices in multilingual education (Mendoza et al., 2024).

Throughout this edition, such perspectives suggest that authenticity is not a property of tasks or materials alone but of learners’ lived experiences and the contexts they traverse.

Concluding remarks

Across historical and policy contexts, writing development, pragmatic agency, digital engagement, and evolving understandings of authenticity, the contributions in this volume illuminate TESOL's contextual nature. They show a field framed by legacies, structures, relationships, and choices – and by the agency of learners and educators who move through these worlds.

We would like to pay our sincere gratitude to you as our readers, authors, and reviewers for continuing your support to *TESOL in Context* and your work within ever-shifting landscape of this field.

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Languages and cultures in the regions: A tribute to Ruth Nicholls (1947-2024)

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Abstract

Multilingual and multicultural Australia is typically represented in urban settings. This representation is challenged by half a century of languages and multicultural teaching and research originating in Armidale in the New England region of NSW. From the 1970s to the present, educational institutions in Armidale have been leaders in the multicultural, TESOL and languages education fields, a tradition recorded in a manuscript prepared by Ruth Nicholls (1947-2024), a lecturer in TESOL and Languages at the Armidale College of Advanced Education (ACAE) and at the University of New England (UNE) from the early 1970s until her retirement in 2013. This manuscript, which accompanies a carefully documented archive, records innovation in applied linguistics, TESOL, languages and cultures education over decades, as well as productive collaboration between Armidale-based specialists working in these fields. This paper draws on Ruth's manuscript (Nicholls, ca. 2014) to trace TESOL, languages and cultures education and research in the New England region, extending the account up to the present and into regions beyond the New England.

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Introduction

In 1973, at a time when the White Australia policy was only just coming to an end, and public awareness of Aboriginal history, culture and society beyond colonial era justification for dispossession was only just emerging, courses in Aboriginal and multicultural education, as well as courses in languages education, including TESOL, were established at the Armidale College of Advanced Education (ACAE). These courses were the origin of more than half a century of unbroken languages and multicultural education in Armidale.

Multiculturalism and multilingualism in the New England region of NSW, where Armidale is located, has a much longer history than half a century. As recorded by Clayton-Dixon (2019), a community of five languages, alongside languages from two other language families, has been used by First Nations Australians on the New England Tableland for millennia. Nevertheless, the formal teaching of languages and cultures education in Armidale at the ACAE and at the University of New England (UNE) over five decades is a heritage worth celebrating, especially when viewed alongside the ‘monolingual mindset’, that is, English monolingualism understood as the ‘unmarked case’, so apparently entrenched in settler Australian culture throughout most of this time (Clyne, 2008; Ellis, 2006, 2008).

This article is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Nicholls, a long-serving and devoted lecturer in TESOL and Languages education at both the ACAE and at UNE until her retirement in 2013. From 1973 to the present, educators in Armidale, Ruth’s friends and colleagues, have continued to implement programs in languages and cultures designed to overcome the ‘limitation of human potential’ represented by monolingualism (Ellis, 2008, p. 316). That the heritage of languages and cultures education in Armidale is recorded is largely thanks to Ruth, whose carefully curated archive, a post-retirement labour of love, is the source of much of the history recounted below. This history records how, over the decades in Armidale, teacher education in the fields of languages, TESOL, migrant education, and Aboriginal studies has drawn on the knowledge, skill and experience of both staff and students, and has resonated with evolving theory and practice in these fields. The account below begins with the Diploma in Migrant Teaching offered in 1973 at the ACAE and then tracks a series of innovations from this starting point to the array of related programs now offered at and supported by UNE. As recorded below, these innovations led to UNE academics extending the focus on languages education and use beyond the New England region to other regions of Australia. An unbroken thread that runs throughout this account is Ruth Nicholls’ unwavering commitment to languages and cultures education in the New England region and beyond.

Leading the languages education field from the 1970s to 1990s

Languages have been academic disciplines at UNE since the founding of the New England University College in 1938. In fact, among the five academic staff in that first year of operation, two, i.e. 40%, were languages scholars. French and German were the first ‘modern’ languages offered, and Latin and Ancient Greek were offered for those who studied Classics. Subsequently, as UNE became an independent university in 1954, and continued to grow, Italian and Modern Greek were introduced, responding to the needs of families of second-generation migrants in NSW. Asian languages were taught within social science and Asian studies disciplines, as was standard practice in tertiary education at the time; these were located at the ACAE, where Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian were offered.

In 1973 Dr Alan Kerr established the two-year Diploma in Migrant Teaching at the ACAE. Notably, the preferred title, Diploma in *Multicultural* Education, was not considered ‘acceptable’ at the time. Moreover, even though this diploma was a graduate diploma, the word ‘graduate’ could not be used because it was offered at a college of advanced education rather than a university (Nicholls, ca. 2014). Nevertheless, the Diploma included modules in adult and child migrant education, society and culture, as well as language teaching and a related practicum. Significantly, the Diploma included an introduction to linguistics for language teachers taught by John Collerson (1994, 1997), who later authored grammar books widely used by Australian teachers. Each offering attracted at least 100 students, both internal and external, and included two very popular five-day residential schools.

Many senior staff in the Adult Migrant Education Service, the various state Departments of Education as well as other government departments also enrolled, creating a major force for new thinking related to immigration and settlement as well as the education of new arrivals (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

By 1976 the success of the diploma led to the ACAE opening the Centre for Multicultural Studies. In the same year Ruth Nicholls began teaching at the Centre, while also teaching TESOL and Modern Languages Teaching methods in the Graduate Diploma of Education offered at UNE.

In 1978, a Graduate Diploma in Multicultural Education was established within the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the ACAE. While the scope of the new diploma expanded to include studies in sociolinguistics and education for a multicultural society as well as English language teaching, and the opportunity to study European languages and modern language teaching, all students continued to be provided with an introduction to linguistics in a module entitled *Linguistics for Language Teachers*.

The program recognised that the whole of Australian society needed to change as the population diversified and encountered varied cultural practices, so it aimed to educate all educators (not just specialist ESL teachers) to meet this challenge (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

The 1978 ACAE Graduate Diploma strengthened the 1973 foundation, developing into an unbroken tradition in Armidale of teacher education in the fields of languages, TESOL, migrant education, and Aboriginal studies. Following the amalgamation of ACAE and UNE in the period 1988-89, this tradition has continued at UNE through partnerships between the School of Education (SoE), and departments of Linguistics and Languages and Cultures in the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS).

In 1973, at the same time as Dr Alan Kerr was establishing the Diploma in Migrant Teaching, Mary ('Millie') Douglas established Aboriginal Education and Aboriginal Studies as compulsory subjects for all students at the ACAE. Later in the 1970s, the Centre for Multicultural Studies, established at the ACAE in 1976, was expanded to become the Centre for Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies. By the 1980s the Centre was led by Dr (later Professor) Anne-Katrin Eckermann, an expert in Aboriginal land rights. The Aboriginal Education programs offered by the Centre were delivered by Aboriginal Fellows, including the well-known activist Burnum Burnum (Harry Penrith). The Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal Education offered through the ACAE Centre trained half the Aboriginal teachers in NSW. The growing number of Aboriginal students, enrolled at both the ACAE and UNE, led to the opening in 1985 of the Oorala Aboriginal Centre established to support these students during their studies. The Oorala Centre continues to flourish and support First Nations students to this day (University of New England, 2025a).

Applying linguistics to language teacher education

Studies in educational linguistics established by John Collerson at the ACAE in the early 1970s remain a feature of current UNE TESOL programs. The content covered is based on ongoing developments in the social and functional approach to linguistics that was such an innovative feature of John Collerson's original teaching. The inclusion of educational linguistics in TESOL and languages education offered in teacher education programs in Armidale from 1973 to the present represents a thread that ties together developments in language education theory and practice, and languages teaching in general, throughout these decades (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

During the 1960s, audiolingual and structural approaches were used to teach additional languages. These approaches featured activities based on teacher-led repetition and drills designed to build accurate control of the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar of the target

language. Once British linguists such as J. R. Firth (1968) and M.A.K. Halliday (1973) had drawn language teachers' attention to how language is used in real contexts, structural approaches evolved into situational language teaching (Richards & Rogers, 2014). In the mid-1960s in Australia, for example, a series of resources, *Situational English for Newcomers to Australia* (Department of Education and Science, 1969-1972), became the mainstay of adult migrant education. These resources were designed to help students learn sentence and interaction patterns they could use in everyday situations, such as 'at the post office' or 'in the restaurant'.

By 1973, when Dr Alan Kerr launched the Diploma in Migrant Teaching at the ACAE¹, approaches used to teach additional languages were becoming increasingly student-centred and communicative. Earlier 'quantitative, cognitive [and] positivist' teaching methods were being overtaken by the 'social turn' (Ortega, 2013) with a focus on authentic language use and building language learners' 'communicative competence' (Hymes, 1972). This was especially true for migrant English programs designed for learners who needed to become fluent language users comparatively quickly in order to navigate successfully life in a new linguistic and cultural setting. The advent of communicative language teaching (CLT) heralded two decades during which additional languages education responded to linguists recasting in social terms phenomena such as cognition, grammar, interaction, learning and identity (Ortega, 2013).

Communicative language teaching, and related pedagogies, were characterised by a variety of group work, pair work, roleplay and problem-solving spoken language activities, designed to build motivation and with an emphasis on fluency over accuracy (Savignon, 2000; Richards & Rogers, 2014). During the 1980s and beyond, interactive communicative activities became a feature of the very popular and distinctive intensive schools attended by all students enrolled in additional language education programs at masters, graduate diploma, and graduate certificate levels initially at the ACAE and then at UNE. Student numbers were high because of the demand at the time for migrant English teachers in school and adult settings, as well as foreign language teachers in schools. Moreover, student teachers could enrol in these courses externally from anywhere in Australia and beyond; the number of overseas students on campus at UNE increased as well. During the 1990s, as other universities began to offer TESOL and Languages education programs, student numbers in those programs at UNE plateaued (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

By the 1990s, English language teachers in Australia were increasingly expected to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing skills into migrant education programs designed to prepare learners to use both spoken and written language fluently *and* accurately to a standard that would underpin effective engagement in education, employment and the community.

¹ The 'Alan Kerr Collection', comprising books and other documents related to the development of TESOL in Australia, is held in the UNE Heritage Centre.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s in Australia, language teaching programs were strongly influenced by educational linguists describing how language is used to make meaning and the related ways text structure, grammar and vocabulary vary from one social context to the next (e.g. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These descriptions have been successfully applied to language teaching and learning and have influenced the development of Australian curriculum documents to the present (e.g. Derewianka & Jones, 2022; Rose & Martin, 2012). Migrant English programs, in particular, were strongly influenced by emerging text-based pedagogies, which shifted the focus of language teaching from isolated sentences to whole texts and their use in context (Feez, 2001; de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2015; Mickan, 2022). Language teaching programs at UNE were well placed to prepare student teachers for these developments through the *Linguistics for Language Teachers* unit first established in the 1970s by John Collerson. Following a recent UNE course review, this unit is being revised for 2026, but it retains the emphasis on functional approaches to language and highlights the contribution linguistics can make to inform teaching, including English and languages teaching (University of New England, 2025b).

Languages and TESOL education at UNE

At UNE during the early 2000s, text-based language descriptions within interactive classrooms that drew on the CLT heritage were a feature of TESOL and Languages education programs in the School of Education. This was also the approach used in the English Language Centre (an ELICOS centre for international students enrolling at UNE), and the Academic Skills Office, established to assist all UNE students with academic English (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

In 2001, the UNE School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics established the Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics (MAAL), later the Master of Applied Linguistics, the first fully online Masters course in Australia, promoted as UNE's 'flagship' degree from 2007. This degree attracted students from Australia and overseas, with students from over 27 nationalities studying the course online. The MAAL represented a broadening of the traditional linguistics courses on offer, which previously focused more on preparing descriptive linguists to analyse and document languages of the world. The MAAL featured units in Intercultural Communication, Applied Linguistics and Bilingualism among others, and increased its appeal to a wide range of languages, literacy and TESOL teachers as well as those in the publishing and diplomatic fields (Elizabeth Ellis, personal communication, March 24, 2025). When a TESOL specialisation was added in 2010, the Linguistics discipline collaborated with School of Education colleagues, Ruth Nicholls and Glenda Kupczyk-Romanczuk, to deliver the TESOL units that prepared both classroom and specialist teachers to work with learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) in primary school, secondary school and adult education settings (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

Following the merger of the ACAE with UNE in 1988-89, Asian and European language and culture disciplines eventually joined into one School. These moves facilitated subsequent collaboration between the School of Education and Languages and Cultures disciplines in the Faculty of Arts (later the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences). By the early 2000s, Modern Greek had been discontinued, but Spanish was introduced in 2012 through an innovative cross-Tasman blended model arrangement with Massey University in New Zealand. In 1995 a four-year Bachelor of Languages had been introduced, enabling students to aim for advanced levels of language proficiency and cultural awareness by spending an academic year studying university courses in a target language country. For UNE's distance education students, who may have been studying in an environment with few opportunities for hearing and speaking the target language in authentic situations, this extended period of language immersion has been found to be especially profitable for developing oral and aural proficiency. Shorter periods of in-country language study have been included in the popular Diploma of Modern Languages (Nicholls, ca. 2014; University of New England, 2025c).

From the beginning, an integrated approach to distance education has been of crucial significance to UNE's identity. UNE was the first tertiary institution in Australia to offer TESOL and language courses by distance education. Innovative characteristics of the original ground-breaking "New England model" of distance education included the requirement that internal and external students be taught concurrently in the same courses, and the incorporation of residential and weekend schools to facilitate face-to-face contact among students and with staff (Eastcote & Small, 1984). In this way UNE's long history of offering languages in distance education mode as well as on-campus mode has extended opportunities for formal language study far beyond the regional centre of Armidale to reach students who for reasons of work, health, family or location are unable to attend traditional classes. As these students use and reflect on their developing language proficiency and learning experiences, they contribute to the development of multilingual and multicultural awareness in families, workplaces, and regional and local Australian communities (Tasker, 2012, 2018; Evans, 2024).

The Diploma in Modern Languages was eventually expanded through a notable collaboration between Languages in the School of Arts and Ruth Nicholls and Glenda Kupczyk-Romanczuk in the School of Education, initially to enable teachers of European languages to add an Asian language to their teaching repertoire. The approach grew out of the Asian Languages Accreditation Program, a UNE initiative begun in 2010 in response to the government's National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP). The aim was to increase the supply of Asian language teachers in Australian schools. Students, who were qualified teachers in other subjects, were enabled to retrain as teachers of Asian (and later other) languages, and so the Diploma combines language proficiency units with Languages Other Than English (LOTE) methodology for primary or secondary school settings, a teaching practicum, and a short intensive in-country immersion program (Evans, 2024). By 2014 the course had been instrumental in assisting 60 NSW teachers to become qualified to teach Asian

languages across the state (Georgina Doukas, NALSSP Languages Officer, DET NSW, personal communication, July 15, 2014; Reading et al., 2013).

In 2010, as initial teacher education courses were being restructured, alongside the streamlining of online delivery, a generalist unit in cross-cultural education was included in all UNE initial teacher education degrees so all teachers recognised:

... that they are **always** teachers of English in their classrooms in **every** learning area, through the medium of their specialist subjects (Nicholls, ca. 2014).

In 2013, Ruth Nicholls retired, handing over coordination of the TESOL units and Languages education units to colleagues. As the decade unfolded, the 'multilingual turn', a logical development beyond the social turn, was re-shaping language teaching (Ortega, 2013), including at UNE. This was a shift from thinking about language learning in terms of separate languages, a consequence of the 'monolingual mindset' so prevalent where English is the dominant language (Clyne, 2008; Ellis, 2006), towards a recognition that language teaching and learning necessarily takes place in plurilingual settings in which languages interact dynamically and interdependently. Enabling language teachers and learners to draw on all the languages they know and can use supports them learning to make meaning in an additional language (Ellis, 2016a, 2016b; Garcia, 2014; Li, 2022; Li & Garcia, 2022; Menken, 2013; Choi & Ollerhead, 2018).

During the decade from 2010 to 2020, UNE scholars were teaching and researching in the fields of Languages, TESOL and Languages Education both from the point of view of social approaches to language education (e.g. de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2015; Feez & Zhang, 2018; Parkin & Harper, 2018) as well as multilingual (later, plurilingual) approaches (e.g. Ellis, 2016a, 2016b; Morgan, 2020; Tasker, 2016), a contribution that has continued beyond 2020 (e.g. Harper & Feez, 2021).

In recent years, discipline knowledge and pedagogical content in the TESOL units have been consolidated and differentiated to strengthen the preparation of teachers striving to meet the needs of EAL/D school students in diverse teaching situations in Australia, as well as the needs of adults learning English in the Adult Migrant English Program, studying in Australian ELICOS centres, and studying English in institutions overseas. This includes addressing the development of literacy and the study of texts that underpins the Australian Curriculum: English and related syllabus documents, as well as more diverse pedagogies used in English education in post-school settings in Australia and overseas (Yilmaz et al., 2023). A new unit, *Perspectives on Language, Society and Culture*, has been designed to cover sociolinguistics, language ecology and the analysis of intercultural interactions. In recognition that teachers, in both Australian and international settings, are increasingly expected to contribute to knowledge

creation, unit consolidation has included a focus on on-going professional development and the role of teachers as researchers generating new understandings and effecting change on the basis of action research in their own classrooms (e.g. Yilmaz et al., 2023; Zhang, 2025).

A wealth of ‘languages in the regions’

Over the last two decades, groups of researchers at UNE began to focus their attention on languages used ‘beyond the metropolis’ (Ellis et al., 2014). This development emerged from the awareness that while the New England region, and comparable regions of Australia, have always been culturally and linguistically diverse, much of the research into language practices and the education of plurilingual children and adults has been conducted in metropolitan areas. Projects that addressed this disparity included the following:

- Community workshops conducted by Elizabeth Ellis on ‘Bringing up Bilingual Kids’, which focused attention on passing on family languages to children in the regions when there is no readily-accessible speech community (Ellis & Bilbatua, 2013, Ellis, 2014).
- The plurilingual and translingual practices of migrants from African countries in Armidale, Coffs Harbour and Wagga Wagga (Ndhlovu, 2014; Ndhlovu & Willoughby, 2016).
- The complex learning journeys of isolated distance students of Chinese and how their encounters with the language and culture fostered international relationships and networks (Tasker, 2012, 2016, 2017, 2018).

These shared interests came together in a Symposium at the 17th World Congress of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) in Brisbane in 2014: ‘*Beyond the metropolis: Language learning, teaching, use and maintenance in rural and regional contexts*’. This provided opportunities to foster links with researchers in other regional areas (Ellis et al, 2014).

The growing recognition of the wealth of language diversity in the regions led to a successful project funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC): *Bilingualism in the Bush* (Ellis & Sims, 2014 – 2018) which followed nine families in three New England towns as they nurtured plurilingualism within their families (Ellis & Sims, 2018). Another successful outcome of this link between researchers in plurilingualism and early childhood was the ARC project: *Starting young: Early years’ languages learning in Australia* (Morgan, Hajek, Lo Bianco & Ellis, 2019-2025): *investigating best practice in language learning in pre-school and early primary school* (Morgan et al., 2024a). This project has informed the National Languages Education Plan (Morgan et al., 2024b). A further project led by Elizabeth Ellis, in collaboration with the

Bicultural Support Program, the International Student Office and the English Language Centre matched international students with young children in childcare settings to provide language and cultural support in their language.

A very different perspective on ‘languages in the regions’ is advanced in the groundbreaking work of UNE scholars, Nick Reid (Linguistics) and Patrick Nunn (Geography), which matched First Nation stories with scientifically-recorded sea-level variation since the last Ice Age. This innovative work showed that oral histories could be passed on accurately over a period of 7,000 years through traditional transgenerational communication practices (Nunn & Reid, 2016). Callum Clayton-Dixon continues his work on reviving the Anaiwan language (Clayton-Dixon 2025).

Innovation and inertia in research-driven course design

The multilingual (later plurilingual) turn in languages education led to UNE researchers collaborating on new Masters programs that drew on the availability of seven language disciplines, as well as on the long history of collaboration between Linguistics, the Language and Literacies group in Education, and Languages and Cultures. These programs included a Master of TESOL, based on Ellis’s (2016) research on plurilingual teachers and designed for international teachers of English, for example, in Thailand or Japan, recognising their plurilingual capabilities and turning their attention to plurilingual approaches they could use in their own classrooms.

A further innovation was the Master of Languages Education, a wide-ranging degree with a core of cross-disciplinary Education and Linguistics units and eight specialist strands in Languages, Languages education, English language/TESOL education, English language testing (IELTS), Linguistics, Applied linguistics, Community and regional languages, and Translation studies. Sadly, due to a university-wide restructure, and in line with the current trend in Australian universities limiting research-driven innovative course development in the humanities, neither of these forward-thinking degrees became ongoing languages education offerings at UNE.

Armidale becomes a refugee sanctuary city

Combined with UNE’s reputation for adopting multicultural approaches to education, advocacy by Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement Inc. resulted in Armidale becoming, in 2018, a designated centre for receiving Ezidi people from a refugee background (Armidale

Sanctuary, 2018-2025). Ezidi people were mercilessly persecuted for decades in northern Iraq, culminating in a catastrophic genocide and siege in 2014. Finding asylum and permanent residency, they now number almost 1,000 residents of Armidale. A UNE-based survey of social attitudes within the Armidale community shows that Ezidi people have been welcomed by the locals and have become integrated into the community (Watt et al., 2023), including through sporting networks (O'Neill, 2023; O'Neill & Baker, 2023, 2025). Nevertheless, the arrival of the Ezidi people presented considerable challenges for local schools and the TAFE college (Feez, Ellis, Tasker, & Harper, 2018; Xavier & Baker, 2025). Most of the newcomers had little to no English, had been through extreme trauma with no schooling, or at best brief and interrupted schooling. There were only small numbers of EAL/D trained teachers in schools, and TAFE offerings were limited to on-arrival AMEP classes and Adult Literacy programs designed for native speakers. With the arrival of the Ezidi students in Armidale, several local TAFE teachers took the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications by enrolling in the UNE Graduate Certificate in Education Studies (TESOL).

In addition, UNE's educational linguists, led by Susan Feez, with Elizabeth Ellis, Isabel Tasker, the English Language Centre, and later Helen Harper and Robyn Cox, established, with funding from the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), a program which orients young Ezidi people to higher education, by, for example, providing access to academic and social English, an understanding of approaches to study and mentoring and role-modelling support. This program ran in various formats for eight years, and, with the knowledge gained, transitioned to a 'business as usual' model within UNE, whereby the Student Services unit takes responsibility for engaging with and supporting students of refugee background (Feez, Ellis, Tasker, & Harper, 2018). The arrival of Ezidi families in Armidale also led to the establishment in 2020 of the first Intensive English Centre (IEC) outside a capital city at the newly-opened Armidale Secondary College.

With the arrival of so many Ezidi refugees, providing adequate interpreting services became a further challenge for the Armidale community, with few trained interpreters in what was at first believed to be their preferred language: Kurdish Kurmanji. Soon, however, it became clear that the Ezidi language was distinct from Kurmanji and efforts have been made to have Ezidi recognised by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). A high-level round table was held in 2019 with the CEO of NAATI, the Languages Director of Multicultural NSW and other key Armidale stakeholders to investigate pathways for training more interpreters (Elizabeth Ellis, personal communication 2025). Efforts continue in order to develop increased interpreter provision (Ellis & Hogan, 2020). In the intervening years, numerous Ezidi young people have been supported to finish school and embark on university degrees or TAFE qualifications. A recent example is the 2025 Health Scholarship offered by the New England Division of General Practice 'in recognition of the Ezidi community who have become an integral part of the Armidale and New England Community' (Boshoff, 2025). The scholarship supports university students with an Ezidi background who are enrolled in a health-related degree.

Into the future – Threats and opportunities

Languages education at UNE has a long and distinguished history, and its varied complement of language educators and linguists from diverse backgrounds positions it well to face the many challenges ahead. So, what do we do well?

We have an increased understanding of the impact of identity on learning outcomes, and an increased recognition of the meaning-making and cultural resources EAL/D students bring to the classroom. We know how these can be used to support students' learning of English (i.e. the 'multilingual turn' in language education). We have a rich heritage of Australian innovation and leadership in TESOL education based on a principled educational linguistics (Partridge & Harper, 2023). We have strong links with professional associations, including ACTA, AFMLTA, PETAA, ALEA, ALS, AILA, LCNAU and ALAA².

There are, however, many threats to our continued good practice, now and into the future. Like most universities, UNE has lost staff, with their knowledge and expertise, to redundancies, and we hear of the closure of languages departments around the country (See for example, Cassidy, 2025; Zhang, L., 2023). We see the promotion of 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to literacy education in Anglophone contexts aligned with high stakes testing, with English aural comprehension and pronunciation assumed, resulting in EAL/D learners being perceived as having learning difficulties and their existing language resources being ignored (Adoniou, 2018; Creagh et al., 2023; Nguyen & Rushton, 2022; Partridge & Harper, 2023; Schalley et al., 2015; Tilney, 2023).

Then there is the loss of targeted funding for EAL/D education and Professional Learning (PL), leading to further loss of professional expertise and knowledge (Australian Education Union & Australian Council of TESOL Associations, 2023; Creagh et al., 2023; Michell, 2025; Oliver et al., 2017; Steele et al., 2025). A fragmentation of the EAL/D research base is apparent, and although it is many years since we lost the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) (Tilney, 2023), today we see the defunding of the Australian Dictionary Centre as well (Manns & Burridge, 2025). What will be next?

Furthermore, we see the promotion of commercial resources designed around language fragments and inauthentic texts, often using British or American English (Creagh et al., 2023). The increasing use of AI in the development of learning and assessment materials risks

² Australian Council of TESOL Associations, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, Primary English Teaching Association Australia, Australian Literacy Educators' Association, Australian Linguistic Society, Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée, Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities, and Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.

embedding a lack of recognition of the full spectrum of EAL/D learner diversity. Large language models are trained on a limited set of languages, estimated as around 100, while there are more than 7000 languages in the world (Fromkin et al., 2021), and often on restricted sets of speakers and contexts. While a focus on the use of digital technology and multimodal texts in classrooms is inevitable to prepare language learners for a digital future, learners' success with authentic language use and meaning-making depends on 'sustained ... guidance and supervision' (Macinska & Vinkler, 2024, p. 16) by the waning numbers of specialist language teachers (Guillén & Sawin, 2025; Neilsen & Weinmann, 2022). Lastly, we face the persistence of the monolingual mindset and the retreat from multicultural and global perspectives in the current international political landscape (Robinet, 2025).

Conclusion

Despite the challenges, the resilience of Armidale's multicultural and multilingual traditions, as documented so meticulously by Ruth Nicholls, represents hope for the future. UNE continues to offer specialist degrees preparing teachers to teach English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) in primary, secondary, and adult education, as well as to teach Languages in primary and secondary schools, at a time when the number of universities offering these teaching specialisations appears to be shrinking across Australia (Crealy, 2025; Steele et al., 2025). UNE also continues to teach the same range of Asian, European and classical languages (University of New England, 2025d), again at a time when these disciplines are being discontinued by many Australian universities (Heffernan & Carroll, 2023).

We are proud of UNE's multicultural and multilingual heritage. The current article illustrates our belief that we should make much more of this heritage than we have in the past. Ruth Nicholls' archive has provided us with the raw material to honour our multicultural and multilingual legacy, while also honouring Ruth's role in promoting languages and cultures education in the New England region of NSW and beyond. It would seem fitting to finish this article with a personal view of Ruth Nicholls, composed by Jim Nicholls, Ruth's husband, scholar of French and former UNE academic.

Postscript: Ruth Nicholls - A personal view

Ruth Nicholls (née Yelland) (1947-2024) showed an interest in languages from an early age: Latin, French and German at school, and French, German and Indonesian at the University of Sydney. As an undergraduate Ruth volunteered at the Sydney University Settlement in Redfern, helping clients with English. From 1968-69, as a post-graduate student in the French

Department at the University of Sydney, Ruth taught French and furthered her experience as a French teacher at the Australian International Independent School. In 1970, Ruth joined the French Department of the University of New England, and in her spare time volunteered in remedial English tutoring with individual and small-group members of the community. In 1972, Ruth returned to Sydney for our wedding and was welcomed back by the University of Sydney French Department.

In August 1972, we sailed for France. While an *assistante d'anglais* in Paris between 1972 and 1975, Ruth completed a *Diplôme supérieure de linguistique appliquée à l'enseignement des langues étrangères* at the Université de Paris 3 – Sorbonne-Nouvelle, and at night taught English at the Australian Embassy to displaced people intending to migrate to Australia. The Paris experience prepared Ruth for the next phase of her academic career.

Ruth's career from 1976 onwards has been documented above by her colleagues. Ruth was a devoted, thorough and thoughtful lecturer, unfailingly loyal to her subject and to her students, internal and external. She regarded the practicum as an essential part of a student's preparation for teaching in schools and made a point of visiting her students on their practicum placements to encourage them and to iron out any problems, but also to forge or maintain relations with language-teaching schools. Even when funding for these visits was withdrawn by the university, Ruth continued to visit her students on placement, at her own expense, and often interstate. In retirement Ruth worked voluntarily with overseas students and their families, and made many friends in the Iranian, Iraqi, and latterly Ezidi communities.

It was a source of great pride to Ruth, and is to me, that our son Peter teaches English to international students at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Pete is third generation TESOL. His paternal grandmother, a Secondary Latin, French and German teacher, worked with migrant education after the war and into the 1950s.

Jim Nicholls

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'Dissolution by design': Gonski school funding and school autonomy reform impacts on English as an additional language/dialect programs in Australian schools

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Abstract

In 2011, the Australian Government embarked on an equity-badged, 'needs-based' school funding reform accompanied by national school autonomy reforms devolving decisions about resourcing, staffing and service design and delivery to school principals. In the second of three articles examining national policy impacts on English as an additional language/ dialect programs in Australian schools, this study examines the 'enchanting' policy designs of the Gonski funding and national school autonomy reforms that deregulated, devolved and ultimately dissipated tied-funded specialist EAL/D provision for English language learners. Analysis of data from ACTA's 2016 *State of EAL/D Education in Australia* survey highlights direct 'on the ground' impacts of school autonomy policies in eroding the essential conditions for school EAL/D program provision and in intensifying school micro-political contestation around specialist expertise required for effective EAL/D program delivery. The article notes the national advocacy of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) in linking possible EAL/D policy solutions to emergent education policy agendas. The article provides a reassessment of the Gonski funding reforms and contributes to a growing critique of school autonomy policies in Australian school education.

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Introduction

In 2011, the Australian Government embarked on an equity-badged, ‘needs-based’ school funding reform accompanied by national school autonomy reforms aimed at improving student performance and outcomes by devolving resourcing, staffing and service design and delivery decisions to school principals. These reforms reflected the longstanding national policy agenda of broadbanding tied funding of specialist provision for English language learners (Michell, 2025) but now turned to applying the New Public Management (NPM) reform agenda to service design and delivery in schools. The result was the effective sidelining and undermining of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) programs in schools.¹ This study traces the policy enchantment/displacement agendas, policy streams and designs that inevitably produced these impacts.

Literature review and methodology

As detailed in the preceding study (Michell, 2025), the policy enchantment/displacement perspective (Moore, 1991), the policy streams (Kingdon, 1984/1995) and New Public Management frameworks (e.g. Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012) provide key analytical perspectives tracing the deregulatory agenda in the policy designs of the Gonski school funding and school autonomy reforms. This agenda is highlighted through a thematic analysis of key policy documents and texts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Herzog, et al., 2017).

Analysis of the policy designs of the Gonski school funding and school autonomy reforms is informed by new policy design research (Howlett, 2014; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018a; Peters & Fontaine, 2022; Siddiki, 2020), specifically, *policy design as content* as represented in the language of policy texts and interpreted by policy analysts (Siddiki & Curley, 2022). Analysis of policy content focuses on common policy design elements such as: ‘(i) goals or problems to be solved; (ii) policy targets, or those whose actions are affected through the implementation of policies; and (iii) tools through which target and target behaviour is compelled’ (*ibid*, p. 123). In this context, elements of the New Public Management (NPM) framework can be seen as both policy tools and policy designs. A major research gap in ascertaining how policy design features anticipate policy outcomes is addressed (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018b; Siddiki & Curley, 2022). One application of this approach has been a focus on causal chain logics that represents the actual driver of policy effects in implementation, and ultimately the effectiveness of a policy design (Capano & Howlett, 2021).

Analysis and critique of Australian school autonomy reforms is informed by the growing literature on school autonomy policies and practices in state and territory jurisdictions. This literature encompasses research studies and government reports on the discursive features (Gobby, 2016; Keddie et al., 2022; Gobby et al., 2022; Smyth, 2011) and system implementation (Clinton et al., 2013; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2016; Gobby, 2013; Hamilton Associates, 2015; MacDonald et al., 2023) of the reforms, as well as impact

case studies in individual schools (Caldwell, 2016; Gobby et al., 2018; Keddie, 2017). There is a significant research gap, however, on the impacts of the reforms on teachers (e.g. teacher ‘exploitation’, Gobby et al., 2024) and students in schools, and specifically, on the equity impacts on EAL/D teachers and learners throughout the education system.

To address this research gap, EAL/D teachers and educators were surveyed about their responses to the school autonomy reform in their state or territory. The survey included multiple choice, Likert scale responses and related open-ended questions, allowing both quantitative and qualitative data analysis of reform impacts in schools (Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2013). EAL/D teacher comments were analysed according to deductive categories relating to key professional roles, responsibilities and relationships (Fink, 2024; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019), and further illuminated with reference to the literature on school micropolitics (e.g. Ball, 1987, 1994, 2012; Ball & Bowe, 1991; Blase & Björk, 2009; Flessa, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Kairiene, 2018; Lochmiller & Pawlicki, 2018; Malen, 1994).

Deregulating funding for English language learners: Gonski policy streams and designs

The period from 2011 to 2016 saw the convergence of problem, policy and political streams around Commonwealth school needs-based funding reform and its implementation as deregulated, flexible funding through devolved school-based resource management in school autonomy programs in all state and territory jurisdictions. Comprehensive national adoption of these reforms reflected the enchantments of additional school funding enhanced by NPM resource efficiencies of school-based, flexible resource management. As outlined in the previous study (Michell, 2025), this agenda had its antecedents in the COAG reform agenda of 2008-2012 on Commonwealth State relations and service provision focused on funding linked to achievement of outcomes/outputs rather than inputs; devolution of decision-making and service design to the frontline; and ‘competitive tension’ between the States and Territories and between service providers (Rimmer, 2010). The Gonski funding and school autonomy reform agendas complemented each other conceptually with the former focused on identifying and allocating deregulated resource inputs to schools and the latter focused on flexibly utilising those inputs in order to maximise educational outcomes.

Commonwealth schools funding reform: Problem and politics streams

The anomalies and inequities of Commonwealth schools funding had long been a key policy challenge due to entrenched interests of non-government school sectors and successive, piecemeal attempts at reform (Greenwell & Bonnor, 2022). Labor learned to its cost from its 2005 election loss that any schools’ funding policy that resulted in reduced funding for non-Government schools was electoral suicide. The Rudd Government consequently deferred this policy agenda until its second term of office (Kayrooz & Parker, 2010).

The needs-based funding reform finally presented by the *Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report* (Gonski et al., 2011) provided the substantive policy response to the problem of historically inequitable school funding across Government, Catholic and independent school sectors. Almost immediately, however, political considerations overwhelmed the policy, with Prime Minister Gillard's promise that no school (meaning non-government schools) would be worse off as a result of the reform (Greenwell & Bonnor, 2022; Reid, 2020). After a 17 month delay due to difficult Commonwealth-state negotiations following the report's public release, the Gonski funding reforms were finally legislated on 26 June 2013.²

Gonski 's needs-based equity funding: Policy design

The final 'Gonski' report (Gonski et al., 2011) proposed an equitable school funding system that would provide a level of base funding to all schools and additional funding for disadvantaged students with the stated aim of removing inequities and minimising identified student performance gaps. A proposed Resource Allocation Model (RAM), consisting of a per student base amount (the School Resource Standard – SRS) and six additional 'disadvantage' loadings, included a low English language proficiency loading for students with limited English³. Students attracting this loading were identified as having a language background other than English (LBOTE) and at least one parent who only completed school education to Year 9 (or equivalent) or less. The design of this 'disadvantaged LBOTE' loading, however, was an indicator of students' low socio-economic status rather than a real measure of their English language proficiency. The loading was arbitrarily set at 10 per cent of the SRS funding amount, up to an unspecified capped funding amount (Senate Select Committee on School Funding, 2014).

On the face of it, the low English language proficiency loading appeared to preserve a dedicated, equity provision for EAL/D learners. That this was not the case is made clear by the flexible, discretionary, and interim nature of the equity funding and the rejection of targeted programs stated in the Gonski report:

Recommendation 6

In contributing towards the additional costs of educating disadvantaged students, *governments should move away from funding targeted programs* and focus on ensuring that the states and territories and the non-government sector are publicly accountable for the educational outcomes achieved by students from all sources of funding. (Gonski et al, 2011, p. 137, author italics.)

Targeted funding programs

The schooling resource standard represents a new approach to funding schooling and the costs of redressing educational disadvantage. ... *This would replace the approach, which the Australian Government has taken since the 1970s, of seeking to influence the direction of schooling or the achievement of particular*

outcomes through additional program funds for specific activities or groups of students....

The panel believes these types of specific purpose funding are incompatible with the new funding model framed by the schooling resource standard and should be phased out, with the funds planned to be allocated through them rolled into the base of funding available for the new model. (Ibid. p. 182, author italics.)

From the outset, then, the new Commonwealth needs-based equity funding was a *notional* provision designed for maximum flexible use by systems and schools with marginal connection to student groups and their actual learning needs. The Commonwealth Government response to a Senate Estimate Question on Notice makes this disconnection clear:

As with all Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools, the total funding (base and loadings) are provided as a lump sum to school authorities, which can then distribute the funding to schools according to their own needs-based arrangements. While Government funding is calculated with reference to students enrolled at a school, schools and school systems are not required to spend specific amounts of funding on individual students or designated student groups. This includes funding provided under each of the loadings for disadvantage.⁴

Equity loadings were thus designed as resource *factors* that appeared to address student disadvantage while effectively weakening a program focus on equity target groups. This inadequacy was not fully appreciated by the Gonski constituency of teacher unions, parents and the general public for whom the prospect of increased overall funding was the focus of their enduring political support in the decade following the report's release.

As evidenced by these policy texts, minimal accountability and transparency for Commonwealth needs-based funding was built into the policy design. With accountability reporting limited to a financial acquittal process relating to the distribution of base and loading amounts in a block funding report, there was no possibility of national reporting on how low English proficiency funding allocations were used by schools and States/Territory systems to support the English language learning of their EAL/D students. The Commonwealth Government response to the Senate Estimate Question on Notice highlights the minimal accountability attached to its school funding:

Accountability for Commonwealth funding is limited to a financial acquittal process relating to the distribution of base and loading amounts in a block funding report. The Commonwealth admits it does not have visibility of the state or territories' own expenditure on specialist English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) services. States and territories are responsible for the distribution of school funding, both Commonwealth and state funding, in accordance with their own needs-based arrangements.⁵

This ‘hands off’ approach by the Commonwealth Government to state and territory government accountability for Gonski funding was replicated, in turn, by state and territory government *laissez-faire* accountability for schools’ use of allocated funding under their devolved school-based management/school autonomy programs. This national funding cascade instituted non-transparent, minimal public accountability for funding at both Commonwealth-to-state and state-to-school levels. With devolved state and territory government responsibility for provision of EAL/D services in schools, flexible funding for EAL/D learners was no longer identifiable, traceable or reportable.

Gonski’s low English proficiency loading: An ‘equity façade’

A further critique of the equity design of the Gonski funding reform centres on the inadequate *quantum* of the low English proficiency loading able to provide meaningful funding support for EAL/D learners. The resulting Commonwealth low-English proficiency loading amounted to a tiny percentage (0.2 per cent in 2019) of total school funding in the Government sector.⁶ Analysis of low proficiency loadings in 2019 found average per student allocations of \$212 for Government schools, \$893 for Catholic schools, and approximately \$987 for Independent schools,⁷ indicating that the uneven, system variations in school sector distributions were by no means ‘sector blind’ (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2016). The per student loading amount for Government schools was so inadequate that it would not even fund a single day’s English language instruction at then teacher salary rates. When compared to previous Commonwealth ESL New Arrivals per capita funding levels (\$5,039 in 2005) and modelling by the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce (2006),⁸ the loading actually constituted a major reduction in Commonwealth funding for English language provision.

The gross inadequacy of the low English proficiency loading can be partly attributed to the ‘disadvantaged LBOTE’ algorithm used to identify students with English language proficiency needs. The formula was found to be an inaccurate proxy indicator that does not capture real English language proficiency needs of the EAL/D learner cohort and its use failed to ensure effective targeting of resources as it produced gross misalignments between students captured by the measure and students with actual English language proficiency needs (CESE, 2013).⁹

The Commonwealth justified this token amount of the low English proficiency loading with reference to jurisdictions’ ability to flexibly pool Commonwealth and State and Territory funding:

As with all Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools, the total funding (base and loadings) are provided as a lump sum to school authorities, which can then distribute the funding to schools according to their own needs-based arrangements. Schools and school systems are expected to pool their funding from all sources (i.e. Australian Government, state and territory and private) and prioritise spending to meet the educational needs of all their students,

recognising that schools and school systems are best placed to understand the individual needs of their students.

The Commonwealth expects schools and school systems to consider their funding from all sources (i.e. Australian Government, state and territory and private) and prioritise their spending to meet the educational needs of all their students, including for students with low English language proficiency.¹⁰

This reliance on pooled resources amounts to an admission that the low English proficiency loading was inadequate for the intended purpose of providing English language support to EAL/D learners. The Gonski funding reform thus succeeded in operationalising reduced, untied funding for English language learners and effectively shifting costs for English language provision to state and territory governments. With maximum divert-ability of its unequal, marginal funding, the Gonski disadvantaged loading for low English language proficiency can only be considered an equity façade.

National school autonomy reform: NPM policy design

In conjunction with the Gonski funding reform, both Labor and Liberal Coalition Governments actively promoted school autonomy and devolved management policies as a key education governance and service reform they believed would drive improved student educational performance and increased school productivity. The specious assumptions on which this reform rested (e.g. Cobbold, 2014; McDougall & Goldenberg, 2007) suggests that this was a pre-existing NPM resource constraint policy solution in search of a policy problem. Politically, the reform effected a systemic shift of responsibility for educational equity and outcomes away from governments towards ‘responsible’ schools and principals, laying the ground for subsequent, possible blame-shifting (Peters, 2017; Torrance, 2018).

With its pseudo-educational goal ‘to meet the unique needs of students at each school and drive improved student performance’ (DEEWR website, 2012), the national school autonomy agenda was advanced through two key policy mechanisms: a) the Gillard Labor Government’s nationally-funded seeding project, *Empowering Local Schools*, and b) jurisdictions’ school autonomy policies, which replicated the national school autonomy design elements of ‘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’ (*ibid.*). These two design elements are core in the description of school-devolved responsibilities in the Commonwealth program:

The Gillard Labor Government will drive improved student performance and outcomes by giving principals, parents and each school community greater power to determine how their local school is run – including greater responsibility for school budgets, determining the right mixture of staff, and

setting local priorities. A national roll-out will commence with 1,000 schools over 2012 and 2013. (ibid.)

The Commonwealth Government's school autonomy program seeded multiple pilot programs in state and territory jurisdictions, boosted by a plethora of policy direction and consultancy and pilot reports (e.g. ARTD Consultants, 2011; NSW DEC, 2012b; Clinton et al., 2013; Hamilton Associates, 2015). While state and territory school autonomy policies varied somewhat in their degree of management autonomy, links to the education system (Gobby, 2016) and policy enactments in different locations (Gobby et al., 2018 Gobby et al., 2022), all operationalised core school-based management designs of global budgeting and flexible staffing advocated by the national program (Keddie et al., 2022). Implementation roll-out in states and territories was staged with financial incentives for early 'opt-in' schools followed by mandatory participation by all schools in the system. **Table 1** provides an overview of this national roll-out of school autonomy programs in state and territory education systems.

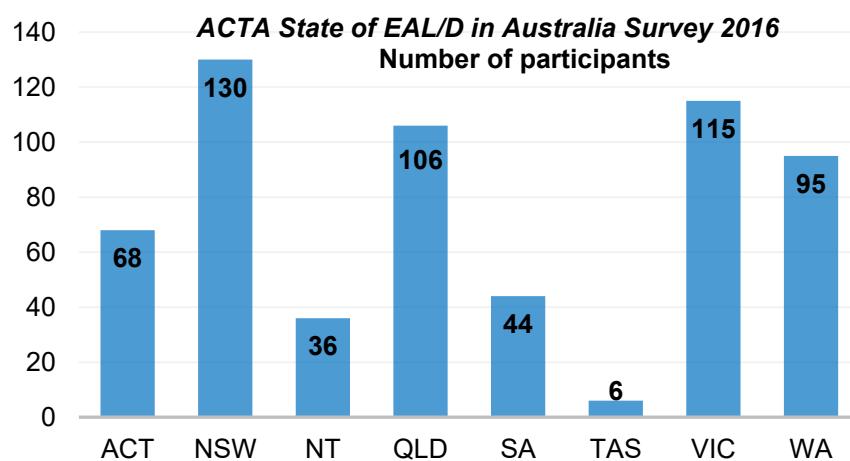
Table 1. Roll-out of school autonomy reforms in state and territory jurisdictions.

JURISDICTION	SCHOOL AUTONOMY POLICY	IMPLEMENTATION
South Australia	Partnerships 21	Introduced in 2000, with one-line budgets in 2011
ACT	ACT school autonomy policy	The policy was developed and published in 2009
Western Australia	Independent Public Schools (IPS)	Introduced in 2009, five intakes of Independent Public Schools constituting 57% of all public schools and 70% of the students and staff in 2015.
Victoria	Towards Victoria as a Learning Community	Introduced in 2012, rebadging of previous self-governing schools' policy, "Schools of the Future", introduced by the Kennett Government in 1993.
New South Wales	Local Schools Local Decisions	Launched in 2012 following school-based management pilots (2011, 2012), finally replaced by School Success model in 2020
Queensland	Independent Public Schools (IPS)	Commenced in 2013, expanded to 120 schools in 2015, then to 250 schools in 2017.
Northern Territory	Independent Public Schools (IPS)	Introduced in 2015 as part of a school improvement initiative, increasing school autonomy.
Tasmania	Tasmania school autonomy policy	The policy was implemented in 2016, involving a transition period, commencing on July 10, 2017, and continuing through 2021.

Given its NPM policy design of devolved service management and delivery, the displacement impacts of school autonomy reforms on school EAL/D programs can be readily foreseen. The flexible resource management of the school's 'one line' budget greatly increases principals' discretion over uses of the allocation, creates competing program priorities, and encourages resource trade-offs or diversion of previously dedicated EAL/D funding to other priorities. Expanded principal control over the school's staffing profile promotes flexible funding and staffing of EAL/D programs; casualisation and de-professionalisation of EAL/D teachers, and residualisation or cessation of the school's EAL/D program. Far from empowering schools and their communities, these policies require schools to make contingent resourcing decisions that impair the quality and continuity of specialist provision for their EAL/D student cohort. The results of the national EAL/D survey outlined in the next section confirms and illustrates these impacts.

Policy impacts: Displacement and dissolution of EAL/D programs in schools

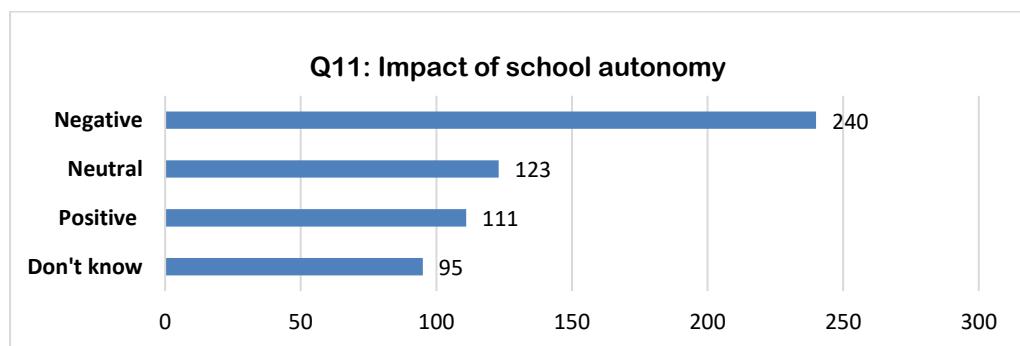
From February to March 2016, the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) conducted a 'State of EAL/D Education in Australia' survey through its state and territory member associations to ascertain the current health of EAL/D programs in Australia. As shown below, the survey received a total of some 600 responses from educators in all Australian state and territory education systems. 57 per cent of respondents were from early childhood and primary schools and 43 per cent from secondary schools. Approximately 55 per cent of respondents were EAL/D teachers; 20 per cent class teachers; 15 per cent school leaders, with the remainder being EAL/D consultants, bilingual support officers, and teacher educators.



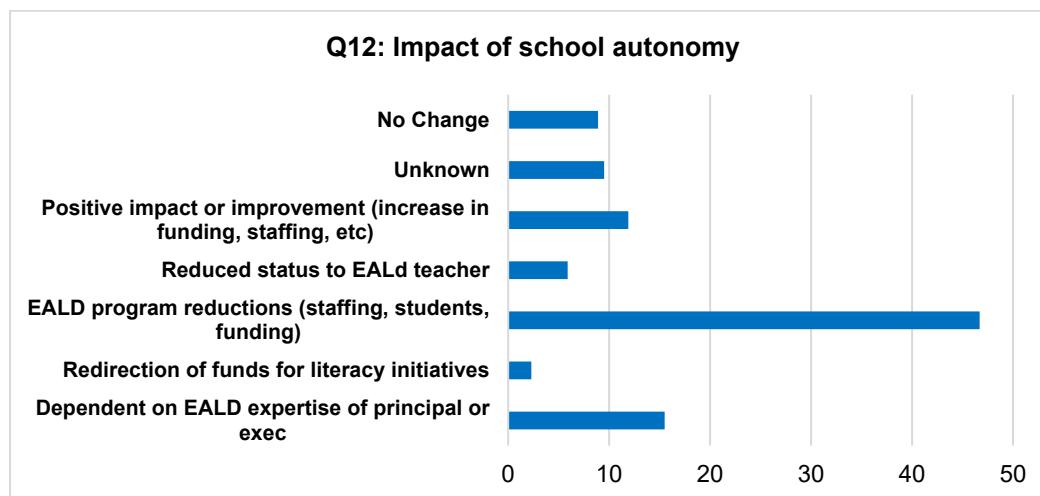
The survey contained 14 open-ended questions inviting further explanatory comments. These comments, which accompanied some 45 per cent of all responses, were analysed, classified and are reported below. The survey responses provide a window on the widespread deterioration of school EAL/D programs caused by state and territory governments' school autonomy policies during the early stages of implementation.

Responses to Question 11 below show that, even at this early stage, some 240 teachers, or 42 percent of respondents reported negative impacts of school autonomy on support for EAL/D learners.

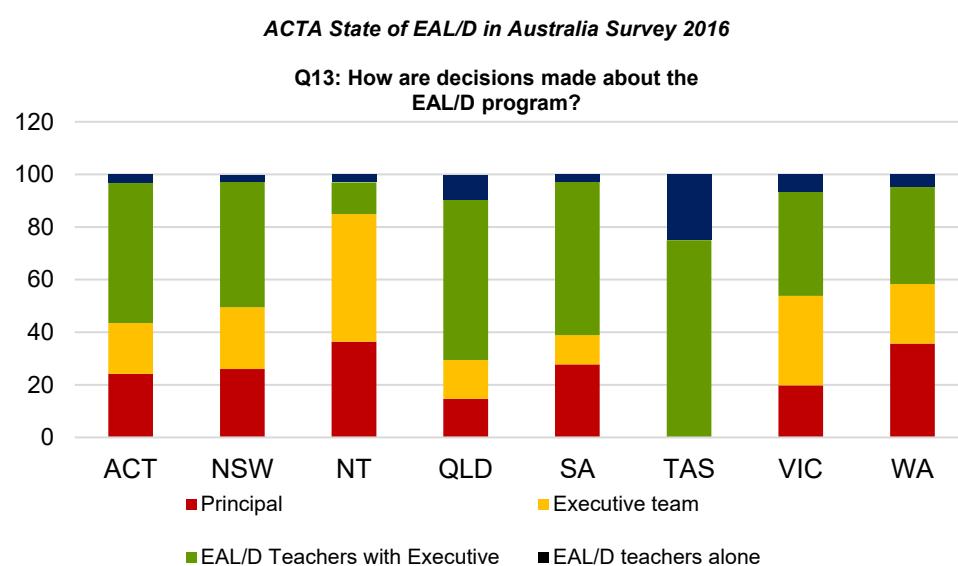
Question 11: *Currently EAL/D funding and support is being decentralised and managed at the school level. Overall, what do you think has been the impact of school autonomy for your EAL/D cohort?*



These negative impacts are elaborated in responses to Question 12 which show that school autonomy programs were eroding EAL/D program funding, staffing and student support in 48 per cent of cases. These responses provided the main topic of the elaborated explanatory comments in the analysis that follows.

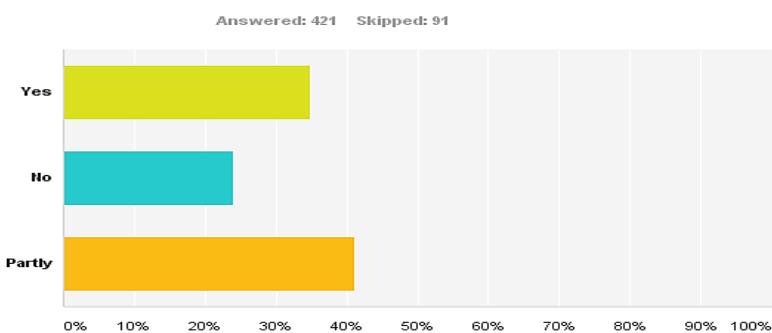


Responses to Question 13 below draw attention to the precariousness of school EAL/D programs in the face of increased school-based decision-making under school autonomy policies. Not being designated as a key learning area with its own curriculum structure and regulations, EAL/D program provision and delivery is dependent on informed negotiation with the principal and/or executive in order to be incorporated in the school timetable as a targeted access and equity program. As shown in the responses below, decisions about the great majority of EAL/D programs are made by EAL/D teachers *in consultation with* the school principal and/or executive. Planning, resourcing and implementation of EAL/D programs in schools therefore crucially rely on the understanding and goodwill of the school principal and executive (cf. Lochmiller & Pawlicki, 2018). Where this is lacking, the school's EAL/D program suffers greatly.



Responses to Question 14 highlight the ambivalence and initial concern of EAL/D teachers about the adequacy of school leaders' understanding of EAL/D education to make appropriate decisions about the program. These concerns are elaborated in the comment analysis that follows.

Q14 Does your school leadership team have the requisite understanding of EAL/D matters to administer funds/make decisions on behalf of these students?



The EAL/D teacher comments presented in **Appendices A** and **B** are a representative sample of all survey comments. Nearly all comments were found to be critical of school autonomy policies, due to teachers' personal experience of its negative impact on their EAL/D teaching role and EAL/D provision in the school. The teacher response below encapsulates the range of teachers' concerns about the erosion occurring across all aspects of the EAL/D program:

EALD programs/provision/services have been seriously eroded over the past several years in our state. Programs have been closed, funding has been reduced, teacher/leader time has been cut, funds allocated for EALD have been used for other school purposes, no accountability for use of funds exists, mainstream teacher knowledge of EALD learners' language/literacy needs has diminished with lack of PL provision.

Ball's (1987, 1994, 2012) policy actor roles and policy enactments shed light on EAL/D teachers' comments showing how they were positioned by school autonomy reforms as both *passive receivers* and *critics* of the reform with little ability or agency to counter its effects (see also Ball et al., 2011; Gavin et al, 2022). The few positive comments about EAL/D provision in a particular school are set against awareness of EAL/D program erosion in neighbouring schools or are qualified by uncertainty about the fate of the school's EAL/D program following future principal and staff changes. Taken together, these comments highlight how school autonomy policies have greatly expanded the decision-making scope and powers of principals at the expense of EAL/D teachers' advocacy and agency on behalf of their students.

Teacher comments are further analysed and classified from two perspectives according to a) essential conditions for EAL/D program provision (**Appendix A**), and b) areas of contestation

around the professional knowledge required for effective EAL/D program planning and delivery (**Appendix B**). These perspectives reflect ‘on the ground’ impacts of NPM devolved and deregulated service delivery principles and internal school resource competition inherent in school autonomy reform.

Teacher comments relating to the *erosion of essential conditions for EAL/D program provision* encompass the areas of:

- System EAL/D policy and support;
- Identification of EAL/D learner needs;
- EAL/D resourcing in schools;
- EAL/D staffing and provision;
- EAL/D program support to students; and
- Accountability for EAL/D program delivery.

This analysis highlights the organisational mechanisms and causal pathways of EAL/D program displacement and erosion resulting from school autonomy policies.¹¹ In relation to 1, comments describe the loss of *system EAL/D policy and support* through restructuring, downsizing or abolition of administrative units and personnel directly responsible for EAL/D program management and guidance. Crucially, this included the loss of system EAL/D pre-service training and in-service professional development. In relation to 2, comments highlight the breakdown in the *identification of EAL/D learner needs* in schools due to sidelining of EAL/D teacher expertise. In relation to 3, *EAL/D resourcing in schools*, comments detail the diversion of low English proficiency needs-based funding to other school priorities due to flexible resource management practices promoted by school autonomy policies. In relation to 4, *EAL/D staffing and provision*, comments highlight the wide-spread deterioration of the targeted program due to flexible staffing practices that undermine stable employment of EAL/D trained teachers. In relation to 5, comments highlight the deterioration of *EAL/D program support to students* as a result of 1, 2, 3 and 4 above. Finally, in relation to 6, comments highlight the lack of system transparency and *accountability for EAL/D program delivery*.

Comments can also be analysed according to *areas of contestation* about the professional knowledge needed for effective EAL/D program planning and delivery. Comments are grouped in relation to professional conflicts around:

- Specialist knowledge, expertise and values;
- School resource decision-making; and
- EAL/D program organisation and pedagogy.

These areas of professional conflict between EAL/D teachers and school executives echo the professional disconnection and division found between teachers and management promoted by school autonomy (Gobbie et al., 2022; Keddie, 2017; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018). This analysis also recalls the wider research literature on the *micropolitics* of schools (Ball, 1987;

Kairiene, 2018), where “overt and covert processes through which individuals and groups in an organisation’s immediate environment acquire and exercise power to promote and protect their interests” (Malen, 1994p. 147). Teachers’ survey comments about deteriorating EAL/D program provision and professional contestation reflect the key findings of school micropolitics research; namely, school micropolitics is exacerbated by school change and reform (Ball & Bowe, 1991; Blase & Björk, 2009); is focused on policy and management issues (Hoyle, 1999); and is implicated in everyday school operations such as resource allocation (Lochmiller & Pawlicki, 2018), instruction and instructional supervision (Blase & Blase, 2002), literacy policy (Innes, 2022), teacher class allocations (Grissom et al, 2015) and team leadership (Flessa, 2009; Johnson, 2004).

Overall, the survey comments offer a rare expression of EAL/D teacher voices and concerns about the impacts school autonomy reforms, and provide clear evidence of the systemic displacement and dissolution of all aspects of EAL/D provision resulting from the two core design elements of the autonomy reform:

- One-line school budgets allowing flexible resource management across multiple school programs and competing priorities;
- School-based management of school staffing, determining the mix, recruitment and selection of staff.

As evident from the comments, school-based decision-making is essentially principal-based decision-making which encourages diversion of previously earmarked funding away from the EAL/D learner target group to other priorities. School-based staffing decisions lead to EAL/D teacher redeployment and casualisation, employment of untrained EAL/D teachers and an overall loss of specialist EAL/D teaching expertise in schools. Changes to the school funding model toward flexible broadbanded funding are not accompanied by commensurate accountability mechanisms and result in a lack of transparency in both system-to-school and internal school funding allocations for the EAL/D learner target group¹² and a lack of public accountability reporting for how these funds are being used.¹³

National EAL/D professional advocacy

The longstanding national EAL/D policy vacuum and systemic erosion of school EAL/D programs in the wake of the Gonski school funding and school autonomy reforms called for a national professional policy response. Throughout this period and beyond, ACTA undertook policy advocacy in two ways: a) submissions to Commonwealth Government inquiries and proposals (see the policy timeline in Michell, 2025) and b) direct representation with key education agencies proposing strategic EAL/D policy solutions to current national policy agendas. The later approach aimed to counter EAL/D omissions in national policy by developing strategic EAL/D input to key policy agendas and documents. While ACTA

submissions have met with little success, the examples of direct agency representation described below have been more productive.

In the wake of Rudd's 'education revolution', ACTA saw the proposed National Curriculum as an opportunity to re-establish a national approach to EAL/D assessment and teaching in Australian schools.¹⁴ As result of representations to the newly formed Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) in 2009, ACTA led development of the *ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression* (ACARA, 2015) published in 2011.¹⁵ This year, ACARA invited ACTA to consult on minor updates to the senior secondary EAL curriculum and on the publication of a downloadable version of the EAL/D Learning Progression in a teacher-friendly format.

Established in 2010 as part of Rudd's education reforms, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was a key national agency through which national recognition and accreditation of specialist EAL/D teaching could be promulgated. To address the EAL/D omission in AITSL's professional teaching standards, ACTA, in collaboration with AITSL developed the *EAL/D Elaborations of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (2015) as a supplementary standards framework.¹⁶

In response to the national EAL/D policy vacuum and widespread deterioration of school EAL/D programs under school autonomy reforms, ACTA issued a *National Roadmap for EAL/D education in schools* (ACTA, 2022) as a comprehensive, national strategy for repairing and reforming EAL/D education, aligned with the National Schools Reform agenda and agreements. Outlining targeted solutions to twelve key national EAL/D policy problems, the *Roadmap* remains an essential blueprint for the national rebuilding of effective EAL/D programs in Australian schools.

Following the *Improving Outcomes for All Report* (2023), which supported making EAL/D a priority cohort for data collection and measurement under the National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA), ACTA met with the NSRA Review Taskforce advocating inclusion of the EAL/D student cohort in national reporting of progress and outcomes as part of a revised Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia. The outcome of this advocacy remains to be seen but will crucially determine the national identification and visibility of the EAL/D student cohort in Australia and therefore the national role and status of EAL/D education over the next decade.

Conclusion

This account highlights how the systemic erosion of EAL/D programs in schools occurred in two stages of national policy development and implementation. Firstly, reflecting longstanding commitment to a national broadbanding agenda, the design of Gonski funding reforms laid the ground for the deregulation and flexible use of previously earmarked funding for EAL/D learners in schools. Secondly, the NPM design of national school autonomy reforms realised

this intent ‘on the ground’ through the widespread displacement and dissolution of school EAL/D programs. In this way, the systemic damage to EAL/D programs inflicted by school autonomy reforms constitutes something of a policy *coup de grace* in the long history of the devaluing and displacement of this targeted program.

The study highlights the value of policy design research in critically analysing the key design features of national education ‘reform’ documents and their effects. A key insight arising from this study is that policy risks and results are inherent in the elements of policy design and therefore can and should be foreseen in any policy formulation and development. Allied to this, is the need for policy researchers to extend critical data sources by utilising a range of publicly available policy documents such as government reports, audits and inquiries, and responses to parliamentary questions, and supplementing these sources with other necessary information, such as survey data.

The study also draws attention to the need for education policy analyses to go beyond generic discourse-based neoliberal and social justice critiques and individual school case studies of school autonomy effects and investigate the systemic impacts of reform policies on equity programs, teachers and students across the education system. This study of the fate and fortunes of EAL/D programs in schools highlights the limits of such discursive and case study approaches, necessitates a reassessment of the equity intentions and outcomes of Australia’s national funding and school autonomy reforms, and invites further critical policy research in this area.

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Glossary

ACARA - Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority

ACTA - Australian Council of TESOL Associations

AITSL - Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

COAG - Council of Australian Governments

CURASS - Curriculum and Assessment Committee (of the Australian Education Council)

DEEWR - Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

EAL/D or EALD - English as an Additional Language or Dialect

ESL - English as a Second Language

IPS - Independent Public Schools

LBOTE - Language Backgrounds Other Than English

NAPLAN - National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NPM - New Public Management

NSRA - National Schools Reform Agreement

RAM - Resource Allocation Model

SRS – School Resource Standard

TESOL - Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Appendix A: ACTA state of EAL/D education in Australia survey

Teacher comments – Erosion of conditions for EAL/D program provision

1. System EAL/D policy and support

All aspects of ELD services have been cut and scaled back at both a school & system level over the past 5 years!!! Significant erosion of services leaving EAL/D students at all levels of schooling at much greater risk than ever before.

There is no EALD team in our state really supporting schools as per the past. There are no consultants in district office or ESL visiting teacher. There is no real voice in the Department anymore for EALD.

Eradication of the Multicultural consultancy has dramatically reduced the TESOL professional learning for all teachers particularly in policy and pedagogy support and current research.

Our EAL support team in central office is now included in literacy. There is nobody to call or get support from except peer teachers whose numbers are decreasing.

Demise of consultancy has meant fewer opportunities for professional learning locally and system wide.

TESOL professional development has significantly decreased and teachers are no longer required to have TESOL qualifications to teach in TESOL contexts.

There is an increasing isolation felt by EAL/D teachers, especially in other schools around us. We live in a vacuum now.

Since we no longer have regional consultants, we do what we can for ourselves.

2. Identification of EAL/D learner needs

Across the system most schools do not have the understanding of EAL/D matters to make informed decisions about catering for EAL/D students' learning needs.

The lack of understanding in this school begins at enrolment and carries onto course placement. Many of the people in decision-making positions do not have the prerequisite knowledge of the needs of EAL/D students.

Leadership have limited knowledge of EAL/D teaching and learning and how this impacts on the EAL/D students accessing the Australian Curriculum.

Schools tend to give little credibility to the needs of EALD students and lump the students with low ability students instead.

Lack of knowledge of how the new funding model works impacts on EAL/D service provision and this led to many schools not retaining the services of the EAL/D specialist

Schools are making decisions on funding without appropriate knowledge about the needs of students.

Funding is being used in many ways that don't directly support students which reflects a lack of understanding of EAL/D matters.

3. EAL/D resourcing in schools

All funding for our EAL/D students have been put into the school general budget. We don't have a separate budget for EAL/D students. Our Principal makes all the decision regarding what our EAL/D students need and who our EAL/D teachers can teach.

With the advent of IPS schools, one-line budgets and online gleaning of data, no one seems to know how much money has been allocated and in many schools there is no longer an EAL teacher to advise on the best way to spend the funds to best support the learning of the EAL students.

Several changeovers of the principal position have affected the allocation of funds to EAL/D students. So, everything depends on what the principal values.

All programs across the school compete with ELD for funds. Usually, ELD is not a significant priority.

EAL/D funding is being pooled with Special Education funding so Special Education teachers are asked to take on the role – with no training.

There's a tendency in schools to employ staff who suit their timetabling arrangements rather than staff who have knowledge and experience in EAL/D support.

The program has essentially been de-valued. Programs are easily collapsed and EALD staff is used to cover staff training and programming!

4. EAL/D staffing and provision

Last year English language proficiency funding was used on non-EAL students EAL/D provision is reducing with regularity since bottom line funding.

EAL/D provision is reducing with regularity since bottom line funding.

Every aspect of ELD provision in our state has been negatively impacted by recent funding models and general lack of commitment at both school/system levels and resulted in a significant deterioration of ELD service provision. ELD is in the worst condition I have ever experienced in my teaching career.

Funds have not been used for EAL/D students and have been allocated for other purposes in the school to the detriment of EAL/D learners and teachers.

Dedicated classroom teacher position (part time) for EAL/D has been absorbed into general school staffing points.

EAL/D teaching specialist positions are being reduced to part-time or replaced by generalist teachers.

Over the past two years we have seen the demise of TESOL support with specialist teacher being reduced to part-time and expected to take release lessons and whole classes.

Teachers are working additional hours and putting in enormous efforts to support the EALD students yet often find themselves unemployed at the end of the school year or made to teach mainstream classes.

The role of the EAL/D teacher is often used to cover other classes when the school deem it necessary.

EAL/D funding is being pooled with Special Education funding so Special Education teachers are asked to take on the role – with no training.

No prerequisite training for any staff. No EALD support in classes. Class sizes above 27 students.

5. EAL/D program support to students

Since schools have become autonomous, any way to save money is looked for and very often it is at the expense of the EAL/D students.

At my school the principal cut the EALD specialist teacher, despite getting funding for it. The funds are not being used on EALD students and no program exists now.

Funds have not been used for EAL/D students and have been allocated for other purposes in the school to the detriment of EAL/D learners and teachers.

Funding cuts are impacting greatly on EAL/D support and therefore students' ability to access all areas of the curriculum.

In a school with over 50% EALD students with literacy issues there is no formal support.

EAL programs have vanished and dedicated EAL teacher support no longer offered to EAL students.

Defunding and downsizing mean less EAL/D support, especially in Aboriginal EAL/D.

Classroom teachers are being presented with students with no English at all and expected to deal with it. The children get less specialist time.

Students in junior school do not have access to EALD trained teachers and sit quietly in the classroom. Their level of language has been impaired by decentralised school funding and ESES system.

The school does not promote and value EAL/D and believe that EAL/D students "catch up" with mainstream.

Students are left to "get on with it" and learn without adequate resources.

Needs are not being met and students are failing.

The whole of EALD is disintegrating. It appears a return to "assimilation" is now the preferred model.

The ESL students are becoming or have become invisible; poor results are easily justified because "well they are ESL" back to the 1960's.

6. Accountability for EAL/D program delivery

Now that most schools in our state are Independent Public Schools, the administration team can allocate/distribute their one-line budget funds however they choose. There is no accountability anymore.

With the advent of IPS schools, one-line budgets and online gleaning of data, no one seems to know how much money has been allocated

I believe that a few years ago the overall picture was clearer – it was clear to the EAL teacher, who scrutinised the census document and who was entrusted with the role of providing support for the EAL students exactly how many students were receiving funding and recommended how that money should be spent to support the students.

Very limited accountability at the department level to ensure allocated funds are being used for the intended purpose.

No adequate checks and balances to schools as to where funding goes – seems to be open to interpretation.

There is no requirement to address the EAL/D cohort for accountability purposes...no school reviews processes which look specifically at EALD groups.

Principal vague about funding amount and does not use all on EAL students.

Where cuts are to be made, they seem to be first made with EAL programs or affecting EAL students – because there is far less community outcry when this happens.

There isn't an appreciation that we have close to 80% EAL. I don't know what percentage of funds are going to the program and where other money is being allocated elsewhere, which is what schools often do.

There needs to be greater accountability. If the school receives funding from the government for EAL/D students through the school census, then they need to show evidence that these funds have been used to enhance the learning of those students.

Appendix B: ACTA state of EAL/D education in Australia survey

EAL/D teacher comments – Areas of contestation

1. Knowledge, expertise and values

The funding is controlled by a principal who doesn't understand the value of EALD teaching everything depends on what the principal values.

Some Principals have very little understanding of EALD and second language acquisition.

When a regional leader, principal and school leadership are unaware of the needs of EAL/D, the effect is devastating.

School leadership have very limited understanding of curricular and language learning needs of students. No real understanding of how seriously at risk many ELD students are of achieving secondary graduation impacting schooling outcomes in a very negative manner.

The new philosophy is specialists are out and teachers can play in any position required in the school. Execs in primary are given EALD and most have no passion for the role. People with no understanding of EAL/D are making the decisions and devaluing it.

Overall schools are less likely to employ teachers with specialist knowledge about EAL learning and teaching and are more likely to use cheaper ESO time to support EAL students.

There is a loss of expertise accumulated over decades.

The system does not care about EAL/D. It is all about money and saving money.

The system doesn't care and doesn't listen to the people who do care.

2. School resource decision-making

Now that most schools in our state are Independent Public Schools, the administration team can allocate/distribute their one-line budget funds however they choose.

Schools in our state have one-line budgets – funds for EAL/D programs are not separated or targeted – the schools decide how much and whether to use the funds for EAL/D positions/programs.

Since schools have become autonomous, any way to save money is looked for and very often it is at the expense of the EAL/D students.

Leadership team has decided not use EAL/D position to support EAL/D students but to instead use position to give teachers their non-contact mandated planning time.

Total control by the Principal – funds, resources and staff and support diverted away from EALD students without consultation or ability to influence decision making.

Principals are choosing where to channel the funds and often funds are not directed to cater to the needs of EALD learners.

Schools are at the whim of the knowledge of Principals who have no knowledge of EAL teaching. Lack of accountability in how funding is used.

People with no understanding of EAL/D are making the decisions and devaluing it.

Never consulted; advice not sought; and given advice ignored.

3. EAL/D program organisation & pedagogy

The Department of Education has systematically diminished the EAL/D team centrally located and left EAL/D programs (support in mainstream and IECs) at the mercy of mainstream admin teams.

EAL/D students are often grouped with Learning Support students and supported with inappropriate teaching strategies.

EAL/D is cancelled when other grade priorities clash.

EALD support is quickly transferred to a literacy position with no specialised support for second language learners.

Our EAL/D students are being treated as native English speakers. Their second language acquisition process has been given no consideration. Our school uses same methods, programmes and resources in the mainstream classrooms to teach English to our EAL/D students, including the new arrivals.

Schools are going for 'programs' that do not take into consideration the language needs of the students. EAL/D students, who do not have sufficient English language to draw upon, fall behind as requirements increase.

The school does not promote and value EAL/D and believe that EAL/D students "catch up" with mainstream.

The program has essentially been de-valued. Programs are easily collapsed and EALD staff is used to cover staff training and programming!

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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* (ACARA, 2011) to include Aboriginal language or dialect speakers learning English as an additional language. Although EAL/D is used throughout the article, its focus is EAL, that is, policy and provision affecting migrant and refugee English language learners which has developed separately from policy for First Nations students.

² During this policy hiatus, the NSW Liberal Coalition Government’s sign-up to the Gillard Labor Government’s school funding plan, the National Education Reform Agreement, on 23 April 2013, was influential in encouraging other reluctant state and territory governments to signing on to the reform (Greenwell & Bonnor, 2022).

³ This exclusive focus on disadvantage was criticised by Kenway (2013) as an inadequate approach to equity, as it fails to recognise that educational advantage and disadvantage are mutually constituted, and leaves the social and education segregation of schools and fundamental resource maldistribution unaddressed. See also: Connors and McMorrow (2015).

⁴ Answers to Senate Estimate questions on Notice SQ18-650, SQ18-651, SQ19-129. Answer to Question on Notice SQ18-651

⁵ Answer to Senate Estimates Question on Notice SQ19-132

⁶ Answer to Senate Estimates Question on Notice SQ19-132

⁷ Analysis of answer to Senate Estimates Question on Notice SQ19-121.

⁸ The last (and only) public review of ESL funding for newly arrived students was the 2006 *MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce Discussion Paper Funding for English Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Students*. The Taskforce Report found that estimated actual per capita costs for delivery of ESL New arrivals services to a newly arrived student in 2005 was \$6,160 for a non-refugee student and \$10,349 for a refugee and humanitarian student. When costs of the improved service provision needed to enable students to achieve reach a satisfactory standard of English were factored in, an amount of \$7,745 and \$18,730 respectively was required. The report recommended increasing the ESL New Arrivals per capita grant, including establishing a differential higher level of funding for refugee and humanitarian entrants with disrupted or no previous education. See report at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED534658.pdf>

⁹ The analysis concluded that the “disadvantaged LBOTE” measure not only significantly *underestimates* the size of the cohort needing EAL/D support but it also *does not capture the right students* and therefore should not be used to identify the English Language Proficiency (ELP) loading for EAL/D students. It estimated that using “disadvantaged LBOTE” as a proxy for English language proficiency suggests that 74.7 per cent of the \$100 million earmarked by Gonski-funding for limited English language proficiency would be misdirected to students who do *not* require EAL/D support.

¹⁰ Answer to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice SQ19-133

¹¹ The areas of impacts of school autonomy policies on EAL/D programs are identified in ACTA’s submission to the 2017 *Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*, p. 57-73

¹² There is no public reporting of schools’ EAL/D funding or staffing allocation by jurisdictions.

¹³ See ACTA *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*, May 2017; Answer to 2018 Senate Estimate question on Notice SQ 18-650 indicates that current

accountability requirements are met through internal financial acquittal statements issued by a qualified accountant certifying compliant use of bulk funds.

¹⁴ In 1992, ESL education officers in South Australian, Victorian and NSW public education systems advocated for an ESL profile be added to the National Statements and Profiles as part of the National Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Project. The Australian Education Council's Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS) accepted the student access and equity arguments and subsequently established and commissioned a national ESL writing team from the three proposing education systems to develop the *ESL scales* (1994) as a supplementary profile to the eight learning area profiles (Lokan, 1997). In this event, the ESL education officers, as employees in their education systems, acted as 'insider' policy entrepreneurs.

¹⁵ The influence of the national assessment tool was limited, however, by the mixed support of state and territory jurisdictions, some of whom had developed their own EAL/D assessment tools. In 2015, A national project under the Education Council developed a national assessment framework designed to enable alignment of jurisdictions' EAL/D assessment tools with the EAL/D Learning Progression. A further national project to review the work in 2019 was discontinued in 2021 after the disbanding of the Education Council and COAG in 2020.

¹⁶ Although the *Elaborations* were initially developed with AITSL support, in the end, the document was not incorporated within the AITSL standards framework and therefore had no status or effect in the national system of teacher regulation.

The effects of mediation and corrective feedback on L2 writing development

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of Mediation-based Feedback and Direct Corrective Feedback on the linguistic accuracy and rhetorical development of EFL university students' writing. A quasi-experimental design involved two L2 writing classes (mediation group vs. correction group), each receiving feedback across three writing tasks: pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test. The mediation group received dialogic, adaptive mediation aligned with learners' Zones of Proximal Development, while the correction group received teacher-led direct corrections. Quantitative analyses revealed that the mediation group outperformed the correction group in linguistic accuracy, with statistically significant differences and a large effect size. Within-group comparisons showed that mediation led to moderate improvements in linguistic accuracy, while direct corrective feedback produced small yet meaningful gains. No significant between-group differences were found for rhetorical development; however, direct corrective feedback yielded sustained medium effect size gains, while the mediation group demonstrated initial progress that regressed over time. The study contributes to research on feedback by highlighting the benefits and limitations of mediation and correction in L2 writing development.

Keywords: *Correction; direct corrective feedback; dynamic assessment; L2 writing; mediation.*

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Introduction

The initial aim of this study relies on the recent call within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, especially in L2 writing, to employ learner-responsive and social interaction-oriented feedback methodologies (Mao & Lee, 2020; Storch, 2018). Feedback has always been an important part of language development, particularly in L2 writing; therefore, how to deliver feedback has always been the focus of many scholarly studies, which have found that Corrective Feedback (CF) has led to improvement in L2 writing. However, it has not been clear which CF type might lead to better improvement due to the variety in learner profiles in these studies (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Mao et al., 2024; Nassaji, 2017). Also, CF-oriented studies have been criticized on two grounds: the lack of dialogic interactions between teachers and learners during offering CF and the lack of personalized and adaptive feedback aligned with learners' needs across an implicit-explicit feedback loop.

Regarding these gaps, scholars have advocated for the integration of the sociocultural approach in L2 writing research (Lee, 2020; Storch, 2018). Sociocultural Theory (SCT) proposes a crucial theoretical framework that reconceptualizes feedback as a dialogic and mediated process, in contrast to unidirectional correction. Drawing on the SCT, Dynamic Assessment (DA), with its mediation-oriented nature, has gained prominence with a feedback form that is fine-tuned, responsive, and relies on progress (Poehner, 2008).

Despite the increase in studies comparing CF types, few have compared DA-based mediation and Direct Corrective Feedback (DCF) in L2 writing classrooms and relied on both linguistic and rhetorical improvement across time. Most studies have either explored these approaches in isolation or investigated linguistic accuracy without examining rhetorical dimensions, such as organization, cohesion, and coherence. This study aims to focus on this gap and to evaluate the short-term and long-term effects of mediated feedback and direct corrective feedback on the writing improvement of university-level EFL learners in a classroom-based quasi-experimental design. One group received Interactive DA, which was tailored to each learner's immediate needs during dialogic interactions, while the other group received unfocused DCF. The linguistic accuracy and rhetorical quality of writing were assessed over time across three writing tasks through both within-group and between-group comparisons. For that purpose, we adopted an analytical rubric, the TEEP (Test in English for Educational Purposes) developed by Weir (1990), since it might offer an established framework for assessing writing quality under key attributes. Accordingly, the linguistic accuracy was measured using grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and mechanics scores. At the same time, the rhetorical quality was assessed with text organization, content, and idea generation, and coherence among sentences. Relying on an ecologically valid research design, this study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the impact of two feedback approaches across writing performances, investigating the transfer effect of learning from feedback to new tasks, and offering empirical evidence on the settings where mediation and/or correction trigger writing both linguistically and rhetorically.

Literature review

Theoretical and empirical perspective of corrective feedback in L2 writing

Managing learners' errors and offering feedback have long captured the attention of educators and researchers due to the recognized importance of feedback as a fundamental element in effective instruction and as a key contributor to enhancing learners' motivation (Ferris, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997), and CF encompasses explicit and/or implicit methods employed by instructors to address learners' errors, whether in oral or in written form (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017a).

Written corrective feedback (WCF) has various features: it can be provided later, which might reduce L2 writers' cognitive load; its written form may help L2 learners to review it whenever they want; and it includes feedback on both linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of texts, such as organization, content, and coherence (Sheen, 2007). WCF encompasses diverse methods, such as direct/indirect feedback, metalinguistic cues, focused/unfocused approaches, and reformulation (Ellis, 2009). Research has mainly compared different WCF types to decide which enhances better text revision (e.g., Alshahrani & Storch, 2025; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bitchener et al., 2005; Boggs, 2019; Kim & Li, 2024; Lyster, 2004; Mawlawi Diab, 2015; Sheen, 2007; Shintani & Ellis, 2013). However, a conclusive decision regarding which WCF type facilitates accuracy is not evident, although DCF is acknowledged as a more effective WCF method in some studies (Lim & Renandya, 2020; Lyster, 2015).

DCF involves error correction to learners, which can help them notice the difference between their inaccurate output and accurate input, and therefore facilitates language development (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017b). Specifically, low-proficiency learners may benefit particularly from DCF because they might face difficulties in understanding and handling indirect CF by themselves (Bitchener, 2017; Lim & Renandya, 2020). Thanks to this support, this study employed DCF as a comparative feedback method to mediation-based feedback, targeting low-intermediate learners.

Another important topic regarding CF studies is feedback scope, which is divided into focused (targeting specific linguistic errors) or unfocused (addressing all linguistic errors) CF (Ellis, 2009). Results of the studies based on feedback scope are diverse; some studies present a supportive approach to focused CF approach (Sheen, 2007), while others criticize it as focused CF may not address learners' various errors and needs (Lee, 2020). For instance, Kao et al. (2025) compared content-only feedback with unfocused corrective feedback plus content feedback in detail in an L2 writing class. The results indicated that unfocused corrective feedback improved grammatical accuracy, specifically in the use of English articles. Also, the authors stated that the explicitness of the feedback might improve grammatical accuracy across time, which aligns with Mujtaba and Singh's (2025) study. Also, the participants, EFL learners, expressed that they liked the explicitness of the feedback provided (Alshahrani & Storch, 2025). Meta-analyses by Mao and Lee (2020) suggest that conducting CF studies in real-

classroom contexts could help explain the controversial results on the issue of feedback scope. Therefore, this study utilized unfocused DCF in a real classroom context, allowing a holistic view of learner performance and offering the opportunity to compare findings with those obtained through mediation-based feedback.

In brief, despite the extensive research into DCF and its potential to enhance corrective force and L2 development, previous studies are characterized by a number of limitations that call for further research. These studies have often been limited to offering intensive CF on preselected topics over time, thus limiting the generalisability of findings across diverse writing tasks (Nassaji, 2016). Moreover, previous studies have often failed to notice learner differences and their different needs (Bitchener, 2017; Ferris, 2006; Ferris et al., 2013; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In this regard, investigating the impact of unfocused DCF tailored to individual learner texts and investigating long-term and transfer effects are warranted (Mao et al., 2024; Storch, 2018). In this regard, this study adopted unfocused DCF with one group, targeting to deliver feedback to address linguistic errors and rhetorical problems in the participants' actual writing tasks in a real L2 writing course.

Sociocultural theory and dynamic assessment: A shift toward mediation-based feedback

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) places a much greater emphasis on the role of social interaction in shaping cognitive development; therefore, learning is assumed to be primarily mediated through interactions with others and culturally constructed tools. While unmediated exposure to stimuli can produce perceptual awareness, it is only when this exposure occurs during goal-directed, socially situated activities designed to trigger new ways of thinking and the internalization of higher mental functions that improvement takes on meaningful form and function (Feuerstein et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, mediation is understood as the intentional and contingent support by a more knowledgeable individual to guide learners through their Zone of Proximal Development. This understanding constitutes the base for DA, which rests on the integration of assessment and instruction in a cooperative work through personalised and adaptive mediation and goes beyond mere error correction to foster ongoing development (Poehner, 2008).

A person's independent ability to solve problems refers to their Zone of Actual Development (ZAD), which might show their internalized competencies. By contrast, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is explained through the difference between what a person can do with and without guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, mediation represents the key method since it might display the learner's ZAD and ZPD. This process is dynamic and bidirectional, in which both the mediator and learner are active agents. The mediator assesses the learner's responsiveness, strengths, and needs while giving scaffolded feedback, which aligns with the learner's developmental stage (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Such a dialogic approach also allows for the co-construction of knowledge and enables the mediator to monitor the learner's ZPD (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

Dynamic Assessment, aligned with Vygotsky's SCT (1978), has emerged as a learning-oriented assessment method, and it integrates instruction with assessment in a single collaborative work (Poehner, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). Accordingly, it assesses learners' current and developing abilities, identifies challenges and needs, and, through dynamic reciprocal interaction, collaboratively works to scaffold learners' needs and reshape their ZPD for unassisted future performance (Davin, 2016; Poehner & Infante, 2016; Shrestha, 2020). Therefore, the core facets of DA encompass mediation, dialogic interaction, and ZPD, facilitating an assessment of cognition, learning perception, and problem-solving through an active teaching process aimed at enhancing cognitive functioning (Haywood & Tzuriel, 2002, p. 41).

The flow of dialogic interaction in DA sessions (Figure 1) relies on providing mediation-based feedback. Within that nature, mediation follows a graduated implicit-to-explicit feedback continuum: the teacher initiates with implicit mediation and progresses to more explicit forms when learners struggle to comprehend the source of errors and self-correct. Conversely, if the student fixes the error with the mediation provided, the teacher encourages verbalized reasoning to probe internal cognitive mechanisms (Poehner, 2008). Through this embedded instruction-assessment process, DA can predict future task performance, as seen through improved accuracy in subsequent tasks and alterations in the nature and extent of mediational prompts, directly linked to an individual's learning potential aligned with the ZPD (Poehner & Infante, 2017; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Storch, 2018; Tzuriel & Shamir, 2002). Unlike traditional feedback models that operate post-performance and focus on error correction, DA is forward-looking and developmental in nature.

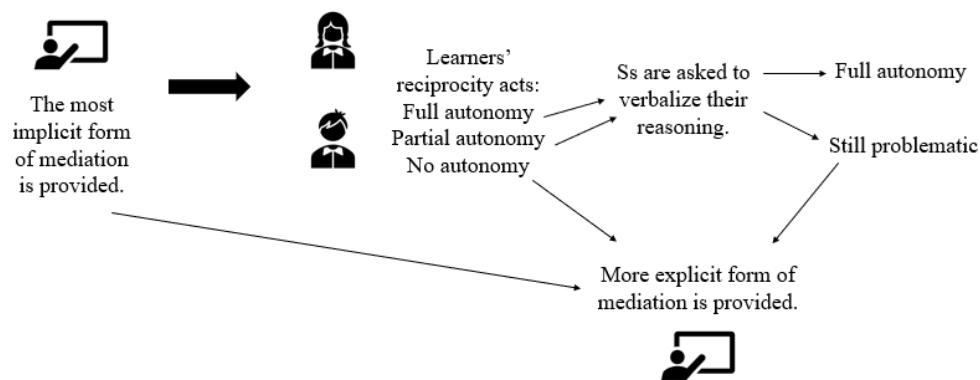


Figure 1. A Sample Flow of Dynamic Assessment.

Research on the application of DA in L2 writing primarily used qualitative designs and small sample sizes, making generalizations difficult (Herazo et al., 2019; Poehner et al., 2018; Rahimi et al., 2015). Some studies focused on specific linguistic aspects (Poehner & Infante, 2019; Poehner & Leontjev, 2018). Shabani (2018) used mixed-methods interactionist DA in writing courses, and Xian (2020) explored online interventionist DA for language accuracy, but neither investigated the longitudinal effects of DA. This study adopted a quasi-experimental design with an aim to compare mediation-based feedback and direct corrective feedback across

three parallel writing tasks, by investigating both the linguistic accuracy and rhetorical improvement over time.

Mediation versus Correction in L2 writing

In this part, we aimed to present relevant studies that explored the comparative effect of mediation versus correction in L2 writing, and there was only one study (Ajabshir, 2024) on this ground. Thus, we also searched for studies that investigated the comparative effect of negotiated feedback and corrective feedback. Negotiated feedback primarily focuses on solving communication breakdowns and guiding learners to understand through negotiation of form or meaning (Nassaji, 2011), without analyzing and tracking the learner's underlying conceptual development. By contrast, mediation-based feedback, grounded in the SCT and DA, views learning as a collaborative and co-constructed process involving learners and more skilled peers, teachers, or parents. In this regard, this approach focuses on the diagnosis of the learner's independent skills as well as the provision of fine-tuned and graduated support to enhance their self-regulation. It is important to address the underlying reasons of learner errors and encourage them to verbalize their inner thoughts while treating errors (Poehner, 2008). Therefore, although interaction is a common point in both methods, mediation goes beyond error correction through interaction, as in negotiated feedback, but mediation gives importance to the evaluation and enhancement of the potential cognitive growth of learners.

Two previous studies compared the impact of direct error correction with negotiated feedback in L2 writing, focusing on specific linguistic forms, such as English articles and prepositions (Nassaji, 2011) and simple past tense and articles (Erlam et al., 2013). The results of these studies were diverse. Accordingly, learners' improvement in the predefined linguistic forms was fostered through negotiated feedback, while direct error correction also enhanced development. Ajabshir's (2024) study, which assessed DA and DCF in an online learning platform targeting second language pragmatic assessment, yielded the contrastive findings. The researcher compared three groups in detail, including teacher-led DA, peer-led DA, and teacher-led DCF. Also, the DA sessions utilized pre-defined feedback prompts, as in interventionist DA. The findings showed that the peer-led DA group outperformed, followed by the teacher-led DA group, and these results emphasized the crucial contributions of DA sessions.

While Ajabshir's (2024) study provides valuable information on how DA and DCF impact the pragmatics knowledge development of the participants, there are several questions that would warrant further investigation. In particular, the effect of these feedback methodologies on learners' ability to transfer their knowledge to new tasks has not been investigated. Also, the long-term impact of DA and DCF on learners' linguistic and rhetorical development has not been clearly explored in the related studies. Moreover, to our knowledge, there is a lack of studies in the literature that have focused on the adoption of interactionist DA in EFL writing classes. All these gaps in the relevant literature motivated us to collect data in a real L2 writing

classroom and compare mediation and direct error correction, examining their short and long-term impact on linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of writing.

Moreover, the comparative effects of unfocused feedback in both DCF and DA formats require more attention. Also, while DA offers a promising approach to support writing development, quantitative and classroom-based studies are still limited. Lastly, much of the existing research has not examined the longitudinal and transfer effects of feedback.

To address these gaps, the present longitudinal study investigated the effects of unfocused DCF and interactive DA on the writing performance of university-level EFL students, with a specific emphasis on linguistic accuracy and rhetorical development. By implementing the intervention in an L2 writing setting, this study aimed to provide a thorough comparison of the two feedback approaches. In this regard, the following main and sub-research questions prevail in this study:

RQ: What were the impacts of mediation and direct corrective feedback on university-level EFL students' writing performance in terms of linguistic accuracy and rhetorical development?

- To what extent did the two groups (mediation versus direct corrective feedback) differ in their post-test and delayed post-test scores for linguistic accuracy and rhetorical development?
- How did the students in each group (mediation versus direct corrective feedback) perform across three writing tasks (pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test) in terms of linguistic accuracy and rhetorical development?

Methodology

Participants

Data were collected from L2 writing classes at a state university in Türkiye. Of the 50 enrolled students, one dropped out and two opted out of participation, resulting in 47 volunteers. The participant pool included 36 female and 11 male students, with 20 female and 5 male students in the DA group (mediation) and 16 female and 6 male students in the DCF group (correction).

All participants were learning English in an EFL setting, including three immigrants: one from Syria (native languages Arabic and Kurdish) and two from Ukraine (native languages Ukrainian and Turkish). The remaining participants were Turkish. To ensure group equivalency in terms of language proficiency and writing competence, a writing pre-test, previously piloted, was administered to the groups at the beginning of the semester.

As the independent samples t-test showed in Table 1, the results did not yield a difference between groups (Mediation: $M=9.36$, $SD=3.59$; Correction: $M=7.81$, $SD=3.64$), $p=.15$, $t(45)=$

1.45, in terms of linguistic accuracy. Similarly, the groups did not differ in terms of rhetorical aspects (Mediation: $M= 12.32$, $SD= 3.54$; Correction: $M= 11.18$, $SD= 3$), $p= .24$, $t_{(45)}= 1.19$. Therefore, both groups were assumed to be homogeneous low-intermediate language learners.

Table 1. *Independent Samples t-test.*

		N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p
Total	Mediation	25	21.68	6.39	2.68	1.50	45	.13
	Correction	22	19	5.81				
Linguistic Accuracy	Mediation	25	9.36	3.59	1.54	1.45	45	.15
	Correction	22	7.81	3.64				
Rhetorical Aspects	Mediation	25	12.32	3.54	1.13	1.19	45	.24
	Correction	22	11.18	3				

$p < .05$

Data collection procedure and instruments

This study used a quasi-experimental design (Creswell, 2012) to examine the short- and long-term effects of mediation and correction on EFL learners' writing skills with a sample of fifty students in L2 writing classes. Quasi-experiments are used when intact classes, groups, and participants are included in the study, so the participants are not randomly assigned. Despite the benefits of quasi-experiments involving intact participants in a natural experiment setting, it might threaten internal validity compared to true-experimental designs (Creswell, 2012). However, some pre-tests and statistical analyses could be conducted to ensure internal validity.

In this study, the school administration pre-assigned the students into two groups of twenty-five. Students with odd-numbered identifiers were placed in Group A (DA Group), while those with even-numbered identifiers were assigned to Group B (DCF Group). As in most classroom-based studies, the researchers did not interfere in assigning the students to groups. Yet, to ensure the internal validity and to have similar participants in both groups in terms of their writing skill, a pre-test was administered, and an independent samples t-test was conducted, which was mentioned under the previous title.

The data collection lasted 21 weeks and involved three parallel writing tests, at eight-week intervals, to test the longitudinal impact of mediation and correction on L2 writing. In the first week, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, emphasizing voluntary participation and ethical consent. This was followed by a distinction in the groups based only on the instructional approach the teacher took to address students' errors: mediation or unfocused direct CF. The former, mediation, was interactional, occurring dialogically in the course of dynamic interactions between the teacher and the students, within the process of addressing individual learner needs. The prompts progressed from an implicit to an explicit continuum depending upon the student's response, allowing for a goal-oriented dialogic process. By contrast, the other group involved an unfocused direct CF whereby the instructor

reviewed each paper and explicitly corrected errors by adding or crossing out morphemes, words, or phrases without any feedback or commentary.

From the second week onwards, the students attended their regular classes, and this research was part of their Writing Skills class, which was held for five hours a week. The syllabus was the same for both groups, and so was the teacher for both, with ten years of experience in English teaching. Every week, the students dealt with a different text from the coursebook, studying its genre while they did a close reading. They also reviewed relevant vocabulary, phrases, and structures. The teacher also provided the students with model texts of the same genre. Every week, after each class, the students were given the assignment to write a text on the genre and topic they had worked with in that week. The teacher held individual consultations with all participants. So, after they finished the assignment, each student went to the instructor's office either for mediation or correction. Each session within the mediation group lasted around 20 minutes, dealing with learners' errors and their responses to the feedback in an implicit-to-explicit loop during mediation, but the ones in the correction group lasted about 10 to 15 minutes during which the instructor provided direct corrective feedback by adding or removing morphemes, words, or phrases without accompanying commentaries or explanations. So, these individual sessions are important to underline the effects of mediation vs. correction on L2 writing, DA, and mediation creates a heuristic context, but direct CF provides explicit corrections.

In order to minimize the possible bias brought about by the dual role of the instructor, who is both a teacher and a researcher, several actions were taken. First, all written texts were anonymized before scoring so that the researcher could not identify individual students while evaluating their work. Second, an independent rater, who had not been directly involved in the instruction, was consulted in verifying a random sample of the ratings with a view to assessing inter-rater reliability. Third, the instructional and evaluative functions were kept separate: mediation and feedback sessions followed standard rubrics and protocols to ensure consistency and objectivity. These measures were meant to add credibility and validity to findings.

The courses and individual DA and direct CF sessions lasted ten weeks, followed by a post-test. We aimed to evaluate the short-term impacts of both methods by making comparisons between and within groups. Moreover, we aimed to present the long-term impact of mediation and correction. In this regard, participants took a delayed post-test eight weeks after the initial post-test, and during that interval, they did not take any mediation, correction, or instructional interventions. To display the study's structure, Figure 2 was provided, showing the research design, including group assignments, intervention timeline, writing tasks, and assessment points.

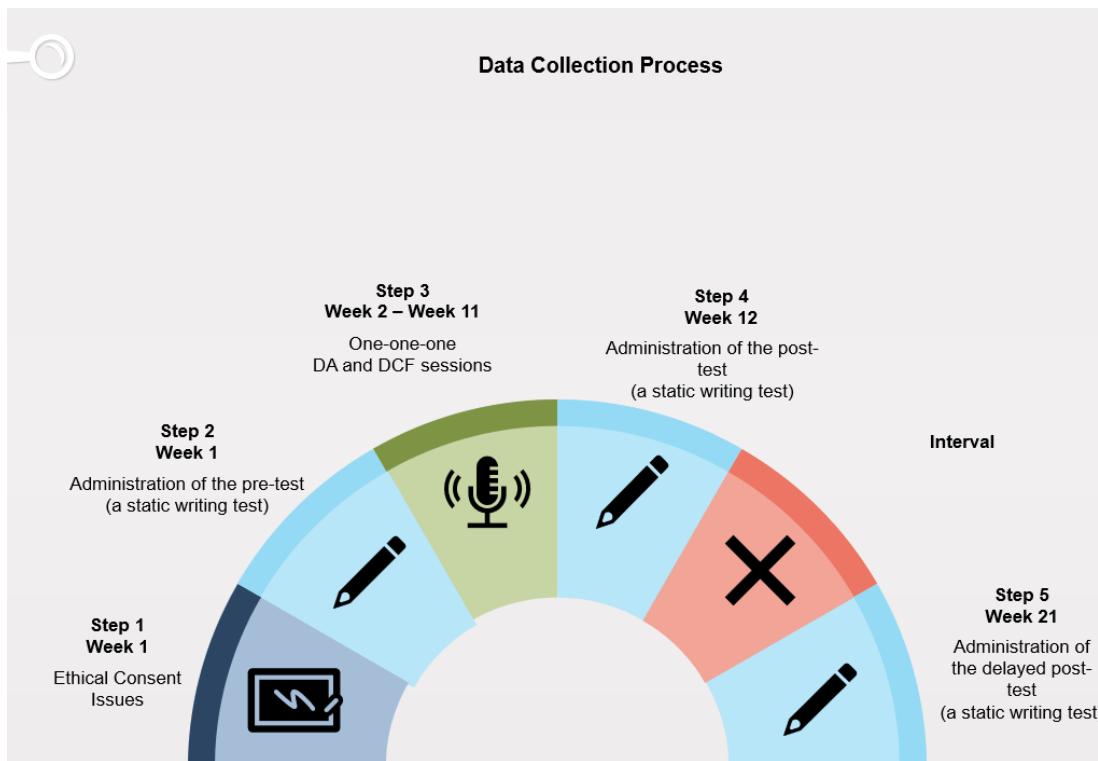


Figure 2. *The Data Collection Process.*

This study employed quantitative data collection tools. Data were collected using three parallel writing assessments developed by the first author. The examination items were based on the Preliminary English Tests designed by Cambridge University. Two experts reviewed these for content and piloted them for validity.

Regarding the validity, an analytic scoring rubric, the TEEP (Test in English for Educational Purposes) (Appendix A) that assigns writing scales developed by Weir (1990) both for rhetorical and linguistic aspects, was employed for scoring the test papers. Moreover, to ensure test reliability, a pilot study was administered, and then two independent raters scored the papers, using the TEEP analytic rubric. Upon scoring, the Kappa test was done to assess interrater reliability. The results showed a reliability coefficient of $\text{Kappa} = 0.76$, $p < .05$ for the pre-test, $\text{Kappa} = 0.83$, $p < .05$ for the post-test, and $\text{Kappa} = 0.82$, $p < .05$ for the delayed post-test.

Data analysis

The gathered data for this quasi-experimental research were analyzed using SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20). Initially, a normality test was conducted to decide whether parametric tests or their nonparametric equivalents would be used. Both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov ($p = .20$) and Shapiro-Wilk ($p = .64$) tests yielded that the data were normally distributed (Pallant, 2010). Based on these results, parametric tests were used for the subsequent analysis. Then, inferential statistical analysis was carried out. A two-way between-

groups ANOVA was conducted to analyze whether there were any differences between groups in both short-term and long-term contexts. Also, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to analyze within-group differences in short-term and long-term contexts.

In addition to numerical data, adopting a microanalytic approach, the mediational moves used during DA sessions for the linguistic and rhetorical errors were presented in detail in tables with an aim to display how mediation might happen in real-time. These examples allowed us to classify mediational moves along an implicit–explicit continuum (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), aligning with the learners' ZPD.

Results

Comparable short- and long-term impacts of mediation and correction on learners' writing development

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the possible difference between DA and DCF groups in their linguistic accuracy in L2 writing. The students in both groups took three different writing tests over time, and there was a statistically significant main effect for mediation in the post-test, $F(1,45)= 10.113, p= .003$ with a large effect size and in the delayed post-test, $F(1,38)= 8.167, p= .007$ with a large effect size. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey test displayed that the mean score of DA group in the post-test ($M=4.4, SD=1.41$) and in the delayed post-test ($M=4.45, SD=1.62$) were significantly different from DCF group in the post-test ($M=3.18, SD= 1.18$) and in the delayed post-test ($M=3, SD=1.57$). These outcomes strongly suggest that implementing mediation significantly facilitated learners' progress in effectively using their second language skills in terms of linguistic accuracy. Thus, adopting the DA method, encompassing an implicit-to-explicit feedback loop, would be a beneficial form of addressing learner errors based on grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Given the diverse needs of target learners and diverse error natures, the adaptive nature of mediated feedback would help learners gain knowledge and progress in the target language (Mao et al., 2024).

Then, a two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate potential differences between the mediation and correction groups regarding the rhetorical aspects observed in L2 writing. The study indicated no statistically significant differences between the groups in both the post-test ($F(1, 45) = .378, p = .54$) and the delayed post-test ($F(1, 38) = .122, p = .80$). These results indicate that neither mediation through DA nor correction through DCF significantly differentiated the groups regarding the rhetorical aspects of L2 writing. One possible explanation is that the mediation sessions may not have systematically addressed rhetorical elements with the same level of scaffolded support as was provided for linguistic issues. While mediation aims to deliver adaptive feedback along a continuum from implicit to explicit, the teacher may have prioritized sentence-level accuracy over higher-order rhetorical features. As a result, the feedback received by students in both groups may have become similar

in practice, diminishing the distinctiveness of mediation-based feedback in this area. Additionally, to further explore the lack of group differences, a closer macrogenetic analysis of the mediation sessions, using verbatim excerpts, could shed light on how students responded to rhetorical mediation, the types of scaffolds that were (or were not) provided, and how learning trajectories evolved over time. These qualitative insights could enhance our understanding of how mediation operates differently from correction, particularly concerning rhetorical development.

Short- and long-term impacts of mediation on learners' writing development

Possible differences in the participants' writing scores over time within groups were examined in terms of linguistic accuracy. Initially a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was done to compare three test scores, pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test, regarding the linguistic accuracy of DA group. The results displayed that there was a significant effect for time, Wilk's Lambda=.152, $F_{(2,20)}=56$, $p=.000$, partial eta squared=.848 after Bonferroni correction. Even though there was a medium effect size of time on the participants' test-scores, all differences were not significant. The students got higher scores in the post-test ($M=4.364$, $SD=.312$) and in the delayed post-test ($M=4.455$, $SD=.346$) than the pre-test ($M=2.364$, $SD=.251$), but no significant difference between the post-test and the delayed post-test was found. These findings suggest that the participants exposed to mediation demonstrated improvements in linguistic accuracy and were able to transfer this ability over time. Mediation during DA sessions offers a socially co-constructed learning process for learners through the active participation of both teachers and learners. This might enhance the detection and fostering of each learner's learning potential (Ajabshir, 2024), which might explain the improvement in linguistic accuracy and the transfer of that improvement over time.

The findings correspond with the analysis of mediational moves observed during the DA sessions, specifically DA-1 and DA-10. The interactions between the teacher and the students were documented, allowing for an examination of the mediational moves. Table 2 outlines the types of mediational moves employed in both the initial and final DA sessions, along with their frequency. Accordingly, in the first session, the teacher predominantly used explicit mediational moves, such as providing metalinguistic explanation ($f=15$), alternative correct choices ($f=7$), showing the place of errors ($f=13$), and providing accurate answers ($f=4$). Yet, in the last session, while explicit moves continued to exist, there was a decrease in their frequency. For example, the teachers provided only five metalinguistic explanations, indicated the locations of six errors, offered alternative correct forms for two errors, and provided the accurate answer only once. Poehner (2008) notes that a transition from implicit to explicit mediational moves, along with a reduction in their occurrence, may indicate progress among learners. The results of the statistical tests and the analysis of mediational moves suggest a positive influence of mediation on language accuracy, highlighting its potential impact on the linguistic development of learners.

Table 2. *Mediation Moves during DA Sessions in Linguistic Dimension.*

DA 1 – Mediational Moves	
Implicit mediational moves Learner-agency based	Explicit mediational moves Teacher-agency based
Displaying sentence with errors (f=8)	Limiting the place of error(s) (f=13)
Demanding revision (f=13)	Offering metalinguistic hints (f=3)
Offering error(s) nature (f=2)	Offering accurate answer(s) (f=4)
	Offering metalinguistic explanation (f=15)
DA 10 – Mediational Moves	
Implicit mediational moves Learner-agency based	Explicit mediational moves Teacher-agency based
Displaying sentence with errors (f=1)	Limiting the place of error(s) (f=6)
Demanding revision (f=3)	Offering metalinguistic hints (f=7)
	Providing alternative error treatment choice(s) (f=2)
	Offering accurate answer(s) (f=1)
	Offering metalinguistic explanation (f=5)

In addition to displaying the spread of mediational moves in the first and last sessions in terms of linguistic dimension, we also presented a verbatim sample representing one part of a mediation/DA session (Özturan, 2022, pp. 113-115). For example, the teacher initiated a DA session by asking for revision, “*Do you think that this is a correct sentence?*”, which is an example of implicit feedback. Yet, the student had difficulty in finding and fixing the error. Therefore, the teacher continued providing feedback in an implicit-to-explicit feedback loop and explained the error’s nature by saying, “*its meaning is clear, but grammar is not correct.*” Since the student still had difficulty, the teacher moved on to a more explicit form of feedback, highlighting the errors and asking, “*What is wrong with it?*”. This mediational strategy did not help the student either, so the teacher provided a metalinguistic hint: “*So this paragraph was written in past tense, but in this sentence you used “will”. So what may be the problem here?*”. Then, the student could give an accurate answer and verbalize the reason by saying “*Oh OK, tense parallelism. I need “would” here*”.

Then, to examine the impact of mediation on rhetorical dimensions, the test of one-way repeated measures ANOVA was administered, and the results displayed a notable effect of time across the three assessments concerning rhetorical aspects, indicating a substantial influence on students’ writing quality, Wilk’s Lambda = .175, F(2, 20) = 47.03, p = .000, partial eta squared = .825 following Bonferroni correction, with a medium effect size. Students demonstrated higher scores in the post-test (M = 5.90, SD = .42) compared to the pre-test (M = 4.00, SD = .87), signifying an improvement in their ability to produce more sophisticated texts in terms of rhetorical aspects after participating in the DA sessions.

Conversely, regarding the transfer of this enhanced skill, the results exhibited a contrasting pattern. In the delayed post-test, students scored lower (M = 5.00, SD = 1.34) than in the post-test (M = 5.90, SD = .42), suggesting a regression in their capacity to produce well-organized texts with the same level observed immediately following the DA/mediation sessions. This decline in scores between the post-test and delayed post-test indicates a challenge in maintaining competence in rhetorical aspects over time. If learning behaviours decreased when mediated feedback was removed, this would display the limited learning potential (Poehner,

2008). Moreover, in some cases and for some errors, learners might prefer explicit feedback rather than having a dialogic and adaptive feedback loop as in DA (Alshahrani & Storch, 2025).

Figure 3 provides verbatim examples from ten DA sessions that focus on errors related to rhetorical dimensions, while Table 3 outlines the frequencies of mediational moves observed in both the initial and final sessions (Özturan, 2022, pp. 93-96). Although different verbatim samples were provided for the rhetorical errors, the analysis indicated that in the first DA session, the most common mediation strategy was offering explicit explanations in English for rhetorical errors, such as saying “*There is no topic sentence*” or “*You did not write a concluding sentence*”. In contrast, no mediational moves were noted in the final session concerning rhetorical elements. This trend corresponds with the statistical finding of a significant improvement in rhetorical performance in the post-test, characterized by a medium effect size. However, the lack of mediation in later sessions may account for the regression observed in the delayed post-test, suggesting that initial gains in rhetorical development were not fully internalized. This outcome supports the idea that the progressive withdrawal of mediation must be carefully calibrated, particularly for higher-order discourse-level skills (Poehner, 2008). These findings highlight the importance of continued scaffolding when addressing rhetorical features, which demand greater metacognitive engagement and prolonged support compared to rule-based linguistic forms.

Table 3. *Mediational Moves during DA Sessions in the Rhetorical Dimension.*

DA 1 – Mediational Moves		DA 10 – Mediational Moves
Explicit mediational move	Implicit mediational move	
Showing a text model through guided questions (f=1)	Limiting erroneous part and asking specific guidance questions (f=3)	No mediational moves annotated
Offering an explanation for the errors in English (f=7)		

Implicit Mediational Move		→ Explicit Mediational Move	
Asking for the quality of text's organization	Limiting erroneous part and asking specific guidance questions	Showing a text model through guided questions	Offering explanation for the errors in English
Guiding student to find the error	<i>Verbatim Samples:</i> "Do you think that there is a topic/concluding sentence?" "Are topic sentence and concluding sentences related?" "How many topics do you have in the text?" "Does this concluding sentence restate and/or summarize the paragraph or start a new topic?"	Compare and contrast the model text and student's text	<i>Verbatim Samples:</i> "You have two controlling ideas in the topic sentence, but you mentioned only one of them in the supporting sentences." "Can you please underline the topic sentence and find the controlling idea?" "Can you please underline the concluding sentence?" "Are supporting sentences related to the topic sentence and concluding sentence?"
Guiding student to self-treat the error			
<i>Verbatim Samples:</i> "Do you think that this is a well-organized text?" "What may be the problem there?" "How can you improve its quality?"			

Figure 3. Sample Verbatim of DA Sessions in Rhetorical Dimension.

Short- and long-term impacts of correction on learners' writing development

The outcomes of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA for the direct CF group revealed a significant effect of time on the participants' writing test scores with respect to linguistic accuracy, Wilks' Lambda = .495, $F(2, 16) = 8.167$, $p = .004$, partial eta squared = .505 after Bonferroni correction. Although the effect size was small, the results indicated statistically significant differences across the time points evaluated. Participants in this group demonstrated higher scores in both the post-test ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.21$) and the delayed post-test ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.57$) when compared to the pre-test ($M = 2$, $SD = .97$). However, no statistically significant difference was identified between the post-test and the delayed post-test. These findings suggest that participants who received direct correction in their written assignments exhibited an enhancement in linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, this improvement in accuracy was evident over time, indicating a potential for the longitudinal transfer of this skill among the learners.

These results suggest that DCF is effective in increasing accuracy, but when provided in isolation over a short intervention period, the gains may be limited. The implications for the educator are that DCF represents a useful, yet modest, intervention to enable learners to become more linguistically precise. One possible explanation for this limited effectiveness lies in the non-interactional nature of the DCF procedure, whereby the teacher cannot witness the learner's immediate cognitive reactions, offer differential help, or verify whether the information has been thoroughly internalized. DCF thus might operate best when supplemented with dialogic or scaffolded feedback, which renders the learner's thinking more accessible.

Moreover, the results of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA conducted to analyze the writing test scores of participants in the correction group in terms of rhetorical aspects demonstrated a significant effect for time, Wilk's Lambda=.101, $F(2,16)=71.236$, $p=.000$, partial eta squared= .899 after Bonferroni correction. This medium effect size indicated substantial differences over time in the participants' test scores. Specifically, the students exhibited higher scores in both the post-test ($M=5.77$, $SD=.64$) and the delayed post-test ($M=5.11$, $SD=1.40$) compared to the pre-test ($M=3.33$, $SD= .97$). Yet, no significant difference was found between the post-test and the delayed post-test. These findings indicate that participants who received direct error correction showed improvement in the rhetorical aspects of their writing. Moreover, this improvement in rhetorical dimensions was observable over time, showing potential for the transfer of this ability longitudinally among these learners.

Contrary to the linguistic accuracy results, the findings for the rhetorical aspects indicated a medium effect size, reflecting a greater practical significance of the feedback intervention. This, therefore, suggests that the DCF significantly contributed to the learners' capabilities in terms of the organization of ideas, structuring of arguments, and improvement of coherence at the textual level. From the perspective of instructors, this finding underlines the need to incorporate feedback practices that go beyond sentence-level accuracy and deal explicitly with rhetorical development. The medium effect size also highlights the potential of sustained feedback practices for instilling higher-order writing skills, particularly when the tasks are

varied, and require the learners to apply rhetorical strategies across a number of topics and genres.

Discussion

Feedback in L2 writing has been extensively explored in the scholarly literature, and most of these studies have focused on the most effective CF type that might lead to improvement in linguistic accuracy in L2 writing. However, there is no agreement on this ground, mainly because there is not enough attention paid to the different learner needs. In response to that issue, scholars have highlighted the urgent need for adopting SCT as an approach for the feedback process (Ferris et al., 2013; Mao & Lee, 2020; Storch, 2018). This approach highlights the importance of fine-tuning feedback to address the personalized needs of learners, recognizing that these needs can vary notably among students (Ferris, 2006).

Previous research has focused on specific linguistic items such as the use of articles and the simple past tense, having overlooked improvement in vocabulary choice, organization, and overall quality of writing. Due to this narrow scope, the effectiveness of unfocused CF remains only partially known. Also, many studies were carried out in controlled environments, so scholars have proposed the application of unfocused CF to an authentic L2 classroom setting (Lee, 2020; Storch, 2018).

This study extends these indications by investigating the short-and long-term impacts of SCT-oriented mediation via DA compared to DCF on the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of L2 writing. It attempts to provide a detailed comparison of the developmental effects of these two approaches over time by presenting empirical evidence obtained from actual classroom settings.

The results showed that mediated feedback in DA sessions significantly improved linguistic accuracy, outperforming DCF on both post-test and delayed post-test measures and exhibiting a large effect size. The results are in accord with Ajanshir's (2024) research, which found that the DA group outperformed the DCF group in L2 pragmatics assessment. This finding is in line with earlier studies showing that DA's adaptive and dialogic approach promotes deeper cognitive engagement (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Poehner, 2008). DA mediation addresses learners' evolving needs and modifies support along an implicit-to-explicit continuum, in contrast to DCF, which fixes mistakes without necessarily encouraging learners to engage in metacognitive reflection. Over time, this kind of scaffolding may help people become more conscious of grammatical patterns and facilitate their internalisation (Poehner, 2008).

This finding is not consistent with that of Boggs (2019), who found no statistically significant difference in linguistic accuracy between scaffolded feedback and DCF, emphasising instead DCF's time-saving benefit. Even though scaffolded feedback was not the primary focus of this investigation, its SCT foundation, which is relevant to this study, allows for an intriguing comparison with the current findings. Specifically, the between-group analysis showed that

DA group performed better than DCF group in this study with a significant effect size. This emphasises how crucial adaptive scaffolding and ongoing dialogic interaction are to long-term language development.

Furthermore, within-group analyses yielded that DCF had a small effect size, while mediated feedback had a moderate effect size. This finding might show that the dialogic nature of mediated feedback might have helped learners internalise linguistic forms more successfully. Opportunities to actively engage with feedback and cooperatively build understanding were probably beneficial to learners who were in DA group (Poehner & Infante, 2017; 2019), which might explain the reason that the mediation group showed more notable improvements.

Although there is a growing interest in DA, few quantitative studies have been conducted in this area. Comparing interventionist group DA settings with non-DA settings, Shabani (2018) concluded that DA was an important alternative approach for improving L2 writing. While the results of this study confirm Shabani's findings, this study is distinct in its focus on the linguistic aspects of writing. Another relevant study, also on interactionist DA, was conducted by Rahimi et al. (2015) with three EFL students, who reported gains consistent with the current study. In contrast to the current study's results, Xian (2020) found no long-term effects using interventionist DA targeting only linguistic aspects.

Also, initial comparisons of within-group differences suggested that the small effect size observed for DCF in this study only partially aligns with previous literature. Shintani and Ellis (2013) did not find any long-term effects for DCF, used either in isolation or in combination with metalinguistic explanation, on indefinite article use, although there were short-term gains. Similarly, Bitchener (2008) and Sheen (2007) found little effect for DCF on the accuracy of articles. In contrast, the results of the present study offer a more positive outlook, with the suggestion that consistent DCF can lead to statistically significant, albeit small, longitudinal gains in linguistic accuracy. These findings are thus more consistent with Bitchener & Knoch (2010), who found longitudinal effects for DCF on article use, and Bitchener et al. (2005), who noted improvements across a number of grammatical categories. While mediation thus evidences stronger effects, the current findings do suggest that DCF remains a valuable pedagogic intervention, particularly when it is scaffolded and supported consistently.

In the case of rhetorical development, the outcome was more complicated. The between-group comparisons did not reveal any statistically significant difference between the mediation and DCF groups. However, the within-group comparisons revealed that the mediation group improved significantly in the post-test with a medium effect size. This gain did not sustain during the delayed post-test, suggesting a regression. On the other hand, the DCF group showed consistent improvements, with a medium effect size for both post-test and delayed post-test measures.

This difference in performance might stem from the quality and type of mediation received. The mediating moves revealed that the teacher in the first DA session relied mainly on explicit explanation to address the rhetorical problems. In the final DA session, however, no mediation was provided for the rhetorical aspects. This might have been an early withdrawal of the

scaffolding, especially of the higher-order skills of rhetoric, which usually requires prolonged support for adequate internalization. These findings support Poehner's (2008) assertion that the reduction of mediation should be carried out in a carefully managed way until the internalization of the targeted constructs is adequately achieved. Without sustained mediation, initial gains are superficial and likely to be lost over time.

The differences in rhetorical development between groups can also be explained through Ferris's (1999, 2006) distinction between treatable and untreatable errors. Ferris notes that untreatable errors, which are germane to idea organization, cohesion, and sentence fluency, may not respond well to indirect feedback. These discourse-level features, which are critical for rhetorical development, might often necessitate direct intervention. In this study, while mediation initially enhanced rhetorical gains through mediated feedback in DA sessions, the teacher's shift to more explicit, unidirectional feedback and the absence of rhetorical mediation may have prevented learners' ability to internalize complex rhetorical patterns. On the other hand, DCF may have consistently provided precise, rule-based corrections for surface-level rhetorical features, and this might lead to sustained effectiveness over time. These findings assert that effective mediation for rhetorical development may necessitate dialogic interaction to address the untreatable nature of higher-order writing concerns.

The present study departs from the relevant studies in that it is situated in a real L2 writing classroom environment and does not involve pre-specified scopes of feedback. Whereas earlier studies tested mediation and correction for specific grammar topics within artificial settings, the current research examined mediation and correction in linguistic and rhetorical dimensions in the context of real L2 writing tasks. Results reveal that mediated input might have helped learners with linguistic accuracy problems, while rhetorical problems improve with the quality input of explicit correction. This aligns with Mao et al.'s review (2024). The possible explanations could be due to incomplete grammatical knowledge or divergent needs. Goal-oriented dialogic interactions are thus important in teachers' understanding of what is happening beneath the surface of a learner's error, which falls under the Mediated Learning Experience as proposed by Feuerstein et al. (2010). Goal-oriented interaction, an essential aspect of SCT, allows educators to effectively create a non-discriminatory and productive learning setting tailored for every learner. In such a structure, mediation provides a great chance for L2 writing instructors to solve learners' errors, which can enable learners to achieve success in L2 writing. Rhetorical problems may also be based on the lack of knowledge of the learner. However, in such cases, taking an implicit-to-explicit feedback loop to show the underlying reasons is not required because accurate guidance from the instructor would be enough for support.

In brief, these findings shed light on implications for L2 writing instructors and teacher candidates: Feedback methodologies must be adapted according to both the nature of errors and students' needs (Mao et al., 2024). However, some methodological limitations of the study limit drawing expansive conclusions from these findings. Theoretically, direct error correction and providing mediation of learner errors both play crucial roles in the improvement of linguistic accuracy and rhetorical dimensions within L2 writing. Sociocultural Theory and

Dynamic Assessment help explain the causes that lead to the emergence of errors by means of goal-oriented dialogical interactions, thus leading to the creation of inclusive learning environments, which take into consideration both the teacher's mediating role and the student's responses to mediational moves. This interaction causes cognitive growth through the process of elaborating stimuli into mediated stimuli and allows educators to observe and track the ZPD of each learner (Feuerstein et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Due to increasing classroom diversity, the need to shift toward SCT was emphasized as part of dealing with errors of linguistic inaccuracy. Thus, language instructors and teacher candidates should be aware of the benefits of SCT and DA in L2 writing settings as well as the need for adaptiveness in a contemporary educational setting as learners come with diverse backgrounds. However, regarding its practicality, DA's implementation in classes, especially in crowded classes, may not be easy. Even though in this study the data were collected as part of a real L2 writing course, both the mediation and correction sessions were conducted outside of the class, which might not be feasible and practical for L2 writing teachers in real life. For that reason, we may suggest conducting group DA sessions in the classroom, which would enhance a social learning environment for students and take less time compared to one-on-one DA sessions. Also, if there were some students who fell behind their peers, one-on-one DA sessions could be a better alternative for them. Also, mediation moments could be integrated into different stages of the L2 writing process, such as revision processes. Teachers and teacher candidates could be informed about adopting different methods (e.g., direct corrective feedback versus mediated feedback) while dealing with learner errors. Lastly, today's computational tools, particularly generative artificial intelligence tools, offer tremendous potential benefits for teachers and students by providing personalized feedback. By instructing these tools with appropriate prompts, teachers would benefit and save time (e.g., Fathi & Rahimi, 2024; Özturan & Shrestha, 2025).

Conclusion

According to this study, L2 writing instructors can effectively address student errors through both mediation and correction. Nonetheless, the heuristic environment that mediation produces, defined as dialogic interactions, may favourably impact both immediate and long-term transfer effects. DCF, on the other hand, depends on teacher agency, which could result in students paying little attention to criticism and accepting corrections passively. Over time, such dynamics probably affect L2 writing performance. As part of DA, mediation is also tailored to each learner's needs, encouraging learner agency and establishing a personalised learning environment through a graduated implicit-explicit continuum of prompts and feedback. The data gathered from real L2 writing classroom practices, which compares the effectiveness of correction and mediation, is a major contribution of this study.

Interestingly, the only longitudinal difference between groups was in linguistic accuracy. Therefore, while a solely quantitative research design may highlight significant and non-significant differences, a moment-to-moment analysis of interactions during mediation

sessions also needs exploration. This would illuminate the reasons behind how mediation helped learners transfer mediational prompts in linguistic accuracy. In light of this limitation, further studies may uncover interactional analysis during DA sessions by categorizing mediational prompts used for linguistic errors. Moreover, future studies can recruit more participants from diverse departments or different learning settings (ESL or academic writing) to compare mediation and correction. This study used one-on-one interactive DA and unfocused DCF, but both approaches can be explored in group or classroom settings in future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A – The Test in English for Educational Purposes Attribute Writing Scales

A. Relevance and adequacy of content

1. The answer bears almost no relation to the task set. Totally inadequate answer.
2. Answer of limited relevance to the task set. Possibly major gaps in the treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition.
3. For the most part answers the tasks set, though there may be some gaps or redundant information.
4. Relevant and adequate answer to the task set.

B. Compositional organization

1. No apparent organization of content.
2. Very little organization of content. Underlying structure not sufficiently controlled.
3. Some organizational skills in evidence, but not adequately controlled.
4. Overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organizational skills adequately controlled.

C. Cohesion

1. Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended

communication is virtually impossible.

2. Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication.
3. For the most part satisfactory cohesion although occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of the communication are not always effective.
4. Satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication.

D. Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose

1. Vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication.
2. Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriacies and/or repetition.
3. Some inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.
4. Almost no inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Only rare inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.

E. Grammar

1. Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate.
2. Frequent grammatical inaccuracies.
3. Some grammatical inaccuracies.
4. Almost no grammatical inaccuracies.

F. Mechanical accuracy – punctuation

1. Ignorance of conventions of punctuation.
2. Low standard of accuracy in punctuation.
3. Some inaccuracies in punctuation.
4. Almost no inaccuracies in punctuation.

G. Mechanical accuracy – spelling

1. Almost all spelling inaccurate.

2. Low standard of accuracy in spelling.
 3. Some inaccuracies in spelling.
 4. Almost no inaccuracies in spelling.

Appendix B – Statistical Tests

Table 4 displays the results of a two-way between-groups (DA vs DCF) ANOVA test on the linguistic accuracy, and Table 5 shows the findings of a two-way between-groups (DA vs DCF) test on the rhetorical aspects of L2 writing.

Table 4. *Two-way Between-groups ANOVA.*

Linguistic Accuracy / Pre-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	1.118	1	1.118	.971	.330	0.21
Linguistic Accuracy / Post-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	17.366	1	17.366	10.113	.003*	0.18
Linguistic Accuracy / Delayed Post-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	20.945	1	20.945	8.167	.007*	0.17

*p<.05

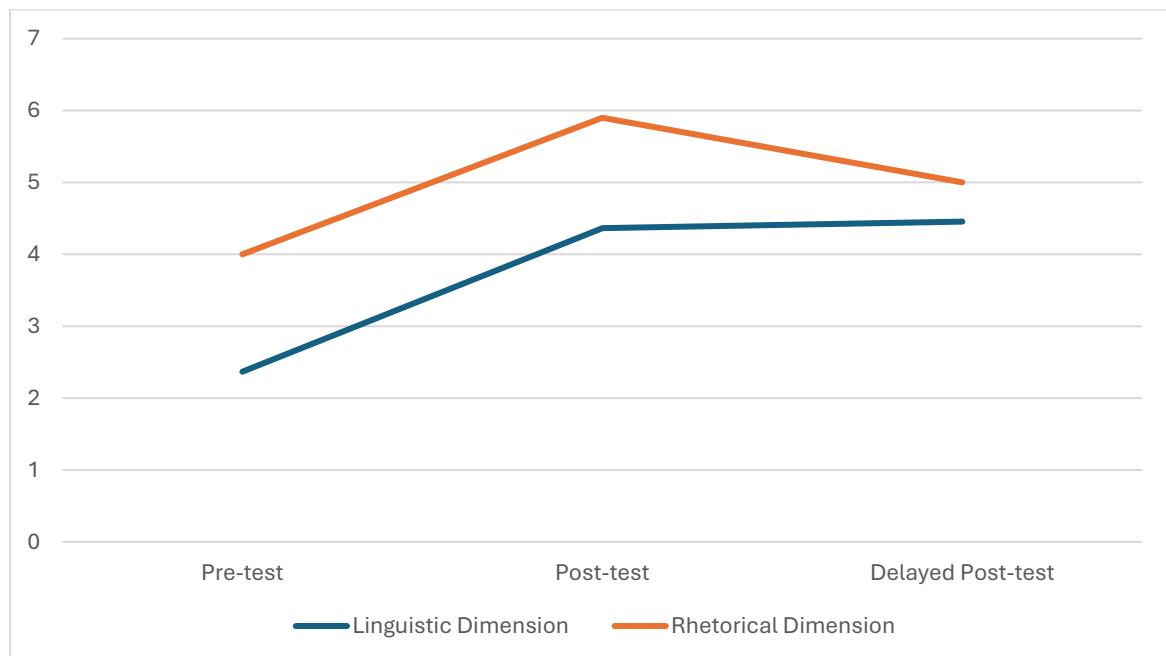
Table 5. Two-way Between-groups ANOVA.

Rhetorical Aspects / Pre-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	.622	1	.622	.187	.85	0.08
Rhetorical Aspects / Post-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	.149	1	.149	.378	.542	0.08
Rhetorical Aspects / Delayed Post-test						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Between Groups	.122	1	.122	.065	.80	0.02

p<.05

Appendix C – Line Graphics

Figure 4 represents the effect of mediated feedback on the linguistic and rhetorical development in L2 writing, while Figure 5 shows the improvement in linguistic and rhetorical aspects of L2 writing through correction.

**Figure 4.** Short- and Long-term Impacts of Mediation on Learners' Writing Development.

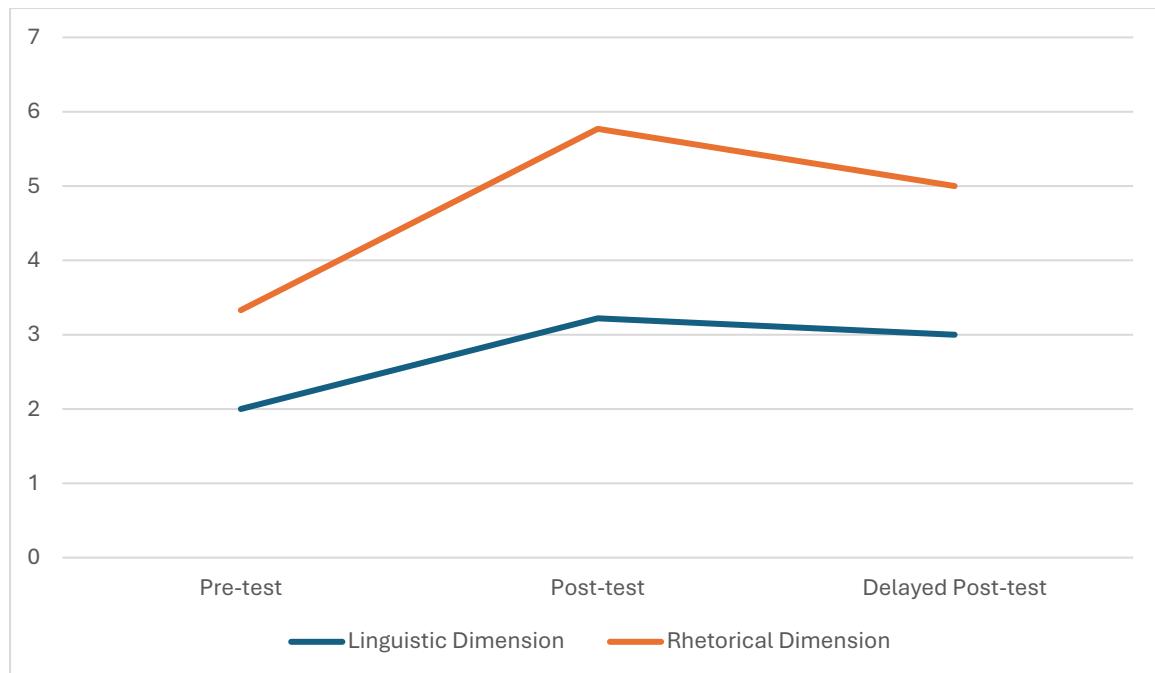


Figure 5. Short- and Long-term Impacts of Correction on Learners' Writing Development.

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Examining the situational contexts and language use in multilingual writing for teacher capacity building

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Abstract

Analyzing student writing samples situationally and linguistically allows teachers to better grasp the registers of secondary writing and the experiences of multilingual learners of English (MLE). Using a qualitative case study methodology, this study aims to demonstrate how to analyze the situational contexts and language use in MLE writing by comparing two different letter writing tasks completed in U.S. high school science courses. The data sources included ethnographic interviews with MLEs and their science teacher, and student writing samples from refugee-background MLEs. The results indicate similarities and differences in the situational contexts of the two writing tasks, leading to the use of clauses and noun phrases for different functional reasons. Specifically, variations in communicative purposes, teacher expectations, and interactions among the participants resulted in distinct writing processes and experiences. The study provides insights into how MLEs functionally employed clausal and phrasal linguistic features to achieve their writing goals. The study offers practical implications for teachers and teacher educators to develop register awareness and enhance support for multilingual writers across content areas.

Keywords: *Linguistic analysis; multilingual writing; register; science; secondary science; situational analysis.*

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, the contextual interpretation of writing has been recognized as vital to understanding the functional relationship between texts and situational contexts (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Brown & Fraser, 1979; Chin, 1994; Halliday, 1978; Michaels, 1987). While a linguistic analysis of written texts provides insights into language use, examining the writing context holistically helps categorize text types and writing expectations. In writing assignments, how a teacher designs and frames the purpose of an assignment to multilingual learners of English (MLEs) influences students' understanding of what goes into the writing and how it should be written. Some studies have also adopted an ecological perspective on classroom writing and examined other classroom dynamics in writing situations such as student-teacher conferences and first language use (Kibler, 2013, 2019). Besides assignment design and contextual characteristics that impinge upon writing, Michaels (1987) argued that writing is also influenced by institutional and external forces such as training on writing and testing policies. These external factors intersect with the specialized literacy practices in subject areas, which further affect the ways of writing (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Despite a clear scholarly focus on multilingual writing in K-12 contexts, few studies have employed a systematic approach to examine the context of secondary school writing. To address this need, Biber and Conrad's (2019) Register Functional (RF) approach offers an analytic lens and structured framework to examine how situational context influences writing produced by multilingual writers. While this approach has primarily been applied to higher education writing contexts, often through corpus-based analysis of writing, it remains underutilized in secondary writing research and practice.

Building on the RF approach as an analytical tool, the primary goal of this article is to analyze situational contexts of two science writing assignments completed in high school science courses and the language used by MLEs to accomplish the communicative goals. The RF approach allows for an interpretation of functional language use and thus illustrates how linguistic choices reflect the writing situations (Gray, 2015). By comparing two writing tasks in terms of their situational contexts and linguistic features, this study aims to provide a nuanced explanation of how context shapes the use of language for particular communicative goals and assist teachers of MLEs in understanding the register of science writing. To achieve these aims, an ethnographic method is adopted to understand the writing practices adopted by a science teacher, writing tasks, and MLEs' writing experiences. The RF approach also offers an analytic lens to identify and interpret MLEs' language use. These insights offer evidence for MLEs' science writing experiences that can inform science literacy, writing integration, and teacher capacity building across content areas. The insights may also be leveraged in needs assessment and writing task design.

Situational contexts and linguistic features of registers

Registers are defined as ‘named, culturally recognized categories of texts’ (Biber, 2019, p. 44). For example, in English or science classes, MLEs must learn to write in specific registers such as lab reports, letters, and persuasive writing. Studies examining situational contexts of writing and MLEs’ language use showed a systematic relationship between context and linguistic features used in registers (Biber, 2019). Broadly speaking, two major registers received extensive attention from scholars with a functional perspective: conversations vs. written academic texts. Everyday English or conversations show different structural and contextual differences compared to the formal academic language or registers in school subjects (Schleppegrell, 2004). Lexico-grammatical structures of language appear in registers to meet the communicative demands of specific situations such as communicating scientific information, writing an argument, or summarizing an article. For example, in a summary task, MLEs might need to employ scientific vocabulary and passive voice structures that commonly occur in science writing.

A situational description of writing is essential for understanding the characteristic features of formal academic registers as the situational context sheds light on the environment or circumstances in which writing tasks are completed (Biber, 2019; Crawford & Zhang, 2021; Staples, 2021). A situational analysis might effectively build teachers’ understanding of the content-language relationship and academic registers in their classrooms, which is often considered a critical part of educator roles by language and literacy scholars (Schleppegrell & O’Hallaron, 2011). An understanding of the situational contexts of writing can help unpack the language-content relationship through a functional analysis. Biber and Gray (2019) proposed a situational analysis framework comprising seven key characteristics of context in which texts are produced: “communicative purpose, participants, relationships among participants, channel, production circumstances, setting, and topic” (pp. 41-46). The present article adopts this operationalization of writing situations to describe the contexts of science writing tasks in a high school science program.

A linguistic analysis of student writing is also essential for interpreting MLEs’ situationally appropriate use of linguistic features associated with academic registers. Studies of written academic registers reported that typically “academic writing is a compressed, informational discourse characterized by the frequent use of phrasal complexity features, such as complex noun phrases, attributive adjectives, postmodifying prepositional phrases, pre-modifying nouns” (Goulart et al., 2020, p. 438) as well as nominalizations (e.g., *describe* - *description*) (Biber & Clark, 2002; Biber & Gray, 2022b). In contrast, the register of conversation is characterized by dependent clauses using subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *because*, *when*, *after*) and finite complement clauses (that- or wh- complements) controlled by verbs. While subordinating conjunctions establish an adverbial relationship between dependent and independent clauses, finite complement clauses complete the meaning of an independent clause (e.g., *I thought that...*, *I don’t*

know when...). Research on writing development suggests that as students advance in written academic English, they typically shift from clausal structures toward more phrasal structures and nominalizations (e.g., Biber et al., 2011; Parkinson & Musgrave, 2014). This developmental trajectory is evident in secondary student writing samples and classroom texts, which increasingly resemble the patterns of academic registers (Green, 2019). Findings from previous studies using the RF approach guided the selection of the linguistic features used in the analyses conducted in this study.

The current study contributes to the existing multilingual research with a theoretical and methodological application of a register-based framework (RF approach) that both teacher educators and classroom teachers can benefit from. This framework is aligned with ethnographic approaches to writing and literacies as social practices (Barton et al., 2000; Street, 2003) and establishes a sociolinguistic understanding of language variation across conversations, academic writing, and other registers (Biber & Finegan, 1994; Hymes, 1974). The analyses of multilingual writing through this framework can therefore inform writing pedagogy and teacher professional knowledge. As Grujicic-Alatriste and Grindleger (2020) noted, there also exists a paucity of systematic scholarship on writing practices across the K-16 continuum that inform college writing instructors of MLEs' pre-collegiate writing experiences. This study bridges the gap between secondary and tertiary-level second language (L2) writing by documenting the types of writing tasks that multilingual writers complete and the contexts of their writing experiences. The findings and discussion presented here offer insights that teachers of MLEs can utilize to support MLEs collectively.

Literature review

Language and literacy scholars utilize varied methods to describe the contexts of writing and linguistically analyze developing writing to better understand the registers. These might include conducting ethnographic observations and interviews with informants, reviewing writing assignment prompts, and utilizing texts, and personal experiences among others (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Biber & Egbert, 2023). Developed by Biber and his colleagues, a situational analysis draws on various sources of data for a holistic description of writing situations. The situational framework specifically includes the following parameters: communicative purpose of writing, participants, relationships among participants, channel, production circumstances, setting, and topic among others (Biber, 2019; Biber & Conrad, 2019; see Table 1). Besides writing analyses, the situational framework has also been adopted in writing studies focusing on task design (Crawford & Zhang, 2021).

The RF approach also informs linguistic analyses of writing by offering functional interpretations of grammatical features that contribute to the complexity of writing such as noun phrases and

nominalizations. A noun phrase usually includes a head noun that is modified by other grammatical structures such as attributive adjectives (e.g., color, size, age, evaluation, frequency), nouns, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses (Biber et al., 2021). For instance, all three of the following examples form a noun phrase in which the head noun (kernel) is modified by an attributive adjective, a noun, and a prepositional phrase (e.g., **uncooked** kernels, **popcorn** kernels, kernels **in the bag**). Nominalizations, on the other hand, are also considered nouns, but these are derived from verbs (e.g., **test-test**, **react-reaction**) and adjectives (e.g., safe - **safety**). Both noun phrases and nominalizations function to provide informational elaboration, precise knowledge communication, and structural compression in writing (Biber et al., 2011). The language used in written texts is strongly influenced by the situational parameters of writing (Biber et al. 2021). In other words, writing situations influence how developing writers deploy linguistic features.

Studies using the RF approach have primarily been conducted in the postsecondary education contexts by scholars specialized in corpus linguistics and registers. For instance, Staples and JoEtta (2022) utilized the situational analysis framework and analyzed linguistic features of four college-level writing tasks in first-year writing and engineering courses. They identified a similar communicative purpose in research and design report tasks, both of which required students to solve a problem through research readings. This similarity resulted in similar frequencies of linguistic features that facilitated the problem-solving goal such as pre-modifying nouns, nominalizations, and adverbial and complement clauses which provided (1) descriptive details, (2) introduced goals and needs, and (3) stated findings. For example, problems were introduced and described with nominalizations (e.g., safety, collision) while findings or conclusions were introduced with clauses (e.g., it was found that...) and verbs helping with reporting findings (p. 9). Notably, when students were provided with a model text in one task (but not others), the writers seemed to integrate the linguistic features from the model text into their writing such as first-person pronouns (e.g., we, our). This study demonstrates how communicative purpose and other situational differences such as using model texts shape students' linguistic choices.

Writing contexts and MLEs' language use in K-12 writing tasks have received growing attention in the past decades (e.g., Chin, 1994; Kibler, 2013, 2019; Valdés, 1999) though few studies have directly linked the situational contexts of writing to writers' linguistic choices. Michael's (1987) study of two 6th-grade writing tasks included many of the parameters outlined in Biber and Conrad's (2019) situational analysis framework as well as district and curriculum effects on writing practices. Through an analysis of the writing contexts (e.g., writing conferences, feedback), Michael noted the teacher's implicit values and expectations of writing (e.g., a process approach, discourse organization) that shaped the writing process and students' revisions of initial drafts based on teacher's feedback during the conferences. In a longitudinal interactional histories theory and framework, Kibler (2019) defines an ecological perspective to writing context that foregrounds students' interactions and engagements with key people (e.g., peers, teacher), policies, and resources within the school community and how those circumstances affect student writing. Kibler

called for a detailed account of students' linguistic and agentic decisions in writing, ultimately leading to a longitudinal analysis of multilingual writing. Kibler's (2013) study provided a rich description of MLEs' experiences and writing-related decisions with a sociocultural and ecological perspective focusing on the institutional policies on writing (e.g., tracking with regular vs. advanced level course options) and interactions during writing. The study showed that high school writing practices influenced MLEs' writing confidence substantially, but also lacked the rigor of college-writing, ultimately leading to disappointments among multilingual writers in transitions to college. Yайлали (2024) applied the full situational framework within the RF approach to gauge secondary MLEs' language awareness in content area writing by having MLEs describe writing tasks and responses to science writing demands. The research showed that MLEs developed an awareness of both situational context and lexical demands of science writing. Multilingual writers also demonstrated an evolving understanding of genre structures, communicative purposes, and grammatical demands of science writing.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) scholars emphasize the contexts of culture (i.e., genres) and writing situations (i.e., registers), highlighting how registers influence immediate language choices through different meta-functions (experiential, interpersonal, textual) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Depending on the writing situation, written language shows linguistic characteristics different from speech such as noun and verb groups, and clausal structures that package information (Brisk, 2021). The SFL framework also stresses the role of language functions, model text analyses, and co-construction of texts in a genre-based pedagogy to provide MLEs with language resources during writing (Hyland, 2007; Martin, 2009; Vicentini et al., 2022). Analyzing students' artifacts especially informs teachers about students' needs and strengths (Burke & Hardware, 2015) and inform instructional interventions in ways that standardized tests cannot because student writing is highly responsive to its context. While these two approaches represent different traditions, both focus on language functions. Particularly, the RF approach's functional interpretation of pervasive linguistic features in texts relates to SFL's meta-functions.

As studies showed, writing context is a prominent focus in multilingual writing research. These studies provided ethnographic and descriptive insights into policies and practices at both macro or local levels— with the exception of the SFL framework, which explicitly connects context to language use. The ethnographic and descriptive nature of writing research in the classroom contexts has allowed the field to better understand the social practice of writing and how it is enacted (Paltridge et al., 2016). However, few studies analyzed multilingual writers' drafts and used such analyses in teacher preparation for multilingual writing support. The lack of systematic analysis of learner writing poses a problem for teacher education considering that teachers of MLEs need to be knowledgeable about the language of their content area and ways to scaffold the disciplinary writing during instruction (de Oliveira & Westerlund, 2021). As the number of MLEs in public schools continues to rise in Western countries (e.g., Explore Statistics, 2025; National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2024), it is critical to equip teachers with effective and

practical frameworks to understand multilingual writing. In the U.S. specifically, standardized assessments consistently show disparities in MLEs' writing performances in grades 7-12 (Olson et al., 2017). With MLEs averaging about 11 % of the U.S. public schools (NCES, 2024), the MLE population constitutes an important portion of the mainstream classrooms. Content area teachers frequently encounter them in content areas yet continue to lack professional background to support writing development. Scholars emphasize that teachers need to understand academic and everyday language as different registers (Schleppegrell, 2013). Situational and linguistic analyses of student writing offer teachers nuanced insight into writing practices and literacies in the classrooms as well as MLEs' language choices, informing writing interventions and instructional practices. However, writing remains an area where teachers feel underprepared due to the lack of professional background and access to effective strategies. For teachers to support writing skills and language use (Zeng, 2024), they need a foundational understanding of writing contexts and MLEs' linguistic choices. Context and language features in multilingual writing may serve as valuable data to build teacher knowledge, skills, and collaboration in writing instruction.

Given the growing MLE population and pressing need for pedagogical support, this study centers on the situational contexts of content area writing and the linguistic features of MLE writing samples, foregrounding MLEs' and teachers' perspectives as critical sources of information on classroom writing. Teachers' expectations, writing knowledge, pedagogies, and task designs shape the registers of student writing or influence engagement across content areas. While teachers are often viewed as instructional experts, their approaches to preparing and introducing writing tasks may vary widely. Likewise, multilingual students— as developing writers frequently exposed to various forms of writing— may offer valuable insights into writing processes. The following research questions guided this study: How do two science writing tasks compare across situational parameters? How do the two science writing tasks compare linguistically?

Methodology

Student demographics and data sources

This article draws on a subset of data from a qualitative case study on multilingual adolescent writing in a public high school science program in the State of Arizona, United States (Yaylali, 2024). The high school was located in an urban refugee neighborhood and served a population with over 80 % students of color. Approximately 8 % of the school population was identified as MLEs, which reflected the national average of MLEs in public schools. The multilingual learners who participated in the study were from African, Asian, and South American countries with varying degrees of English language proficiency determined by the standardized assessment (i.e., emergent-proficient). While some students still attended a formal English language development program, others had exited the program after passing the proficiency exam. Permission from an

institutional review board (IRB) was received to conduct this study. A consent and assent form was sent home for student participation in the study while the teachers completed a consent form. Table 1 provides the demographic information about the participants. Eleven MLEs submitted the writing samples collected in the forensics and oceanography courses taught by the same teacher in consecutive semesters. While most of the MLEs took Oceanography in the Fall semester, a few did not take forensics in the Spring semester. All but two of the MLEs previously took one other science course (e.g., biology or chemistry) prior to the forensics and oceanography courses. In forensic science, students composed a conclusion analysis letter while, in oceanography, they composed a letter to a veteran survivor of a U.S. marine accident during World War II.

Table 1. *Demographics of the Participants.*

Participants	Grade Level	Language Proficiency Attained	Source of Writing Samples
Participant #1	10	Yes	Forensics
Participant #2	11	Yes	Forensics only
Participant #3	11	Yes	Forensics / Oceanography
Participant #4	11	Yes	Forensics / Oceanography
Participant #5	11	No	Oceanography
Participant #6	11	No	Oceanography
Participant #7	11	No	Oceanography
Participant #8	12	Yes	Forensics / Oceanography
Participant #9	12	No	Forensics / Oceanography
Participant #10	12	No	Oceanography
Participant #11	12	Yes	Forensics only

Ethnographic interviews with MLEs and the science teacher (Spradley, 1979, 2016), writing prompts, and writing samples were used to describe the situational contexts of writing in the study. Ethnographic approaches using these methods are well-established in writing analyses (e.g., Biber, 2019; Hymes, 1974). Interviews proved crucial for understanding how writing is situated within specific disciplinary domains and cultures. Throughout the interview process with the science teacher (positioned as the disciplinary expert), I deliberately adopted a stance as a novice to the field of school-based science writing. I explicitly described the purpose of the interview as to understand how writing is integrated into the science discipline, presenting myself as an outsider unfamiliar with conducting, teaching, or writing in science courses. This approach, which Spradley characterizes as “expressing cultural ignorance,” encourages informants to recognize the interviewer’s outsider status and share their expertise more comprehensively (p. 61).

In addition to the qualitative description of the writing contexts, a corpus of 15 writing samples was collected from the participants. These student submissions were chosen for two specific reasons: (1) these two courses involved the majority of the participating MLEs, thus yielding more assignment submissions; (2) both courses incorporated letter writing tasks designed by the teacher, which allowed for a comparative analysis of the situational features of seemingly similar genres. However, some other MLEs did not submit their assignments, which limited the number of

samples in the study. Analyzing these two letter writing tasks enabled a closer examination of how two different situational contexts influences MLEs' deployment of the English language in functionally different ways. All the data collected in the study were de-identified by assigning a new code to the participants and anonymizing the collected artifacts and interviews.

Situational analysis method

I utilized the situational analysis framework associated with the Register-Functional approach to describe the writing context (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Biber et al., 2022). The elements of the situational analysis framework assisted in capturing the full range of situational differences and similarities between the two writing tasks (see Table 3). As an iterative process, I reviewed the writing prompts, relevant classroom materials, teacher feedback on student writing, and the writing samples. While a situational analysis may involve interviews with experts producing the texts (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Biber & Egbert, 2023), this methodological practice has not received much attention in the writing field. In this study, I approached the students and the science teacher as crucial sources of knowledge and interviewed them to better describe the contexts of writing. This paper thus offers insights into multilingual writing by bringing a teacher's views on writing and adolescent MLEs' experiences regarding science writing.

Linguistic analysis method

For the linguistic analysis, I selected a subset of the linguistic features identified within the Register-Functional approach (i.e., phrasal and clausal forms) to analyze students' language use (1) nominalizations, (2) grammatical features forming nouns phrases (nouns, attributive adjectives, and prepositional phrases), and (3) finite complement clauses (that- and wh-) as well as dependent clauses forming adverbial relationships (when, because, since, if). In the previous studies (e.g., Biber et al., 2011), these linguistic features were identified as complexity indicators in developing academic writing and everyday conversations (see Table 3). These language forms informed a nuanced analysis of functional language use across the two writing tasks. Noun phrases functionally assist in conveying precise information (e.g., the **salty** water **in the tube**) while clausal forms communicate adverbial meanings (e.g., time, condition) or complement verb meanings by occupying direct object positions (e.g., I think **that** ...), thereby contributing to syntactic elaboration. In the analyses, repeated language forms were included in the total raw counts (tokens). However, examples that do not accurately reflect a linguistic feature, place names, and modifiers derived from verbs were not included in the analysis. For instance, the bolded words in the following examples, “**salt** water, Greendale **High** School, **United** States, **abandoned** ocean”, were not included as examples of attributive adjectives in the linguistic analysis. The linguistic

analysis was completed manually due to the small number of multilingual writing samples. Each of the selected linguistic features identified and counted to assess usage patterns across the writing tasks. For accurate identification of the linguistic features, the grammar book published by Biber and his colleagues (Biber et al., 2021) was taken as a reference. As a researcher and teacher educator, I utilize this book in my courses and research activities frequently. For comparative purposes, frequency counts of each linguistic feature were normalized to occurrences per 100 words because the student writing samples were relatively short—a characteristic typical of secondary school science writing. Furthermore, a detailed qualitative analysis was performed to accurately interpret the functional use of these linguistic features in student writing.

To answer the first research question, I conducted a situational analysis of writing using the RF framework. I then illustrated the analysis of the linguistic features to answer the second research question. Finally, I presented a discussion on potential application of such analyses to provide MLE teachers with considerations for writing tasks, multilingual writing support, and MLEs' writing needs in secondary classrooms. The discussion also explores implications for teachers-researcher collaborations for potential interventions or instructional decisions.

Results

Situational analysis

Below is a description of the situational characteristics of two science writing tasks (i.e., letters) that MLEs wrote in oceanography and forensic science courses (RQ1).

Letters to survivor.

The oceanography course was offered in the Fall as a full-term course granting a science credit for high school graduation. The letters addressed Mr. Adolfo Celaya, a survivor of the U.S.S. Indianapolis cruiser that was sunk during World War II (*participant*). Before the assignment of this letter, students received information about the navy veterans or various survivors of the U.S.S. Indianapolis by watching videos and interviews related to the history of this event (*topic*). The writing task was the culmination assignment of the learning activities about the remaining survivors of this tragic event. The purpose of the letter was to ask any questions that students had about the survival experience of this navy recruit who lived in Arizona as well as share any personal thoughts or feelings related to this event (*communicative purpose*). Although the survivor was the main addressee of this assignment, the letter was initially read by the teacher and received feedback (*participants*). Furthermore, students were able to provide or receive voluntary peer feedback on each other's writing although this was not a structured process (*participants*). The

students primarily typed this writing assignment at home (*setting*) and submitted it virtually to the classroom learning management system (i.e., Google Classroom) for feedback and grading (*channel*). Table 2 summarizes the situational characteristics of each writing assignment.

Table 2. *Situational Analysis of Two Writing Tasks.*

Elements of a Situational Analysis	Letter to Survivor	Conclusion Analysis Letter
Communicative Purpose	To share questions, emotions, feelings and empathy.	To inform the principal of a lab test result.
Topic	The survival experiences of a navy veteran	The status of white powders found in student lockers.
Participants	Student, Mr. Adolfo Celaya (authentic audience), teacher	Student, teacher, peers, an imaginary principal
Relations among Participants	Teacher as the expert and feedback provider; power dynamics in place	Teacher as the expert and feedback provider; power dynamics in place
Channel	Writing mode	Writing mode
Settings	Written at home	Written in the classroom and at home
Production Circumstances	Peer interactions on the writing task, drafting, revising, and editing	Teacher discussions on the writing content, but no peer interactions on writing

The *production circumstances* in this assignment showed various forms of teacher involvement and interaction with students. The teacher's involvement was primarily to scaffold the writing process. During the interview, the teacher said, “I did show them how to address a letter and how you put the name and went through that process of how to do it and [end with] ‘sincerely’. They did a rough draft. They had peer editing for it...”. The existence of a real external addressee led the teacher to engage the MLEs in peer-review, drafting, editing, and revising. The process of editing and revising the letters provided the teacher with more control over the final product because the survivor would be reading the letters. The teacher expressed that the letters needed to be reviewed for any errors prior to being physically mailed to the survivor. However, the criteria for evaluation of writing were not established. Students received teacher feedback in Google documents. During the interview, the teacher stated that he would benefit from strategies to provide effective feedback on multilingual writing, showing his willingness to work more closely with the MLEs. Below are samples of the letters.

[Sample letter 1]:

Dear, Adolfo, Celaya,

Hi my name is [Student's name] and I am writing because we watched a video in class I am a student at [School name]. And I was interested in how your life has been. Hope you are doing well.

These are some questions I have for you: How did you feel about the people around you, did you trust them, or did you try and took care of yourself? Why do you think you made it out alive? How was this situation affected your life after you made it out alive? How is your mental life going? And how was this recorded? How come you didn't give or drink the water? Would you ever want to swim with sharks if you had the opportunity [sic]?

[Sample letter 2]:

How are you? The purpose of this letter is to inform you that as we were learning about the USS Indianapolis survivors. When we heard your speech and some other videos made me have to ask you some questions about their ordeal during and after rescue praise, and opinions. What was your ordeal during the situations without knowing if they ever came to rescue you? How did you manage to be different from others at times on the third day when others were drinking salt water from the ocean? What was your important medal that you received that makes you so proud of yourself? Why did you decide to choose to play basketball for a school? How did you feel about racism? Were you able to live with it all the days of your life? I thank you for the responses that you will give us [sic].

[Sample letter 3]:

Dear Mr. Adolfo Celaya:

Hello, My name is [Student name]. I am an eighteen years old girl and a senior at [School name]. I started my freshman year at [School name] as a refugee from Uganda, in 2016 who knew nothing but spoke a little broken English and I will be graduating in 2020. It's nice to meet you even though it's through a letter. I am a girl who has a dream of being a model and helping people around the world who are in need of help and suffering. My life has been amazing since I came to the United States, you might be wondering why it's been amazing for me to come here and I will tell you why, so since I came to the US, I went to school without worrying about paying school fees. I've eaten food without thinking I will go hungry the next day or have lunch or dinner for tomorrow. In my oceanography class we watched a video about the USS Indianapolis. I was truly amazed by the story, not that I'm

happy about what happened to those who didn't survive but how strong everyone stayed and fought for their lives. I'm glad that I'm writing this letter to you. I would love to say that you fought the hardest road to where you are now and I'm so proud. You inspired me to work hard no matter where I am or everything I want and need in my life. I have much respect for soldiers like you and don't ever blame yourself for what happened that day. It's in the past and we will keep honoring those who didn't survive. I would love to meet you in the future if that's possible [sic].

Sincerely,

As seen in the letters above, multilingual writing samples varied by length and content. While the first two shorter samples above primarily include a students' questions to the survivor (How did you feel about the people around?), the third one shows more personal and emotional content (My life has been amazing ...). During the interview, the student who wrote the third letter stated, "he [the teacher] told us to write what we feel and how. So, I wrote whatever we felt in our heart to feel, like I told him basically about my life and his life. It's not the same, but we're surviving. We're here [in the U.S.]. We're alive". In this example, she found similarities in the survival experiences of the navy veteran and herself prior to immigrating to the U.S. Another student showed empathy for this survival experience by saying, "I think that if I was in your place the first shark, I would see would give me a panic attack". Since this letter was flexibly designed to include any personal perspectives or questions due to the topic being human experience, patriotism, and emotions, variation in the content was evident.

Conclusion analysis letters.

Similarly, the conclusion analysis letter was an assignment used in the forensics course offered in the Spring term as a full-term course granting a science credit for high graduation as well. In the interview, the teacher mentioned appropriating this task from general letters and forensic reports that law enforcement officers would write in criminal cases. Situationally speaking, this assignment utilizes students' prior knowledge of letter writing and simultaneously integrates writing the results of a drug test conducted on white powders (*topic*). The *communicative purpose* of the assignment was to write a letter to an imaginary principal (*participant*) of a high school where the white powders were hypothetically found in student lockers. The science teacher indicated that this writing task had an informational goal because its primary goal was to inform the principal about the results of the white powder tests. The teacher stated that students needed to tell the principal (*participant*) which of the several given bags contained a drug after conducting a series of experimental tests. The students had to engage in problem-solving, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning.

Students completed the conclusion analysis writing task on computers, both in class and at home (*setting*). While students discussed their observations on the chemical interactions of the white powders, no peer or teacher review was embedded in the process, limiting the task's interactiveness in the classroom (*circumstances of writing*). The communicative purpose (to inform the results of tests only) influenced the content, centering student responses to only relevant information although some variation was still visible. In other words, students were only asked to provide the results of the drug test, but as both samples show, students deviated from this goal slightly.

The influence of the teacher's expectations on the writing process was evident. He designed the task as the culmination of a lab test and learning activities about chemical reactions to draw connections between content and the writing task. The teacher's expectations became clearer as he discussed the writing process during the interview. He did not expect to receive elaborate writing responses, but rather a casual response or 'a general note'. In a worksheet, students had already completed a table listing the reactions of the powders to different chemical processes (e.g., making bubbles, boiling, sinking), so their task was to transfer their notes to a short writing task and relay the conclusions based on their observations to the principal rather than discuss all the reactions observed in the drug test. The submissions received feedback from the teacher in a Google document only after the submission was complete (*relationship between participants*). This feedback was not intended for revising and resubmitting the assignments since the situation included a hypothetical principal, rendering this letter a less interactive and more solitary writing task. The sample letters below exemplify how students constructed the conclusion analysis letters.

[Sample letter 1]:

Dear, school principal regarding our finding from the unknown powder that we tested. It has been found that it was a table salt not a drug. According, our testing we used our method of using the known drugs first before the unknown powder. Additionally, the known drugs that were used first are brogaine, speculate, rotaran, barrop, and even table Salt. Presently, all the known drugs are correctly put into chemical tests in order to be able to identify the unknown drug. In brief, the results came as true as the chemical testing revealed them to us that it isn't a drug [sic].

[Sample letter 2]:

Dear principal,

I have been in the lab making tests to figure out what the powder was in the student's locker. I do believe that my tests are correct. If you have any concerns, please contact me. I do believe that the powder in the locker was (D-Barrop). While I

tested other powders, I got different reactions, but some were the same except one. This powder was the only one that melted on the hot plate and when I tested the powder that was in the locker, I got the same reactions, and I am able to prove that [sic].

Both samples share the conclusions of the drug tests briefly, aligned with the teacher's expectations. The second writing sample also includes some information about the observations (e.g., melting). Teacher feedback on the content was not available on either writing sample while only one sample spelling correction was originally made by the teacher.

Similarities and differences between writing tasks.

It is clear from the situational analyses that the contexts of these two writing tasks (letter to survivor vs. conclusion analysis letter) show common situational characteristics such as participants (teacher, external addressees, and/or peers), relations among participants (power differentials), channel (writing typed on computer), setting (home), and some of the circumstances of production (limited discussions with peers). However, certain differences also exist that are important to note: *teacher expectations and interactiveness*.

While the letter to survivor required strict obeying to the genre features of general letters (e.g., greeting, ending, address, date), the conclusion analysis letter required strict obeying to the findings of the lab test, demanding the writers to communicate specific information, leaving little space for any other content. The writers were required to integrate information drawn from their observations of the chemical reactions. Although both letters included a dialogue with a distant interlocutor (a survivor or a principal), the letter to the survivor included emotions, personal experiences, empathy statements, and questions from students, providing more flexibility to include personal and private content. Having an external interlocutor also contributed to the interpersonal nature of the writing tasks.

The letter to the survivor assignment involved more interactional characteristics due to the intentional peer interactions and teacher's written feedback in a Google document, which assisted students in revising their letters addressing the real audience. However, the interactiveness in the conclusion analysis letter was limited as this assignment was designed as a brief report on lab observations to an imaginary principal who would not read the letters. Instructions on the genre structure of the second letter were less rigidly specified in the classroom as the only expectation applied to the genre structure of the letter was the informational content (i.e., conclusions) that were presented in 1-2 paragraphs per the writing prompt. MLEs' learning experiences in the English classes as well as their familiarity with letter writing from the letter to survivor assignment

in the previous semester likely provided them with a schema to compose the conclusion analysis letter.

Also illustrated in these analyses, multiple data sources played a critical role in mapping the situational context of writing such as interviews with teachers and students. The students' and teachers' perspectives assisted in capturing the nuances in the situational characteristics of the writing tasks. Interacting with the constituencies of writing provided a wide understanding of the writing done and thus helped with a more comprehensive description of written tasks.

In the interviews, MLEs also shared the challenges that they generally faced during the completion of both letters. Many students expressed difficulties in understanding the tasks and felt that they lacked adequate time to discuss the expectations of these tasks with the teacher. Multiple MLEs reported struggling to accurately form clarifying questions about science topics, which led them to meet with the teacher privately at the end of the classes. Opportunities for external writing support were not available at the time (e.g., bilingual staff or family members).

Linguistic analysis

A linguistic analysis of the two tasks was conducted by drawing on the pervasive linguistic features found in previous register studies (RQ2). The linguistic features used in the analysis (i.e., phrases and clauses) are provided in Table 3 along with their frequency counts. After an overview of the frequency information, a functional interpretation of these linguistic features follows.

The frequency counts (tokens) of the nominalizations and attributive adjectives in the two groups of writing tasks show different tendencies. Conclusion analysis letters, which are strictly based on the observations in the experiments, included more nominalizations (4.7 vs. 0.9 per 100 words) and attributive adjectives (4.3 vs. 2.1 per 100 words) compared to the letters to survivors. Very few prepositional phrases and nouns as modifiers were used in both tasks, likely due to the short writing tasks and the constrained nature of the tasks that did not expect plenty of descriptive content. Furthermore, this tendency reflects the findings in the linguistic studies on academic writing development. As an example, a prepositional phrase would be suitable in the second letter to the survivor where the question “How did you feel about racism?” would benefit from some clarification by adding “racism **in the school**”. Similarly, in the last sentence of the first conclusion analysis letter sample where the student uses the pronoun *it*, the pronoun could be replaced with “the white substance in the locker isn’t a drug”.

Table 3. Grammatical Features Used in the Linguistic Analysis.

Modifiers of Nouns in Phrasal Structures	Clausal Structures
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	Nominalization	Attributive Adjective	Prepositional Phrase	Noun	Adverbial Clauses Finite Complement Clause (that and others)
Secondary School Registers	Raw Frequencies (Token) vs. Normalized Counts per 100 Words				Raw Frequencies (Token) vs. Normalized Counts per 100 Words
Letters to Survivor (N=8)	13 vs. 0.9	25 vs. 1.6	16 vs. 1	6 vs. 0.3	35 vs. 2.4
Total Words (1508)					
Mean (189)					
Range (109-294)					
Conclusion Analysis Letters (N=7)	48 vs. 4.7	44 vs. 4.3	8 vs. 0.7	7 vs. 0.6	19 vs. 1.8
Total Words (1019)					
Mean (146)					
Range (99-125)					
Key	+Attributive adjective (e.g., hot plate) +Nominalization (e.g., investigation) +Prepositional phrase not including <i>of</i> phrases (e.g., tests on the powder) +Finite dependent clause (adverbial) (e.g., When I added water to the powder) +Complement clause (e.g., I think that the weather is too cold to go out)				

Clausal structures such as adverbial and finite complements were employed slightly more in the letters to survivor, which might not be considered a striking difference (e.g., you might be wondering **why**...). A further analysis of the samples also showed that both letters involved first and second persons (e.g., you, yourself, them, we, I) that contributed to the engagement of the external audiences in the letters. Diverging from the conclusion analysis letters, the letters to survivors also included verbs and adjectives to communicate emotions and opinions (e.g., glad, proud, believe). Table 4 shows examples of the linguistic features along with their functions in the given samples.

In the conclusion analysis letters, nominalizations, a more frequently used language feature, were primarily employed to communicate the results of the experimental tests (e.g., results). It is possible that the primary focus on writing the results led MLEs to leverage certain nominalizations consistently in their writing (e.g., results, findings, reactions). Similarly, since the assignment required a descriptive presentation of the results, adjectives likely contributed to the accomplishment of this writing goal. MLEs seemed to describe the materials and the context of

the test with adjectives modifying nouns (e.g., chemical test). In the letters to the survivor, though, the students frequently used descriptive details through adjectives to show their emotions, opinions, and empathy in their letters as they explored the survivor's experience in videos played in the classroom (e.g., dangerous war, admirable person, bad memory).

Table 4. *Linguistic Feature and their Functional Roles.*

Language Feature	How it assisted in the letter (function/use)	Examples in Student Writing
Adverbial clauses	To express reason for appreciation (LS)	I really want to praise and express my special thanks to you because you are courageous.
	To express reasons for conclusions (CAL)	I came to this conclusion because when I made the hot plate test, the powder melted the same as the Barrop did.
Complement clauses	To ask questions about the experience with mental verbs (LS)	Did you ever think that you could not survive?
	To share conclusions with reporting verbs (CAL)	It has been found that it was a table salt not a drug.
Nominalizations	To express concepts related to service (LS)	Thank you for your commitment to serve this country.
	To introduce the results or findings (CAL)	I have the results for all these powders.
Adjectives	To describe the context of the event (LS)	I didn't know how you survived from that dangerous war.
	To describe the test or the materials (CAL)	Presently, all the known drugs are correctly put into chemical tests in order to be able to identify the unknown drug.

Note. Conclusion analysis letters and letters to survivors abbreviated as CAL and LS respectively.

A common function of adverbial clauses used in both letters was to express *reasons* either for personal appreciation of service or the conclusions reported in the letter (e.g., because). The complement clauses differed in their usage in the letters by being used with some mental verbs (e.g., think, feel) to ask questions in the letter to the survivor or being used with reporting verbs to share the results in the conclusion analysis letter (e.g., find, reveal).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how two letter writing tasks in science compared to each other across the situational parameters of the Register-Functional (RF) approach and how those tasks compared in terms of students' linguistic choices. The analysis revealed that teachers embed specific values, expectations, and perspectives into the design and implementation of each writing task (e.g., corrections on mechanics or acceptable information to include). As disciplinary scholars reiterated, these values and expectations suggest the disciplinary specific ways that writing is enacted (Moje, 2015) as well as the contexts that influence secondary writing (Kibler, 2013). Influenced by these classroom dynamics, the two letter-writing tasks differed situationally across multiple criteria as well as MLEs' language choices although certain commonalities existed between these two writing tasks.

Content of the letters varied in terms of informational, interrogative, and personal/emotional content, which reflects the distinct communicative purpose of each task. For example, letters to survivors incorporated writers' emotions, questions, expressions of empathy, and sometimes personal survival experiences from refugee-background students. These letters' organization and content was also influenced by the teacher's emphasis on accuracy. In contrast, conclusion analysis letters prioritized information derived from experimental tests and did not involve a structured feedback process.

The presence of an authentic audience (i.e., the survivor) combined with the teacher's strict genre requirements influenced the level of interaction and revision positively in the first letter. The conclusion analysis letter, however, involved minimal interaction features as instructed by the teacher (e.g., greeting, closing) and received less feedback, which illustrates the teacher's authoritative role in determining the writing process. In contrast to the first letter writing practice, this writing context provided limited opportunities to discuss the language use and structure of this genre. This led to less explicit writing instruction on how the conclusion analysis letters text could be structured and why it was written in the way it was (Hyland, 2007, p. 151). MLEs would likely benefit from such genre-based conversations prior to constructing the letters.

More frequent deployment of linguistic features associated with developing academic writing—such as attributive adjectives—in the conclusion analysis letters aligns with the informational nature of this writing type while a larger corpus of student writing might provide more generalizable evidence. Occurring in both tasks with different frequencies, these linguistic features functioned differently in the letters to survivors, primarily serving to describe war contexts and personal life experiences. Clausal structures, though occurring with similar frequencies across both tasks, exhibited distinct patterns, mainly expressing reasons through adverbial clauses. Complement clausal structures functioned differently between tasks (i.e., asking questions vs.

presenting conclusions) while their usage was largely determined by verb choices (mental verbs vs. reporting verbs).

One advantage of employing situational analysis through interviews was to reveal variability in student responses and their engagement with writing tasks. In both assignments, content and linguistic features were influenced by task expectations (i.e., asking questions vs. reporting conclusions). The content of the writing samples in the corpus demonstrated that more content variability in the “letters to survivor” as this task allowed for personal experiences and emotional content when students introduced themselves. Such a move was encouraged by the teacher and was not viewed as a deviation from the task. Conversely, the conclusion analysis letters, which required specific information such as experimental data, displayed less variability due to more constrained task design.

Situational analyses of writing tasks might also assist in needs assessment (Crawford & Zhang, 2021). By carefully analyzing multilingual writers’ experiences and understandings of situational contexts, their needs can be more accurately identified (Yaylali, 2024). Teachers, as disciplinary writing experts, can make more informed decisions about designing and integrating writing tasks within their subject areas. For instance, incorporating interactive activities into writing circumstances (e.g., peer feedback, online teacher feedback for revision) can support MLEs’ use of linguistic features as verbal and written interactions might provide opportunities to revise initial drafts. The appendix provides practitioners with a practical resource that can guide teachers’ efforts to reflect on writing activities in their classrooms and identify linguistic features commonly used by their students.

This study has implications for writing instruction and teacher professional development as well. For example, writing tasks across different subject areas (e.g., English, science, history) and grade levels can be systematically aligned based on teacher expectations and personal/informational content demands. A stronger understanding of MLE writing through such analyses could also facilitate the formation of professional learning communities among grade-level or department-level teacher groups. Without such alignment, multilingual writers may continue to experience substantially different writing processes (e.g., presence or absence of peer interaction, teacher feedback, revision opportunities) and produce texts varying significantly. The secondary L2 writing field and teacher education programs might integrate situational analyses of writing contexts to inform instruction, MLE support, and writing policies so that multilingual writers receive consistent support across disciplines.

The situational and linguistic analyses of writing tasks within two high school science courses support our understanding of letter-writing assignments as examples of school-based genres in a science education program. Conducting situational analysis enabled me, as the researcher, to

distinguish more effectively between seemingly similar writing genres. Such analyses can serve various purposes, particularly in developing understanding of register similarities and differences. If situational and linguistic analyses can be leveraged strategically across secondary writing practices throughout the curriculum, several critical questions emerge: How might situational analysis be incorporated into school-wide writing projects for feedback mechanisms across different subject areas? To what extent can such analyses generate valuable data for enhancing teacher collaboration on multilingual student writing? While future empirical research may address these questions more comprehensively, specific situational characteristics identified in this study—such as teacher expectations and external audiences—as well as linguistic choices offer insights that could inform writing feedback. Educators might deliberately integrate interactivity among students to receive and integrate feedback on writing or give global classroom feedback based on observed patterns in student writing. Teachers can also incorporate a genre analysis of model writing samples in various modes to provide MLEs with writing and language support (Zeng, 2024).

Conclusion and limitations

The primary goal of this article was to analyze the situational contexts and linguistic features of two letter-writing tasks completed in forensic science and oceanography courses that identified similarities and differences in both writing processes and MLEs' intentional language use. Following the RF approach (Biber et al., 2021), this exploratory paper has illustrated how situational and linguistic analyses of secondary multilingual writing samples could be leveraged to examine science writing practices and texts written in a high school science program. Although the RF approach has been underutilized in secondary school writing contexts, this study offers an opportunity to consider this methodological framework as a valuable tool for interpreting writing contexts and integrating writing instruction more effectively. The affordances of the RF approach allow educators and researchers to construct a more contextualized understanding of writing situations and MLE experiences and critically reflect on science writing tasks from a situational perspective.

The situational and linguistic analyses of two letter writing tasks also allowed me, as a researcher and outsider to the science classrooms, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the differences in disciplinary writing contexts and interpret written science registers linguistically. Interviews with both the teacher and multilingual writers served as valuable sources of insight into writing contexts, which is a methodological contribution to writing studies in secondary education settings. Ultimately, understanding secondary writing contexts may help bridge the persistent gap between secondary and tertiary levels of writing instruction. The analyses presented in this article respond to calls for consideration of situational context not only in transitional spaces of higher education

such as first-year writing and intensive English courses, but also in lower grades of schooling (Grujicic-Alatriste & Grunleger, 2020).

The limitations of this study stem from its substantial reliance on teacher and student interviews. These interviews proved invaluable for mapping the situational contexts of writing and constitute a methodological contribution to the secondary L2 writing field, but future research might also benefit from capturing and analyzing student-teacher conferences and peer-to-peer interactions during writing activities to provide more comprehensive descriptions of writing circumstances. An additional limitation is the small corpus size, which constrains the generalizability of the linguistic analysis findings. Future studies employing larger corpora could conduct more robust quantitative analyses to better elucidate how linguistic structures function collectively to accomplish writing goals and offer more definitive conclusions regarding the functional use of the linguistic features. As the only data coder in this study, I would also like to acknowledge this limitation.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights for both teachers and teacher educators. A situational and linguistic analysis of student writing can make teacher collaborations more structured and focused while promoting peer mentoring in writing—an area often challenging for content area teachers. Ultimately, such an analytical lens in student writing is to enhance teachers' instructional capacity and linguistic knowledge to better support multilingual writers across disciplinary contexts.

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Appendix

A tool for analyzing writing situations and language use in student writing

Situational Analysis Features	Observations / Notes from Your Class
Communicative Purpose Topic Participants Relations among Participants Channel Settings Production Circumstances	
Examples of Linguistic Features in Annotated Excerpts	
Key and Examples <u>Attributive adjectives</u> (hot) Nominalization (reactions) Prepositional phrase (in the locker) <u>Finite dependent clause</u> (when I test the powder)	A Conclusion Analysis Letter Dear principal, I have been in the lab making tests to figure out what the powder was in the student's locker. I do believe that <u>my tests are correct</u> . If you have any concerns please contact me. I do believe that the powder <u>in the locker</u> was (D-Barrop). While I tested other powders I got different reactions but some were the same except one. This powder was the only one that melted on the <i>hot</i> plate and <u>when I tested the powder</u> that was in the locker I got the same reactions and I am able to prove that.

<p><u>Complement clause</u> (that my tests are correct)</p>	
<p>Key and Examples <i>Attributive adjectives</i> (mental)</p> <p>Nominalization (situation)</p> <p>Prepositional phrase (around you)</p> <p>Finite dependent clause (after you made it out alive)</p> <p>Complement clause (you made it out alive?)</p>	<p>A Letter to Survivor</p> <p>Dear, Adolfo, Celaya,</p> <p>Hi my name is [student's name] and I am writing because we watched a video in class I am a student at [school name]. And I was interested in how your life has been. Hope you are doing well.</p> <p>These are some questions I have for you: How did you feel about the people <u>around you</u>, did you trust them, or did you try and took care of yourself? Why do you think <u>you made it out alive</u>? How was this situation affected your life <u>after you made it out alive</u>? How is your <i>mental</i> life going? And how was this recorded? How come you didn't give or drink the water? Would you ever want to swim with sharks if you had the opportunity?</p>

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Pragmatic strategies in Vietnamese and Japanese complaints and complaint responses: A World Englishes perspective on learner agency

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Abstract

This study investigates how Vietnamese and Japanese undergraduate learners of English performed *complaints* and responses to *complaints* in a simulated international business exchange project. Drawing on multiple pragmatic research frameworks (three for *compliments*, three for responses to *compliments*, and modality markers), the study analyzed 158 emails exchanged by students from universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Tokyo, Japan. The Vietnamese students performed these speech acts more clearly and directly, flexibly using various strategies. In contrast, the Japanese students showed a strong preference for indirect and face-saving strategies, resulted in their intentions being obscured due to a lack of negative evaluations in their *complaints* as well as both linguistic and sociocultural L1 transfer. Finally, the paper reviews the latest ELF research, providing implications for pragmatic instruction in class particularly how teachers can consider L2 learners' agency from a World Englishes perspective. In conclusion, teachers should encourage L2 learners to become effective ELF users who can make *informed pragmatic choices* (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022) based on knowledge of English culture norms and how they

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wish to present themselves in English. By doing so, educators can empower learners to navigate global communication with strategic competence and an authentic voice.

Keywords: *Complaint; complaint response; ELF; international communication; international collaboration; pragmatic instruction.*

Introduction

According to Kachru and Smith (2008), only over 300 million people used English as their first language, whereas 800 million people lived in the Outer Circle, where English is an official language, or in the Expanding Circles, where English is used as a lingua franca to communicate with foreigners. Jenkins (2015) reported that the number of actual L2 speakers increased “from 235,351,300 in 1997 to over 430 million in 2003” (p. 2), and approximately one to two billion people use English as a Lingua Franca (EFL) or English as an International Language (EIL). Tajeddin and Pakzadian (2020) defined EIL as “the status of English as the world’s second language and the commonest language utilized for global business, trade, travel, correspondence, and numerous others” (pp. 1-2). Therefore, it is estimated that people living in Kachru’s Expanding Circle like Vietnamese and Japanese will have more opportunities to communicate in English with English non-native speakers rather than native speakers. In this context, many scholars have questioned whether English pedagogy based solely on native speaker norms is truly effective in preparing learners for their future English use (Tajeddin and Pakzadian, 2020). This tendency is strong in Asia (Kachru, 1998) because English is a dominant EIL in Asia (Lam, Cheng, Kong, 2014).

This study has three objectives: first, to provide empirical data on how Vietnamese and Japanese undergraduate learners of English composed *complaints* and *complaint responses*; second, to make pedagogical suggestions for how teachers can teach English norms while respecting non-native English learners’ agency; and third, to provide teachers with comprehensive criteria for analyzing learners’ *complaints* and *complaint responses* (see Methodology and Appendix). This study aims to contribute to the fields of intercultural pragmatics and TESOL since the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and Japanese English use have been little explored. Also, many native English speakers teaching English to non-native English speakers wonder how they should teach English usage to their students while respecting their identities and agency. This study will provide them with some implications.

Compliments and responses to compliments in business settings can be useful materials for teaching pragmatics to university students in terms of polite and effective communication because many of them are preparing to enter the business world. Furthermore, *complaints* are,

among the speech acts, young business persons most wish to have studied during college (Koseki, 2021). Moreover, *complaints* and *complaint responses* occupy the greatest number of pages among speech acts in business English textbooks for CEFR A1–A2+ learners, published by three major global publishers: Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Pearson (Koseki, 2022). These findings suggest that teaching complaint-related speech acts at the university level is particularly relevant for English language learners preparing for professional communication.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics refers to “the ways in which [linguistic forms] are used in a social context to perform a communicative act” (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). The pragmatic meaning of an utterance often depends on its context. For example, the statement “It’s cold in here” may function as a suggestion (“Let’s eat in the kitchen”) or as a request (“James, shut the window”) depending on the situation (Peccei, 2007, p. 4). Without an understanding of the illocutionary force and the sociocultural conventions and norms that govern language use, speakers may unintentionally convey meanings that differ from their intended message.

Jenny Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic failure as “the inability to understand ‘what is meant by what is said’” (p. 91), emphasizing that while grammatical errors may signal limited language proficiency, pragmatic failure can negatively affect how a speaker is perceived as a person (p. 97). She further warns that such failures can lead to cross-cultural communication breakdowns and contribute to harmful national stereotypes. These insights underscore the critical role of pragmatic competence in effective and respectful intercultural communication.

Speech acts

John Austin (1962) introduced the concept of speech acts, recognizing that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions. For example, the utterance “I do” (p. 5) spoken during a wedding, enacts the social reality that the speaker is marrying his or her

partner. Austin referred to such expressions as a speech-act, which includes acts such as apologizing, begging, criticizing, ordering, praying, promising, thanking, and warning.

Speech acts are inherently relational. As Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2021) explain, they “affect the relationship between the person who makes them and their interactional partner” (p. 24). Because speech acts carry interpersonal and sociocultural weight, pragmatic failure in their execution can lead to misunderstandings and potentially damage relationships between interlocutors.

Complaints

Much of the previous pragmatic research on *complaints* used the criteria developed by Julianne House and Gabriele Kasper (1981), Elite Olshtain and Liora Weinbach (1987, 1993), or Anna Trosborg (1995) to analyze the data. House and Kasper (1981) compared German English learners' and British English native speakers' *complaints* and *requests* elicited via role-playing in terms of directness levels and modality markers. They found that Germans used higher levels of directness. Some German learners explicitly condemned the interlocutor's actions or the interlocutor himself or herself whereas English native speakers did not do so. House and Kasper explained that this type of utterance "seems to be taboo in the British cultural context, while it seems perfectly appropriate behavior for Germans under specific interactional conditions" (p. 183). House and Kasper's (1981) comprehensive model of directness levels (see Methodology) as well as modality markers (see Appendix) have been used in much subsequent research of *complaints*.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) analyzed Hebrew *complaints* elicited from 70 university students (35 native and 35 non-native Hebrew speakers) through discourse completion tests in twenty situations. They found that native Hebrew speakers used more severe expressions than non-native speakers, particularly when their interlocutor was of lower status and the contract between speaker and listener was explicit. In their another study (1993), Olshtain and Weinbach compared the *complaint* strategy choices of 25 Hebrew, 23 American English, and 27 British English native speakers using a questionnaire consisting of 20 situations including five distractors to explore their cultural differences. They found a similar tendency in complaint

strategy choice among the three groups even though slightly more American English speakers avoided censure and that slightly more British English speakers chose indirect strategies than Hebrew speakers depending on the contents.

Anna Trosborg (1995) compared English *complaints* created by Danish learners of English at three different proficiency levels with those created by native English speakers as well as with Danish *complaints* created by native Danish speakers. The data were collected from conversations about assigned situations (e.g., The hearer has borrowed the speaker' car and damaged it. [p. 319]). She found that Danish learners of English, regardless of proficiency level, had difficulty making English *complaints* appropriately, particularly in mastering indirect strategies like hinting. However, the results of native Danish speakers' performances in Danish and those of native English speakers' performances in English were similar, showing that Danish learners' difficulty in performing appropriate English *complaints* seemed to derive from their lack of English language proficiency rather than cultural differences.

Beth Murphy and Joyce Neu (1996) analyzed *complaints* directed at a professor from American and Korean graduate students. The results showed that 79% of Korean students' complaints were classified as criticisms (e.g., "But you just only look at your point of view and uh you just didn't recognize my point." (p. 200)) and 21% of their complaints demanded solutions rather than requesting them (e.g., "Your grading is not fair and uh so it must be changed" (p. 203)). Also, they found that American *complaints* typically included four components: (1) an explanation of the purpose of the complaint, (2) the complaint, (3) a justification for the complaint, and (4) a request for a solution.

Responses to complaints

Compared to research on *complaints*, the number of research on responses to *complaints* is significantly limited (Davidow, 2003). Previous research on responses to *complaints* mainly focused on how organizations address their customers' complaints, offering strategies to better satisfy complainants. William Benoit (1997, 2018) proposed a typology of *image restoration strategies* based on his previous studies of major American companies' responses and image restoration strategies during corporate crises. He found that the typical strategies used by major

American companies were denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of the offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification (apologies) (Benoit, 1997, p. 179).

On the other hand, Moshe Davidow (2003) identified six dimensions influencing customer behavior after receiving the responses to their complaints by analyzing 57 complaint-handling studies published from 1981 to 2001. The six dimensions of organizational responses identified were timeliness, facilitation, redress, apology, credibility, and attentiveness (p. 232).

Sabine Einwiller and Sarah Steilen (2015) analyzed 15,045 complaints and responses to complaints (5023 original complaints, 4153 corporate responses, 3335 follow-up posts by complainants, and 2534 posts by other users) from the Facebook and Twitter accounts of 34 large American companies selected from the Forbes Global 2000 lists (p. 199). They identified Benoit's (1997, 2018) image restoration strategies and Davidow's (2003) six dimensions, complainants' subsequent behavior, and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction (see Methodology). They found that the most appreciated response strategy was redress. Companies rarely offered full financial or material compensation, but promising to correct the problem or to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act led to complainants' satisfaction. Additionally, thanking complainants had a positive effect on satisfaction. Conversely, defensive strategies, such as denial (simple denial or shifting blame to another person or organization) and evading responsibility, were rarely applied and did not lead to complainants' satisfaction. Strategies such as asking for further information, the most common strategies in their data, as well as expressing regret and apologizing, were not appreciated by complainants, either. Therefore, Einwiller and Steilen concluded that "Asking less and assisting more would help win back complainants and potentially win over those who observe the interaction between complainant and organization on SNS" (p. 202).

Politeness on a speech act of complaints

Politeness is a crucial factor to consider when analyzing speech acts, and the theory developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson' (1978, 1987) has been the most frequently used in pragmatic studies. They argued that "all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) 'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself"

(p. 61). According to their theory, face consists of two components: “negative face,” which refers to the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition, and “positive face,” which reflects the desire to be appreciated and approved of by others (p. 61). *Complaints* are identified as *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) because they express the speaker’s negative evaluation of the hearer’s behavior or personality, thereby threatening the hearer’s *positive face*.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) explained that speakers or writers making complaints must navigate three strategic choices: (1) whether to make the complaint, (2) whether to express the complaint explicitly or implicitly, and (3) whether to use mitigating strategies to reduce its impact on the hearer. These choices are especially significant in intercultural communication, where norms of politeness and face management may vary widely.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 39 Vietnamese sophomores majoring in English language at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and 38 Japanese sophomores majoring in policy and strategy studies for innovation at a university in Tokyo, Japan. The Vietnamese students were enrolled in a business English course taught by the second author, while the Japanese students attended an academic reading and writing course taught by the first author. All participants had an English proficiency level of CEFR B1–B2.

This study was conducted as an enrichment component of the coursework. All student participants were informed about the joint project and provided informed consent for participation and data collection; all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Data collection

Data were collected through an international business email exchange project implemented by the authors in 2022 and 2023. In the 2022 project, 23 Vietnamese and 22 Japanese students participated in the project whereas the 2023 project contained 16 Vietnamese and 19 Japanese students. Different cohorts of students participated in each iteration, comprising all students enrolled in the respective courses. Due to differences in class sizes, some volunteer students were asked to correspond with two partners. While some wrote unique emails to each partner, others reused the same complaint email.

In total, 80 complaint emails were collected: 39 from Vietnamese students and 41 from Japanese students. Each student was asked to write two responses: one treating their partner's complaint as justified and another treating it as unjustified. However, some students did not submit responses to the unjustified complaints, likely due to the difficulty of the task. Ultimately, 46 responses to justified complaints (23 Vietnamese and 23 Japanese) and 32 responses to unjustified complaints (16 Vietnamese and 16 Japanese) were collected.

Exchange business email project

This study was part of a joint international business email exchange project in which Vietnamese and Japanese students role-played as sales representatives of their own country, chosen by their foreign partners. The project aimed to provide students with authentic communicative experiences by engaging them with real international correspondents.

All activities were conducted online via a dedicated Google Classroom managed by the authors. Instructions, announcements, teaching materials, assignment submission spaces, journal entries, and questionnaires were posted on the platform, allowing students to access and participate at any time. Each week, students studied a specific email function in class using example texts from the *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence* (2003), a required textbook for the second author's course, then composed and posted their own emails. Afterward, they read and responded to their partner's email. In the first writing project, students wrote seven types of emails:

- Inquiry
- Response to inquiry
- Order
- Response to order and invoice
- Complaint
- Response to justified complaint
- Response to unjustified complaint

In the second writing project, students wrote only three types of emails—enquiry, response to enquiry, and complaint—due to scheduling constraints stemming from differences in academic calendars between Vietnam and Japan. Additionally, Zoom meetings were held during each project to facilitate student socialization and intercultural engagement.

Complaint analysis criteria

Three frameworks were used to analyze students' complaints: House and Kasper's (1981) directness levels and modality markers, Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987, 1993) severity of complaints, and Murphy and Neu's (1996) characteristics of complaint versus criticism.

House and Kasper's (1981) directness levels and modality markers.

House and Kasper's (1981) eight-level directness model and their classification of modality markers (see Appendix) were used to analyze the data. The eight-level directness criteria are:

- Level 1: By performing the utterance in the presence of the hearer (Y), the speaker (X) implies that he/she knows that the offensive act (P) has happened and he/she implies that Y did P.
- Level 2: By explicitly asserting that P, X implies that Y did P.
- Level 3: By explicitly asserting that P is bad for him/her, X implies that Y did P.
- Level 4: By explicitly asking Y about the conditions for the execution of P or stating that Y was in some way connected with the conditions for the doing of P, X implies that Y did P.

- Level 5: X explicitly asserts that Y did P.
- Level 6: By explicitly asserting that the action P for which Y is agentively responsible is bad or explicitly stating a preference for an alternative action not chosen by Y, X implies that Y is bad/or X asserts explicitly that Y did P and that P is bad for X, thus also implying that Y is bad.
- Level 7: X asserts explicitly that Y's doing of P is bad.
- Level 8: X asserts explicitly that Y is bad (p. 160).

They also introduced modality markers—downgraders and upgraders—that influence the politeness and impact of the complaint (see Appendix). Although Trosborg (1995) later developed similar criteria, this study adopts House and Kasper's original framework.

Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987, 1993) severity of complaints.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) developed a scale with five major categories to evaluate the severity of complaints in terms of the speaker's position with respect to the hearer's face.

- Below the level of reproach: The speaker completely avoids direct or indirect reference to either the event or the hearer.
- Expression of annoyance or disapproval: The speaker avoids direct and explicit mention of the event or the hearer but gives very obvious hint at the fact that the hearer considers the event offensive.
- Explicit complaint: The speaker openly threatens the hearer's face by referencing either the hearer or the offensive action, or both. However, no sanctions are instigated.
- Accusation and warning: The speaker openly threatens the hearer's face by using the first-person (the speaker) reference and the future tense and even implies potential sanctions for the hearer.
- Immediate threat: The speaker openly attacks the hearer's face. This can be an ultimatum with immediate consequences (pp. 199-201).

Murphy and Neu's (1996) complaint versus criticism characteristics.

Murphy and Neu (1996) identified characteristics for differentiating between complaints and criticisms.

Characteristics of complaints:

- Use of Pronoun “we” to indicate that both parties share the blame or to negotiate the problem.
- Depersonalization of the problem.
- Use of questioning to ask for advice, for permission to explain oneself, or to get the listener to reconsider or discuss the problem (e.g., “Do you have a minute so that we could go over the paper together?” [p. 204]).
- Use of mitigators to soften the complaint (e.g., just, a little, kind of, perhaps, really, you know, I don’t know).
- Acceptance of partial responsibility for the problem.

Characteristics of criticisms:

- Use of the second person with the modal “should” that indicate that the speaker is in a position to dictate the behavior of the listener.
- Personalization of the problem, placing the blame on the other.
- Refusal to accept responsibility for the problem (pp. 204-205).

Analysis criteria for responses to complaints

To analyze students' responses to both justified and unjustified complaints, three frameworks were used: Benoit's (2015,2018) image repair strategies, Davidow's (2003) dimensions of organizational responses, and Einwiller and Steilen's (2015) empirical findings.

Benoit's (2015, 2018) image repair strategies.

Benoit's (1997, 2018) Image Repair Strategies consist of the following five strategies:

(1) Denial:

- (a) Simple denial of the charges.
- (b) Shift the blame to another person or organization.

(2) Evasion of responsibility:

- (a) Provocation: Claiming that the act was a reasonable response to another offensive act.
- (b) Defeasibility: Blaming a lack of information about or control over important elements of the situation.

- (c) Accident: Claiming that the offensive action occurred by accident.
- (d) Good intention: Saying the offensive behavior was performed with good intentions.

(3) Reducing the offensiveness of the event

- (a) Bolstering: Strengthening the audience's positive feelings toward oneself.
- (b) Minimization: Trying to minimize the negative feelings associated with the wrongful act.

- (c) Differentiation: Insisting that the act is distinct from similar, more offensive actions.
- (d) Transcendence: Placing the act in a more favorable context.
- (e) Attacking the accuser
- (f) Compensation

(4) Corrective action: Promising to correct the problem and/or promising to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act.

(5) Mortification: Confessing and begging for forgiveness, an apology

Davidow's (2003) dimensions of organizational responses to complaints.

Davidow (2003) identified six dimensions of organizational strategies in response to customer complaints that affect customers' subsequent activities.

(1) Timeliness: The perceived speed with which an organization responds to or handles a complaint.

(2) Facilitation: The policies, procedures, and structure that a company has in place to support customers engaging in complaints and communication.

(3) Redress: The benefits or response outcome that a customer receives from an organization in response to a complaint.

(4) Apology: An acknowledgement by the organization of the complainant's distress.

- (5) Credibility: The organization's willingness to explain or account for the problem.
- (6) Attentiveness: The interpersonal communication and interaction between the organizational representative and the customer. (p. 232)

Attentiveness was defined as "the care and attention that the customer gets from the organization or its representatives," including respect, effort, empathy, and willingness to listen (p. 243).

Einwiller and Steilen (2015)'s empirical findings.

The strategies identified by Einwiller and Steilen (2015) through their analysis of corporate responses to social media complaints were also used as reference points to analyze student responses to complaints.

- (1) Inquiring further information
- (2) Gratitude
- (3) Regret
- (4) Corrective action
- (5) Explanation
- (6) Active transfer
- (7) Passive transfer
- (8) Apology
- (9) Understanding (p. 200)

Results

Complaints

Directness levels of complaints and modality markers.

The analysis based on House and Kasper's (1981) directness levels revealed similar tendencies between Vietnamese and Japanese students. Both groups predominantly (83.8%) used Level 2 strategies (explicitly mentioning the offensive act) and Level 3 strategies (explicitly asserting

that the offensive act is bad for the speaker). Specifically, 46.2% of Vietnamese and 61.0% of Japanese students used Level 2, while 33.3% of Vietnamese and 26.8% of Japanese students used Level 3, showing Japanese stronger preference for Level 2, avoiding expressing negative consequences for themselves. No participants in the present study used Level 1, Level 4, or Level 5 strategies. Hinting at a complaint indirectly (Level 1) seems to have been too difficult for L2 students, as indicated by Trosborg (1995).

While most students avoided highly face-threatening strategies, a small number used more direct forms. Nine students used Level 7 (explicitly asserting that the hearer's action is bad), and one Vietnamese student used Level 8 (explicitly asserting that the hearer is bad). This dichotomy—between face-saving and face-threatening approaches—may reflect the influence of textbook examples studied in class. Of the four example emails used, two modeled Level 2 strategies and two modeled Level 7 strategies.

Modality markers—linguistic devices that mitigate or intensify the impact of a complaint (see Appendix)—used in students' complaints were also analyzed. Vietnamese students used 126 downgraders and 5 upgraders, while Japanese students used 140 downgraders and 4 upgraders. Students' preferred downgraders were *grounders* (100% of both groups), *agent avoiders* (Vietnamese: 76.9%; Japanese: 87.8%), modals such as *would* and *could* (Vietnamese: 48.7%; Japanese: 65.9%), and *steers* (Vietnamese: 43.6%; Japanese: 31.7%). The high frequency of *grounders* and modals may have been influenced by the text examples.

Severity of complaints.

The analysis based on Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) severity framework revealed notable differences between Vietnamese and Japanese students. Japanese students overwhelmingly favored the explicit complaint strategy (90.3%) while Vietnamese students demonstrated greater variation in strategy use (expression of annoyance or disapproval: 12.8%; explicit complaint: 64.1%; accusation and warning: 23.1%). Interestingly, the distribution of textbook examples mirrored this range: one modeled *expression of annoyance*, one modeled *explicit complaint*, and two modeled *accusation and warning*. This suggests that instructional materials may influence learners' strategic choices, particularly when modeling more assertive complaint

styles. Both groups avoiding the extremes of complaint severity such as *below the level of reproach* (completely avoiding reference to the offensive event or the hearer) or *immediate threat* (issuing ultimatums with immediate consequences).

Characteristics of complaints and criticisms.

Murphy and Neu (1996) distinguished complaints from criticisms. In the present study, 12 complaints (10 Vietnamese and 2 Japanese) were classified as criticisms. Among these, 8 used direct blame with “you,” and 2 contained demands rather than requests (e.g., “I agree to receive your discount so as to adopt for a more professional attitude.”). However, the majority of the students’ complaints contained the four structural elements of American complaints identified in Murphy and Neu’s study, though only one-third included an explanation of purpose: (1) explanation of purpose: 37.5% (Vietnamese: 33.3%; Japanese: 41.5%); (2) complaint: 85% (Vietnamese: 74.4%; Japanese: 95.1%); (3) justification: 98.8% (Vietnamese: 97.4%; Japanese: 100%); (4) request for solution: 90% (Vietnamese: 81.2%; Japanese: 92.7%). Students also favored depersonalization in describing the problem (Vietnamese: 82.1%; Japanese: 87.8%). These patterns suggest a general awareness of politeness strategies, though occasional criticisms indicate areas for pedagogical attention.

Other strategies.

In addition to the strategies identified through formal frameworks, students employed a range of other pragmatic devices to mitigate the face-threatening impact of their complaints, including:

- Seeking guidance from the interlocutor on how to handle damaged products (6 Vietnamese, 6 Japanese).
- Suggesting third-party responsibility, such as compensation by a shipping company (5 Vietnamese, 2 Japanese).
- Showing consideration for the interlocutor’s perspective (e.g., “I think the reason that the wrong sizes have been sent to me is because I’m ordering US sizes, and you’re sending measurements in Japanese sizes.” [Vietnamese; problem: wrong size]; “We

understand that it is slightly confusing because VinFast sells several alike cars.” [Japanese; problem: wrong car design for a video game]).

Analysis of responses to complaints

Responses to justified complaints.

Vietnamese and Japanese students employed similar strategies when responding to justified complaints. Drawing on Benoit’s (2015, 2018) image repair strategies, Davidow’s (2003) dimensions of organizational responses, and Einwiller and Steilen’s (2015) findings (see Methodology), the most frequently used strategies included:

- Gratitude: 93.5% (Vietnamese: 87%; Japanese: 100%).
- Apology: 78.3% (the same number from both groups).
- Redress: 71.7% (Vietnamese: 70%; Japanese: 73.9%).
- Timeliness: 43.5% (Vietnamese: 47.8%; Japanese: 39.1%).
- Regret: 37% (Vietnamese: 34.8%; Japanese: 39.1%).
- Credibility: 37% (Vietnamese: 43.5%; Japanese: 30.4%).
- Bolstering: 34.8% (Vietnamese: 30.4%; Japanese: 39.1%), highlighting positive traits or past actions.
- Shift Blame: 32.6% (Vietnamese: 26.1%; Japanese: 39.1%), attributing issues to third-party entities such as shipping companies.

Additionally, 41.3% of responses (30.4% Vietnamese, 52.2% Japanese) included a request for the complainant’s preference regarding resolution (e.g., refund or replacement). This strategy, though not explicitly discussed in the cited frameworks, reflects attentiveness and a customer-oriented approach.

A notable cultural difference emerged in the content of the redress strategy. Japanese students exclusively offered refunds or replacements, while Vietnamese students demonstrated greater variety: eight offered discounts on future purchases, and one offered a free gift (two packs of coffee). This suggests that Vietnamese students may be more flexible or creative in their approach to compensation.

Responses to unjustified complaints.

Responses to unjustified complaints involved a wider range of strategies, likely due to the increased face-threatening nature of the interaction. Fourteen students (7 Vietnamese, 7 Japanese) were unable to complete this task and were excluded from the analysis. The most frequently used strategies included:

- Gratitude: 78.1% (Vietnamese: 68.8%; Japanese: 87.5%).
- Simple Denial: 71.9% (Vietnamese: 75%; Japanese: 56.3%).
- Apology: 50% (Vietnamese: 56.3%; Japanese: 43.8%).
- Regret: 31.3% (the same number from both groups).
- Attentiveness: 28.1% (Vietnamese: 25%; Japanese 31.3%).
- Attack Accuser: 28.1% (Vietnamese: 25%; Japanese: 31.3%), pointing out the complainant's mistakes.
- Shift Blame: 25% (Vietnamese: 18.8%; Japanese: 31.3%), attributing responsibility to third parties.
- Corrective Action: 21.9% (Vietnamese: 31.3%; Japanese: 12.5%), including commitments to prevent recurrence.

These findings highlight the complexity of responding to unjustified complaints and the pragmatic balancing act students performed. While denial and defense were common, many students also employed strategies to preserve the relationship and demonstrate empathy—underscoring the importance of teaching nuanced response techniques in EFL contexts.

Discussion

Transfer of L1 connotations

One of the learners' pragmalinguistic challenges that we identified in our students' performances was transferring L1 connotations, resulting in readers' confusion. For example, many Japanese learners (8 Vietnamese, 24 Japanese) used *as soon as possible* when asking their foreign partners to take immediate action. In Japan, *as soon as possible* often implies immediate action, since punctuality and promptness are important social norms in Japan. In other cultures,

however, this phrase may be interpreted more loosely because it does not include a specific deadline.

Similarly, many Japanese students (3 Vietnamese, 12 Japanese) ended their requests for solutions with the phrase, *thank you in advance*, probably as a translation of the Japanese phrase *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. This phrase is widely used in everyday life in Japan. Its literal meaning is "(I humbly) request (you) to do (something) appropriately," and it is interpreted as "I wish you to treat the matter well" (Obana, 2012, p. 1535). In Japan, it is a strategy to request the listener's or reader's endorsement, when used at the end of a request. While this usage is appropriate in Japanese culture, it may sound pushy in English culture, where gratitude is typically expressed after a favor is granted. Thus, teachers should help L2 learners realize that many customary expressions may carry cultural connotations and therefore, may not convey the same meaning in other cultures.

Transfer of L1 socio-cultural norms

Another major problem found in many students' emails was a lack of clarity probably because their choice of polite strategies reflecting their L1 socio-cultural norms was wrong. For instance, 90% of students' complaints (87.2% Vietnamese, 92.7% Japanese) did not contain any expressions of annoyance or disapproval of the offensive act. In addition, 25 (61%) of Japanese students' complaints (28.2% of the Vietnamese) did not contain any negative evaluation of the offensive act. These results may reflect Japanese culture preference to avoidance of confrontation to save both their interlocutor's and their own faces (Ohbuchi and Atsumi, 2010). However, since expressing a negative evaluation of an offensive act seems to be a necessary component of English complaints (House & Kasper, 1981; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Decock & Depraetere, 2018), these students' choice of strategies obscured their intentions, probably resulting in unintended miscommunication in English-speaking cultures. Similarly, many complaints in both groups (Vietnamese: 33.3%; Japanese: 41.5%) lacked an explanation of purpose in their emails probably due to mitigating the face-threatening impact on their readers. These violates both Grice's (1975) Quantity Maxim (The speaker/writer's contribution to the interaction should be neither more nor less than required.) and Manner Maxim (Messages

should be clear.). Although these problems were found in both cohorts, they were more serious in Japanese performances.

The most significant problem found in some students' emails was that eight students (2 Vietnamese, 6 Japanese) offered compensation, such as replacements or discount coupons to unjustified complaints, despite having already defended themselves or pointed out the complainers' mistakes in the former part of the emails. This problem may have stemmed from their strong desire to avoid confrontation and maintain good relationships with their readers to save both complainers' and self's positive face, even when the complaint was perceived as unjustified. However, in real business situations, it is impossible to respond to unjustified complaints this way. Therefore, this content violates Grice's (1975) Quality Maxim (Messages should be truthful with adequate evidence.) and Manner Maxim. On the other hand, the high frequency of use of *agent avoiders* among Japanese responses may be an L1 influence because null subjects are permitted in the Japanese language (Liceras & Diaz, 1999; Wakabayashi and Negishi, 2003). To conclude, teachers should help their students understand that their sociocultural norms may not apply to L2 communication.

The impact of samples in the textbook

One of our major findings from this study was the significant impact of sample emails taken from *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence* (2003), the textbook used in the second author's course. Although both Vietnamese and Japanese students aimed to mitigate face-threatening force in their complaints, their strategy choices were significantly influenced by the instructional materials, some of which model confrontational styles. For instance, some sample complaint emails from the textbook threaten the reader by mentioning the possibility of suing them in the first contact to report the problem. We included these examples in our teaching materials to provide our students with a variety of references, but students seemed to view them as models to imitate. This finding indicates that teachers should thoughtfully select their teaching materials, taking into account the desired learning outcomes of the activity.

Teaching native speaker norms from the World Englishes perspective

One of the latest trends in World English research is the study of multilingualism and multiliteracy. Leung (2025) highlights *continua of biliteracy*, a framework originally introduced by Hornberger (1989), “dealing with the fluid and nonbinary nature of language and literacy development and use involving two or more languages” (p. 3). He discusses how users of English as a lingua franca (ELF) actually “make use of all of their available linguistic resources flexibly and contingently to meet their communicative needs without regard to language boundaries” (p. 6). Furthermore, he discusses that native speaker models are “a selective assemblage of the type of socially “safe” polite language usage associated with public and professional interactions” (p.11), and therefore, social and pragmatic conventions of language use such as politeness are negotiable in EFL communication. Similarly, House (2024) summarizes the latest pragmatic research on English as a lingua franca and illustrates how EFL users jointly and successfully negotiate meaning and achieve “a semblance of normality” (p. 2) in their interactions. However, House (2024) did not mention what language culture norms we should teach to L2 learners.

Should teachers of English language teach native English speakers’ norms in this globalized world where English is mostly used between non-native speakers? Ishihara and Cohen (2022) recommend “an informed pragmatic choice” (p. 107), whereby speakers or writers choose their language and strategies with a full understanding of target language norms and the consequences of their choices. Since L2 learners are social beings with their own cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews, they may deliberately want to resist adapting to the norms of the target language culture in some contexts. Therefore, they recommend English teachers instruct learners in “commonly-shared pragmatic interpretations and potential consequences of their pragmatic behavior” (Ishihara and Cohen, 2022, p. 108) without imposing these interpretations on them. In other words, teachers should help their students communicate their intentions while fully understanding the possible impressions and consequences of their linguistic and strategic choices. Furthermore, Ishihara and Cohen (2022) recommend that L2 learners use “relatively straightforward expressions” (p. 108) and “avoid elaborate politeness or indirectness, idioms, and cultural innuendos” (p. 108) when interacting in this globalized world where it is quite difficult to infer their interlocutors’ cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion and implications

This study investigated how Vietnamese and Japanese undergraduate learners of English composed *complaints* and *complaint responses* in a simulated international business exchange. The analysis using multiple frameworks revealed both shared pragmatic tendencies and culturally shaped differences between Vietnamese and Japanese performances. Most students' *complaints* complied with English norms, but some were analyzed as criticisms. Regarding responses to *complaints*, Vietnamese students adopted more extensive strategies such as providing readers with benefits to compensate negative consequences on readers. However, further analysis revealed some linguistic and sociocultural divergence from English norms probably due to linguistic and sociocultural L1 transfer. This divergence was typically seen in Japanese students' emails, resulting in obscuring their intentions.

These results yielded some implications for foreign language teachers. First, foreign language teachers should explicitly teach the target language cultural norms rather than focusing solely on linguistic aspects. It helps their students avoid communicating unintended implications resulting in negative evaluations against them. However, teachers should also be sensitive to their students' identity and agency as social beings. Therefore, a goal of pragmatic instruction is to foster L2 learners who can make informed pragmatic choices. To avoid unintentional misunderstandings due to cultural differences, teachers should encourage students to use straightforward language to clearly express their intentions. Finally, to teach L2 learners successful and effective cross-cultural communication, collaborative online international learning projects, such as the one implemented in this research, should be promoted more. It is quite easy in this digitized world where students are good at and like communicating online. In such projects, students can develop both linguistic and sociocultural skills as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills by communicating with real partners in an authentic setting (Ryabova, 2020).

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Appendix

Modality markers (House & Kasper, 1981, pp. 166-170)

X: the complainer.

Y: the complainee.

P: the action which X interprets as bad for him.

Downgraders

1. *Politeness marker*

Optional elements added to an act to show deference to the interlocutor and to bid for cooperative behavior (e.g., please).

2. *Play-down*

Syntactical devices used to tone down the perlocutionary effect an utterance is likely to have on the addressee.

- (a) past tense (e.g., I wondered if...)
- (b) durative aspect marker (e.g., I was wondering...)
- (c) negation (e.g., Mightn't it be a good idea.)
- (d) interrogative (e.g., Mightn't it be a good idea?)
- (e) modal (e.g., mightn't)

3. *Consultative device*

Optional devices by means of which X seeks to involve Y and bid for Y's cooperation; frequently these devices are ritualized formulas (e.g., Would you mind if...?).

4. *Hedge*

Adverbials – excluding sentence adverbials – by means of which X avoids a precise propositional specification thus circumventing the potential provocation such a specification might entail; X leaves the option open for Y to complete his utterance and thereby imposes his own intent less forcefully on Y (e.g., kind of, sort of, somehow, and so on, and what have you, more or less, rather; Could you kind of lend us some records?).

5. *Understater*

Adverbial modifiers by means of which X underrepresents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition (e.g., a little bit, a second, not very much, just a trifle; I'm a little bit disappointed in you.).

6. *Downtoner*

Sentence modifiers which are used by X in order to modulate the impact his utterance is likely to have on Y (e.g., just, simply, possibly, perhaps, rather; Couldn't you just move over a bit?).

7. – (“minus”) *Committer*

Sentence modifiers which are used to lower the degree to which X commits himself to the state of affairs referred to in the proposition. (e.g., I think, I guess, I believe, I suppose, in my opinion; I think you've made a mistake.).

8. *Forewarn*

A kind of anticipatory disarmament device used by X to forewarn Y and to forestall his possible negative reactions to X's act. Typically, a forewarn is a metacomment about what X is about to do, a compliment paid to Y as a preliminary to a potentially offensive utterance, or an invocation of a generally accepted cooperative principle which X is about to flout (e.g., far be it from me to belittle your efforts, but..., you're a nice guy, Jim, but..., this may be a bit boring to you, but...).

9. *Hesitator*

Deliberately employed malformulations, used to impress on Y the fact that X has qualms about performing his ensuing act (e.g., erm, er).

10. *Scope-stater*

Elements in which X explicitly expresses his subjective opinion vis-a vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of his utterance (e.g., I'm afraid you're in my seat; I'm a bit disappointed that you did P; I'm not happy about the fact that you did P.).

11. Agent avoider

Syntactic devices by means of which it is possible for X not to mention either himself or his interlocutor Y as agents, thus, for instance, avoiding direct attack (e.g., passive, impersonal constructions using people, they, one, you as “neutral agents” lacking [+ definite] and [+ specific] reference. This is just not done, Mr. Robinson.).

Gambits (i.e., optional, mostly photic discourse-lubricants)

1. Cajolers

Elements used to increase, establish, or restore harmony between the interlocutors. Their significance may be informally glossed as “please be in agreement with my speech act.” (e.g., you know, you see, I mean, actually....).

2. Appealers

Appealers appeal to the hearer and function to elicit a hearer signal, an uptaker (e.g., okay, right, yeah)

Supportive moves

1. Steers

Where X intends to steer the discourse in a certain direction consistent with the fulfilment of his intent (as expressed by his central move) by introducing a topic which has one or more features in common with the business conducted in the central move (e.g., Would you like to put a record on?).

2. Grounders

In which X gives reasons for his intent (as expressed in his central move). Grounders may precede or follow the central move (e.g., God, I’m thirsty. Get me a beer, will you? (where the grounder precedes the central move).

3. Preparators

X indicates or suggests what type of an intent he is going to make manifest without, however, specifying the nature of the proposition following the preparator (e.g., I would like to ask you a question.).

Upgraders

1. Overstater

Adverbial modifiers by means of which X overrepresents the reality denoted in the proposition in the interests of increasing the force of his utterance (e.g., absolutely, purely, terribly, frightfully; I'm absolutely disgusted that you left the bathroom in such a state.).

2. Intensifier

Adverbial modifier used by X to intensify certain elements of the proposition of his utterance (e.g., very, so, such, quite, really, just, indeed; I'd be really pleased if you could help me.).

3. + (“plus”) Committer

Sentence modifiers by means of which X indicates his heightened degree of commitment vis-a-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition (e.g., I'm sure, certainly, obviously, really).

4. Lexical intensifier

Lexical items which are strongly marked for their negative social attitude (e.g., swear words. That's bloody mean of you.).

5. Aggressive interrogative

Employment by X of interrogative mood to explicitly involve Y and thus to intensify the impact of his utterance on Y (e.g., Why haven't you told me before?).

6. Rhetorical appeal

In using a rhetorical appeal, X attempts – by claiming or implying the non-possibility of not accepting that P – to debar Y from not accepting that P (e.g., You must understand that, anyone can see that, It's common knowledge that).

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Affordances and limitations of ‘the digital’ for adult migrants with limited or interrupted formal education

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Abstract

Digital technology has become essential for daily life, creating a complex challenge for adult migrants with limited or interrupted formal education who must simultaneously develop digital literacy, additional language, and basic literacy skills. This study examines how different groups of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) engage with digital tools, revealing a critical disconnect between digital access and genuine language acquisition. Through video-recorded classroom observations and interviews, three learner groups were identified: pre-literacy learners who rely heavily on speech-to-text features but struggle to develop independent skills; learners with some first language literacy who show more sophisticated tool use but often engage in what we term “translation without transformation”, and extended literacy learners who demonstrate strategic tool use but lack opportunities for authentic language production. Using van Lier’s (1996) concepts of awareness, autonomy, and authenticity, we analyse how the affordances of digital tools vary across these groups. While digital tools provide immediate solutions to communication challenges, their current use often bypasses rather than supports genuine language learning processes. Our findings point to the need for differentiated pedagogical approaches that build on learners’ existing digital practices, integrate linguistic and digital knowledge development, and create opportunities for authentic language use through principled teacher-learner interaction.

Keywords: *Adult SLIFE; affordances; digital literacy; language learning; pedagogy.*

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Introduction

Digital technology has become an essential mediator of daily life, fundamentally reshaping how people access vital services and participate in society. For adult migrants who may be trying to learn the language of a new host country, this digital imperative creates a complex burden – they must develop digital literacy skills while simultaneously acquiring basic language and literacy competencies in the language of their host country. Some adult migrants, termed Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), may also have limited experiences of schooling, low but developing literacy skills in their first language, and limited exposure to print-based literacy traditions (Slaughter & Choi, 2024; Tour et al., 2023b). Limited print literacy skills can hinder both educators' and learners' capacity to use common strategies for language acquisition, for literacy development and for the development of digital literacy skills (Blackmer & Hayes-Harb, 2016; Slaughter & Choi, 2024; Tour et al., 2022a, 2023b).

Developing proficiency in print literacy and in digital technologies is vital as those with limited language and literacy skills can face substantial challenges in securing employment and in integrating into society more broadly (Auer, 2018; Jenkinson et al., 2016). In Australia, for example, newly arrived migrants must navigate government-operated social services such as myGov, Centrelink, Medicare, and child support through digital platforms. Failure to effectively engage with these systems can result in serious consequences, including financial penalties (Australian Tax Office, 2024; Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022; Scanlon Institute, 2019; Slaughter & Choi, 2024; Tour et al., 2023b).

When newly arrived migrants and refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds arrive in Australia, they are provided with access to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and unlimited hours of English language instruction up to vocational English level. Instruction is often accessed in connection with welfare and employment support programs. In recognising the critical importance of digital literacies as part of the language learning and resettlement journey, several Australian government initiatives offer opportunities that support the development of digital skills for adult learners of English, including AMEP online learning modules (Tour et al., 2023b). In addition, the research-led *AMEP digital literacies framework and guidelines* (Tour et al., 2022b) provides support for teachers to teach digital literacy skills in adult English language learning contexts (Tour et al., 2023a).

Alongside this resource development, a growing body of research is also investigating the everyday digital literacy practices of refugees and migrants and barriers to digital inclusion (e.g., Alam & Imran, 2015; Bletscher, 2020; Tour et al., 2022a ; Tour et al., 2023b; Tran et al., 2022), including the use of digital technologies in language learning more broadly (e.g., Bigelow et al., 2017; Norlund Shaswar, 2021; Tour et al., 2022a). Less attention, however, has been paid to how SLIFE's specific needs and capabilities shape their use of digital tools for language acquisition in the language learning classroom. That is, research that asks the very specific questions of “What do learners do with technology in the classroom?” and “How do these digital literacy skills correlate with literacy and language learning pathways?”

(Symser, 2019). This information is critical to understand not just how SLIFE use technology, but how their use of technology intersects with, and hinders or fosters language learning, ultimately contributing to research-led pedagogical guidance for educators.

This research project is underpinned by a commitment to participatory research methods where research is undertaken with teachers rather than on the practice of teachers. To this end, this collaborative research project was undertaken by two university-based language teacher educators and three practicing TESOL educators teaching beginner adult learners in an adult education centre in Australia. The data includes video recordings of learners' use of technology in the classroom, collected over a ten-week long semester, documenting the complex ways learners use digital applications on their mobile phones to access information and to make meaning. While digital tools appear to offer convenient solutions for language barriers – through translation apps, speech-to-text features, and multilingual interfaces – our research reveals a critical disconnect between digital access and genuine language acquisition. Through detailed analysis of classroom observations, we find that different groups of learners engage with digital tools in distinctly different ways, dependent on their level of literacy and language proficiency (pre-literacy learners, learners with some first language literacy and extended literacy learners). Our analysis and categorisation of learners and their digital practices reveal a crucial insight: while digital tools provide immediate access to information, they may sometimes hinder rather than help actual language acquisition. As one learner articulated, “Me... I need something like spell. Learn me... spelling”, expressing a fundamental need to develop language skills that go beyond mere access to digital translations or AI supported generation of text.

Our study examines such tensions through van Lier's (1996) concepts of awareness, autonomy, and authenticity in language learning. We analyse how SLIFE's current digital practices either support or potentially obstruct these crucial elements of language acquisition. Our findings point to the need for more nuanced approaches to digital literacy instruction that recognise learners' existing multilingual and multimodal practices while providing appropriate scaffolding for genuine language development. In what follows, we first outline our theoretical framework and research method, then present a detailed analysis of how each learner group engages with digital tools. We conclude by discussing implications for teacher training and program design, emphasising the need for principled pedagogical approaches that can help learners move beyond simple digital access to genuine language acquisition.

Theoretical framework: Digital affordances and language learning

Understanding affordances in digital language learning

To analyse how digital tools support or potentially hinder SLIFE's language development, we draw on van Lier's (1996) concept of affordances and his AAA curriculum framework (Awareness, Autonomy, and Authenticity). The concept of affordances was developed by psychologist James Gibson in 1979, informed by a biological or ecological perspective, to

describe the reciprocal relationship between an organism and its environment. An affordance refers to properties inherent in the ecosystem and the opportunities they provide for organisms active in the environment (Gibson, 2015). An affordance suggests potential actions, but its relevance is determined by the organism's needs, capabilities, and goals. van Lier (2000) illustrates this concept through the example of a leaf and the affordances it offers different organisms. A leaf, for example,

can offer crawling on for a tree frog, cutting for an ant, food for a caterpillar, shade for a spider, medicine for a shaman, and so on. In all cases the leaf is the same: its properties do not change; it is just that different properties are perceived and acted upon by different organisms. (van Lier, 2000, p. 252)

van Lier (2004) argues that the concept of affordance can be readily applied to language and language learning as an engaged and active language learner has the potential to recognise and capitalise on linguistic opportunities. That is, they can identify language affordances and leverage them to make meaning material. An affordance, therefore, refers to “what is available to the person to do something with” (van Lier, 2004, p. 91), and through guidance, such affordances can lead to “higher, more complex levels of activity” (2004, p. 62).

van Lier (1996) argues that affordances are compiled of three concepts – Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity, collectively referred to as the AAA framework. Van Lier refers to these concepts as “constants” that serve as the basis of an AAA language education curriculum. Curriculum, van Lier (1996) stresses, does not relate to a fixed set of predetermined topics or items to study but rather, refers to a practice or process that assists teaching and learning. The three principles are “amalgams of knowledge and values” (van Lier, 1996, p. 3) that underpin the development of a curriculum. That is, the curriculum is underpinned by our understanding of cognitive development and knowledge acquisition, which includes an understanding of the context, including educational goals and values, and the learner themselves. van Lier (1996) also emphasises the importance of a theory of learning in the development of any curriculum since it guides pedagogical instruction. The developmental work of Vygotsky (1978) underpins van Lier's concept of the AAA curriculum, with social interaction seen as a crucial mechanism for learning. Here, van Lier stresses the importance of interaction in its various forms, that is, the exchanges between teachers and learners, pedagogical designs that provide optimal learning opportunities, and the wider social processes and conditions of the social interaction for learning.

The AAA Framework and digital SLIFE learning

In the context of digital language learning tools, we must examine not just what features digital applications offer, but how learners perceive and engage with these features based on their existing capabilities. For example, while a translation app might offer sophisticated grammar explanations, these may not constitute real affordances for pre-literacy learners who cannot yet read in any language or are not yet familiar with the grammatical constructs at

play. Similarly, speech-to-text features might offer immediate communication solutions but may not afford actual language learning if learners do not engage with the underlying linguistic patterns. To interrogate this challenge, we employ van Lier's (1996) AAA framework and the three interrelated lenses of Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity to analyse whether and how digital tools can create genuine affordances for language learning.

Awareness.

Within van Lier's AAA framework, "Awareness" implies "paying attention". That is, "focusing one's consciousness, or pointing one's perceptual powers in the right direction, and making mental 'energy' available for processing" (van Lier, 1996, p. 11). In language learning, this involves consciously directing attention to language patterns and actively processing linguistic input. For SLIFE using digital tools, awareness becomes critical yet challenging. While tools like Google Translate provide immediate answers, they may bypass the essential cognitive engagement that leads to actual learning. For example, when pre-literacy learners use speech-to-text for quick translations, they may miss opportunities to notice sound-letter relationships or word patterns. Similarly, copying translated text without analysing its structure could prevent learners from developing metacognitive awareness of how the target language works. Meaningful language acquisition requires guided attention to form, meaning, and use (Ellis, 2016; Loewen, 2020; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Van Patten et al., 2020). For SLIFE engaging with digital tools, this raises crucial questions around awareness, including,

- Does quick access to translations promote or bypass conscious engagement with language?
- How do different levels of literacy affect learners' ability to notice and process linguistic patterns?
- What kinds of scaffolding might help learners move from passive tool use to active language awareness?

Autonomy.

"Autonomy" in van Lier's (1996) framework refers to learners' ability to make meaningful choices about their learning process and take responsibility for their language development. Key features of autonomy are "choice" and "responsibility" whereby students are provided with a variety of language elements and the autonomy to choose what they need. van Lier (1996, p. 27) argues that "so long as adequate opportunities are available" and that learners have choices, then they are responsible for their own learning or their lack of learning. The degree of autonomy that language learners exhibit is also shaped by their motivation to learn. If they are passive recipients, their ability to sustain attention and the high level of cognitive effort needed for complex learning will be weak. Intrinsic motivation, however, can lead to curiosity and a spirit of exploration, which can be powerful motivators in language learning.

Regardless of whether the motivation is extrinsic or intrinsic, learners must invest effort, including cognitive, emotional, and physical investment, to process language.

For SLIFE, digital tools present a paradox: while they appear to enable independent action (like using translation apps), they may inadvertently create dependence. Meaningful autonomy requires not just access to tools, but the ability to select and use them strategically for learning. When learners rely solely on translations for immediate communication needs, they may struggle to advance the independent problem-solving strategies and decision-making capabilities that characterise autonomous language learning. Effective autonomy requires structured support to help learners move from tool dependence to strategic tool use. In the digital context, key considerations include asking,

- How do different literacy levels affect learners' ability to make informed choices about tool use?
- When do digital tools support independent learning versus creating tool dependency?
- What balance of structure and freedom best supports SLIFE learners' development?

Authenticity.

The principle of "Authenticity" in van Lier's (1996) framework refers to a process of "authentication, a validation of classroom events and language, and an endorsement of the relevance of the things said and done, and of the ways in which they are said and done" between teachers and learners (van Lier, 1996, p. 133). In other words, what is considered authentic or inauthentic, relevant or irrelevant, and what speakers genuinely wish to express in contexts of language learning are matters for teachers and learners to validate and is dependent on their engagements.

For SLIFE, digital tools can either support or hinder authentic language use. While tools enable learners to engage with real-world texts and communications (like government services or medical information), simply translating these materials may bypass opportunities for meaningful language engagement. Authenticity would be enacted when learners and teachers work together to create contexts where digital tools support rather than substitute for genuine communication. This requires moving beyond translation to situations where learners actively construct and negotiate meaning through language, even if imperfectly. For digital SLIFE learning, critical questions include,

- How can digital tools support meaningful communication rather than just translation?
- What makes learning activities authentic for different SLIFE groups?
- How can teachers help authenticate digital tool use for genuine language development?

The AAA framework, with its constants of awareness, autonomy and authenticity, provides the structure for helping us to understand how digital affordances vary across our three identified SLIFE groups: pre-literacy learners, learners with some L1 literacy, and extended

literacy learners, as was explored in this research project. In the sections that follow, we apply this framework to analyse our empirical observations of how different SLIFE groups engage with digital tools in their language learning journey.

Materials and methods

This research employs a qualitative case study approach with ethnographic elements to investigate how different groups of SLIFE engage with digital tools in their language learning journey. This methodological approach enables deep understanding of learners' digital practices within their classrooms, while acknowledging the complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and educational factors that shape their learning experiences. Multiple data sources were collected across this research project, including video recordings of the use of digital tools in the language classroom, audio recordings, classroom artifacts, and naturalistic observations. Over a ten-week period, we captured both planned activities and spontaneous interactions that revealed how learners navigate digital tools in their language learning. The ethnographic elements allow us to consider the broader social and cultural contexts that influence learners' digital practices, while the case study framework helps us maintain focus on the bounded system of the community centre and its participants. This approach aligns with van Lier's (1996) theoretical framework, allowing us to examine how awareness, autonomy, and authenticity manifest in learners' engagement with digital tools across different literacy levels.

Research context and participants

This study was conducted at a non-profit Registered Training Organization (RTO) in Melbourne, Australia, which provides government-funded English language services for new and long-term adult migrants. The three TESOL teachers who were co-researchers in this project were all qualified primary school or secondary school teachers and held post graduate educational qualifications in TESOL. Qualifications ranged from a graduate diploma to Masters-level certifications. Despite their comprehensive training, all three teachers reported that their formal training had not specifically prepared them for teaching adults with low literacy levels – a gap commonly reported in the adult TESOL sector (e.g., Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2022; DeCapua et al., 2018; Grierson, 2010; Slaughter et al., 2020). Consequently, they viewed this research project as a valuable opportunity for professional development in this area.

Forty-six students across three Foundation-level (beginner) classes participated in the study and came from diverse educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The participants ranged in age from 32 to 65 years old, with an average age of around 50. The vast majority, over 90 percent of participants, were female. While several participants did not have knowledge of when or where they were born, or their visa status, a majority of participants had arrived in Australia on a refugee visa, coming from African and Middle eastern countries

including, Iran, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, as well as from across the Asian continent including China (inc. the Chinese mainland, the special administrative region of Hong Kong and the autonomous region of Tibet), Cambodia, Vietnam, and East Timor.

Length of residency in Australia varied from between one to 45 years, averaging 16 years in Australia. Experiences of schooling prior to arrival in Australia varied, with some students having attended secondary schooling, some students receiving only primary schooling, while others had limited to no experience of schooling at all. The students had been attending the Foundation (beginner) classes at the RTO for between one to four years, but on an average of two years. While all participants emphasised the importance of learning English, many reported that the classes provided their only opportunity for English practice due to the limited need for English in their daily lives.

Ethics approval (Project ID no. 1853251) was provided by the University of Melbourne Human Ethics committee and English language plain language statements and consent forms were translated into Chinese (Mandarin), Oromo, Somali, Tibetan, and Vietnamese, and explained orally by multicultural education aides where needed.

Learner categories

Based on input from the teachers and initial observations, we identified three broad but distinct categories of SLIFE learners, which became central to our analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the typical characteristics of learners within each group. It should be noted that learners did not necessarily belong exclusively to one group but that, in general, their patterns of digital technology use fitted into these categories.

Table 1. Categories of SLIFE and their key characteristics in relation to their use of digital technology.

Category	Educational Background	Key Characteristics
Pre-literacy learners	Minimal formal education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong oral skills in first language(s) Limited literacy in any language with emerging basic reading and writing skills Some self-identification of dyslexia Common experiences of trauma Heavy reliance on audio/visual digital tools
Learners with some L1 literacy	Completed primary school education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to read and write in first language Ability to read and write the English alphabet, although some struggle with sound-symbol correspondence Ability to use basic digital translation tools Developing awareness of language patterns
Extended literacy learners	Completed secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong L1 literacy skills

Data collection

Data collection focused on capturing how learners from each category engaged with digital tools during classroom activities. Primary data sources included video recordings taken with GoPro cameras on student desks, mobile phone recordings by students, teachers, and researchers, and through a stationary video recorder placed in a far corner or in the back of the classroom. The data collected involved just over 500 minutes of recordings. Classroom activities were also collected including a language portrait activity undertaken by learners whereby they used a silhouette of a body to map their linguistic repertoires, and whole-group word-splash activities about phone use. The word splash activity was guided by questions such as,

- Can you show me how you use it?
- Did you download the app yourself?
- What are your three favourite apps?
- When and why do you use them?

The classroom activities were designed, in part, to help identify participants' linguistic backgrounds, revealing connections to 12 countries and 16 languages, with Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, and Dinka being the most prevalent. Pseudonyms have been used for participants in this research article.

Data collection limitations

Several factors affected our ability to gather comprehensive data. These include variable attendance patterns by students due to funding eligibilities and personal circumstances, challenges in obtaining precise profiles from pre-literacy learners, with some learners having no knowledge of their date or place of birth, and difficulty capturing all aspects of learners' digital tool use outside the classroom. Despite these limitations, the rich classroom data provided substantial insights into how different SLIFE groups engage with digital tools in their language learning journey.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2021, 2024) with elements of multimodal interaction analysis (Norris, 2004) was employed to examine the rich dataset of video recordings, classroom artifacts, and field notes. The analysis proceeded through several phases, beginning with multiple reviews of video recordings to identify and code instances of digital tool use, including both verbal exchanges and non-verbal behaviours around digital devices. Through an iterative process of theme development, we mapped emerging patterns against van Lier's (1996) AAA framework. In particular, we paid attention to patterns of tool use across learner categories, moments of success and struggle with digital tools, and interactions between digital tool use and language learning. Given the complex nature of digital interactions, our

multimodal analysis examined screen interactions, physical positioning and gestures around devices, and transitions between digital and non-digital resources. Cross-case analysis across the three learner groups helped identify distinctive patterns of digital tool use and demonstrated how awareness, autonomy, and authenticity manifested differently at various literacy levels. To ensure trustworthiness, we engaged in regular peer debriefing between researchers, maintained detailed analytical memos, triangulated findings across multiple data sources, and conducted member checking with participating teachers. This analytical approach allowed us to develop a nuanced understanding of how different SLIFE groups engage with digital tools while maintaining sensitivity to the complex social, linguistic, and educational factors shaping their learning experiences.

Findings: Digital practices across SLIFE categories

Pre-literacy learners: Digital tools as communication bridges

Pre-literacy learners in the project primarily engaged with digital tools through speech-to-text features and basic translation tools to meet immediate communication needs. Their digital practices centred on using Google Translate's speech function for basic word translations, watching multilingual video content on platforms like Facebook, accessing religious content through audio apps, and sending voice messages via WhatsApp. Students within this group identified the importance of apps such as the Centrelink app and while some did have the app on their phones, those that did talk about their use of the app stated that they did not use it themselves but had family members help them use it. In other instances, they reported logging in in response to a message stating that they had a notification but did not know how to read or interpret the information, simply following the instruction to "look" at the notification. The classroom practices of another student, Bifani, also illustrates how a lack of literacy and digital literacy skills impact on learning. Bifani sent voice messages in Oromo to her husband, asking for translations of English words, as she did not have the skills to use translation and dictionary tools or to type her questions in a text message (See Figure 1).

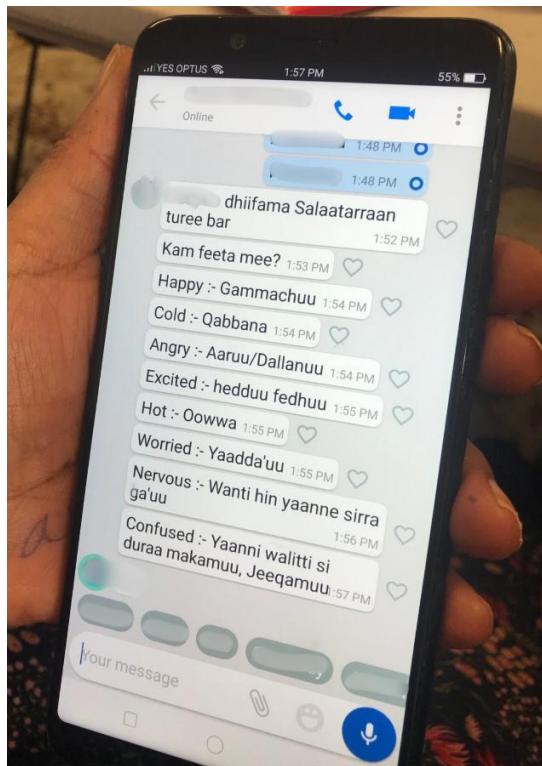


Figure 1. Bifani's use of voice messages to her husband and his text responses.

The focus on this group of learners also enabled us to observe their most prominent use of apps in the class, which was the use of Google Translate for assistance with spelling, and the challenges students faced when using the app. As a first example, Amal's use of Google Translate exemplifies the typical patterns and limitations of this group's digital engagement. While she demonstrated strategic use of Google Translate's speech function for basic word translations, her attempts to use the app to find out the spelling of proper nouns revealed both the possibilities and constraints of digital tool use, particularly when Amal's accented English proved problematic for the program. As two examples, Amal tried using Google Translate to get the spelling of "Khartoum" and of "Guba" and despite repeated attempts, she knew that the output provided were not correct. The way in which Amal was framing her queries also impacted what the app produced as it translates exactly what is being said and does not interpret requests as questions, as she had presumed. For example, in trying to determine the spelling of Khartoum, Amal used the speech to text function to input "Spelling Khartoum" which resulted in an output of "Beiling cartoon", and "Spelling Guba, Spelling Guba", resulted in an output of "Woolloongabba". Although she could recognise when translations were incorrect, she lacked strategies beyond repeated attempts with the speech function to resolve the errors.

In another example, Aluel asked a fellow student sitting next to her, Akech, how to use the speech function to find the spelling of words. Akech showed Aluel the Google Translate app and used the speech to text function to ask "Spell English" which the app was able to produce. When Aluel tried inputting "Spell Dinka" as a follow up, the app was not able to produce a correct response. Both Aluel and Akech continued inputting "Spell Dinka" for a further eight minutes, with Aluel continuing for a total of 10 minutes, before giving up. The

[Name] *dhiifama Salaatarraan turee bar*
 [Sorry XXX, I was at prayer.]

Kam feeta mee? [Which ones do you want?]

Happy :- Gammachuu

Cold :- Qabbana

Angry :- Aaruu/Dallanuu

Excited :- hedduu fedhhuu

Hot :- Oowwa

Worried :- Yaaddaa'u

Nervous :- Wanti hin yaanne sirra ga'u

Confused :- Yaanni walitti si duraa makamuu, Jeeqamuu

teacher was attending to other students at the time, and the event was identified when the researchers were reviewing the GoPro recordings from the lesson.

For the pre-literacy learners, digital tools offer important affordances, including immediate access to basic word translations, facilitation of written task participation through digital mediation, and maintenance of social connections through voice and video features. However, significant limitations emerge in their use: learners often become dependent on digital tools without paying attention or developing awareness to language and language learning skills. They may engage superficially with language through copying practices from digital tools to handwritten texts on paper that bypass crucial learning processes, and lack alternative strategies when digital tools fail, losing autonomy. These patterns suggest that while digital tools provide essential communication bridges for pre-literacy learners, their current use may inadvertently hinder the development of foundational language skills.

Learners with some L1 literacy: Bridging language systems

Learners with some L1 literacy demonstrated more sophisticated digital tool use, leveraging their existing literacy skills to access a broader range of features and applications. These learners employed multiple strategies in their digital practices, including various input methods (speech, text, handwriting) and cross-referencing between translation apps, while developing language-specific approaches based on their L1 background. For instance, the students who were Vietnamese speakers and who were able to read Vietnamese explained that they predominantly relied on speech input due to the complexity of typing diacritics. Chinese language users, on the other hand, alternated between character writing and pinyin input when using digital tools depending on their familiarity with the different writing systems. Our classroom observations revealed how these learners strategically navigate these linguistic challenges. For example, one Vietnamese-speaking learner regularly copied and pasted entire texts from utility companies into Google Translate, while a Chinese-speaking learner used a translation app that presents information in their preferred format (pinyin or simplified characters), with clear demarcation of the English translation for enhanced readability.

The affordances of digital tools for this group also included their ability to leverage L1 literacy for new language learning, more strategic tool selection based on specific needs, and greater autonomy in information seeking. However, significant challenges included struggling with transfer issues between languages, tending to over-rely on translation without processing meaning, and showing limited independent language production. For example, in the writing of one student, Mei, we noted that she used Chinese characters and their sounds to annotate English pronunciation (writing 伯是特 [pronounced as bai shi te] for “best”). 伯是特 is not a recognised word in Chinese, but the sounds roughly align with “best” in English. Likewise, Mei also used 呢切 (ne qie) to approximate the sound for the English word “nature” (see Figure 2). This approach demonstrates both innovation in learning strategies and potential limitations, as such cross-linguistic approximations hindering effective

communication. The student is demonstrating awareness and autonomy, but comprehensible pronunciation may not be achieved if students are purely relying on digital tools and aural skills to support pronunciation and not, for example, learning how to use the international phonetic alphabet, which students were taught, to assist with pronunciation.

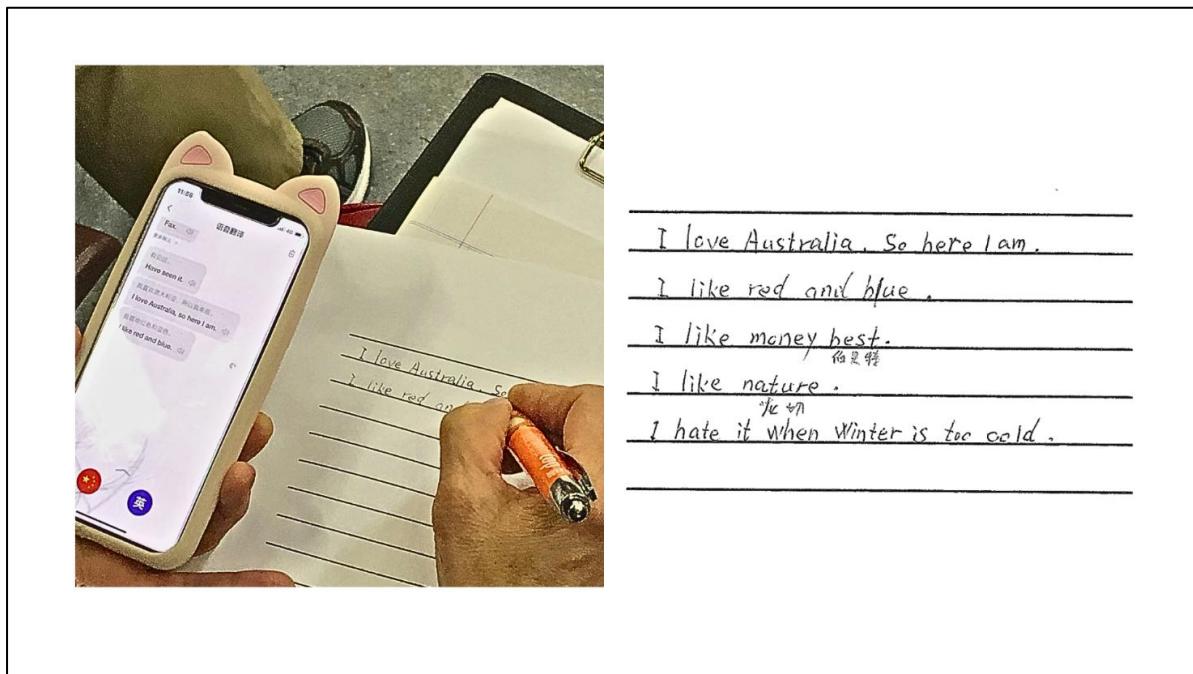


Figure 2. Mei's use of digital tools to support learning of literacy and pronunciation skills.

Extended literacy learners: Towards strategic digital learning

Extended literacy learners, although still learning at Foundation level, demonstrated the most sophisticated digital practices among SLIFE, employing a range of reference tools including dictionaries, corpus tools, and multiple translation applications to support their language learning. These students often had higher levels of oral proficiency but were still developing their writing and literacy skills. These learners showed greater metacognitive awareness in their tool use, as exemplified by Hana who specifically chose an app called *Wenquxing* for its corpus-like features, allowing her to analyse word usage patterns and collocations. Her explanation that “Sometimes Cantonese and Mandarin is different. Writing in Cantonese is more direct to English” reveals sophisticated understanding of language differences and strategic tool selection (see Figure 3).

	<p>Teacher: What do you use to learn English?</p> <p>Hana: I use wenquxing. If you write down the English [on the board], I type in here like this [types in “freedom”]. This all come up [App shows list of phrases/expressions frequently used with the words and their translations]. It explain the whole sentence.</p>
	<p>Hana: And I also use this one [Google Translate] because I can write to it. Sometimes Cantonese and Mandarin is different. If Cantonese, I write on it. It is more direct to English. Because my pronunciation is not good. So I write Chinese and I can correct there I am right or not. Sometimes, maybe, I am short of one character, so they correct it.</p>
	<p>Teacher: What is there was an English word you didn't know, like the word “paternity” we have on the board?</p> <p>Hana: So I will go to the English and it will give me the word in Chinese. They help me.</p>

Figure 3. Hana's use of various dictionary and translation applications.

This group's approach to digital translation also demonstrated more nuanced engagement showing potential for moving beyond mere translation to active meaning-making. Jing's language portrait activity (see Figure 4) illustrates this point. In an earlier task when Jing was asked to write about her language portrait, she copied a basic translated text describing the colours, “Orange is mandarin, because very easy and interesting” onto the worksheet. She

then worked independently to rewrite her ideas into a final written text, writing, "These two colours are warm colours. He represents my mood". In this final version, we can see how Jing moves beyond the initial translated text to independently express a more sophisticated idea about colours. Such examples show how digital tools can support awareness and autonomy rather than just translation as substitution for genuine language production.

However, despite these advanced practices, extended literacy learners still faced significant challenges including lacking opportunities for authentic communication, remaining hesitant despite strong skills, and struggling to effectively integrate digital learning with classroom activities. These findings suggest that while extended literacy learners possess the metacognitive skills for more sophisticated digital tool use, they still need structured support to fully leverage these tools for language development.

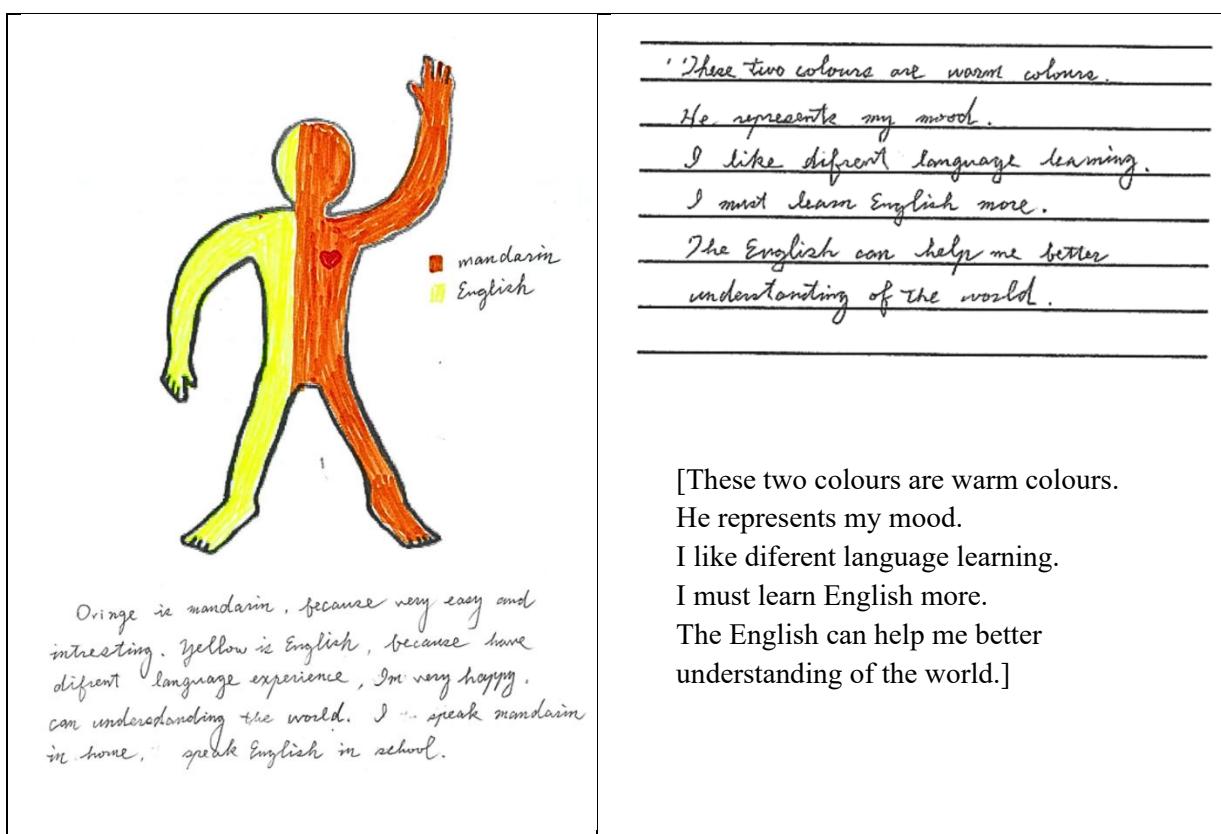


Figure 4. Text development for extended literacy learner Jing.

Common themes

Across all three SLIFE groups, several significant patterns emerged in relation to their engagement with digital tools and language learning. In terms of tool selection, we observed a consistent preference for simple translation tools across all groups, even when learners have the capability to use more sophisticated tools. This tendency toward basic tools appears alongside limited awareness of more advanced features of apps that might better support language learning, while social media emerged as a crucial platform for maintaining

community connections across all groups. Learning behaviours across the groups reveal a strong inclination toward immediate solutions rather than engagement with language learning processes. This manifests in limited integration of digital tools with traditional learning methods and a persistent reliance on copying rather than original production, regardless of literacy level. Teacher-student dynamics also reinforced these patterns, including the teachers frequently providing direct answers rather than learning strategies, offering limited guidance on effective digital tool use, and struggling to create opportunities for authentic language practice which connected to their lives and their digital learning needs.

From digital access to language learning – A critical disconnect

Our findings reveal a fundamental tension in SLIFE's use of digital tools that manifests differently across learner groups but points to a common challenge – the gap between digital access and actual language acquisition. For pre-literacy learners, digital tools offer a crucial communication bridge but may inadvertently hinder foundational skill development, as seen when Amal repeatedly attempted to find the spelling for “Khartoum” through speech input. While the tool provides immediate access to needed information, their use can bypass the conscious attention to language patterns that genuine learning requires, thus failing to engage with van Lier's (1996) concept of awareness. Learners with some L1 literacy demonstrated what we have termed “transfer without transformation” – moving content between languages without deeply processing it. This challenges the development of autonomy in van Lier's (1996) framework, as learners become dependent on translation rather than developing independent language learning capabilities. Even among extended literacy learners, who show the most sophisticated tool use through strategic selection of resources and attempts at meaning-making, we see untapped potential for authentic language learning. Though these learners can navigate multiple digital resources, they often lacked opportunities to move beyond translation to genuine language production and communication. This pattern across all groups suggests that while digital tools provide essential scaffolding for immediate communication needs, their use often created a form of digital dependence rather than supporting the development of genuine language competence.

Towards a new pedagogical framework

Based on our analysis of how different SLIFE groups engage with digital tools, we propose three essential underpinnings for effective digital literacy pedagogy in SLIFE contexts. First, teachers need a detailed understanding of learners' current digital practices, including their existing linguistic and literacy resources, their strategies with digital tools or learning or simply translation strategies, and barriers to effective tool use. This understanding must go beyond simple categorisation to recognise how learners like Hana strategically select tools based on language-specific needs, or how pre-literacy learners develop workarounds for their limited reading abilities. Such understandings provide a foundation for teachers to develop

differentiated scaffolding approaches to meet learners' needs. Second, effective instruction must simultaneously develop basic literacy skills, digital tool competence, language awareness, and learning strategies rather than treating these as separate domains. This integration is crucial, as demonstrated by the limitations of current approaches where learners like Amal can use translation tools effectively but fail to develop underlying language skills. Finally, authentic teacher-learner interaction must move beyond providing direct answers to developing strategies for independent learning. This was evident in classroom observations where teachers often resolved immediate communication needs but missed opportunities to build long-term learning capabilities. This framework suggests that effective SLIFE instruction requires a fundamental shift from viewing digital tools as simple solutions to seeing them as part of a broader pedagogical approach that supports genuine language development through carefully scaffolded learning experiences.

Systemic challenges, opportunities, and further research

The current adult migrant education landscape presents a complex mix of challenges and opportunities that directly impact SLIFE digital literacy development. Key challenges include limited teacher training for SLIFE contexts (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2022), with our participating teachers noting the absence of specialised preparation in their formal education programs. This gap in professional preparation is exacerbated by systemic pressures for quick results over deep learning, as evidenced in our observations of teachers providing immediate solutions rather than developing learning strategies. Teachers must also learn to integrate digital tools purposefully within learning activities, creating opportunities for authentic communication that builds on learners' existing digital practices. Program administrators face the challenge of providing specialised SLIFE training and supporting professional development in digital pedagogy while creating opportunities for teacher collaboration. They must design programs that allow time for strategy development, the balancing of immediate needs with long-term learning, and invest in appropriate digital resources – all while developing assessment measures that capture learning processes rather than just outcomes.

At the policy level, there is a pressing need to acknowledge SLIFE-specific needs through funding for specialised teacher training and support for innovative program development. However, narrow competency-based and compliance-focused curriculum and assessment frameworks complicate the situation, often prioritising measurable outcomes over meaningful language development, while resource constraints limit opportunities for innovative program development. Policy makers therefore need to develop assessment frameworks that consider digital literacy development while balancing accountability requirements with actual learning needs.

However, significant opportunities exist alongside these challenges. Our findings reveal learners' rich multilingual resources and sophisticated digital practices, particularly among extended literacy learners who demonstrate strategic tool use for meaningful communication.

The increasing sophistication of digital tools offers new possibilities for language learning, though these need to be thoughtfully integrated into pedagogical approaches. Growing recognition of SLIFE-specific needs, as reflected in recent policy discussions and research attention (e.g., Tour et al., 2023a; Tour et al., 2023b; Social Compass, 2019), creates potential for systemic change. These contrasting challenges and opportunities suggest that while the path forward requires addressing significant systemic barriers, there is also real potential for developing innovative pedagogical approaches that can better serve SLIFE's needs.

Further research is also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of different scaffolding approaches and to support the development of assessment tools that capture digital literacy development, to understand how different SLIFE groups progress in language learning, and to investigate the long-term impact of different digital integration strategies. The challenge ahead lies not in limiting digital tool use but in designing principled pedagogical approaches that help SLIFE move from digital dependence to genuine language competence, a shift that requires coordinated effort across all levels of the education system.

Conclusion: Beyond digital access to language learning

This study has revealed a crucial gap between digital access and genuine language acquisition in adult migrant SLIFE education, demonstrating how digital tools can simultaneously enable immediate communication while potentially hindering long-term language development. Through detailed analysis of three distinct learner groups – pre-literacy learners, those with some L1 literacy, and extended literacy learners – we have shown how digital practices and learning needs vary significantly across literacy levels. Pre-literacy learners rely heavily on speech-to-text features without developing underlying language skills, learners with some L1 literacy engage in “translation without transformation”, while even extended literacy learners, despite their sophisticated tool use, often lack opportunities for authentic language production. van Lier’s (1996) concepts of awareness, autonomy, and authenticity have helped illuminate how digital tools’ affordances vary across these groups, pointing to the need for more nuanced pedagogical approaches. Our findings suggest that effective SLIFE instruction requires moving beyond viewing digital tools as simple solutions to seeing them as part of a broader pedagogical approach that integrates linguistic, literacy, and digital knowledge development. As captured in one learner’s request – “Me... I need something like spell. Learn me... spelling” – the challenge lies not in providing quick digital solutions but in supporting genuine language development. This requires coordinated effort across all levels of the education system, from classroom practice to policy making, to help learners progress from digital dependence to true communicative competence in their new language. In an increasingly digital world, such integrated approaches become ever more crucial for supporting adult migrants’ full participation in their new communities.

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BOOK REVIEW

Will, L., Stadler, W., & Eloff, I. (Eds.). (2022). *Authenticity across languages and cultures: Themes of identity in foreign language teaching and learning*. Multilingual Matters.

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Over the past four decades, many definitions of authenticity in language education have been prevalent (e.g., Breen, 1985; Roach et al., 2018; Widdowson, 1990). However, given the theoretical literature on authenticity abounding in works with limited scope (i.e., language teaching and language materials), context (i.e., English-speaking societies), and theory (i.e., second language acquisition theories), further studies are needed to integrate the existing findings for a comprehensive discussion of authenticity in second/foreign language education. To that end, *Authenticity across Languages and Cultures: Themes of Identity in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, edited by Leo Will, Wolfgang Stadler, and Irma Eloff, aimed to reveal the emerging understanding of this concept in the light of other theoretical frameworks, diverse contexts, and curricular dimensions.

The volume is organized into 16 chapters in three parts. After introducing authenticity from different contemporary perspectives, the first section (Chapters 2-7) dips into the associations between authenticity and language pedagogy. These authors have looked into the phenomenon through different lenses (politics and philosophy, English as a Lingua Franca, etc.), placing authenticity into a multidimensional frame and exploring authenticity in language teaching to bridge theory and practice for the best. Moreover, this part challenges the stereotypical nature of authentic discourses in some didactic settings, where idealized authenticity attributes a native language to its speakers and invalidates non-native learners' identities (see Chapter 2). This section also aims to inspire inclusive classroom climates to move away from inauthenticity. Furthermore,

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this part informs authentic practices and choices in three domains: teaching methodology (see Chapters 5 and 7), language testing (see Chapter 4), and language materials (see Chapter 6).

The second part (Chapters 8-12) probes the interplay between authenticity and learners' and educators' identities in different contexts of language pedagogy (e.g., Europe, Canada, and Africa). Two chapters suggest the development of multicultural curricula for today's classrooms to avoid the ideologically and politically driven value systems of Western societies (i.e., Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), which impose idealized norms and neo-nationalist behaviors on agentive individuals (see Chapters 8 and 11). Two other chapters zoom in on text authenticity from two different perspectives: situating language materials and texts within learners' sociocultural contexts in Africa (Widdowson, 1978) (see Chapter 10), and developing language materials for heritage language learners based on their multiculturality, beliefs, and attitudes, casting light on the importance of intercultural awareness for learners' success in intercultural interactions and identity co-construction (see Chapter 12). The ninth chapter of this section explores the role of socioemotional factors, affecting authenticity in early childhood education in the South African environment as an ignored domain in authenticity studies.

The third part (Chapters 13-16) focuses on the authenticity roles of literature in education. To that end, the authors have focused on how aesthetic effects of literature (e.g., autobiographical fairy tales, self-expression in indie-folk music, and literary contents) can be used as authenticity strategies for situating and personalizing language materials, expressing oneself in a classroom, bridging cultural gaps, training teachers in pre-service courses, and developing critical language awareness. This part involves classroom case studies from diverse sociocultural settings, underscoring the universality of aesthetics in authentic language pedagogy in light of locally specific arts. Considering global shifts, the afterword is especially helpful since it gives readers a clear idea of where to focus future studies and implications. It also provides a reflective summary of the key insights in this volume and a critical perspective on authenticity, highlighting the dynamic, context-dependent, multidisciplinary, and multimethodological nature of the phenomenon in question.

Taken as a whole, this volume has many strengths. For example, it has tapped into the multidimensionality of authenticity, making progress from the previous unidimensional definitions and frameworks, which were mostly bound to texts and materials (e.g., Breen, 1985; Widdowson, 1978, 1990). Another contribution of this edited volume is that it acknowledges authenticity as a situated process of negotiation between the self and society in personal and social arenas, suggesting language teachers provide opportunities for dialog in the classroom, negotiate their ideas and experiences with their students, and construct the syllabus with other course members. Moreover, the next distinctive point in this volume is the endeavor to put authenticity into a multidisciplinary frame, representing the dynamic interplays between diverse views and insights (philosophy, politics, linguistics, etc.) into authenticity. It also tries to put into practice the

theoretical views on authenticity to showcase its out-of-the-box applications and uses in language pedagogy. It also taps into the contribution of the contemporary phenomena of multiculturalism, globalization, and digitalization to the surge of authenticity in the principles and procedures of language teaching and testing.

Despite the values of this resource, it has some limitations. Albeit drawing upon a wide range of disciplines and dimensions, these contributions may not be integrated as a model or framework of authenticity because it is far from theoretical economy, which minimizes the assumptions of a model to be easily interpretable (Simon, 2002). In addition, some contributions could be more practically oriented to help novice teachers translate authenticity into practice (e.g., Chapters 4 and 7). Moreover, although a revisited view of authenticity is claimed in the foreword and the first chapter to move away from the views of native-speakerism in authenticity, the values promoted in the book (e.g., existential individuality in identity formation) are rooted in the theories from the Western societies, presenting an unbalanced top-down pattern of the voices from the Global North and Global South.

To conclude, this volume is an intellectually rigorous guide for researchers and practitioners although its findings may not be applicable to the examination of authenticity in the contexts ignored in the book (e.g., Asian and South American countries). The implication of this book for researchers is to retheorize the extant thoughts on authenticity to develop a comprehensive model of this concept, shying away from the past's native-speakerism and today's neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism. Moreover, as a reference point for policymakers, materials developers, and teachers, this book may raise their awareness to reconsider authenticity in their thoughts and practices and to make headway toward inclusive authenticity.

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Mission statement

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.

