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Mission

WAESOL Educator is the biannual, professional, peer-reviewed, online journal of the Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL) organization. *WAESOL Educator* publishes articles concerning the teaching of language in elementary and secondary education, higher education, adult education, and bilingual education, as well as teacher preparation for pre-service and in-service teachers.

The two main goals of *WAESOL Educator* are

- to share information related to language teaching practices, materials, research, and professional development opportunities;
- to support and mentor potential authors who teach, conduct research, administer programs, and/or study in classrooms with multilingual learners.

All manuscripts receive a double-blind review.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

NEW YEAR GREETINGS TO ALL,

The start to 2024 brings a fresh WAESOL board and opportunity to engage further with our membership and greater Washington state community. As a board in 2023 we facilitated a promising second in-person conference since pandemic virtual offerings, supported the overhaul of how you are viewing this very WAESOL Educator, and advocated on a federal level connecting with all federal legislative offices in the state. These are some of the efforts that will continue into this year as we navigate challenges we all face with the increased need for resources and the decrease of funding, not only in Washington state but nationally. I would like to thank our 2023 board members and our WAESOL Educator team for their contributions to making these and other goals come to fruition.

Looking ahead to 2024, as a WAESOL team we hope to reestablish more opportunities for professional development, maintain and grow our advocacy efforts, and fortify our relationships with membership. Beyond the annual conference, hosting one or two meaningful, online opportunities for professional development and clock hours is a priority. By meaningful, I mean that we aim to bring relevant topics our membership is enthusiastic about and can put into practice. Part of supporting more professional development opportunities involves our advocacy efforts to maintain and increase federal support for teacher training and professional development opportunities. Interacting with all the Washington state federal legislative offices provides room to engage and maintain conversations about all things TESOL, support for you as educators, and for our students and EL communities. None of this happens without you, the WAESOL community, of course. Encouraging discourse and utilizing all our tools, like email, social media, and the WAESOL Educator, as consistent mediums of communication will be essential.

I look forward to working with this 2024 board and being part of the collaborative efforts to facilitate an impactful annual conference in the fall as well as increasing our advocacy efforts on the federal and state level. I thank the outgoing 2023 board members for their contributions and welcome the new 2024 board members as we look forward.

¡Sí se puede!

ROSEMARY COLÓN

2024 WAESOL BOARD PRESIDENT

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Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages

LETTER FROM THE PAST PRESIDENT

Dear WAESOL Professionals,

This past year certainly had its own share of challenges as we attempted to move past pandemic mode and into whatever this new landscape is. However, the positive vibes shared at the 2023 WAESOL Conference certainly provided reason to celebrate and be hopeful for the future of the organization.

One goal for this year was to increase membership and attendance at the conference as well as find ways to better serve the needs of the organization. We certainly met at least a need for community through the organization; what was also impressive is the number of submissions we received for both conference presentations and nominations for board membership. It is great to see more people seeking to be active in the workings of the organization, and I hope those who applied for either a presentation or office but didn't get the chance this year will submit again next year or at the 2024 Spokane Regional Conference. We need the variety of new and seasoned voices engaging in dialogue about the myriad topics relevant to the profession.

For those of you who are interested in getting more involved, I encourage you to inquire about possible committee membership. For example, if you are a social media guru, I encourage you to contact me or another board member to get involved in spreading the word about upcoming events, initiatives, and opportunities. If you enjoy reading articles with a copy editor's eye, the WAESOL Educator most certainly needs readers and members to join the editorial committee. An initiative started during the pandemic that we want to revitalize is WAESOL Online, so if you have an interest in presenting workshops or know of someone who does or even just want to facilitate workshops, this is a crucial need for this coming year. There are so many opportunities to serve that are important and don't require an election to fill the roles. We also welcome your ideas for how to better meet the needs of our members whether via email or as part of a face-to-face conversation.

I look forward to another year of helping build both the organization and our profession as past president. Since this is a member-run organization, we need all of us to be involved in the process to succeed. I encourage you to reach out to any of the board members to share your ideas and interests. Let's continue progressing as an extended team of professionals.

My best to you all in this coming year.

Sincerely,

David R. Martin, PhD *(he/him)*

2024 Past-President

Letter from the Editor

Readers,

Welcome to the Winter 2024 issue of *WAESOL Educator*. This is my seventh issue as editor of WAESOL Educator and, regrettably, my last. My first issue was Winter 2021 when I took over at the last minute and at the bottom of a very steep learning curve. It was exciting and overwhelming in equal measure. Since then and with the valuable help of too many to name (but Martha Savage, Christina Mitma-Momono, and James Hunter really deserve a shout-out) we have continued the tradition of publishing excellent articles by English language teaching professionals. I think I am most proud of having speerheaded the transition to systematized double-blind peer reviews which I believe has had a positive effect on the quality of the writing. It means that a variety of experienced voices in the field read and give valuable feedback to our authors. Part of our mission at *WAESOL Educator* is to "support and mentor potential authors" so with our amazing peer reviewers we regularly go through several rounds of reviews with authors who might need a little help wordsmithing. As I was once told by a mentor at Oxford University Press, "Everyone needs an editor!" (although, being British, she would have eschewed the exclamation mark).

And so, my last issue: There are articles here that we hope will spark your imagination, motivate you to try new activities, wrestle with cutting-edge topics, or reinforce your existing teaching practices. The articles range from important concepts in our profession such as asset-based language, ungrading, and learning styles to useful tech ideas such as HotSeat, ChatGPT, and ELSA. Those working with multilinguals of all levels might benefit from the information on Theme deployment and on intentional classroom conversations around reading. Connect with us on social media to let us know what resonates with you.

Please consider submitting an article for the next issue. We all learn better when we learn from each other. Share with us what you're doing in your classes that is working well for you, a presentation you have given, or professional development you have learned from. The deadline for submission for the summer issue is April 15 and for the winter issue is November 15.

Best wishes,

Bridget Green *(She/Her)*

Editor

Land Acknowledgment

Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL) recognizes and honors our many diverse Indigenous and Native Peoples in the Pacific Northwest, in the United States, and globally–past, present, and future. We acknowledge that the arrival of the English language impacted the traditional languages and cultures of the Native, Indigenous, and First Nations Peoples and we celebrate the work to reclaim or maintain their languages and cultures. We stand in solidarity with the Native, Indigenous, and First Nations Peoples and respect their sovereignty, cultural heritage, and lives. May we all take a moment to honor the Indigenous tribes and Indigenous lands that we reside on and pay our deepest respects.

A conversation with Denise Furlong: Creating welcoming spaces for newcomers

DENISE FURLONG AND DAVID MARTIN

Dr. Denise Furlong was the keynote speaker at the annual WAESOL Conference in October 2023. Dr. Furlong holds an Ed. D. in Literacy Education from Rutgers University with an emphasis on English learner education. She is currently an Assistant Professor and the Director of Advanced Studies for Reading Specialists & ESL at Georgian Court University in New Jersey. She has nearly 25 years of experience in teaching multilingual learners and coaching their teachers in a variety of K-12 educational settings. In addition to K-12, Dr. Furlong has also enjoyed the opportunity to work with adult English learners at the university level and within various community environments. Her book, Voices of newcomers: Experiences of multilingual learners (2021) was the 2023 recipient of Delta Kappa Gamma's Educator Book Award.

During her WAESOL keynote presentation, she made a direct connection between her work with Newcomers and all multilingual learners and the conference theme—Sharing, Reflecting, and Expanding Our Practice. Her presentation set a positive tone of advocacy on behalf of our students regardless of the teaching context. Recently, Denise took time out of her busy schedule to share her experience and advice for *WAESOL Educator* with David Martin, outgoing WAESOL president.

David Martin: What led you to become a teacher?

Denise Furlong: Funny, this past week we've been talking at Georgian Court University about First Gen students and how most of the students we recruit do not have family members who are teachers. I can resonate with that. As a first gen student myself, I didn't have any teacher role models in my family, so I don't even know what brought me [to the point of wanting to be a teacher] other than a small [period of] time when I was a senior in high school, and I decided I was going to be a physical therapist, which is a form of teaching really. However, growing up I had always wanted to be a teacher, and what we talk about with recruitment is that so many times with teachers it's like a contagious situation where one person in the family becomes a teacher and others want to follow. Many recruits might say that they have an aunt or a mother who's a teacher, or their grandfather... That wasn't the case for me as is the case for so many of those we seek to bring into teaching; however, I am really proud that I have a nephew who's a teacher and another one who's on his way, so maybe I started it being contagious in our family.

Denise Furlong with her award-winning Voices of newcomers: Experiences of multilingual learners at the 2023 WAESOL Conference

DM: How did you get your start working with Newcomers?

DF: When I first got my undergraduate degree, I was an elementary education major with a secondary major of Spanish, which you need in New Jersey [to get certified]. When I graduated, I was able to teach elementary school and then also I took a test to be K-12 Spanish certified, and I remember looking right away to go back to school. I was still living at home with my parents, and I remember looking at something that Rutgers was offering, and it was like their master's degree in language, and it had bilingual ESL. I said to my mother "Wow, it's like I wrote what I wanted, and they have that in these classes," so I got my ESL degree along with my master's degree. That is kind of where my path took me and then I followed this path to a different district where I started teaching in middle school. That was really when I first met students who were Newcomers. Again, I was still a kid but now I was a teacher kid. However, it was then that I started to kind of consider how [newcomers] have different needs and how they must be feeling when they're here and they just want people to understand them and their experiences. Ultimately, that really drew me in.

DM: What has been the most impactful experience you have had as a teacher of Newcomers or multilingual learners?

DF: So I can think of so many, and that's what I think we experience as teachers of multilingual learners. Currently, I have come back to working in a high school, and I am constantly just blown away by the motivation that my multilingual learners have. I am humbled by the things that they've gone through. Before this experience, I had only known a handful of unaccompanied minors, but in the past few years [it has become much more prevalent]. I have students showing up, and they don't have their parents next to them. Needless to say, there might be some uncertainty in their lives, so when I think about what is impactful, I think about the everyday impact that the students have on our world and their worlds. I could probably choose twenty things, but you know as a teacher you have to think, "What are they going through each day?"

DM: In your book, you pose questions to teachers asking them to compare their own experience as learners to what they see happening in their own classrooms. How might you answer that question and what is your advice to new teachers in the ML classroom whose students are struggling?

DF: So as a younger student I was very shy and would not ever raise my hand. If a teacher called on me, I answered in a whisper because I just did not want the spotlight shone on me. Remembering my experience kind of gives me empathy for the feelings of our multilingual learners where they really sometimes don't want to have the spotlight on them whether it's in their heritage language or in English. Sometimes they want to kind of fade into the background. Therefore, I feel it is important to set up your classroom or your educational setting in the way that helps people feel comfortable; therefore, if they make a mistake, it's no big deal. In this type of classroom, they are willing to take risks. I think this applies to our littles all the way up to our adult learners. After all, I think we all feel that way to one extent or another; we don't want to take a risk and put ourselves out there if it's going to be embarrassing. I think about developing an inclusive environment a lot, especially for our learners who might be in the silent period and might just need to work in a small group or need time to write down their thoughts first or to draw.

DM: You mentioned in the Keynote presentation how happy you were that the language used to speak about multilingual learners is changing. What do you feel is the most important lesson we can learn from the shifts in the language used to refer to our multilingual students?

DF: So I know a lot of times people are like "Oh, they're changing the names of everything; first they were this and now they're that." However, I really think it is a big deal. I think that when we refer to things through a positive lens, it really affects how we look at the students. Since we are moving towards more states officially calling these students multilingual learners, we're kind of saying that there is more than just English that they're learning. They are leveraging all these languages, and they are learning content. Therefore, I think it is important that we are shifting from an English-centric view and really empowering them. It's the same thing that happened when we used to call newcomers port of entry students, you know. You're focusing on one time in their lives rather than acknowledging them and saying "Hey, you're here. We're happy you're here and let's learn alongside you!" I think it's really a big deal and represents a shift in mindset that goes along with our shift in language that I think is so important.

DM: Could you speak to your own experience a bit more as a language learner? What parallels do you see between your experience and those of your students?

DF: Sure! So my second language is Spanish and I had the privilege of learning Spanish as a second language in a predominantly English-speaking area. I learned Spanish beginning in high school, and then I went on to study it in the university setting and then in my position as a teacher. What I consider important was that when my motivation was at its peak to learn and after I passed all the certification tests, it was when I had to communicate with the families of my students that I started to kind of embrace the language and the culture. This lesson applies when we talk about motivation to learn the language, and that's what we talk about when our students really see authentic uses for language and how learning this language is going to be beneficial. For me, it was not just about saying "Oh, I'm going to learn it so I pass this test or I get this certification" but more like "I'm going to learn it so I could really authentically be part of my students' lives and their families' lives and become an advocate." So, probably the advocacy is really what helped me move along in my journey because it was a challenge as a non-native speaker. In the end, once I was able to apply the language and learn authentic language, that was so much more powerful.

DM: How can teachers of multilingual students best advocate for their students?

DF: Start small, advocating at the state level, advocating in teams where you are speaking up and saying these are ways that these decision makers need to be really considering the diverse needs of our multilingual learners, whether they are language learners or adult learners or everybody in between. Something else to consider is that sometimes the most difficult advocacy you undertake is in the same hallway as your classroom. Sometimes our own colleagues might be the ones that fight us the most. However, acknowledging that is your first step and then you can take it from there. Mostly, though, empowering ourselves to act on our students' behalf is crucial, keeping in mind that we're not anyone else's voices but sometimes we're in a position where we can amplify the voices and experiences of our students.

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Cite this article

Furlong, D.A. & Martin, D. (2024). A conversation with Denise Furlong: Creating welcoming spaces for newcomers. *WAESOL Educator, 49*(1), 3-5.

FROM THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING REFLECTIONS AND TEACHING TIPS

Using HotSeat to engage students in learning second language vocabulary

PATUR RAHMAN AND MUHAMMAD AHKAM ARIFIN

Summary: This article introduces an offline computer application called HotSeat that can be used by language teachers to teach vocabulary. It first describes how teachers can use this app in their classrooms and then discusses how the use of this app can actively engage students by promoting Egbert et al.`s (2021) six main engagement facilitators (social interaction, authenticity, interest, support, autonomy, and challenge) in learning language.

Keywords: vocabulary learning, student engagement, language learning, learning app, engagement facilitators

Introduction

At the end of one of my English classes, the whole class crowded together and yelled, “Don’t go, sir! We still want to play.” My junior high school students in the classroom in Indonesia did not realize they were learning vocabulary. It was reasonable since their learning activities were only yelling, pronouncing, and competing with one another without realizing that they were drilling English words using visualization or the use of pictures through an offline vocabulary learning application called HotSeat.

To make it clear, HotSeat (Figure 1) is an offline Adobe Flash desktop application to enhance vocabulary comprehension. It can be used for all student levels as teachers have the flexibility to input their own list of vocabulary and images into the app. This open-access app can be downloaded. (It is, however, only compatible with laptops running a Windows operating system.) The app offers interactive learning because students need to work in a group and interact with their teammates to compete and win the game. This video game can thus engage students to learn new vocabulary.

Using HotSeat in the classroom

I have integrated HotSeat for English vocabulary enhancement in some segmented classroom levels in both high school and university classrooms. I conducted research on the use of this app in a junior high school. I have found that my students’ vocabulary achievement improved significantly based on their pretest and posttest scores (Rahman et al., 2016). They also expressed that they felt interested in learning vocabulary with this app as they found it novel and that none of their teachers had implemented it in their classrooms.

Based on my teaching practices, to play HotSeat some tools need to be prepared in advance. First, the class must be equipped with a projector screen. Second, a laptop operated by the teacher is needed to access the app and to display the vocabulary list to the whole class. Third, although it offers some lists of English vocabulary on different topics, they are still quite limited, so the teacher has to add their own vocabulary list to the app (Figure 2). HotSeat is an offline app, and thus no internet connection is required once it has been downloaded.

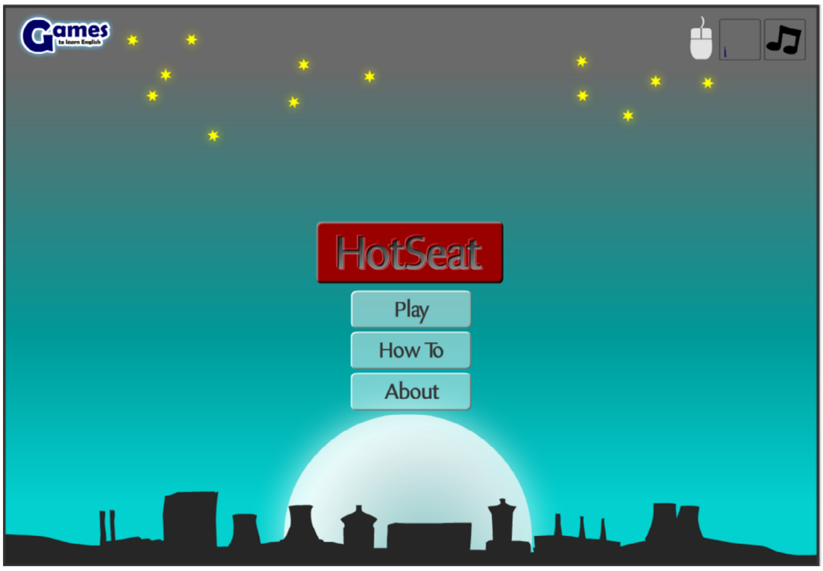

Figure 1 : Main screen of HotSeat

To use this app to teach vocabulary in classrooms, generally I have two main stages. I call the first stage 'the presentation stage' and the second "the competition stage." For the presentation stage, I display a group of vocabulary words on the projector screen with both the words and images while having all students drill the vocabulary (Figure 3) as a class. I pronounce the target vocabulary items one by one, and all students will also practice pronouncing each item with me. During this activity, I make sure that students pronounce each word clearly, and thus students might pronounce certain words until their pronunciation is comprehensible.

Next, the competition stage has three rounds. In the first round, I display the images without the written word(s) (Figure 4). One of the groups (Group A) tries to guess as many of the words as they can in sixty seconds. They get one point for each correct answer. Next, the other group (Group B) have their turn just like the first group. In the second round, the activity is the same. The only difference is that the vocabulary items shown on the screen are now different. In other words, the first round typically presents half of the target vocabulary items, usually ranging from fifteen to twenty words, and the second round includes the other half, which is also usually composed of fifteen to twenty target words.

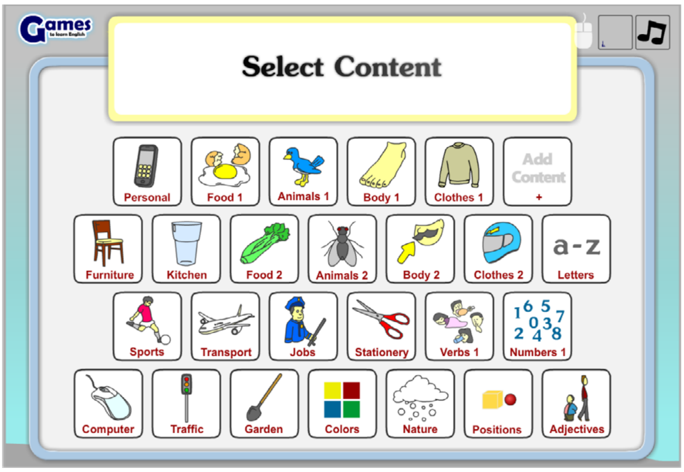

Figure 2: Vocabulary list available on HotSeat

Figure 3: A vocabulary picture along with the word, or text

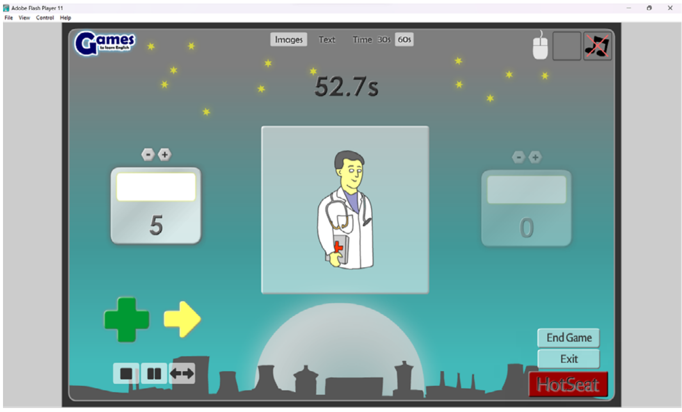

Figure 4: Picture only without the word, or text

The last round uses the hot seat activity. One student, a representative from Group B, sits on a chair with their back to the board, or the projector screen, which displays the target vocabulary items along with the images. Thus, the student in the hot seat cannot see the words and images, but their teammates can see both. The teammates then describe the words one by one so that their friend on the hot seat can guess them. They describe each vocabulary item by giving a synonym, antonym, or definition. They could also incorporate body movements. For example, they see the word *wallet*, and they say, for example, *something that men use to carry their money*, or they could also act like they are taking something from their back pocket and pretend they are paying for something. They have sixty seconds to describe as many words as possible. For each correct answer, the group will get one point. This will also be the same for Group A. In my context, my junior high school students mainly rely on body language to describe the target words; however, those in the senior high school and university employ both their body and verbal language.

HotSeat and student engagement

This app fulfills the six facilitators that learning applications need to meet to engage students in language learning identified by Egbert et al.'s (2021) engagement model. The facilitators include *social interaction, authenticity, interest, support, autonomy*, and *challenge*. In this game, students *socially interact* with other students when one student is seated in front of the whole class and takes the hot seat. The rest of the students then explain each target word and the student in the hot seat tries to guess it. As teachers can incorporate new vocabulary lists into the application, they can offer personalized vocabulary based on student needs in their real-life contexts, thereby promoting *authenticity*. Teachers, for example, can take authentic materials such as pictures of traffic signs that students might see when they have the opportunity to go overseas, or select materials that are useful to help students reach their real-life goals.

In terms of *interest*, students can be highly engaged with this app because it offers a gamified learning environment in which students compete with their teammates and earn points for their correct answers to win the hot seat game. Based on their research findings, Wu and Huang (2017) mentioned that students are interested in game-based English vocabulary practice as they experience a sense of achievement and success upon solving problems or acquiring new knowledge. In the Indonesian EFL classroom context, Sudibyo et al. (2021), for example, showed that a hot seat game could arouse students' interest in learning vocabulary because it allows them to actively interact with their peers and participate in their own learning process.

To *support* student learning, teachers can have students drill the vocabulary list in advance, so they are well prepared to support one another by providing clues to their teammates in the hot seat to guess the word correctly. In addition, teachers could have students drill the vocabulary list in advance or at the beginning of the class. For example, teachers could show both pictures and texts so that students can practice their pronunciation in describing new words. After this, teachers can conceal the text and show only the pictures and students will have to guess them. During this activity, students repeat the vocabulary while teachers can monitor to ensure that all students pronounce the target words comprehensibly.

Lastly, to promote student learning *autonomy* and to further *challenge* students, the materials and the app can be accessed at any time on their own outside of the classroom. It also means that students, when learning by themselves, can opt for any lessons that match their skills. Since teachers can upload their own vocabulary list, they could provide learning materials that match their students' interlanguage development.

Reflections and conclusion

Based on my research and personal experience after having implemented this app several times, I have shown how the offline vocabulary app HotSeat can be used to help improve students' English vocabulary comprehension in different contexts from junior and senior high schools to university-level students. In this paper, I have also related my teaching practice using the app to meet the requirements of Egbert et al.'s (2021) engagement model. For example, this app has the potential to engage student interest since it gamifies a somewhat tedious practice activity in a fun and recursive way. It allows students to socially interact with their peers by supporting one another in acquiring new vocabulary. Finally, teachers can design or create their own vocabulary list in the app, enabling them to provide personalized learning materials to their students and promoting autonomy. Thus far, this app has the potential to effectively engage students in learning vocabulary in classrooms.

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FROM THE CLASSROOM:
TEACHING REFLECTIONS AND TEACHING TIPS

Incorporating ungrading into writing classrooms

JENNIFER ALTMAN

Summary: Incorporating ungrading into writing classrooms via self-assessment surveys, ungraded reflection essays, and the first two, ungraded essay drafts afforded three teachers at the UW Intensive English Programs time and cognitive energy to give students the best writing guidance we could, resulting in final drafts with clear arguments and support. Ungrading freed us to offer the best constructive feedback we could and our students to experiment with ideas and language.

Keywords: DEI, ungrading, grading, assessment, writing

Introduction

As discussions around Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) have increased in post-secondary educational institutions, conversations around grading have emerged: What is it, what is its purpose, and what is its impact on learning? Kohn (Blum, 2020), in his introduction to Blum's *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do instead)*, discusses how the fixation on grades can lead to students cheating, gaming the system, and not learning. Delpit (2019) asserts that assessment encourages learning where grading does not. Moreover, learning a language requires students to take risks, and yet grades discourage that (Akimoto, 2023). Over several years of department conversations in the University of Washington's International and English Language Programs' Intensive English Program, my colleagues and I struggled with how to "grade" writing: how could we simultaneously give students room to take risks, and grade their writing? Two colleagues and I embarked on an experiment with "ungrading" in an academic reading and writing course at an upper level of our IEP and found success. We found that students' writing skills and confidence were boosted when we taught students how to set and assess their learning goals, to write reflection essays that would be ungraded, and to write the first two drafts of their content-based essays that would be ungraded, but to write the third draft that would be graded. In this article, I will first define grading, launch into three classroom activities we employed, and end with a discussion of the implications of employing aspects of ungrading in our Intensive English Program (IEP) writing classes.

Until August 2020, the University of Washington's International and English Language Programs included an Intensive English Program. As the program was closing, the IEP had approximately 200 students, aged 18+, from approximately 15 different countries who were planning to matriculate into an undergraduate or graduate program in the US. The IEP had 5 levels (5 was the highest level and 2 the lowest; while we had curriculum for level 1, we never had a lot of level 1 students) and the academic reading and writing course that inspired this research was a level 4 course that met 5 days a week for 2 hours a day.

Grading versus ungrading versus assessment

While differentiating *ungrading* from *grading* and *assessment* is challenging, it is important to understand each term. *Grading* involves evaluating students' performance, but it is an unreliable measure because it incorporates criteria like attendance and participation that are not direct measures of learning (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.; University of South Carolina, n.d.) and may be based on vague or inconsistently applied standards (University of South Carolina, n.d.). *Assessment*, on the other hand, can measure learning from ungraded, beyond-the-course skills like critical thinking, and emphasize achievement of specified learning outcomes (University of South Carolina, n.d.; Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.). Furthermore, *assessment* can be employed to determine how a course's assignments and tests are meeting specific learning outcomes (University of South Carolina, n.d.). *Ungrading*, however, according to Blum (2020), involves changing the question from *What score did I get?* to *What did I learn?* especially when it involves self-assessment and instructor-student conferences. Furthermore, *ungrading* means using a single-point rubric (was the assignment completed or not?), which affords students the opportunity to take risks and experiment with writing while it affords instructors cognitive energy to offer high quality constructive feedback (Blum, 2020).

Case study 1: Skills self-assessment surveys

Turning from extended definitions of grading, assessment, and ungrading to the first case study, we will see how ungrading, as employed via self-assessment and conferences, becomes a circular process in that students receive feedback and incorporate it until there is no more feedback to give (Blum, 2020). The first element of ungrading in our sections of the level 4 academic reading and writing class became a series of three self-assessment surveys that we gave students over the course of a quarter: a pre-course, mid-course, and end-of-course skills assessment (which were initially created by Giurca and then adapted by Altman, Giurca, and Smolker). In the pre-course skills assessment, we asked students to identify which of the learning outcomes represented their strengths and which their challenges. Then, we asked them to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely goals to improve their language skills. With the mid-course skills assessment, we asked students to assess how they were doing in terms of meeting their goals: Were they meeting them or did the goals require revision? With the end of the course skills assessment, students evaluated how effective their goals were. In asking them to set, revisit, and revise their goals, these surveys helped students recognize that learning is their responsibility, assessment is circular, and knowing how to self-assess learning is important because as students advance beyond language learning programs into degree programs or jobs, they will be expected to assess themselves (Akimoto, 2023).

Case study 2: The reflection essay

Once students had set their goals for the quarter, we introduced the reflection essay: a weekly reflection on whatever we had read and discussed plus a topic-relevant discussion question for their group. To build automaticity into essay formatting so that students could focus on expressing their ideas in writing, the reflection essay was a one-page essay that conforms to North American academic essay conventions. If students had reflected on the readings and on class discussions as well as included a discussion question, they earned full marks—this is ungrading (Blum, 2020; Inoue, 2022). In other words, we did not evaluate the quality of their writing; we just used a one-point rubric: had they followed the instructions and submitted the assignment (Blum, 2020). This freed us to offer high quality feedback on how well they had communicated and supported their ideas and to offer language instruction tailored to each student. In the classroom, we put students in small groups of 3 to 4 and had them read their ungraded reflection papers aloud and discuss their questions. This presented us the opportunity to conference with each student about the third, graded draft of their essays while everyone was meaningfully engaged listening and discussing with their group. In addition, it presented students the opportunity to both hear one another's work (which normalized reading one's writing aloud, a useful revision strategy) and engage in civil discourse.

Case study 3: Multi-draft essay writing

With the practice gained in the process of writing the reflection essays, students embarked on writing essays in response to a prompt that asked them to support their position using the course readings. In coordination with my colleagues, we asked students to submit three drafts of each essay. The first two drafts would be ungraded while the third graded would be graded using the department writing rubric, in compliance with department policy. We found that ungrading the first two drafts gave us the cognitive energy to give thorough constructive feedback. Following a lot of work on the readings (including, but not limited to vocabulary, focus and discussion questions, paraphrasing, and summarizing for each reading), we gave the students a writing prompt and did an in-class write for the first draft so that we could support them as they were writing (which has the side benefit of making it more difficult to cheat). We returned each of the first two drafts, gave students (who were already in groups of three to four) time to read through our feedback and then they were to help each other incorporate the feedback. While the students were doing that, we sat with each group and conferenced with students individually or as a group according to their needs. In these conferences, students would get answers to their questions and we would get answers to ours. Ungrading allowed us to focus on giving quality constructive feedback and conferencing allowed students and teachers to work together on writing so that by the third draft the students' writing had improved significantly.

Conclusion

Ungrading helped the students feel included in the writing process because we teachers were asking them to clarify their ideas. Additionally, it allowed us as teachers to embrace the diverse ideas and writing skills our students had. When we conferenced with each student, we had time to personalize writing instruction to each student's diverse needs as a writer.

My colleagues and I found that incorporating ungrading into our writing classrooms via self-assessment surveys, ungraded reflection essays, and the first two, ungraded drafts of content-related essays afforded us the time and cognitive energy to give our students the best writing guidance that we could give. The result was final drafts that had clear arguments and support. Previously, when we were grading all three drafts against the rubric, we had to split our energy between offering feedback and evaluating, and this left us and our students wrung out and dissatisfied, and our students less skilled as writers. Ungrading freed us to focus on offering the best constructive feedback we could give, and it freed our students to experiment with ideas and language, and to learn how to express themselves clearly in another language. Furthermore, ungrading helped the students feel included in the writing process because we teachers were asking them to clarify their ideas. Additionally, ungrading allowed us as teachers to embrace the diverse ideas and writing skills our students had. What more could we ask for?

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Pre-service teacher beliefs: Does perceptual learning-style matching increase initial L2 vocabulary learning?

GREGG BREKKE AND MARK KILLIAN

Summary: The meshing hypothesis is an assumption held by a majority of educators that students will learn better if material is presented to them in a single mode that matches their preferred learning style. In this randomized between-groups, mixed-methods study of initial L2 vocabulary learning, 100 pre-service teachers were trained and tested with either auditory or visual input. Results showed that no matter the preferred learning style, participants who took the visual test performed significantly better than participants who took the audio test. A majority of participants believed that style matching affected their vocabulary learning.

Keywords: pre-service teacher, beliefs, perceptual learning style, matching, meshing hypothesis, L2 vocabulary learning

Introduction

Many educators believe that learners innately attend to information in a way that best optimizes their learning based upon individual learning styles. Up to 93 percent of educators in the UK and 96 percent in the Netherlands assumed that matching learning styles improves learning (Dekker, et al., 2012), and in one U.S. survey of 596 educators, 76 percent believed that matching learning styles to instruction increases learning (MacDonald et al., 2017). Learning style preferences are ostensibly related to relatively stable and fixed biological or personality traits (Coffield et al., 2004). From a praxis standpoint, teachers hope to increase classroom learning by employing the *meshing hypothesis*, an assumption that students will learn better and with fewer frustrations if material is presented to them in a single mode that matches their preferred learning style (Pashler et al., 2008).

A review of over 800 learning styles studies (Coffield et al., 2004) highlighted the challenges of assessing the validity and reliability of research claims for the meshing hypothesis. The authors reviewed 13 studies related to different learning styles models and instruments. The review revealed that "after more than 30 years of research, no consensus has been reached about the most effective instrument for measuring learning styles and no agreement [has been] reached about the most appropriate pedagogical interventions" and that no significant style-matching gains can be shown (p. 145).

One limiting factor is that very few studies have used a design to test for crossover interactions between groups based on learning-style preferences, learning aptitude, or both; an extensive literature review of style-based interventions concluded that only about 20 studies were experimentally sound based upon this criterion, and of those, 17 had "compellingly negative results," and the remaining three had unconvincing outcomes (Pashler et al., 2008; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012).

Challenging inverventions based upon the meshing hypothsis, the author of an L2 vocabulary study of university students learning Spanish concluded the following: "Ultimately, then, the current study cannot be considered to uphold the superiority of style matching over style mismatching in vocabulary learning on a large scale" (Tight, 2010, p. 818). In line with Macedonia (2015), while it is true that students express learning-style *preferences*, it has not been empirically shown that their conscious awareness of those biases influences unconscious neural processing of input. In other words, the L2 vocabulary learner does not selectively process and store information in one region of the brain in a way that is better than in another region, giving the learner a "dominant" style. Style preference and ability are not necessarily correlated.

Responding to research, Pearson Education, which has created learning-styles curricula for K-12 students, called for more evidence before researchers dismiss the influence of learning styles: "It would be a mistake to conclude that the style-matching hypothesis is definitively false. It is impossible to definitively prove an effect doesn't exist and future research may validate the usefulness of learning styles in education" (2016). Adding to the debate, other researchers report with near certainty that the meshing hypothesis is a neuromyth (Dekker et al., 2012; Macedonia, 2015; MacDonald et al., 2017).

Given the reported negative relationship between learning-style matching and outcomes (Coffield, et al, 2004; Pashler et al., 2008; Tight, 2010; Macedonia, 2015), understanding preservice teachers' beliefs about employing the meshing hypothesis may be useful in several ways. First, understanding preservice teachers' actual beliefs about learning-style matching may reveal a potential mismatch between those beliefs and actual outcomes. Second, it is important to assess potential outcomes associated with a belief in the inherent efficacy of learning-style matching. Educators who diversify classroom input with style matching may see increased student learning and more "evidence" of meshing. This outcome, however, likely results from multimodal input—not meshing—since L2 vocabulary learning is enhanced when training includes more than auditory or textual input alone (Tight, 2010; Macadonia, 2015). That is, ". . . this particular neuromyth presents a challenge to the education field because it seems to be supporting effective instructional practice, but for the wrong reasons" (MacDonald et al., 2017).

Practically, the results of this study could lead to educating preservice teachers about the potential drawbacks of learning-style matching, and it could also inform L2 vocabulary instruction and discussions about the differences between style matching and multimodal instruction (MacDonald et al., 2017).

Study

The goal of this study is to answer four questions:

1. To what extent do learning-style preferences (auditory, visual) equate to L2 vocabulary learning *aptitudes* (as measured by listening recall and reading recall)?
2. What is the extent to which learning-style preferences (auditory, visual) predict how much L2 vocabulary an individual comprehends and retains based on *mode of instruction* (as measured by listening recall and reading recall)?
3. Which modality (auditory or visual) is the strongest predictor of scores (as measured by listening recall and reading recall)?
4. What is the extent to which education students involved in the study believe that the meshing hypothesis influences their L2 vocabulary learning?

Participants

A total of 100 adult males and females educated in a western system (i.e., WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) participated in the study, recruited from a university teacher education course focused on second language learning. No participants had any knowledge of Tagalog, a Filipino language (used for instruction in the present study). Participants received 5 extra credits points for the semester.

Method

Participant learning styles were first identified. Next, participants were randomized into two groups, trained with either audio or text on the same set of vocabulary, and finally tested with one measurement (Pashler et al., 2008). This study included a self-predictive test score, post-test questionnaire about the vocabulary learning experience, and a follow-up test after one week.

Materials and procedure

First, participants completed the *Barsch Learning Style Inventory (BLSI)*, a measure used in education and psychology research to investigate learning-style preferences and learning outcomes for verbal, visual, and tactile input (Krätzig & Arbuthnott, 2006; Knoll at al., 2017). The survey consisted of 24 questions about learning preferences: auditory, visual and kinesthetic. It is scored along a five-point scale, with these possible answers: *Often = 5 points; Sometimes = 3 points; and Seldom = 1 point*. The relative strength of the participants' learning-styles preferences was determined by the total points assigned to each category, and only data from those participants with a visual or auditory preference were included.

Of the 105 participants, 72 preferred visual input (69%), 28 preferred auditory input (27%), and five preferred tactile input (5%). The learning-styles preference distribution fit within reported surveys: visual preference between 50%-80% (hereafter referred to as visual learners); auditory preference between 20%-40% (from here on referred to as auditory learners); and tactile at less than 30% (Tight, 2010). We excluded kinesthetic learners from the analysis because their sample size was too small, and we did not offer kinesthetic learning-style training. Consequently, we used a total of 100 unique participants in our analysis. Data were collected over three years (2017-2020).

In order to compare whether or not learners acquire L2 vocabulary in one modality better than another when influenced by a particular learning-style, testing needs to be done on large numbers of people with words of similar length, structure, and associative features (Macedonia, 2015, p. 2). Thus, 12 Tagalog verbs were chosen. The vocabulary words were not cognates of Spanish, and all had two syllables. The words were everyday action verbs such as *read, walk,* and *eat*.

Participants were randomized and trained in one of two test groups: auditory (A) or visual (V). Both test groups received the same training script but in a different modality. Test Group A heard the words and Test Group B read the words. Participants were directed to not supplement words with writing, speaking or actions. Each word was presented for 15 seconds, for a total of about three minutes for each training block of 12 words. During the three training blocks separated by two-minute intervals, the same 12 words were introduced but in a different order.

Test Group A trained with a recorded script and heard each audio prompt twice for 15 seconds; each word was heard six times and its definition four times. The Group A audio script adhered to the following pattern and for each word:

"The word is tayo.
Tayo *means stand up.*
Tayo *means stand up.*
Again, the word is tayo.
Tayo *means stand up.*
Tayo *means stand up."*

Test Group V trained with a timed PowerPoint presentation and read each text prompt for a total of 15 seconds; The Group V text adhered to the following pattern for each word:

The word is tayo. Tayo *means stand up."*

After a five-minute break, test groups were presented with a paper-and-pencil active recall test of the 12 vocabulary words in a different order (but in the same order for both groups). Participants wrote down their predicted scores (x/12) before testing. The A test group heard each vocabulary word narrated one-by-one and had five seconds to write down the English definition from memory alone. The V test group read each vocabulary word on the computer screen one-by-one and had 5 seconds to write down the English definition from memory alone. Participants used active recall of meaning which can be considered a more advanced degree of knowledge than recognizing definitions in a set of options (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004).

After the recall test, participants answered post-test questions about whether the training matched their preferred learning style and if this mis/match affected their learning. We used the following initial and contingent follow-up question to understand participant belief about the meshing hypothesis:

"Did your preferred learning style (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) match the vocabulary training for the 12 words? Yes or No?"

- ▫ If the participants answered *Yes*, then they answered the open-ended question "Do you think you *learned more words* than if the words were taught in a different style? Yes or no? Explain."
- ▫ If the participants answered *No*, then they answered the open-ended question "Do you think you *would have learned more words* if the words were taught in a different style? Yes or no? Explain."

We identified participants who expressed their actual or potential L2 vocabulary learning (either positively or negatively) in terms of a *single* learning-style preference and matching as *(+) meshing*. We identified those who expressed their actual or potential L2 learning (either positively or negatively) in terms of paired *multimodal* enrichment such as hearing, reading, pictures, writing down words, or iconic gestures, as *(-) meshing*. To assess participants' *beliefs* in the meshing hypothesis, we correlated data from the participants' answers on the post-test questionnaire with their preferences on the *BLSI*, assigned experimental groups, and reported style preferences.

One week later both test groups were tested over the same 12 words in a different order (but in the same order for both groups).

We employed a one-way ANOVA and T-tests for independent samples to determine whether learning-style preferences significantly differed in test results. In accordance with the literature, we expected that meshing would not occur. Auditory learners in the V test group would score the same or better than auditory learners assigned to the A test group.

Results

The results of the present study confirmed the researchers' expectations. Audio learners assigned to the A test group scored an average of 6.813 on the initial test, whereas Audio learners assigned to the V test group scored an average of 9.364 (Table 1). In contrast, Visual learners assigned to the A test group scored an average of 7.324 on the initial test, whereas Visual learners assigned to the V test group scored an average of 10.590 (Table 1).

Results from the one-way ANOVA revealed that Audio and Visual learners assigned to the V test groups scored significantly higher on the initial recall test (p-value<.001) than Visual and Audio learners in the A test groups (Figure 1). Based on the effect size (Eta-squared), 19.5% of the variance

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the L2 Vocabulary Learning on the Initial Recall Test

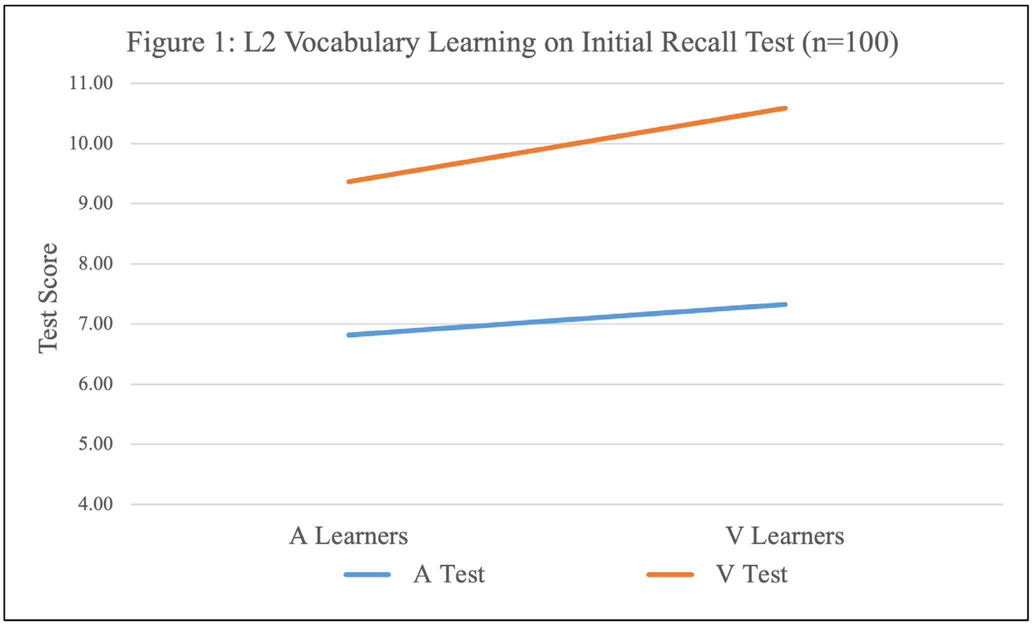
Learner Group	Test Group	N	Mean	Standard Dev.
Audio	Audio (A)	16	6.813	3.781
Audio	Visual (V)	11	9.364	3.107
Visual	Audio (A)	39	7.324	4.417
Visual	Visual (V)	34	10.590	2.381

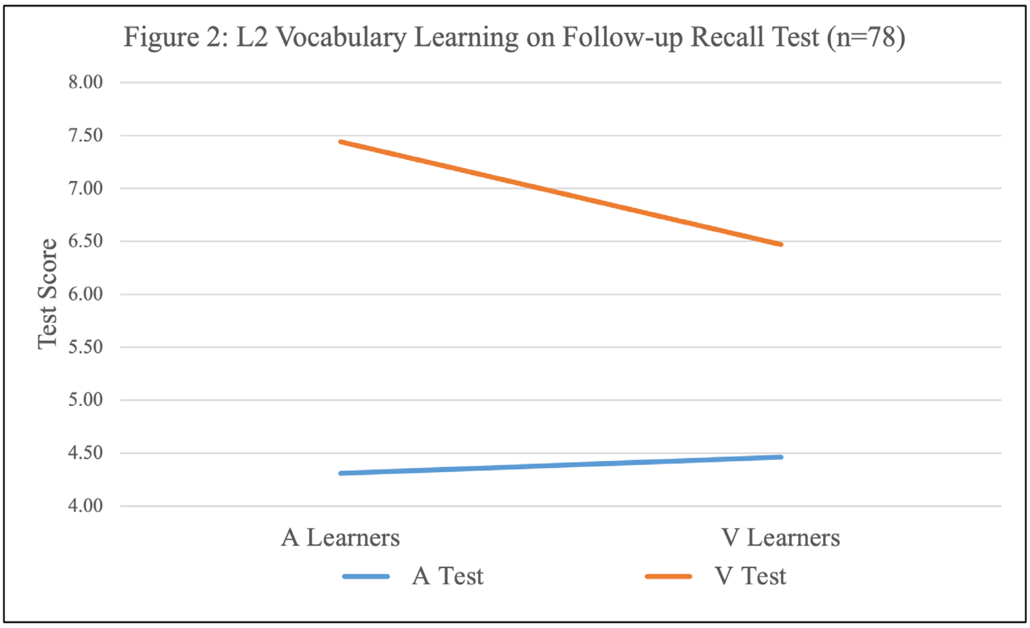
in T1 test scores is associated with membership in the testing groups.

Although there was a 22% attrition rate in the sample on the follow-up recall test, the same pattern emerged (Figure 2), albeit with lower overall scores. Audio learners assigned to the A test group scored an average of 4.31 (n=13, SD=3.225), whereas audio learners assigned to the V test group scored an average of 7.44 (n=9, SD=3.167). In contrast, Visual learners assigned to the A test group scored an average of 4.46 (n=26, SD=3.524), whereas Visual learners assigned to the V test group scored an average of 6.47 (n=30, SD=3.026).

These results contradict the meshing hypothesis. According to the meshing hypothesis, participants who prefer audio learning styles assigned to the A test group would outperform participants who prefer visual learning styles assigned to the A test group. If this were the case, we would expect the audio learners in the A test group to have higher scores than the visual learners in the A test group. However, this is not the case. V test group scores were higher for both audio and visual learners on the initial and follow-up recall tests. These results demonstrate that no matter the learning-style preference, participants in the V test group performed better on the L2 vocabulary learning tests than participants in the A test group. In sum, no crossover interaction occurred between test groups. As reported in Pashler et al., (2008, Figure 1), "...the *same* learning method [visual] optimized the mean test score of both kinds of learners, thereby precluding the need to customize instruction."

Although assignment to the V test group was a significant predictor of participant scores, another strong predictor was participants' *predicted* scores. Before each test, the instructor asked participants to predict their scores. These predictions strongly correlate (p-value < .001) with the student's actual scores (r = .58 for A test group and r = .5 for V test group). In total, the predicted scores explained 39% of the variance of the actual scores (R2 = .393). Despite their learning-style preferences, students in the V test groups predicted significantly higher scores than students in the A test groups, on average (p-value<.001). This unexpected outcome may indicate that reading, compared to listening, has more influence on students' L2 initial vocabulary learning.





General discussion

Stated learning-style preferences do not adversely affect aptitude

This study examined both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the meshing hypothesis. This study confirms a previous study's findings (Tight, 2010) that students have aptitude to learn L2 vocabulary regardless of learning-style preferences.

Reading produced more L2 vocabulary learning than listening

Regardless of learning-style preferences, the present study results indicate that visual text training produces more L2 vocabulary learning than auditory input. Visually trained participants monitored their vocabulary learning and predicted their output with strong accuracy. One possible influence on the V test group judgement of learning is that compared to auditory input, visual input can be more easily "refreshed," rehearsed and monitored in short-term memory, then compared *after a delay* with long-term memory in later training blocks without interference from short-term memory (Dunlosky & Nelson, 1991; Holmes, 2016, p. 8). This process may also free up more attention for word association or visualization of verb activities, which some V test group participants reported in the post-test questionnaire.

Many education students wrongly assumed that meshing increases learning

In line with previous research (Macadonia, 2015), results show that an individual's assumptions about the effectiveness of style matching on instruction do not influence L2 vocabulary learning outcomes. Still, a large number of education students (57%) in the present study reported that style matching positively or negatively influenced their own L2 vocabulary learning. This belief is contrary to the empirical data which showed that there are no crossover interactions of learning styles when matched with instruction.

Pedagogical implications

MacDonald (2017) reports that persistent educator belief in learning-style based interventions "reflects the broader need to convey nuances across disciplinary boundaries of education and neuroscience to best meet the instructional and learning needs of students and educators." They recommend that in addition to the literature, educational coursework and professional development should highlight the differences between style matching and multimodal instruction. For example, teacher educators can model multimodal instruction that enriches L2 verbal vocabulary material with pictures. Verbal and visual codes are stored in different brain areas, so visual enrichment builds an expanded web of connections that strengthens and preserves vocabulary learning over time (Repetto et al., 2017). Additionally, kinesthetic input provides essential information for encoding language information and for interpreting the world. Iconic gestures paired with L2 verbal vocabulary information are stored and recalled as embodied cognition or as "body in mind" (Macedonia & Knösche, 2011), the focus of Total Physical Response (TPR) lessons. Interestingly, the WIDA Standards Framework interpretive communication modes model includes listening, reading, and viewing but omits the sensory/motor category (2020, p. 28-29).

Students may also benefit from instructional approaches based on vocabulary word type. Evidence indicates that pairing iconic gestures with concrete nouns (e.g., *bicycle, backpack*) and manipulation verbs (e.g., *hold, write*) strengthens learning while paired pictures enrich abstract verbs (e.g., *dream, think*; Repetto et al., 2017). Surprisingly, glossing L2 words with L1 definitions does not appear to improve beginning L2 vocabulary learning (Morett, 2019).

Lessons incorporating multimodal Universal Design Learning (UDL) support translanguaging (Cioè-Peña, 2022). Multilingual learners can independently utilize manipulatives, tactile vocabulary lists, assistive technology, audiotext, drawings (instead of writing), cut-ups, and sorting. Students also have the option to audio record their ideas and to transfer them into writing in L1 and/or L2.

Limitations

Participants in the present study were adults from Western, educated (literate), industrialized, rich, and democratic societies (WEIRD); children, and literate populations from oral cultures should be included in future research. The present study looked at single-modality verbal input effects only: auditory or visual. Furthermore, only one instrument (the BLSI) was used to assess style preferences. Research should continue to examine the effects of enriched input and permutations of learning styles. Other research could examine possible pathways of pre-service teachers' belief formation regarding style matching or ways to influence those belief outcomes (MacDonald, et al., 2017).

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Investigating Theme deployment in advanced Saudi EFL students' academic writing

NAGLA S. ALQAEDI

Summary: This study investigates the construction of cohesive and complex writing among advanced Saudi EFL university students. Specifically, the aim of this study is to explore the types of Themes as initial elements in sentences and how students employ them to build textual cohesion and coherence in their writing.

Keywords: Theme, advanced EFL students, academic writing

Introduction

In university settings, English academic writing assignments are essential in highlighting the importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' ability to achieve cohesion and coherence in their texts (RahmtAllah, 2020). Within Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory, Themes emerge as fundamental resources shaping meaning in texts.

As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain, Themes are the initial elements that serve as the point of departure of the message; they are what the clause is about. They function as cohesive tools, packaging information through linking preceding and subsequent sentences (Forey & Sampson, 2017). Examining how Themes are chosen is essential for understanding the complexity and cohesion within academic writing.

While much EFL research has focused on language proficiency levels based on sentence structure and vocabulary mastery (e.g., Fajrina & Sadeghi, 2021), limited studies have examined the formation of rhetorical structuring in EFL writing, particularly in the Saudi context, with a focus on Themes. Creating informative flow and maintaining cohesive concepts are critical variables in text quality, necessitating strategic thematic choices (Schleppegrell & Christie, 2018).

However, Themes are not always expressed in the same way in different languages; writers from different linguistic backgrounds organize information differently (McCabe & Alonso-Belmonte, 2000). Kaplan (1995) emphasizes the influence of native language and culture on how writers structure their written texts. For EFL students, this interference affects writing organization, potentially opposing English language norms (Hyland, 2013).

This study, therefore, employs a content analysis approach to investigate the types and frequencies of Theme choices in 36 research proposals written by advanced Saudi EFL students. The primary goal is to understand how these students utilize Themes to create cohesive and coherent texts, with attention to the cultural influences on their thematic choices. This exploration aims to offer practical tools to enrich the meaningfulness and organizational structure of EFL academic writing.

What is Theme and why is it powerful?

Themes, as previously discussed, serve as the foundational elements in sentences, significantly enhancing the cohesion and complexity of academic writing (Schleppegrell & Christie, 2018). They serve to organize texts, linking preceding and subsequent sentences through detailed elaboration (Forey & Sampson, 2017). This function is essential in fostering cohesive and coherent structures in the academic writings of EFL undergraduate students.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) underscore SFL 's emphasis on constructing meaning across various language development settings. Within this framework, Berry (1995) categorizes Themes in children's data into two types: interactional (contentlight) and informational (contentful). These choices address what Themes refer to in discourse. Interactional Themes, such as personal pronouns, engage directly with discourse participants, while informational Themes, represented by full noun phrases addressing aspects of the topic, add depth to discourse. Although Berry initially focused on children's writing, recent studies (e.g., Martinez-Insua, 2022) demonstrate the framework's relevance in university learners' analyses. This study emphasizes the significance of Themes in academic writing to enhance the language learning and teaching processes. The following brief paragraph exemplifies these two types of Themes. (Themes of interest are in bold).

> ***Translation of poetry*** *is one of the most difficult tasks a translator can take on because poetic language cannot be as easily understood as ordinary language*

> *that has a literal meaning. **These translators** may face linguistic, literary, aesthetic, and cultural problems in translating poetry. In this research, **we** will focus on the most important difficulties the Saudi university students face in translating poetry from Arabic to English.*

In the first sentence, *Translation of poetry* introduces new information, which serves as an informational Theme. In the next sentence, the Theme *these translators* refers to the concept of translators mentioned in the preceding sentence. This linkage represents an informational thematic choice that sustains discourse cohesion. The pronoun *we* in the third sentence serves as an interactional Theme that helps in engaging readers and provides an authorial voice in the text. Therefore, personal pronouns such as *we* serve as interactional Themes compared to other informational Themes. Such thematic choices, utilizing referential expressions, contribute significantly to discourse development (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In addition, Themes in writing, as highlighted by Brown and Yule (1983), serve two essential functions. Firstly, Themes act as cohesive ties that weave sentences together, interconnecting ideas and referring to previously introduced concepts, known as local cohesion. Secondly, Themes help maintain a coherent viewpoint by establishing connections and links with preceding discourse, thereby establishing global coherence across paragraphs. Therefore, the investigation of the types of Themes written by Saudi EFL learners and their roles in establishing cohesion and coherence is crucial for understanding how these learners effectively convey their intended messages.

English academic writing and EFL Arabic students

Arab EFL learners face challenges in English academic writing, particularly in producing well-structured paragraphs and essays (Abu Rass, 2015), negatively impacting their advanced education and language skills. The complexity of lengthy writing tasks poses a particular challenge for these students, demanding careful organization and structure.

These challenges stem from cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and English. For instance, Arabic, influenced by Qur'anic phrasing, often employs repetition and an oral style (Abu Rass, 2015). Consequently, the writing of Arab EFL students frequently mirrors these repetitive thematic patterns aligned with their native language structures (Mohamad & Omar, 2000).

However, proficient and cohesive texts necessitate the strategic use of advanced linguistic devices such as nominalization and signaling nouns. Nominalization involves transforming verbs and adjectives into nouns (Ventola, 1996) while signaling nouns contain abstract nouns to encapsulate previous discourse (Flowerdew, 2003). These choices are crucial for packaging information and developing complex academic writing. Analyzing the types of Themes in students' writing sheds light on how EFL learners construct sentences and develop information in writing.

Research methods

This study employed a mixed methods content analysis approach to explore Themes in students' writing (Krippendorff, 2018), aiming to understand how students construct cohesive and coherent texts. The investigation specifically focused on analyzing thematic patterns to establish connections between ideas at both the sentence and paragraph levels.

Participants and data collection

For this study, 173 fourth-year students from the Department of English Language and Translation at Saudi Electronic University collaborated in groups of three to five individuals, collectively producing 36 research proposals. These students were selected based on their advanced academic level, having successfully completed previous examinations and assignments. All participants were native Arabic speakers. Consent was obtained from each participant to access their papers via the university's student portal.

While the collaboration involved 173 students, this study's analysis specifically focuses on these 36 documents. The emphasis centers on the content of these papers rather than the collaborative process among the students. These documents, analyzed using the UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell, 2008), formed the corpus of this study.

Data analysis

- Qualitative Coding: All 36 documents were uploaded into the corpus for systematic review, aiming to identify Themes at the beginning of each sentence. A total of 1,138 instances of these Themes were detected and categorized using Berry's (1995) framework, distinguishing between interactional and informational Themes.
- Quantitative Counting: Following the coding process, all identified Themes were quantified to reveal trends within the texts, providing numerical insights into Theme usage.
- Concordance Tracking: Utilizing the UAM Corpus Tool's concordance function, a detailed contextual examination of Theme usage was conducted. This approach helped pinpoint the specific choices of Themes employed by students to connect ideas across previous sentences and paragraphs.

Results

After identifying Themes in Saudi students' writing, the study showed a strong preference for informational Themes over interactional Themes (Figure 1). Informational Themes accounted for 70.22% of coded Themes, significantly higher than interactional Themes (29.78%). This 40% difference revealed the students' reliance on content-heavy Themes. As established by Berry (2013), academic writing prioritizes informational Themes due to their referential value in constructing meaningful and cohesive discourse.

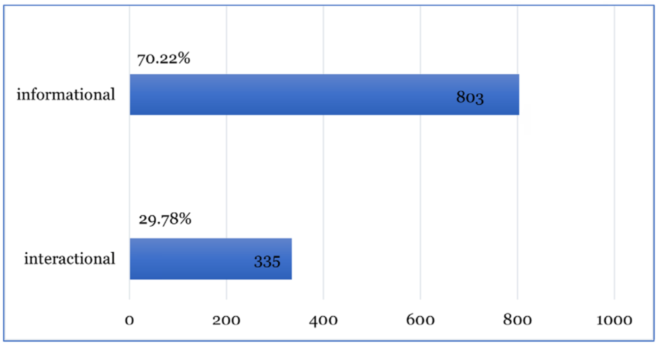

Figure 1: Frequencies of Theme types in students' writing

An in-depth analysis of students' thematic choices in connecting ideas revealed four key Themes: repetition, nominalization, reclassification, and signaling nouns (Figure 2). Repetition emerged as the most frequent Theme, accounting for 71.22% of all coded Themes. This high frequency indicates a strong reliance on repeating the same words and phrases when referencing preceding concepts. For instance, the Theme *cultural competency* was repeated across four consecutive sentences, as exemplified in the discussion section below. In contrast, nominalization was notably less frequent, comprising only 2.93% of the observed Themes. This low occurrence might suggest that students find nominalization patterns unfamiliar or challenging to utilize. For instance, *interpretation* in the following example was nominalized from the verb *interpret* in the preceding sentence, serving as a cohesive element linking ideas in a complex manner: *The speaker interprets the speech and then pauses. However,* ***interpretation*** *has significantly increased in importance and experienced significant evolution.*

Reclassification was moderately used, representing 18.54% of instances. This use of reclassification involved substituting synonymous phrases to repeat concepts, such as replacing the research in one sentence with the study in the following sentence. Finally, signaling nouns, which encapsulate and summarize previous statements, comprised only 7.32% of the coded Themes. In the following example, the *process* serves as a cohesive device, referencing the translation procedures discussed in two preceding sentences: ***The process*** *is difficult since there is a need for expertise in many cultures as well as staying up to date on new terminology as language evolves.*

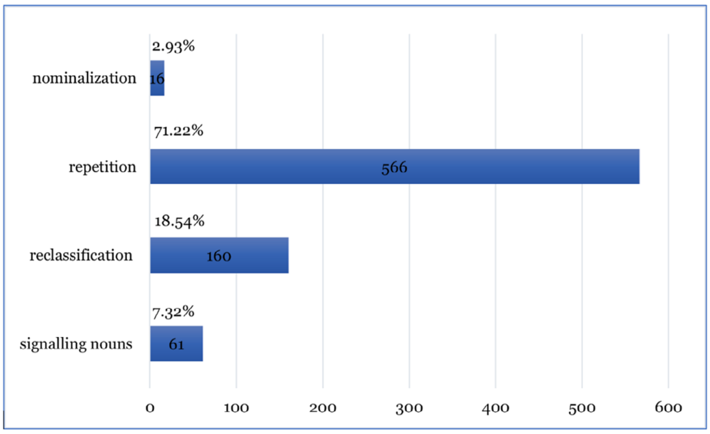

Figure 2: Frequencies of informational Themes in students' writing

Discussion

The extensive use of repetitive choices aligns with research showing Arab EFL writers favor redundancy, influenced by linguistic and cultural factors (Mohamad & Omer, 2000). For Saudi students, repetition aids meaning-making as a preferred learning strategy stemming from the memorization and restatement valued in Arabic rhetoric (Al-Seghayer, 2021). These tendencies transfer into repetitive academic writing patterns echoing Arabic structures.

While repetition creates local cohesive links within paragraphs, overreliance on duplicate phrasing reflects basic writing strategies (Jalilifar, 2010). Consider the following paragraph from a student's essay.

> ***Cultural competency*** *can be defined as a collection of beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a system, organization, or group of people to work effectively in a cross-cultural setting.* ***Cultural competency*** *also entails a thorough awareness and respect for a culture, as well as the ability to know "what to say to whom, where, and when" from a social and pragmatic standpoint.* ***A complete understanding of the cultural competency*** *will allow translators to deliver intended messages effectively and appropriately. In addition,* ***cultural competency*** *has a significant impact on translation quality.*

The paragraph displays a pattern of repetition, predominantly featuring the Theme of *cultural competency* across four successive sentences. Initially introduced in the first sentence, the concept is repeated in the second sentence for elaboration and emphasis, demonstrating an attempt to clarify and define the topic. The third sentence incorporates the same Theme within a complex noun phrase, introducing new information while preserving the original topic, marking a shift in presentation style. The fourth sentence refers to the original Theme, providing a sense of continuity and expressing the subsequent discussion.

While using repetition can maintain the focus of the central idea (Fries, 2002), the repetitive nature of establishing local cohesion by consistently repeating the same concepts hinders the formation of broader connections between ideas, thereby limiting the depth of expression (Jalilifar, 2010). Such a repetition-heavy approach might stem from an attempt to enhance clarity and maintain focus, typical of less experienced learners aiming for straightforward cohesion rather than complex interconnections (Wang, 2007).

Conversely, strategically connecting repetitive Theme chains across a text can establish global coherence, indirectly familiarizing readers with complex concepts and shaping their understanding through reinforcement of key terms (Tabari & Johnson, 2023), as can be seen in this paragraph:

> ***Translation*** *is described as a "cultural turn" as defined by Bassnett and Lefevere (2016). To effectively translate messages from the source language to the target language audience, translators must be culturally competent for each of the target audiences they work with by gaining a complete understanding*

> *of cultural background, awareness, and sensitivity.* ***Translators*** *must do more than merely translate words from the source language into the target language.* ***They*** *must also communicate the meaning of those words in a way that the audience can understand.*

Continuing with the same essay, this paragraph transitions from discussing cultural competency in the previous paragraph to emphasizing the importance of translation in conveying messages effectively. Although there were repetitive Themes such as translators in the second and third sentences, the shift from cultural understanding to the role of translators contributes to establishing global coherence, marking a transition in the focus while maintaining contextual relevance.

Although the emphasis on global coherence denotes an advanced approach (Tabari & Johnson, 2023), local cohesion, which is mostly generated through repetitive Themes within paragraphs, may rely on more basic strategies. This issue, commonly observed among EFL writers, has been consistently highlighted in previous research (Wang, 2007). While the writer attempts thematic variation between paragraphs, further diversification could enrich the text. Specifically, nominalizations and signaling nouns could connect ideas, increase structure complexity, and strengthen cohesive flow. Relying less on repetition and employing more varied thematic choices would advance the textual development.

Therefore, this analysis reveals the dual-edge role of repetition in EFL writing. Students heavily utilized repetitive Themes, potentially reflecting cultural inclinations. Such excessive repetition often fails to advance concepts, indicating underdeveloped skills (Wang, 2007). However, strategic reinforcement can serve advanced functions by underlining global connections to strengthen textual coherence (Tabari & Johnson, 2023). Essentially, while overuse signifies weaker writing capabilities, purposeful emphasis of central Themes enhances semantic flow.

Implication and conclusion

The specific utilization of thematic repetition in Saudi EFL writing holds substantial pedagogical implications, particularly as students demonstrate limited understanding in this area. Therefore, enhanced support from teachers is crucial to assist them in overcoming these challenges.

To begin, discussions around culture and language awareness could effectively familiarize students with the contrasts between their first language writing and the established norms of standard English academic writing. For instance, teachers could initiate instruction by exploring elements of both L1 and L2 writing, encouraging students to reflect on what constitutes good writing in each language.

Further, employing text analysis can prove invaluable in familiarizing EFL students with English language norms. Analyzing short paragraphs from their own writing helps demonstrate the use of Themes in connecting ideas, highlighting strong and weak choices. This analysis provides clarity on distinguishing between repetitive elements that enhance text complexity and those that merely add ineffective emphasis. Explicitly identifying instances of excessive repetition can raise students' awareness about their thematic choices. Furthermore, illustrating the differences between excessive local repetition and repetition for global reinforcement enables students to differentiate between surface-level cohesion and conceptual development.

Guidance on the impacts of thematic choices in creating cohesion and coherence significantly contributes to developing advanced writers. Recognizing areas where students struggle with repetitive Themes and transitioning to more advanced choices can empower students with vocabulary and structural variations. For example, demonstrating the use of nominalization and signaling nouns aids in condensing information and eliminating unnecessary wording. This thematic-based approach supports students in advancing towards sophisticated writing choices that enhance text development, fostering cohesion, and coherence.

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Get lit: Helping English learners grow through intentional classroom conversations

ELIZABETH FINCHER

Summary: The article outlines culturally responsive activities in dialogic literacy instruction to create an inclusive classroom environment. An overview of dialogic theory and practice grounds the need for effective professional development in literacy instruction. Discussion of how to create engaged, dialogic communities through daily classroom routines and evidence-based practices shows how to support English Learners' literacy growth and increase linguistic responsiveness, especially with digital nativism.

Keywords: Dialogic pedagogy, literacy, English language learners, culturally responsive, oral language

Dialogic practice in literacy instruction

Dialogic practice (DP) nurtures confident, engaged readers and writers, and teachers in the field require essential tools to help ELs grow through intentional classroom conversations. This article provides an overview of the theoretical framework that guides dialogic pedagogy to apply in daily dialogic routines which educators can implement consistently in their classrooms to support ELs' linguistic and reading needs. The activities explore dialogue among peers, between teacher and student(s), and between author and reader.

Dialogic pedagogy in literacy instruction and intervention can benefit from effective professional development (PD) to support teachers' use of intentional conversation in classroom practices. Prior research on effective PD to support teachers' literacy intervention for ELs suggest teachers' implementation of differentiated, small-group interventions for ELs with literacy challenges is more effective than solely whole-class literacy or sheltered instruction (Baker et al., 2014; Shelton, Hogan, Chow, & Wexler, 2023). Effective PD can improve teachers' level of preparedness to deliver evidence-based literacy practices and facilitate activities which

- incorporate unique cultural and linguistic resources (i.e. funds of knowledge) (Moll et al., 1992);
- meet instructional reading needs;
- access culturally responsive instructional materials.

Theoretical framework

Building inclusive classroom communities with dialogic pedagogy can scaffold language for ELs. DP is one of the five key areas of culturally responsive teaching (NAYEC, Steed & Price, 2016). A DP literature review (Piazza et al., 2015) reports that "[w]hen students engage in dialogue, particularly around texts and life experiences, they use new language, connect the known to the unknown, and expand their worldviews" (p.8). Dialogic classrooms provide opportunities for students to engage with each other, with texts, and the world around them.

Dialogic pedagogy as a theoretical framework has roots in Bakhtin's (1981) findings: "Emergent literacy develops during dialogic reading through a child's reciting of their interactions by heart and through retelling of the interactions 'in one's own words'" (p. 341). Bakhtin (1981) believed meaning is constructed through conversation between people and between readers and texts. Grounded in social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 2011), which posits that students experience and understand what they learn through frameworks of language and culture, dialogic practice centers students as co-constructors of meaning who understand texts they read and their world experiences through different perspectives. Prioritizing respectful discourse and empathy for one another's perspectives and experiences is integral to inclusive, diverse classrooms. In dialogic literacy instruction, there is no "right answer" or "ready-made truth" (Bakhtin, 1981); rather, learners search for meaning collectively through conversational interactions and academic oral language. Students and teachers share responsibility in co-constructing knowledge through discussion which results in multiple interpretations of meaning from texts and "with authors", rooted in Rosenblatt's Transactional Reading Theory (1993).

Dialogic literacy pedagogy

Dialogic pedagogy is a powerful approach during daily routines in whole group and small group literacy instruction, and during intensive, one-to-one instruction to develop ELs' emergent literacy skills (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023) across curricular content and in teaching English to newcomers. ELs often demonstrate difficulties with emergent literacy skills at the start of primary grades compared to Native English Speaking (NS) peers (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023). Research shows effective literacy instruction for NS and ELs necessitates attention towards students' oral language proficiency as it relates to what students are expected to read and how they are to engage during classroom activities (Jaekel, Jaekel, Fincher, & Brown, 2022; Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023). Research emphasizes that DP, as a means of social interaction in reading, is essential (Piazza et al., 2015) and can disrupt narrow or singular definitions of meaning as well as address disparities in reading achievement (Kay, 2018). A 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment reported that 34% of eighth-grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading, highlighting disparities based on socioeconomic status, race, and disability (NCES, 2019). A dialogic literacy-centered classroom supports oral language proficiency and provides opportunities for students to engage in learning talk and talk with texts to create intentional, compassionate student-teacher relationships (Rosenblatt, 1993).

Effective implementation of dialogic pedagogy can help English learners to

- build language and vocabulary, increasing rate of language development (Kay, 2018),
- establish emergent oral language and early literacy skills,
- enhance knowledge and concepts of print,
- move beyond comprehension tasks of recall,
- deepen understanding of texts and relate to texts on a personal level.

Models of dialogic pedagogy

A dialogic teaching model (Alexander, 2017) introduces five principles to embed in instruction based on how "talk" is shaped by cultural and social perspectives. Classroom contexts vary in linguistic repertoires, cultural norms, and learning goals; there is a range of talk-based pedagogical skills and strategies.

According to Alexander (2017), repertoires in dialogic teaching framework include interactive talk, everyday life, teaching talk, learning talk, questioning, and extending to support ELs' language acquisition. The five principles in which DP can flourish in classroom culture are:

- Collective—Teachers and students address learning tasks together, as a group.
- Reciprocal—Teachers and students listen to each other, share ideas, and consider multiple viewpoints.
- Supportive—Students articulate ideas freely.
- Cumulative—Teachers and students build on their own and each other's ideas, to form them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry.
- Purposeful—Teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with educational goals, content, and language objectives.

These five principles offer great value in setting intentions for dialogic teaching and in guiding ongoing reflection of praxis. Supportive principle states students articulate ideas freely; without fear of embarrassment over "incorrect" answers, students can begin to help each other reach common understandings and challenge their beliefs in shared meaning-making interactions.

Another DP model, PEER, can encourage further dialogue at a high level through evaluation and expansion measures. As teachers move beyond validating responses in dialogue (to, for example, Yes/No questions) to encouraging additional thoughts, opinions, and connections to make meaning, higher level engagement occurs. More opportunities for oral language production also involve authentic questioning in which students ask questions and connect to personal experiences in the practice of uptake as well as pursue further inquiry.

PEER Strategy is an interactive reading strategy with the following principles:

- Prompting—Prompt the student to label objects in a book/text and talk about the text/story.
- Evaluating—Evaluate the students' responses at a high level.
- Expanding—Expand the students' language skills (oral and written) by repeating and adding on.
- Repeating—Encourage the student to repeat their language or "talk" (e.g. questioning, expanding).

As ELs become familiar with a text, the teacher uses higher level prompting to encourage students to go beyond labeling objects in the pictures to talking about what is happening and making connections. Evaluating at a high-level means moving beyond an affirming response (e.g. "Interesting! Great!") to an incorporating response via elaboration, commentary, or a follow-up question (e.g. "Can you say more about that? Why do you think that? How do you know?"). Expanding means repeating learners' responses and adding on, which can lead to positive effects on oral receptive and expressive language (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023).

CROWD is another model that can inform strategies to use in teaching the talk with texts. Specific prompts teachers can use in reading books with learners are:

- Completion—Learners complete a sentence (e.g. rhymes; repetitive phrases).
- Recall—Say in their own words what has happened in the text or talk about a story that's familiar and relate to relevant events.
- Open-ended—Notice and talk about details in comprehension.
- Wh- questions—What, when, where, why, and how questions are used frequently.
- Distancing—Students reflect on their own experiences, bridging their home culture to the text and real world.

Dialogic practices in the classroom

Read-alouds in literacy instruction provide ample opportunity to apply the prompting model (e.g. CROWD). The distancing prompt contextualizes what students learn or read to make meaning through lived experiences and schema, including children's linguistic repertoires, through talk. Code-switching (i.e. using dual languages in conversations) engages learners and builds confidence in oral language proficiency. Rereading the same text for different purposes and using dialogue to make meaning, supports literacy and language growth. For example, an emergent reader text, *Dot Likes to Dig* by Laura Appleton-Smith, demonstrates what recall prompts might look like in reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities to increase linguistic responsiveness. For example, texts with repetitive phrases or words builds vocabulary and confidence in oral reading. Completion prompts in interactive talk and writing scaffold students' comprehension skills, as in summarizing. Students can recall the plot points or ideas in a story interactively, through talk, and transfer verbal recall to writing to aid comprehension. Open-ended questions allow students to make connections to text and deepen comprehension, and consistent use of 'Wh' questions supports meaning-making. Example questions to guide students' talk, as modeled by teachers are *"What is Dot up to in the story? What three things does Dot take from the bathroom to bury? What is the problem in the story? Why do they think Dan is not mad even after all the mischief Dot gets into? How might you feel if you were Dan?"*

The PEER strategy also applies in read-alouds and close reads with the same text (e.g. Dot Likes to Dig) through teacher modeling. First, teachers can model how to look at the cover and infer what the book is about. Using labeling in a picture walk, teachers can model talk: *"Let's look for clues on the book cover to help us infer what this book is about. When we infer, we use clues in the book and what we already know to figure something out. The title of the book is Dot Likes to Dig and because I see Dot pictured on a dirt pile outside with lots of things sticking out of it, I think this story is going to be about Dot getting into mischief. The title is Dot Likes to Dig so I think the mischief involves digging."* Students can practice re-reading collaboratively for fluency practice. During a close read and prompting to encourage talk about the text, teachers can evaluate responses at a high level and expand language by adding on to students' ideas.

Text-based questions for differentiated instruction (i.e. repeating language) aid deeper thinking and recall. Interactive writing in small groups involves students contributing to a piece of writing led by the teacher. Oral language supports interactive writing with positive effects on early literacy development of concepts of print, phonological awareness (i.e. counting out words or segmenting words), phonemic awareness (i.e. listening for individual sounds of words), word reading, fluency with rereads, letter formation, written words and spelling application, application of general knowledge or content knowledge (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023). Intentional dialogue in interactive writing includes these ten steps:

1. Launch with a purpose and understanding of an audience;
2. Negotiate the message, or co-construct writing a piece with students' input and ideas;
3. Rehearse the message, piece by piece;
4. Count the words in the writing piece;
5. Discuss with students where to start writing on the page;
6. Share in writing, as students take turns writing letters, words, or phrases as appropriate with different colors for assessment purposes;
7. Practice writing on paper or online (e.g. whiteboard, Google Jam board);
8. Scaffold and re-teach grammatical, phonological, or vocabulary concepts as appropriate;
9. Read and reread to make sense of writing;
10. Illustrate and share with the audience.

Another dialogic strategy is a penny debate, or structured, cooperative discussions which apply information from texts to claim a stance (e.g. agree or disagree) with a statement provided by the teacher on a relevant topic. Content knowledge is scaffolded to participate orally in the debate. This activity centers dialogue as each participant receives two pennies; students give a penny each time they speak. All students share twice. Using texts for evidence, students discuss their positions before the debate begins. The structure of this format provides space for practicing uptake, as teachers and peers ask expanding questions. Students must listen to peers' comments during the debate to respond to peers.

An intentional dialogic strategy with texts means that both teachers and students ask authentic questions through reader-author dialogue. As students converse with authors and peers, evaluate author's context, and recognize cultural or political identity of author(s), they learn to ask questions to scaffold dialogue with the "author persona." Questions to guide classroom conversations are "Who is the author? Where and when was this text written? What else was happening there at the time? For what purpose was this text written? For what audience? What is known about author's political stance(s)? What power or privilege do/did they have or want to maintain? How do I perceive this author's persona? Would they be my friend, foe, or neither? Why?"

Conclusion

Helping ELs grow through intentional classroom conversations involves setting goals as practitioners. Practitioners identify Els' linguistic challenges to implement effective and culturally responsive strategies for increased engagement in literacy learning. Additionally, practitioners can modify and scaffold dialogic instruction to build on ELs' funds of knowledge or "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133).

Another goal is to explore and apply digital adaptations of dialogic activities in a collaborative and multimodal approach (e.g. Padlet). Lastly, practitioners can select and adapt multicultural children's literature in teaching the talk with texts. Dialogic learning strategies in the classroom to strengthen oral language competencies and early literacy skills include daily dialogic routines, "penny debates" focused on cooperation, PEER Strategy and PROMPTS in teaching the talk with texts or children's literature, interactive read-alouds, interactive writing through talk, asking authentic questions in reader-author dialogue; and intentional use of multimodal and digital learning tools. Creating culturally brave and engaged dialogic communities involves increasing linguistic responsiveness and responding to the digital nativism of learners to equip educators with new tools for standards-based literacy instruction.

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An educator's reflection on asset-based language following the WAESOL conference

LAUREN BEVEN

Summary: This is a reflection on the keynote speech by Dr. Denise Furlong at the WAESOL Conference in 2023, with a focus on shifting towards more asset-based language in our field. The author also presents the case for a new asset-based term to replace a deficit-based term commonly used when describing language learners.

Keywords: WAESOL, asset-based language, linguistic isolation

Since my introduction into the English language learning field in 2002, I have seen various terms be introduced, widely used, and go out of use. For instance, when I began teaching English language, *ESL, EFL*, and *TESL* were widely used. We talked about students and teachers. When I completed my master's degree in the field a decade later, *ESOL* and *TESOL* were most popular. At that time, we talked about learners and teachers/facilitators. And just over a decade later, this year's WAESOL conference featured a key-note speech where the terms *Multilingual Learner* (ML) and *Multilingual Language Learner* (MLL) were widespread.

The 2023 WAESOL Conference featured a key-note speech by Dr. Denise Furlong. In her speech, Dr. Furlong made the case for asset-based language in our field. Certain terms were more familiar to me, such as ML/MLL. It was my first time learning the term *Learners with Educational Differences* (LED). Personally, I am relieved to have an alternative to the deficit-based *SLIFE/SIFE* terms which describe students with an interrupted and/or limited formal education. When I document information about a learner, I like to carefully consider the terms that I am using to describe the learner. If the terms are widely understood to other educators but could be construed as negative or critical to the learners themselves, I feel strongly that I should reconsider how I document that information. Even if a term is the "industry standard", its impact can be detrimental and far-reaching.

In the spirit of reflection, I would like to address a particular term which is widely used in English language programs and beyond. The term in question is "linguistic isolation". National and state governments collect data on individuals who are "linguistically isolated", and the presence of "linguistic isolation" has been linked in research to various negative outcomes, including higher mortality and lower socio-economic status. A 2019 report from the Oregon Health Authority defines the term as follows: "A linguistically-isolated household is one in which no member at or above 14 years old speaks English proficiently." The history of this term is described in Drake's 2014 article as follows: "The term linguistic isolation originated in the 1980 U.S. Census in response to the growing need to communicate with individuals who were being supported by legislation..." (Siegel, Martin, & Bruno, 2001, p. 2-3).

In summary, the original use of "linguistic isolation" was in reference to the individuals who were harder to communicate with in English during government data collection, and the term is still in use in recent years.

"Linguistic isolation" is a term which has always been problematic for me as an educator in our field, and I would like to

The cover of the WAESOL Conference program October 2023 illustrate why this term is problematic in three ways. First, learners are often described by their instructors as "linguistically isolated" when they speak their native language at home and their English proficiency is in the beginner/intermediate range. The term holds negative connotations because it implies that the choice to speak one's native language at home with family members is an impediment to more advanced English proficiency.

Second, the use of the word "isolation" indicates a lack of participation and involvement in a surrounding community. This implies that the community is English-speaking. However, this is often not the case for learners. They may have extended family, friends, neighbors, business owners, instructors, doctors, and others in their surrounding community who also share proficiency in the learner's native language and use that language in interactions with the learner.

Third, instructors often encourage their "linguistically-isolated" learners to practice more English at home with their family in order to meet their English language goals. This encouragement may be well-intended, but it is often undesirable, impractical, and counter-productive for learners to use English in their daily home life. I have worked with countless adult learners who are told by their instructors to speak more English at home, but there are many reasons why the family continues to use their native language at home. For instance, many of my adult learners have school-age children who insist that the family use their native language exclusively at home because that is a core part of their identity.

Essentially, the term "linguistic isolation" is deficit-based. In MacSwan's 2020 article, the author identifies the need for an asset-based approach regarding ML's home language use: "Rather than seeing children's home language as a deficit, asset-based pedagogies see it as a critical resource to be affirmed, valued, and fully utilized as part of a child's school-based learning experience" (p. 28).

In this vein, I would like to propose an asset-based term which conveys the positive action of choosing to speak a language at home. With this choice, an individual is keeping a vital lifeline to a culture, identity, and history. In place of "linguistic isolation", I propose the terms "linguistic conservation" and "linguistically conserved". I believe that these terms are asset-based and empowering.

The continuous shift towards asset-based language can be challenging, and there are certainly times when it is not possible to adopt the new terms quickly. However, as educators in our field, we can appreciate the unique power and adaptability of the English language. The terms may change, and our field is always moving towards more inclusive, asset-based language. In the spirit of Dr. Furlong's keynote speech, I hope that educators in our field will consider retiring the term "linguistic isolation" and adopting the asset-based term "linguistic conservation" to describe an incredibly powerful action to conserve the use of one's language at home.

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A conference reflection: Children as peacemakers in divided societies

ANDREA RAKUSHIN LEE AND AMINA SURKOVIC

Summary: The authors of this article will share their reflections on the conference Children as Peacemakers in Divided Societies in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina which focused on intercultural and peace education with a special focus on the education of children. Key sessions highlighted language-focused discussions and the role of virtual intercultural exchanges in language classrooms.

Keywords: language-focused discussions, virtual intercultural exchanges, global challenges and conflicts, fostering understanding, meaningful intercultural opportunities

Introduction

The *Children as Peacemakers in Divided Societies* conference held over several days in October was an enlightening experience that skillfully combined academic lectures and workshops. The workshops, which offered a space for interactive learning and skill development, were a focal point for schoolteachers and pre-service teachers. The chosen venue was the historic “Hotel Holiday,” which played a crucial role in housing foreign journalists during the Bosnian War (1992-1995). The setting, which was along the notorious sniper alley where many innocent lives were lost, provided a striking backdrop for talks about tolerance and peace.

The primary conference themes centered on intercultural education and peace education. According to the conference website, this “intersectional approach becomes all the more vital at a time when intolerance and challenges to democratic principles, as well as ongoing wars worldwide, threaten to unravel the fabric of societies everywhere” (Children as Peacemakers in Divided Societies: Educational Approaches, 2023, para. 1). Conference sessions also highlighted other relevant themes including multicultural education, human rights education, citizenship education, education for democracy and global education (Children as Peacemakers in Divided Societies, 2023).

The conference, held amid the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, provided a thorough exploration of a variety of themes, including the particular difficulties posed by the war as well as more general problems in education. Notably, because of the events on October 7 some of the participants from Israel and Palestine were not able to attend, underscoring the complex realities in a region marked by historical tensions and armed conflicts for more than 75 years.

The conference continued discourse on the dynamics of teachers’ beliefs about education and experiences of contact between groups in conflict in culturally responsive teaching practices. Discussions extended to educational work with refugee students, examining the intricacies of fostering meaningful connections, but also emphasizing the need for innovative approaches to support refugee students in their educational journeys.

The cover of the conference program October 2023

The authors’ reflections

The authors of this article will share their insights from the conference. Andrea is an assistant professor of education from the United States and lived in South Korea for 11 years. She worked with North Korean refugees there. Amina is currently a Project Coordinator at the Jesuit Refugee Service in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she has dedicated the past five years to the field of human migration, both forced and voluntary. In addition to her role in migration, she contributes part-time to the Education Sector at the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, highlighting her commitment to both humanitarian efforts and educational initiatives.

Insights from Andrea:

During the conference, I was intrigued by several sessions that centered on the role of virtual intercultural exchanges in education including *Intercultural Competence: Simulations in Virtual World, Global Learning Experience: Developing Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Exchange,* and *Peace Education through Virtual Exchange*. Opportunities for intercultural exchanges in language classrooms provide many valuable benefits for our students. It can be an opportunity for students to learn about other cultures in a personal and meaningful way, engage in intercultural dialogue, improve language skills, and broaden their understanding of the world. I want to provide valuable opportunities for my students to engage in face-to-face intercultural exchanges, but unfortunately, many of them do not have the time or money. As project coordinator, I am exploring ways to implement these types of virtual exchanges thus tying the curriculum and activities into the courses I am teaching. I also reflected on my own experiences living in South Korea for 11 years and teaching English to North Korean refugees. Americans are portrayed as the primary enemy in the North Korean media and education system. In the United States, we also view North Korea as an enemy and focus on its nuclear weapons and the Kim regime. However, North Korean people share many similarities with people around the world, and it is important to humanize their experiences. I will never forget the meaningful interactions I had with the North Korean refugees I worked with. It is challenging for me to imagine perceiving these kind-hearted individuals as my enemies. I learned so much about resilience, hope, and fortitude from them. These small but invaluable intercultural exchanges are critical in bridging divides and learning about our differences and the many similarities that bring us together.

Insights from Amina:

I benefited significantly from the contribution made by Kasumagić-Kafedžić and Clarke-Habibi (2023) who explored the connection between theory and practice in peace education in the Bosnian setting (2023). Their work sheds light on how the theoretical aspects of peace education are applied in practical settings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, the conference explored the subtleties of self-image, motivation, and emotional intelligence while delving into the experiences of Arab teachers in the context of special education. Examining future teachers’ depictions of cultural diversity both before and after taking intercultural education courses provided insights into the program’s capacity for transformation. According to the presenters, future educators are better able to recognize the subtle differences across cultures after completing intercultural education courses. As a result of their enhanced understanding of cultural customs, values, and beliefs, they became more sensitive when engaging with others from different backgrounds. Being exposed to a variety of viewpoints and experiences resulted in a deeper and more nuanced knowledge of cultural differences. In the Arab education system in northern Israel, teachers’ conflict resolution techniques, emotional intelligence, and empathy have come to light as crucial factors in creating inclusive and peaceful learning environments. The importance of mentor training in educating diverse university students to serve as mentors and promote positive educational experiences was emphasized, along with its role as a tool for social transformation.

In the session *Creating a Safe Space for Student Sharing in a Country in Conflict* by Jen Sundick and Manal Yazbak Abu Ahmad, the presenters described a course that was set up to bring together students from different colleges in Israel who come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The course was called ‘Exploring Cultures through Literature in English.’ The students were pre-service English teachers who came from religious backgrounds including Jews, Muslims, Druze, Bedouins, and Christians, as well as secular backgrounds. The students participate in a 1-year online course that includes one or two face-to-face classes with students working in small groups. Many of the benefits as well as challenges of this project were discussed. Fostering meaningful intercultural dialogue, especially between groups that have experienced division, is critical in promoting progress and understanding. Participants engaged in these discussions, gaining valuable insights and contributing to the collective effort of promoting peace, diversity, and education on a global scale.

Further resources to explore

The conference was co-sponsored by the War Childhood Museum (WCM), an institution that plays a crucial role in shedding light on the profound experiences of children affected by armed conflicts. Many of us who work as language educators have had the honor of working with refugee populations, but we might not have the specialized training necessary to completely understand the extent of trauma these people have experienced. Furthermore, there may not be as many resources available to help these students’ social and academic development and to foster resilience. In light of this, we advise visiting the War Childhood Museum’s website and getting involved with the programs they have put in place to promote a deeper understanding of the experiences of kids during times of conflict. The Museum is an invaluable resource that offers educators perspectives, tools, and insights that can improve their capacity to support and relate to students whose early years have been impacted by war. It is interesting to note that the museum has refined its terminology, referring to the experience as “childhood marked by war” instead of “childhood in war.” This revision reflects a wider perspective, recognizing that individuals who have contributed to the museum collection, for example, may have been uprooted at birth and experienced a childhood shaped by war, even in cases where they were not directly involved in the fighting. This level of linguistic precision is essential to capturing the complexity of these experiences. Stressing that the Museum’s scope goes beyond this particular temporal and spatial framework is crucial. Although the museum’s initial research was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has since extended to 17 other conflict and post-conflict areas so far. The War Childhood Museum’s dedication to becoming a worldwide hub for studying and presenting the shared experience of childhood shaped by conflict is reflected in this international expansion. Lastly, the War Childhood Museum has achieved recognition on a global level as the winner of the esteemed Council of Europe Museum Prize. This award recognizes the museum’s dedication to quality work and its important role in enhancing the cultural and educational environment.

The International Association for Intercultural Education *will be hosting another conference in Chemnitz, Germany on 26-28 March 2024 with presentation strands related to language. Although the conference does not focus explicitly on language education, there are presentation strands related to language.*

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A book review of

Peercy, M. M., Tigert, J. M., & Fredricks, D. E. (2023). *Core practices for teaching multilingual students: Humanizing pedagogies for equity*. Teachers College Press.

A must-have resource to disrupt inequities for multilingual learners

MARJETA BEJDO

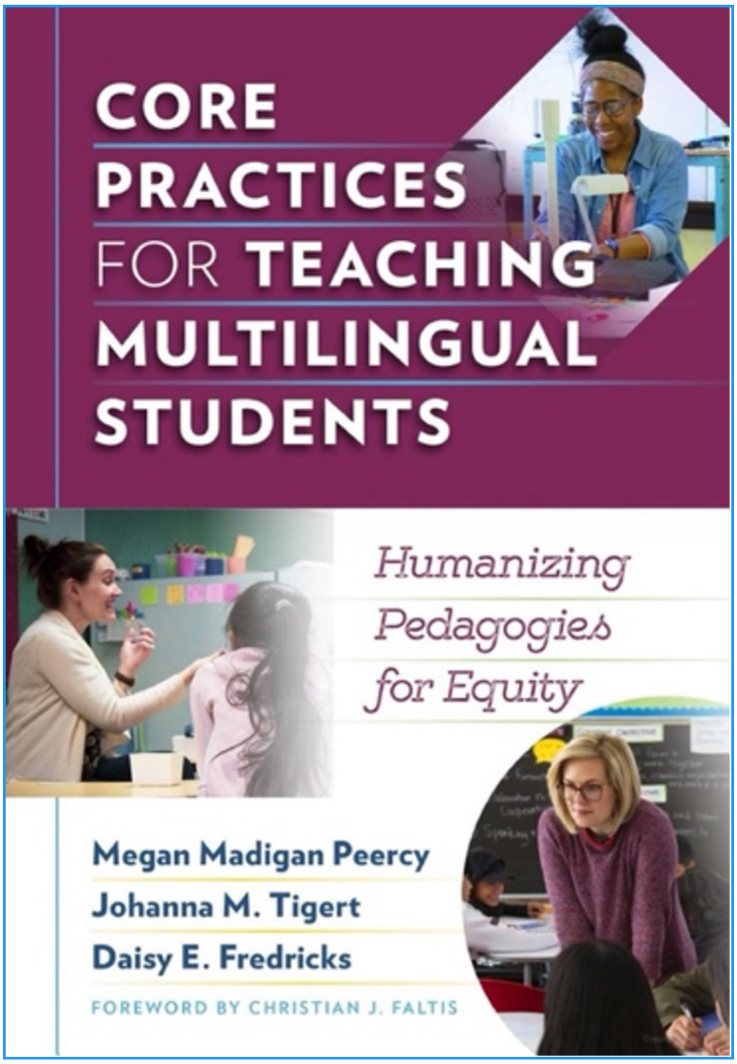
Summary: This resource provides teachers with six core practices for teaching multilingual students. It provides real classroom examples of how each core practice looks like and it also provides tools for teachers to analyze their lessons for the six core practices. This book intends to humanize pedagogy, disrupt inequity for multilingual students and emphasizes the importance of collaboration and reflection in teaching to promote equity.

Keywords: multilingual students, core practices, humanizing pedagogy, equity, collaboration, reflection

The number of multilingual students is increasing in U.S. classrooms (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Ottow, 2019), yet classroom teachers often feel unprepared and unsupported to serve these students (Peercy et al., 2023). Teachers have questions about how to humanize their practice and best support multilingual students in their classrooms. From my experience, humanizing pedagogy manifests when multilingual students are empowered by and carry their linguistic and cultural wealth into their learning spaces. Teachers can work to achieve more humanistic pedagogy by creating classroom environments in which multilingual learners feel safe, seen, understood, supported, and valued for who they are. A review of *Core practices for teaching multilingual students: Humanizing pedagogies for equity* provides in-service and pre-service teachers with core practices for teaching multilingual students.

This book focuses on how classroom teachers can humanize pedagogy for multilingual students. The principles that the authors use to define humanizing pedagogy include:

- knowing students as whole human beings,
- valuing the assets and resources they bring into the classroom,
- building mutually caring, trusting relationships between teachers and students,
- seeing students as active participants in their learning,
- drawing on students' experiences and knowledge,
- providing instruction that is rigorous and meaningful and recognizes their experiences, and
- disrupting traditional power dynamics in schools and classrooms.



The six core practices outlined in the text correspond to classroom practices which can help teachers achieve a more humanized pedagogy. They are:

1. **Knowing students:** Learn about their home language, English language background and literacy, prior schooling, their interests, their experiences in their homes and their communities;
2. **Building a positive learning environment**: Set high expectations, clear and consistent routines, use culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining pedagogy, build trusting relationships and supporting students' social-emotional skills;
3. **Content and language instruction**: Use comprehensive input, scaffolding, differentiation and integrated content and language objectives;
4. **Language and literacy development**: Promote vocabulary development, use students' home language as a resource, engage students in receptive and expressive language use, adapt instruction to students' language development needs;
5. **Assessment**: Design and use formal and informal assessments for language and content, interpret the results of standardized tests, include English language proficiency tests, differentiate formal and informal assessments in response to students' language development and content knowledge;
6. **Relationship and advocacy**: Collaborate with colleagues, make meaningful connections with families, engage in advocacy with a variety of stakeholders, practice teacher self-care.

The six core practices for teaching multilingual students are identified from work and collaboration that the authors have done over several years with several ESOL teachers. Those teachers have contributed to this work by sharing their experiences as they were working through their questions, challenges, and successes about instructing multilingual students. Throughout the book, stories from the classrooms of those ESOL teachers bring to life what the six core practices for teaching multilinguals look like in real-world classrooms.

I found this book to be a great resource and highly recommend it for educators at every level. As a classroom teacher, I found the examples from the field shared in this book to be windows into other classrooms. I also found them reassuring of my own teaching practices. For example, in the second chapter of this book, the authors endorse the practice of building classrooms that are linguistically and culturally responsive, which is an important part of my pedagogy. One of the examples the authors provide is "allowing students to use all of their languages" (p. 30). I learn key words in the languages of my multilingual students and teach greetings in those languages to my class with the intention of helping my multilingual students feel that our classroom is a safe place for them to use their language(s). My multilingual students are encouraged to use their home language(s) in our class. It is heartwarming to see my monolingual English-speaking students try and say "hello" to their multilingual peers in their home languages. The authors also discuss the importance of collaborating with colleagues as another way to advocate for multilingual learners. As a classroom teacher, I value collaboration with my school's English language development teacher. We coordinate small group instruction during literacy and math rotations, and, despite common planning time constraints, we make time to meet and collaborate even if that often means using personal time to do so.

Teaching can be isolating, and most teachers do not have the opportunity to observe other competent teachers in action, but the stories from the classrooms in this book provide teachers with concrete examples of what effective teaching practices for multilinguals look like in practice. My understanding of humanizing pedagogy for multilingual students from reading this book suggests that it directly addresses inequity and injustice past and present for multilingual students; this book supports teachers by building their understanding of how to do just that. In my opinion, in-service and pre-service teachers alike would benefit from being familiar with the six core practices identified in this text. I believe that all teachers need to try to incorporate these practices into their classrooms to ensure equity for multilingual students. This book would be a valuable addition to the libraries of educators from early childhood to higher education.

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Leveraging ChatGPT for adult ESL education

REBECCA ELLER-MOLITAS

Summary: This resource review explores the integration of ChatGPT, an AI tool, in adult ESL education. It highlights ChatGPT's 24/7 availability, support for educators in lesson planning, and its ability to create real-life scenarios for effective language learning. The review emphasizes ChatGPT's role as a supplement to traditional teaching methods, enhancing the learning experience while acknowledging its limitations, such as the inability to fully grasp cultural nuances.

Keywords: ChatGPT, adult ESL education, AI in teaching, language learning, lesson planning, real-life scenarios, educational technology, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), pedagogical tools

Introduction

In the dynamic world of adult English language education, instructors are constantly seeking innovative ways to enhance teaching and learning experiences while still maintaining some semblance of work/life balance. Enter ChatGPT, a groundbreaking AI tool that promises to revolutionize the way we approach language teaching. ChatGPT 3.5 is currently available to use at no cost. ChatGPT 4 (also called ChatGPT Plus) is priced at $20/month at the time of writing. This resource review delves into how ChatGPT serves as a powerful ally for educators, focusing on three key areas: support for instructors in lesson planning and activity design, real-life scenario generation with flexible learning materials, and 24/7 availability and consistency. But first, let's take a moment to understand ChatGPT and how it works.

ChatGPT, a Large Language Model, uses a complex algorithm to generate language responses that are coherent and contextually appropriate. Essentially, ChatGPT learns from a vast array of data, including books, articles, and websites. This allows it to predict word order and construct sentences in a manner that closely mimics human speech. This AI model doesn't 'understand' language in the human sense but rather recognizes and replicates patterns in the data it has been trained on – basically, it plays a high-stakes game of fill-in-the-blank.

For ESL teachers, understanding ChatGPT's foundational mechanism is crucial. It's not just a static database of information but a dynamic tool that generates language based on the input it receives. While it can converse in several languages (with varying degrees of fluency), its proficiency in English, backed by extensive training data, is where it truly shines. Teachers should note, however, that like any AI technology, it functions best under the guidance of an educator who can direct its use effectively and ensure that its output aligns with pedagogical goals and enhances the learning experience.

It's important to be aware that ChatGPT is completely unstructured in terms of output requests. To receive information, an educator needs to input a prompt or question. A specific query is much more likely to elicit a useful response. For example, the prompt Identify target vocabulary and provide me with an example dialogue tailored to high-beginning adult English language learners visiting a doctor's office during flu season. will garner a more useful response than a prompt such as Give me a lesson plan on going to the doctor's office.

Support for instructors in lesson planning and activity design

ChatGPT acts as a valuable assistant for instructors, easing the process of lesson preparation and designing classroom activities. Under your guidance, this tool can craft teaching materials suitable for all skill levels, from beginners to advanced students. By tailoring these materials to specific educational needs, ChatGPT streamlines lesson planning. It also enhances the engagement and effectiveness of classroom activities. For example, when tackling complex subjects like consumer economics, ChatGPT can develop a comprehensive lesson plan. This plan includes a variety of activities such as reading, writing exercises, dialogues, and math problems, all aligned with CCRS, ELPS, or even IELCE competencies. ChatGPT's innovative method of content creation offers fresh teaching strategies that align well with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), providing a diverse range of instructional techniques to accommodate all learners. These strategies cater to different learning styles, making lessons more interactive and enriching the learning experience for students.

When creating prompts for activity design, I prefer to follow a specific format so that ChatGPT can meet my needs quickly and thoroughly. I've found the following prompt template (Figure 1) effective:

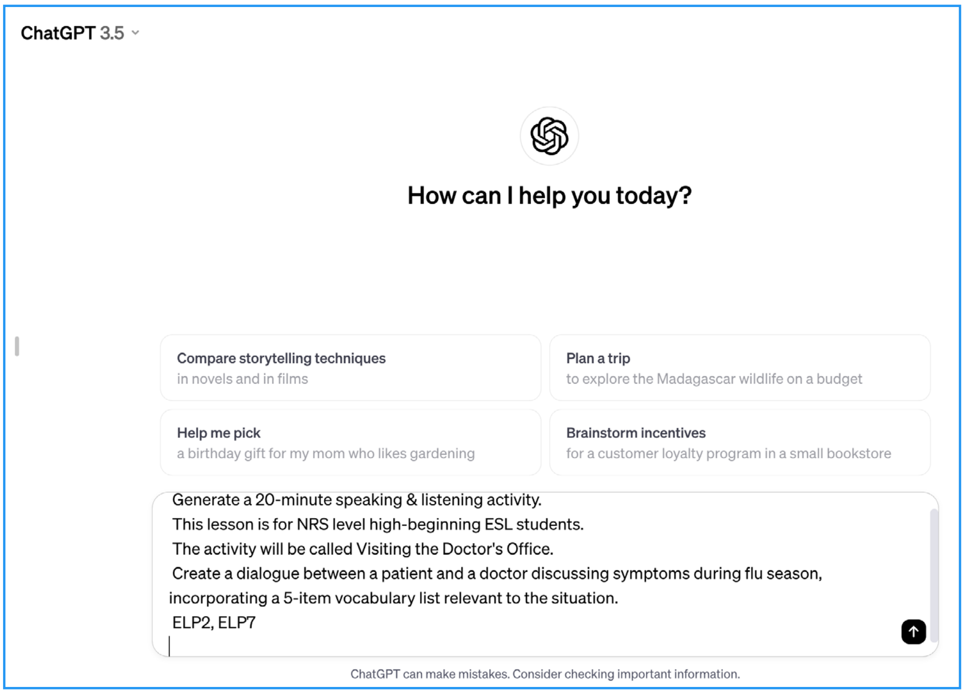
When: Generate a 20-minute speaking & listening activity.

Who: This lesson is for NRS level high-beginning ESL students.

What: The activity will be called Visiting the Doctor's Office.

How: Create a dialogue between a patient and a doctor discussing symptoms during flu season, incorporating a 5-item vocabulary list relevant to the situation.

Standards: ELP2, ELP7

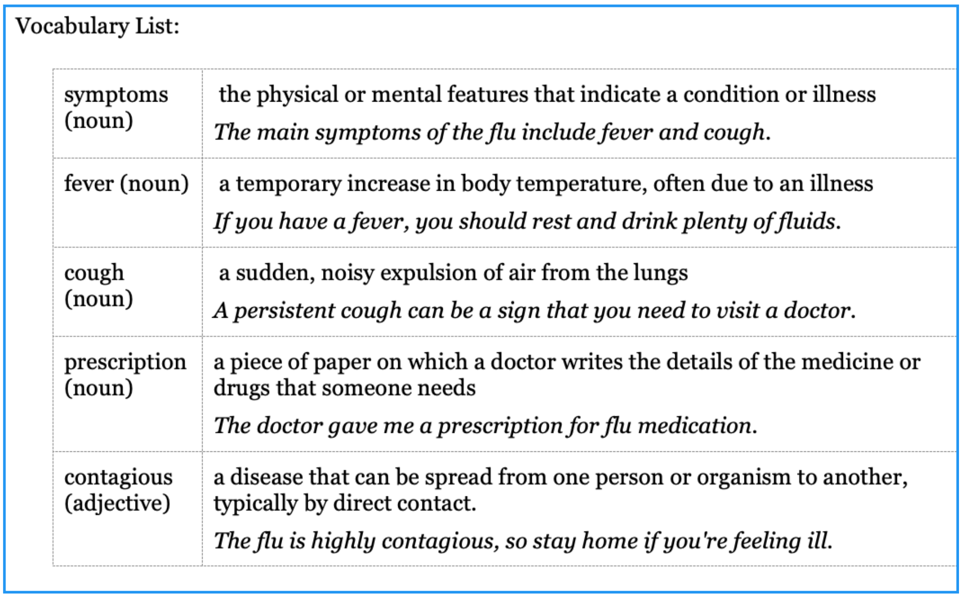


Generate a 20-minute speaking & listening activity.
This lesson is for NRS level high-beginning ESL students.
The activity will be called Visiting the Doctor's Office.
Create a dialogue between a patient and a doctor discussing symptoms during flu season, incorporating a 5-item vocabulary list relevant to the situation.
ELP2, ELP7

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Consider checking important information.

Figure 1: Example ChatGPT prompt

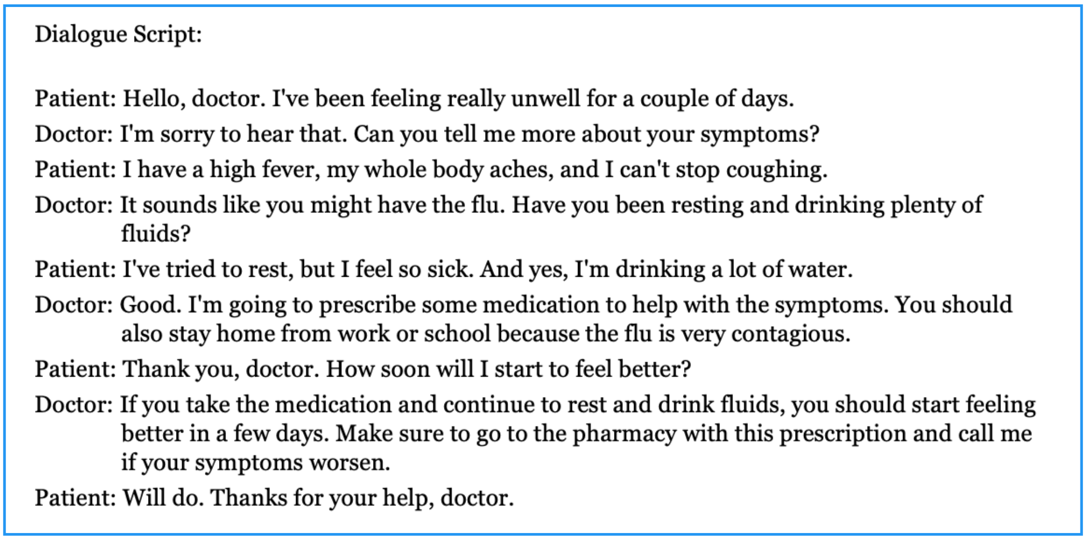
This prompt directs ChatGPT to produce an activity that is manageable yet challenging for high-beginners, incorporating practical vocabulary and an everyday scenario that encourages students to speak and listen actively. Based on the prompt, ChatGPT created the vocabulary list and sample dialogue below (Figures 2 and 3).



Vocabulary List:

symptoms (noun)	the physical or mental features that indicate a condition or illness *The main symptoms of the flu include fever and cough.*
fever (noun)	a temporary increase in body temperature, often due to an illness *If you have a fever, you should rest and drink plenty of fluids.*
cough (noun)	a sudden, noisy expulsion of air from the lungs *A persistent cough can be a sign that you need to visit a doctor.*
prescription (noun)	a piece of paper on which a doctor writes the details of the medicine or drugs that someone needs *The doctor gave me a prescription for flu medication.*
contagious (adjective)	a disease that can be spread from one person or organism to another, typically by direct contact. *The flu is highly contagious, so stay home if you're feeling ill.*

Figure 2: Vocabulary list generated by ChatGPT



Dialogue Script:

Patient: Hello, doctor. I've been feeling really unwell for a couple of days.
Doctor: I'm sorry to hear that. Can you tell me more about your symptoms?
Patient: I have a high fever, my whole body aches, and I can't stop coughing.
Doctor: It sounds like you might have the flu. Have you been resting and drinking plenty of fluids?
Patient: I've tried to rest, but I feel so sick. And yes, I'm drinking a lot of water.
Doctor: Good. I'm going to prescribe some medication to help with the symptoms. You should also stay home from work or school because the flu is very contagious.
Patient: Thank you, doctor. How soon will I start to feel better?
Doctor: If you take the medication and continue to rest and drink fluids, you should start feeling better in a few days. Make sure to go to the pharmacy with this prescription and call me if your symptoms worsen.
Patient: Will do. Thanks for your help, doctor.

Figure 3: Dialogue scritpt generated by ChatGPT

This is a good start to a dialogue activity for a medical visit. However, minor revisions are necessary – including to the definitions of the vocabulary words. Depending on context, some words used in the definitions are likely above level for this student population. The goal of using ChatGPT to craft an activity is to save educators' time and precious energy. Queries are not likely to produce a perfect response, but when a prompt is constructed carefully, ChatGPT should produce something which can be quickly tailored to serve learners' needs.

Real-life scenario generation and diverse educational resources

ChatGPT stands out in developing real-life scenarios for student role-play activities, such as ordering food or asking for directions. This makes language lessons more applicable and approachable, encouraging students to practice English in everyday contexts. For teachers, ChatGPT is a valuable ally, offering an array of educational content including short stories, news articles, and even song lyrics. This diversity revitalizes teaching and helps maintain student interest and participation. Additionally, ChatGPT aids in creating assessments and quizzes that align with these scenarios and help teachers evaluate student progress or tailor future lessons to address learning gaps.

Acknowledging the cons is essential for a balanced review of ChatGPT's use in adult ESL education. One significant concern is that ChatGPT cannot fully grasp cultural nuances and sensitivities like human teachers do. For example, explaining colloquial expressions is a challenge; the expression pull someone's leg is common in English, whereas a Spanish equivalent would be to pull someone's hair. ChatGPT can translate these words effectively, but it can't understand the cultural context in which the language will be used, so it may provide incorrect guidance. This can lead to misunderstandings. There's also a risk that students might rely too much on AI, which could affect their critical thinking skills. Many wonder if teachers could also come to rely too heavily on the tool, but because output is directly tied to the quality of an educator's inquiries, that risk is minimized. Finally, ChatGPT sometimes provides inaccurate or inappropriate responses. As an example, when asked to produce an image of employees in the workplace, it sometimes defaults to white males dressed for office work. Additionally, when asked to cite its sources, it may reference works that do not exist. This means teachers need to check its content carefully before using it in class. These points underline ChatGPT's role as a supportive tool, not a replacement for trained educators in language teaching.

24/7 availability and consistency

ChatGPT's always-on availability is a game-changer in education. It acts as a reliable support system, responding to student inquiries and aiding language practice at any hour of the day or night. This constant availability is a significant advantage for adult learners with varied schedules. For teachers, it means a reduced workload after class hours. Thus, we can focus more on lesson planning and less on addressing out-of-class questions and last-minute homework panic queries. With ChatGPT's support, educators can rest assured that students have access to continuous learning support without the need for extended instructor office hours.

In conclusion, ChatGPT has emerged as a versatile and invaluable tool for adult English language instructors. Its round-the-clock availability ensures consistent support for students, while its ability to assist in lesson planning and activity design lightens the workload for educators. Moreover, its capability to generate real-life scenarios and diverse learning materials makes English learning more practical, engaging, and enjoyable. As we integrate this AI technology into our teaching practices, we must remember that it is a supplement—not a substitute—for the indispensable human elements of teaching. In the hands of a skilled educator, ChatGPT can truly enhance the educational journey for adult English language learners, making the educational experience more effective, personalized, and enjoyable.

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Harnessing ELSA for enhanced English language learning: An educator's guide

LAILA NOOR

Summary: Technological advancements in the 21st century such as the app ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) have transformed language learning. ELSA leverages AI to enhance English proficiency by offering feedback on pronunciation, fluency, and grammar. Aligned with global English test standards, ELSA is a practical self-assessment tool and augments traditional classroom teaching methods. Research endorses ELSA's effectiveness, recommending it for educators aiming to improve students' English language skills.

Keywords: ELSA, AI, language learning, pronunciation

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology in the 21st century has resulted in an explosion of digital tools for language learning. Among these tools, the ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) app stands out as a particularly effective solution for improving English language speaking skills, pronunciation, and fluency. As an English Language Learner, I used the ELSA app for three months and identified improvements in my pronunciation and speaking skills, with my proficiency level improving from intermediate to advanced.

ELSA has two versions: the ELSA app and ELSA speech analyzer. ELSA app is like a personal language coach to identify the pronunciation errors made by English learners. The ELSA tools offer personalized learning paths and instant feedback. For instance, isolated words and phonemes are tested (Figure 1). ELSA app provides feedback on pronunciation of each phoneme.

The ELSA score is likely calculated based on a proprietary algorithm that takes into account the various aspects of speech that the app analyzes:

- **pronunciation**: how accurately the user pronounces words in English;
- **fluency**: the smoothness and flow of speech, without unnecessary pauses or hesitations;
- **word stress**: the emphasis put on certain syllables within words (Figure 2);
- **intonation**: the rise and fall of the voice in speaking, which can affect the meaning of what is being said;
- **listening**: likely relates to the user's ability to comprehend spoken English, possibly tested through listening exercises within the app.

Speak the word and get pronunciation feedback for each sound.

interesting

/ˈɪn.trɪ.stɪŋ/

Figure 1: ELSA app phoneme practice

This detailed feedback is represented in the form of percentages and an overall ELSA score indicating the user's proficiency in each category (Figure 3). The IELTS Speaking Score Predictor provides an estimation of what the user's speaking score might be if they took the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) based on their performance on the app.

For enhancing fluency, the ELSA speech analyzer offers insightful feedback on aspects like pace and pause. It notes that excessive or insufficient pauses can detrimentally impact the

English fluency score. The analyzer recommends maintaining a pace of 80-120 words per minute for optimal fluency. For example, if a speaker speaks more than 120 words or less than 80 words in a one-minute of their sample speech, they will score poorly in their fluency level. Additionally, it presents a detailed view of all pauses, including their length, helping speakers identify their pauses in speaking. The tool also displays the number of words spoken per minute, enabling speakers to gauge if their speaking pace is too fast or slow. In terms of grammar, the ELSA speech analyzer identifies grammatical errors made during speaking and offers corrective feedback, allowing for real-time improvement.

This comprehensive feedback assists learners in refining both their fluency and grammatical precision in English speaking. For vocabulary, the ELSA speech analyzer provides the learner information about vocabulary levels aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); this tool allows learners to gauge their level of language competence within a few seconds.

What stands out about ELSA is its comparative analysis feature. It aligns its results with standards set by internationally recognized English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, Pearson, CEFR, and TOEIC. This comparison may be useful for international students to prepare for these tests, providing them with a reliable self-assessment tool.

With its robust features and capabilities, ELSA can be an effective tool in classroom settings or as a supplement to traditional teaching methods. In the classroom, teachers can use the app to structure pronunciation lessons by selecting specific words or phrases that students struggle with and using the app's feedback as a teaching guide. Learners can use ELSA for unlimited times in a day to improve their English-speaking skill. Teachers may further suggest ELSA app for at home practice by learners to improve speaking skills outside of class. This hybrid learning model would allow students to get the most out of their English language learning journey.

ELSA's effectiveness is supported by various research; Zawacki-Richter et al (2019) conducted a study on AI applications in higher education, and most of the studies they reviewed

A tricky 5-syllable word, with the emphasis placed on 3rd syllable - say 'ou-shi-AEN-i-uh'

Figure 2: ELSA app word stress practice

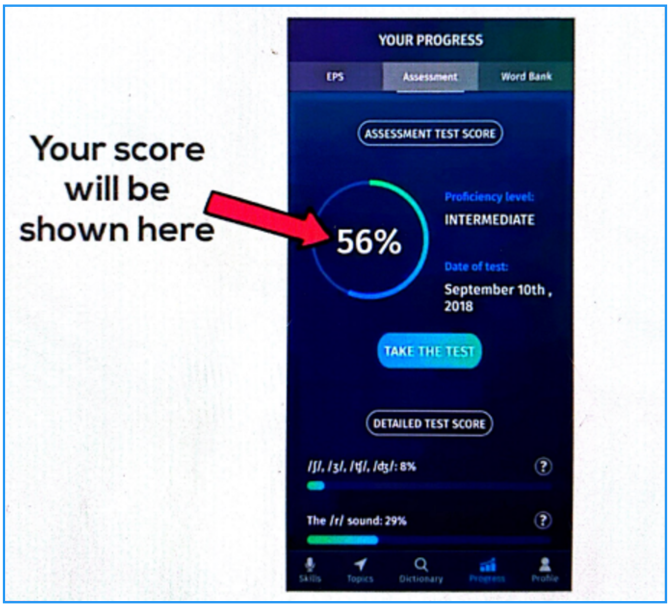

Figure 3: ELSA app feedback

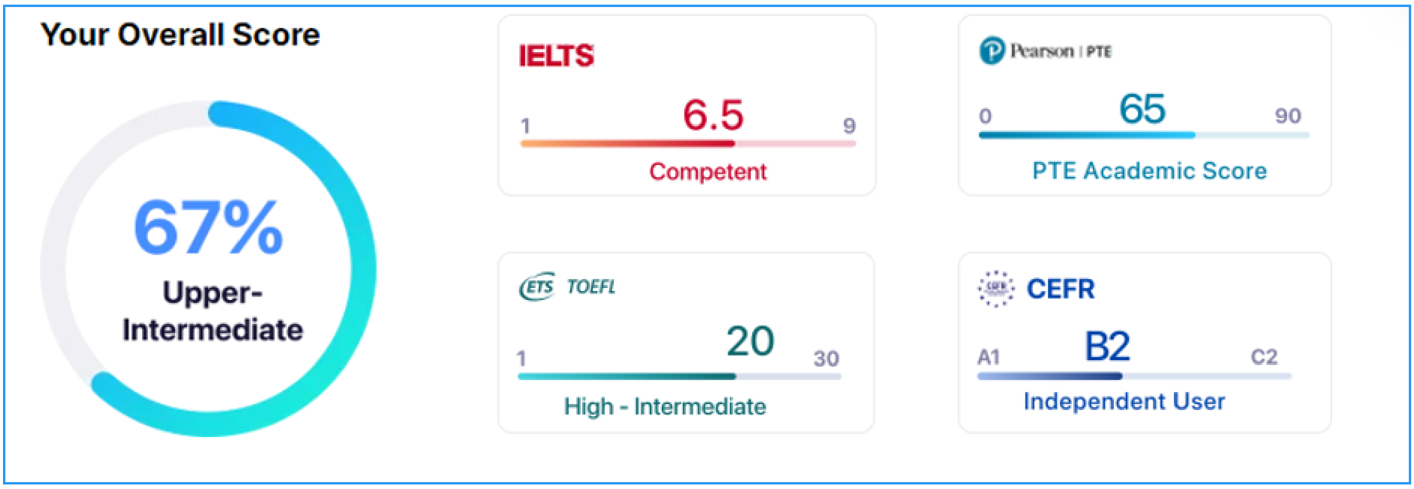

Figure 4: ELSA speech analyzer overall speaking score prediction

regarding Intelligence Tutoring Systems (ITS) reported positive and satisfactory results.

Furthermore, Becker & Edalatishams (2019) revealed that ELSA received a 4.5/5 rating from 23,000 users and was found to be supportive for developing English pronunciation among non-native speakers. Nushi & Sadeghi (2021) also advocated for the use of ELSA as a supplementary teaching aid for English pronunciation, as its advantages outweigh the disadvantages. A notable drawback of the ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) app is the necessity of a subscription. The subscription cost may vary based on plans (i.e., monthly, yearly etc.) and account type (i.e., personal or business). However, research indicates that the investment in ELSA is worthwhile. This suggests that despite the initial cost, the benefits gained from using the app, in terms of improved English language skills, justify the expense. The implication is that users receive significant value from the app, which offsets the subscription fee. This finding is important for potential users weighing the cost against the potential educational benefits of ELSA.

The ELSA app represents a significant advancement in language learning technology. By adopting this tool, educators can provide learners with more opportunities to practice and improve their English language speaking skills in a flexible and personalized manner. This tool not only aids in language development but also encourages learner autonomy and personalized learning paths. Furthermore, while the ELSA app, including its speech analyzer feature, requires a subscription, school administrations have the option to subscribe by funding this resource. By doing so, they can offer free access to students, ensuring that the benefits of ELSA are available without financial barriers. This approach aligns with educational goals, providing an inclusive and accessible tool for language learning. Educators can consider integrating ELSA into their teaching practices, both inside and outside the classroom, making lessons more interactive and enriching the learning experience for students.

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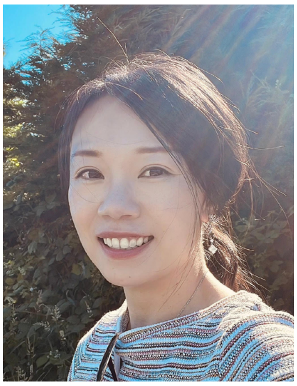

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