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Volume 22, Issue 1**

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ISSN:2373-8936
INTESOL Journal

**A Journal for Indiana
 Teachers of English
 to Speakers of
 Other Languages
 Volume 22, Number 1
 2025**

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This Issue

Believe

The field of TESOL has always faced challenges. We find ourselves facing challenges now. This year, we remind ourselves to believe. We remember that we believe in this work, that we believe it matters, that we believe our multilingual learners matter. We believe that we're professionals, that we know what we're doing at the same time as we continue to learn, improve, and grow. We believe that things can get better, that we can make them better, and that must. We remember that we believe, and believing, we move forward.

The INTESOL 2025 conference was a great success, with keynote speaker Dr. Tim Boals sharing with us the past and future of WIDA and of the teaching of multilingual learners. Invited speaker Dr. Dorina Sackman Ebuwa brought energy and expertise to the conference.

This issue features two editorial features and seven peer-reviewed articles. In the Voices from the Field, Adams interviews Undraa Maamuujav of the Butler University College of Education. Next, in 2025 INTESOL featured a white paper by Morita-Mullaney and Greene critiquing the education waiver proposed by the Indiana Department of Education.

In this issue we have a seven excellent peer-reviewed papers discussing English language teaching and learning research and practice in Indiana. There are several research focused papers, with Bernedo and Bergeron presenting findings from a study of co-teaching teams, and Pang and Zhu presenting an analysis of

VoiceThread use by pre-service and in-service teachers, and Rose Hill, Luo, and Romano comparing writing programs in China and Indiana..

This issue also includes articles with a practice focus. Korneyko and Kalnytsa present a topical overview of English medium instruction teacher training. Colovic-Markovic describes her design of a TESOL practicum course based in service learning. Maddox and Williams present considerations from a course specifically designed for learners to thrive in the service industry. Finally, Sharifi provides background for the experiences of Afghan refugees in the United States.

The Editors of the INTESOL Journal and the INTESOL Board would like to thank the authors for their substantial contributions to the 2025 issue of the INTESOL Journal, as well as the reviewers who support authors in bringing their work to higher heights of quality and rigor.

This year's issue of INTESOL features the artwork of Rattan Kaur from Pleasant Crossing Elementary School.

Finally, I will note that this is my last issue in the ITJ Editor-in-Chief position. The new EiC will be Dr. Michelle C.S. Greene. I will step into the associate editor role.

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Voices from the Field

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Introduction

“Voices from the Field” is a feature article in INTESOL Journal, the aim of which is to introduce newcomers and new projects to the affiliates and members of INTESOL and to document what is happening “on the ground” in response to challenges and changing conditions. In Fall 2024 Dr. Undraa Maamuujav joined the faculty of the College of Education at Butler University.

Before Undraa even arrived at Butler, I, Susan, was already excited by what she brings to our community in terms of research, pedagogy, and resources and was eager to get her involved quickly in our professional network. Undraa graciously agreed to present her research at the 2024 INTESOL Conference and her work was warmly received by that audience.

This feature article will allow her the space to go into greater detail about who she is, what she brings, and what she sees on our shared horizon. Each section contains her thoughtful responses to my interview questions.

What is your current role? How did you get here?

I am currently a faculty member in the College of Education at Butler University in Indianapolis, where I teach First Year Seminar and preservice teacher education courses. Before joining Butler University and relocating to Indiana in the summer of 2024, I served as a research scientist in the School of Education at University of California, Irvine. There I worked on two federally funded writing projects—the Pathway to Academic Success and the WRITE (Writing Research to Improve Teaching and Evaluation) Center. Both projects focused on inservice teacher professional development training and research aimed at enhancing writing instruction at

the secondary level. So, my work centers on teaching, research, and the continuous improvement of education in the area of writing development and instruction at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

How did I get here? When I reflect on this question, I find it important to go all the way back to where my educational journey began—my hometown of Ulaangom, a small town in Uvs province, located in the remote western region of Mongolia. It was there that I completed my secondary education and developed my foundational literacy skills, all in my native language Mongolian. At the time, in that remote region of Mongolia, English was not taught in schools; the only foreign language offered was Russian. At the age 17, I left my hometown to attend university in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, where I majored in English and Education. I was an eager and enthusiastic young person who had just chosen to study and teach a language that was entirely new to me. So, when I was assigned to read Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in its original, unabridged, non-translated form and write a literary explication during my first semester as an undergraduate, I was in over my head. I felt very much like, “Oops, what did I get myself into?” That first year of my undergraduate program was incredibly challenging, as I worked tirelessly to build my basic English proficiency skills as a second language learner. But it was this early struggle and the continuous challenge of learning to speak and write in a new language that sparked my interest and shaped my academic and professional career. Learning a new language, and writing in it, is an incredibly challenging yet tremendously rewarding experience. For me, it became a fascinating entry point into a career centered on language, literacy, and education.

Fast forward—after earning my BA in English and Education and MA in Linguistics from the University of the Humanities in Mongolia and teaching there for two years, I made yet

another big move. This time across the ocean to begin a whole new life. I came to the United States as a graduate student at California State University, Los Angeles, where I taught for over a decade upon completing an MA in TESOL. In 2017, I joined the University of California, Irvine as a composition instructor, and a year later, I started the Ph.D. program in Education. After nearly 15 years of teaching, I took a pause to focus on research in order to systematically examine writing instruction and development across diverse educational contexts. This transition laid the foundation for my current scholarship on equitable and evidence-based instructional practices to improve the writing skills of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

What opportunities are you discovering in your role? What has surprised you most about these opportunities? Where do these opportunities seem to be leading right now?

First and foremost, returning to teaching after several years of engaging in intensive research has been an amazing experience that allows me to use the classroom as a space for experimentation and inquiry. Devoting the past seven years of my life fully to research has helped me stretch my thinking, engage in inquiry at a deeper level, and systematically examine what works and what doesn't based on evidence. As a practitioner-oriented researcher, I have engaged in developing a range of instructional resources and studied how teachers in diverse educational settings implement them and whether they work in their contexts. Now, I have the opportunity to apply and refine those instructional resources in my own classroom. In a way, my classroom is like a lab where I experiment with different strategies and examine how students in my teaching context engage with these strategies and whether they work for them. This unique blend of teaching and research, as well as the ability to use my own classroom as a site to experiment and examine research-informed practice, has been one of the most exciting opportunities.

Another opportunity I have been excited about in my current role is the chance to design my own year-long writing and literacy curriculum for the First Year Seminar. Last year, I taught the course under the theme “*The Interplay of Self and Society*,” based on a curriculum I developed. In this year-long model, we begin by exploring the concept of self through personal and reflective writing, paired with rhetorical analysis of autobiographical texts and autoethnography. Engaging incoming first-year students in this kind of work holds significant value—it invites them to reflect on their lived experiences and creates opportunities to connect with one another on a deeper level. At the same time, it has challenged me to step into more creative and personal forms of writing, as I model, share, and write alongside my students. But what has surprised me most is the amount of courage it takes to write something that is deeply personal. To do this work authentically, you have to embrace both vulnerability and intellectual humility, and you have to be brave to share it publicly. Much of my own writing until now has been academic—peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, an academic book, and other scholarly work. So, engaging in personal writing has certainly been a significant challenge, but one that remains profoundly meaningful.

These opportunities are leading me toward a more integrated vision of teaching, research, and writing, bridging work that is both personally meaningful and academically rigorous. I have started working on two projects of personal significance: the first is writing a book based on my First Year Seminar curriculum and the second is an experiment-in-memoir project. This direction is pushing me to explore pedagogies that are not only research-informed but also human-centered. Looking ahead I envision my work expanding into the development of curricular models and instructional resources that align well with analytical, reflective, culturally responsive, and evidence-based writing practices.

What challenges are you discovering in your role? What are the implications of these challenges?

I feel a strong need to stay current and relevant, especially as the literacy landscape continues to rapidly evolve with advancements in technology, AI tools, and new forms of digital communication. The shifting context of education due to societal forces and technological change demands continuous learning to keep pace with emerging tools, to critically assess their pedagogical value and ethical implications, and to respond thoughtfully to the evolving needs, challenges, and expectations of students. At an individual level, this challenge pushes me to be more innovative and creative in my teaching and to design learning experiences that invite students to co-create, co-construct knowledge, and engage in experiential learning. It also means positioning students as active participants in the inquiry process, where they don't just consume information but contribute to knowledge-building in meaningful ways. Collectively, this challenge reinforces the need for ongoing professional development and interdisciplinary collaboration.

A much broader challenge—one that I believe many teachers and scholars are facing right now—is the effort it takes to stay focused and committed in the midst of overwhelming external forces and pressures. We are living and working in a time shaped by constant disruption, political polarization, social unrest, identity threats, climate anxiety, rapid technological change, and so on. These broader forces affect us directly and indirectly, emotionally and mentally, making it increasingly difficult to maintain the clarity, as well as the energy, needed to stay grounded in our teaching and scholarship. On top of these systemic challenges, we are also bombarded by day-to-day distractions—whether they are news headlines, social media feeds, family responsibilities, or institutional demands—that accumulate and create cognitive overload.

As educators, we are already in a demanding profession that requires deep intellectual engagement, emotional labor, and a high level of presence and care. With so much to process, it becomes easy to feel scattered, discouraged, and burned out. The sense of overwhelm we feel can deflate our energy and motivation, and at times, continuing the work can feel daunting. So, staying focused and committed isn't just a matter of self discipline; rather, it is a real challenge tied to the socio-political conditions under which we live.

The implications of these challenges can be far-reaching. The cognitive overload we encounter and accumulate over time can hinder our performance. It can diminish our capacity to be innovative. It can prevent us from meaningfully engaging with students and empowering them to learn and grow. Sustaining our passion can become increasingly difficult, especially if the broader system does not value or support the work we do. A visible and far-reaching consequence of these conditions, particularly at the secondary level, is the teacher shortage we are seeing across the country.

What trends or patterns in ELL K-12 or higher education enrollment have you observed?

Before I respond to this question, I would like to briefly comment on the term ELL (English Language Learners). I recognize that several terms are used interchangeably with ELL, including EL (English Learners), Multilingual Learners, Second Language Learners, among others. I also want to acknowledge that some educators and scholars view the term ELL as problematic due to its potential to convey a deficit-oriented perspective and to reinforce stigmatization and stereotypes associated with this student population. In recent years, I have observed a growing preference for the term Multilingual Learners of English (MLEs), particularly within the literacy scholarship and TESOL communities. I have adopted this terminology in my own research and writing, as it reflects the linguistic assets and cultural

wealth these students bring. It acknowledges that many of them use and have exposure to multiple languages across various communicative contexts, including home, local community, school, and other academic settings.

In the K-12 educational context, MLEs have been a growing student population. According to the most recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics (updated in May 2024), the percentage of public K-12 students identified as English Learners increased from 9.4% (approximately 4.6 million students) in Fall 2011 to 10.6% (about 5.3 million students) in Fall 2021 (NCES, 2024). While I haven't seen the most current enrollment statistics at a national level, I am curious about how the current social and political conditions, especially those affecting immigrant communities, are influencing enrollment trends among this student population at the K-12 level.

In higher education in the United States, MLEs represent a diverse student population that includes international students, undocumented students, US-born language-minority students, and immigrant students. Enrollment trends among these groups can vary significantly depending on factors such as the state, the type of institutions (e.g., community college vs. research university), and even whether the programs are at undergraduate or graduate level. Within the TESOL community, a particularly concerning trend I have observed has been the substantial decline in enrollment—especially among international students—in pre-collegiate Intensive English Programs (IEPs). This decline has led many university-based IEPs to either close or undergo significant restructuring. A far-reaching consequence of this trend is a parallel decline in enrollment in graduate-level TESOL programs. This raises serious concerns about the future of the field and the preparation of educators equipped to teach multilingual learners.

What are some promising practices you have observed, championed, or brought about in your context? Why are these promising practices so promising?

Some promising practices I have studied and championed are based on the cognitive strategies approach to teaching reading and writing, as well as to disciplinary literacy and critical thinking. This curricular approach, developed by my advisor Carol Booth Olson, is based on decades of research, refinement, and successful implementation. It has been tested across diverse educational contexts and shown to be effective in improving students' writing through several large-scale randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies. The most recent study (Olson et al, 2025) on the use of the cognitive strategies approach, which was published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, involved 4136 students in Grades 7-11 and 174 teachers across 46 schools in seven U.S. states. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic during the study's implementation, the results demonstrated a statistically significant positive impact on students' overall writing quality, as well as improvements in specific dimensions of writing such as content, productivity, structure, stance, and language conventions.

Cognitive strategies refer to “acts of mind” such as planning and goal setting, making connections, forming interpretations, reflecting and relating, and evaluating—metacognitive strategies and mental processes that skilled readers and writers use to construct meaning (Olson, 2011). These strategies enable deeper engagement with texts, promote analytical thinking, and help learners make meaning through close reading and analytical writing. Teaching these strategies explicitly to MLEs enhances their understanding of how language is used to construct meaning and then apply this knowledge and the strategies in their own writing. When MLEs are provided with structured opportunities to practice these strategies, they not only develop stronger

reading and writing skills but also cultivate critical thinking and a more nuanced awareness of language and authorial craft.

The strength of this approach and its accompanying instructional practices lies in its time-tested, evidence-based, and theory-driven foundation, as well as its adaptability across diverse instructional contexts. Its demonstrated effectiveness with diverse student populations, particularly MLEs, makes it a promising and scalable model for improving writing, reading, and literacy outcomes.

What state and/or federal policies are uppermost on your mind these days? Why? What do you wish policymakers knew about the impact of these policies on families, teachers and students?

As someone who is relatively new to Indiana, I am in a period of observation and learning when it comes to the state-level education initiatives, policies, and decision making processes that relate to students and communities we serve. I view this as an ongoing opportunity to deepen my understanding of the state's educational landscape. At the same time, what is uppermost on my mind these days are changes and developments at the federal level, particularly those policies that have direct impact on higher education, teacher preparation programs, and K-12 students our aspiring educators will be working with. Programs and funding decisions such as Federal Student Aid, Title III of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program, and Adult Education Act are of particular importance. These federal programs and initiatives play a crucial role in supporting students from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds and communities.

I wish policy makers fully recognized the tangible, day-to-day impact these policies have on the lives of students, families, and educators—particularly those in under-resourced

communities. For many students and families, programs like Federal Student Aid and Pell Grants can mean whether to pursue college or forgo higher education due to financial hardship. And for K-12 students, especially those from historically marginalized groups, funding and programs like ESEA Title III shape the quality of instruction they receive and the resources available in their schools. The policy decisions around these programs and their funding directly affect students' futures, family stability, and educators' ability to make a meaningful difference, so considering this human element and the long-term implications seems necessary.

I also think that sustained support across all levels—federal, state, and institutional—is vital in addressing the existing disparities, fostering equitable educational outcomes, and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have the tools, resources, and support they need to succeed. Effective and equitable educational outcomes for all students must remain a shared responsibility across the education ecosystem. Without the collective effort, systemic inequities will persist and continue to limit the potential of too many learners, especially those from marginalized and underserved communities.

What is something of which you are particularly proud of that connects to your role, your work, your organization?

Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of working with many outstanding educators, researchers, scholars, and teachers across various contexts—individuals who are deeply committed to advancing education, improving instruction, and making meaningful difference in the lives of students. Working alongside these dedicated and compassionate professionals has shaped my professional career and personal growth in a profound way. Their passion and persistence have inspired me and motivated me to keep going, to persist in times of uncertainty, and to find the courage to face and overcome challenges. The collective effort is

energizing and is what drives progress in education and society. I am proud to be part of this shared commitment—commitment to advance education, improve lives, and serve communities. I am proud that I have persisted and am persisting despite many challenges I have faced along the way. I am proud that I am contributing to the collective effort in my own small but meaningful ways. And I am proud that I am fulfilling my individual responsibility to help build a better future for our children and generations to come.

If you could wave a magic wand, what would you wish for refugees, for ELLs, for their families, and/or their teachers? Why?

This is a difficult question—difficult because the challenges facing refugees, MLEs, and their families, as well as immigrants and migrants more broadly, are deeply rooted in persistent stereotypes, lack of empathy, structural barriers, and systemic exclusion. So, I feel that there is no simple solution or magic fix. Addressing the issues and threats these communities face calls for a shift in mindset, greater empathy, and a willingness to see the world through the eyes of others. Many individuals from these communities have already endured significant hardship and have taken immense risks in leaving behind everything to rebuild a whole new life. Many of them have fled violence and instability in search of safety, opportunity, and survival. I wish that their strengths and resilience were recognized and honored, that their languages, cultures, and contributions were valued in our schools and society, and that they were not met with additional and unnecessary barriers but with compassion and support. I wish that teachers working with students from these communities were provided with the support and resources they need to help them thrive.

Conclusion

The INTESOL community is indeed enriched by Undraa's presence and her contributions. You are encouraged to get to know her, to seek out opportunities to benefit from her insights and to engage with the recommended teaching tools she has developed (links and references provided below). You will find her a deeply committed educator, a delightful colleague, and a generous thought partner.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Susan R. Adams, PhD., is Professor of Education in the College of Education, Butler University. A former ESL teacher and instructional coach, her work is featured in such publications as *Theory into Practice*, *English Journal*, *The New Educator*, *TESOL Journal*, and the *Currere Exchange Journal*. She is the co-editor of *Exploring Meaningful and Sustainable Intentional Learning Communities for P-20 Educators* (2024) and co-author of *Race and Pedagogy: Creating Collaboration for Teacher Transformations* (2016).

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Undarmaa (Undraa) Maamuujav, PhD, is currently a faculty member in the College of Education, Butler University. Her research and scholarship focus on writing instruction and development of culturally and linguistically diverse students in secondary and postsecondary levels. Her work has been published in academic journals such as *TESOL Journal*, *TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, *CATESOL*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Assessing Writing*, *Written Communication*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Writing & Pedagogy*, and *International Journal of Educational Research Open*.

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Recommended Teaching Resources

- [Language Support Guidebook: Language Enrichment for Multilingual Learners of English](#)
An open educational resource developed in collaboration between the Pathway to Academic Success Project and the ELL Team of the Council of the Great City Schools
- [Academic Linguaging and Historical Thinking: Cultivating Students Language Skills for Argument Writing](#) by Undarmaa Maamuujav and Jacob Steiss
An upcoming book focused on helping preservice and inservice teachers learn how to integrate academic language skills with argument writing instruction
- [Conducting a National Expansion of Text-based Argument Writing Intervention for Secondary Students Using a Cognitive Strategies Approach](#) by Olson, C.B and colleagues
A research article that reports findings from a multisite cluster randomized controlled trial designed to scale up an existing successful professional development program that uses cognitive strategies approach to text-based argument writing.
- [Strategies for Writing to Learn in the Content Areas: A Teacher Resource and Guide](#)
An open educational resource developed by the Pathway to Academic Success Project Team at University of California, Irvine
- [Writing Instruction Across the Disciplines: Evidence-based Practices in Grades 6-12](#) Edited by Steve Graham, Carol Booth Olson, Tanya Baker, Huy Chung, Undarmaa Maamuujav, and Jacob Steiss
An upcoming book that translates the best current research on adolescent writing instruction into teacher-friendly practices that are easy to implement in today's diverse classrooms.

Editorial
Indiana TESOL White Paper
Financial Earmarking: The Money Follows the Child

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Indiana’s English learners (EL) is the fastest growing student constituency consisting of 93,625 students that represent 296 language backgrounds, and requiring language services. The EL population has grown by 85% from 2016 to 2024 (Indiana Department of Education, 2024) and 75% are born in the U.S., making them Indiana Hoosiers. Indiana’s EL population is diverse with families contributing to corporations, universities, factories and farms. Districts serving ELs receive a per pupil amount in state funding and federal funding and such funds are used to provide required language services (Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981).

The currently proposed ESSA waiver authored by the Indiana Department of Education will impact how Title III dollars are distributed. Presently, when Title III is released from USDE to IDOE, the funds are distributed on a per pupil basis and districts must use those dollars for identified-English Learners. There are **safeguards** to ensure these funds are used for ELs and not reappropriated for local priorities that may thwart the legal rights of ELs. These distributions are protected to ensure they are “earmarked” for English Learners: The proposed ESSA waiver plan to move most Title funds, including Title III earmarked for ELs into a block grant states the following: 1) to advance student achievement; 2) to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan; and 3) to ensure continued provisions for the same populations. Indiana TESOL has grave concerns about how these dollars would be reappropriated and that changing present

language services for them would create the conditions for lowering achievement; limited capacity for oversight of these changes; and violation of federal and state laws.

Serving ELs in schools *requires* language services that are 1) research based; 2) adequately resourced; and 3) found to be effective (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981). Funding for ELs comes from two main sources in Indiana: federal and state. For the federal, Title III funds that come from the Office of English Language Acquisition are nested within the U.S. Department of Education. The federal Title III dollars were already appropriated in the last Congressional session and are part of meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act and are appropriated per pupil/per EL (ESSA, 2015). This is a per pupil allocation, meaning the funds are earmarked for ELs. Our state funding source, the Non-English Speaking Program (NESP), was established in 1999 through legislation introduced by a state senator from Elkhart, Indiana, in response to the growing Latinx immigrant workforce in the region's RV industry (Morita-Mullaney, 2015). These federal and state sources for funding are earmarked; meaning they are specified for the audience that is identified as being an EL, similar to how we identify students who have special education needs. This funding is for them.

As dollars associated with Indiana students presently follows a per pupil amount and the money follows the child. We argue upon this same premise that *the money should follow the child*. Title III dollars are earmarked for English learners (the population). This financial decoupling from the child as proposed within the ESEA waiver discredits the argument of the money following the child.

History

- In the 2023 legislative session, the NESP funds were decoupled or unearmarked, meaning district leaders had to decide how to use such dollars. IDOE was no longer responsible for grants associated with NESP and thus, it was sent to the general fund. EL directors/leaders throughout the state reported the misuse of these funds and that they were not all used to serve EL populations, a violation of ESSA and other federal statutes.
- Current proposals would similarly decouple Title III funds into a block grant through the ESEA waiver, removing accountability safeguards and allowing districts to use the money for non-EL purposes.
- The last flexibility waiver under NCLB (2012–2015) redirected resources to the bottom quartile, disrupting EL programming and reducing legally required services. While ELs showed growth in the VAM model, they remained far behind, an outcome tied to diminished service delivery during that period.

Outcomes of Decoupling

- **Funding may go to non-public endeavors:** Because this waiver would allow a competition or application for funds, there is no guarantee this would go to public schools, opening up greater privatization creating issues for oversight ensuring that funds are actually used for students.
- **Erosion of language rights:** Decoupling funds undermines *Castaneda v. Pickard* (1981), which mandates that EL programs must be based on sound theory, implemented effectively, and evaluated for success. When EL funds are treated as discretionary or general-purpose revenue, students are deprived of the services necessary for linguistic and academic development, violating their rights. Additionally, districts and states can

face lawsuits and loss of federal funding for failing to meet the obligations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

- **Declining achievement and future dropout of ELs:** Research consistently shows that when ELs are not adequately supported, they fall behind academically and are significantly more likely to score lower on state standardized assessments (Fry, 2007; NWEA, 2019). As a result, they are more likely to be placed in remedial or inappropriate special education tracks and more likely to drop out of high school before graduation (Artiles et al, 2005; NWEA, 2019). **This has direct economic consequences for the state.** Students who drop out of high school earn, on average, \$11,000 less per year than high school graduates and \$35,000 less compared to a college graduate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). Lower educational attainment correlates with higher rates of public assistance and incarceration. Therefore, the long-term GDP growth of the state is weakened when large segments of the future workforce are undereducated and underemployed.
- **Deprofessionalization of teaching:** When EL funding is decoupled, school administrators often shift funds away from specialized EL teachers, bilingual aides, or targeted professional development. This not only erodes the quality of services provided but also leads to layoffs of bilingual staff, overreliance on underprepared general education teachers, and burnout among remaining EL professionals, further contributing to the current educator shortage crisis.
- **The Educator Shortage Crisis:** The burnout and turnover experienced by teachers is made worse by the deprofessionalization of English Language (EL) teaching. Professional specialization is beneficial as it allows the division of roles among staff.

After such a division of roles occurs, there is always the possibility of monopolization, where remaining staff take on more responsibilities than they should, leading to overwork, a lack of adequate support, and burnout. This cycle of burnout is an expensive problem to address, and it is made worse as there is an ongoing stream of teachers leaving the profession. This results in a staffing crisis, which is more expensive to fix than simply upholding the original roles and responsibilities.

- **Increased abuse among districts who use it for what they will:** When EL-designated funds are used without oversight, districts may divert them to cover general budget gaps instead of building effective language programs. This leads to inconsistent services across districts, widens educational inequities, and creates an accountability gap where there are no consequences for failing to serve the students the funds were intended to support.

Broader Economic Costs of Undermining EL Funding

Investing in EL Education is a *pro-growth economic strategy* that supports workforce development, civic integration, and long-term fiscal stability. Conversely, failure to adequately support ELs through properly resourced and accountable programming carries both immediate educational costs and long-term economic consequences for Indiana.

English Learners are among the fastest-growing populations in Indiana schools, particularly in urban centers and rural regions tied to agriculture and manufacturing. According to the Indiana Department of Education, the number of EL students grew by over 50% between 2012 and 2022, a trend projected to continue given patterns of migration and workforce demand (Indiana Department of Education, 2024). These students represent not only an educational

constituency but a crucial share of Indiana's future workforce, especially in industries experiencing persistent labor shortages.

Many Indiana employers in healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, and service industries rely on a bilingual labor force. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce's *Indiana Vision 2025* report notes that language and cultural skills are essential for employers seeking to serve diverse clientele and expand into global markets (Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 2023). The Indiana Department of Workforce Development projects continued demand for bilingual workers across high-growth occupations, including healthcare support, transportation, and production (Indiana Department of Workforce Development, 2023). In healthcare, language barriers contribute to miscommunication, errors, and inequitable care; bilingual professionals help mitigate these risks and expand patient access (The Joint Commission, 2022). In manufacturing and logistics, industries foundational to Indiana's economy, English learners play key roles in production and distribution chains. In education, customer service, and public services, culturally responsive communication is increasingly expected and valued. Undermining EL education today limits these students' ability to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow.

Indiana TESOL Resolution

Indiana TESOL calls for the immediate dismissal of the ESEA flexibility waiver and the preservation of categorical, per-pupil funding for every English learner. This proven model ensures:

1. predictable consistency so districts can plan for staffing and resources;
2. guardrails/safeguards that ensure the dollars are being used specifically for ELs; and
3. sustaining compliance within federal and state statute for serving ELs.

Abandoning this model would dismantle critical protections, divert resources away from the students who need them most, and jeopardize the academic and economic future of Indiana's EL population. To conclude, we argue that the money continues to follow the child, honoring a long-standing model of effective language programming for Indiana's ELs and investment in Indiana's future.

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From Co-Planning to Co-Reflection: The Power of Elementary and ELL Co-Teaching Teams Using the Collaborative Instructional Cycle

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ABSTRACT

As K-6 Indiana classrooms continue to diversify, effective collaboration between elementary and English Language Learner (ELL) co-teaching teams becomes even more crucial. This qualitative research study navigates how Honigsfeld and Dove's (2015) Collaborative Instructional Cycle—co-planning, co-instruction, co-assessment, and co-reflection—is integrated in elementary settings. Findings from two focus groups reveal that common planning tools, clear instructional roles and responsibilities, integration of background knowledge, and flexible reflective practices measurably impact instructional practice and increase student outcomes. This article suggests practical implications to foster inclusive and successful co-teaching learning environments.

Introduction

As our society becomes increasingly multilingual and multicultural, the K–6 classroom is a microcosm of diversity. This shift demands a major rethinking of how we teach. English Language Learners (ELLs) are not just students acquiring a new language. They are navigating complex cultural landscapes while striving to succeed academically. To truly serve them, educators must embrace a pedagogy that is responsive, inclusive, and transformative. Currently, only 28 of 50 states have requirements for general education pre-service and in-service teachers to have some sort of training to work with ELLs. According to Ellis et al. (2023), 71% of

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) allocate fewer than two instructional hours to working with ELLs, and 88% of EPPs do not offer opportunities to teach ELLs.

As statistics like these emerge, the need for more data-driven decisions led us to facilitating focus groups. We recognize that teacher educators need to take advantage of every opportunity to work jointly with local school partners to inform their collaborative practices. Specifically, for this research, we focused on the practice of elementary teachers co-teaching with teachers of ELLs. Given the limited studies highlighting how co-teachers might model equitable collaborative practices, our study focused on a theoretical framework designed to be utilized by K-6 teachers. To gain information about elementary co-teaching practices, we held focus groups structured around the four interconnected phases: co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess, and co-reflect. We framed our study through the lens of Honigsfeld and Dove's (2015) Collaborative Instructional Cycle to interpret the focus group data we gathered and analyzed to explore the research question, *what role does the Collaborative Instructional Cycle have on collaborative practices for K-6 content and ELL teaching teams?*

We began reviewing literature on Honigsfeld and Dove's (2015) Collaborative Instructional Cycle. We also found it imperative to review literature on successful co-teaching practices and partnerships in elementary ELL classrooms. Lastly, we reviewed literature about aligning spaces and schedules for effective co-teaching due to an apparent lack of shared space and schedule gleaned from our focus groups.

Literature Review

Content and ELL Co-Teaching Partnerships

Essential qualities for effective co-teaching partnerships are trust, respect, communication, and shared responsibility. Bauler et. al. (2019) argued that ELL and content

teachers showcase resilient co-teaching practices even with minimal planning time. These co-teaching teams demonstrated trust and a mutual commitment to student outcomes, as opposed to strictly adhering to one co-teaching model (Box, 2023). Studies reinforced this, indicating that effective co-teaching requires intentional relationship-building, professional development, and a collaborative culture (Box, 2023; Hendrickson, 2011; Bauler et.al., 2019; Beck & Pace, 2019; ASCD, n.d.).

Co-teachers who regularly plan and reflect more effectively differentiate instruction for ELLs. Other studies emphasized the importance of defined roles and shared responsibility (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2012). When co-teachers have clear role expectations and responsibilities, they are better able to meet ELLs' content and language needs (ASCD, n.d.; Bauler et.al., 2019; Hendrickson, 2011; Beck & Pace, 2019). Similarly, studies found that co-teachers who used collaborative tools and engaged in co-reflection were more successful in aligning their instruction (Martin-Beltrán et al. 2012; Bauler et.al., 2019; Hendrickson, 2011; ASCD, n.d.).

Research also argued that co-teaching encourages inclusive classroom settings where ELLs feel supported, which increases participation and confidence (Friend & Cook, 2017). Additionally, collaborative instruction promotes higher-order thinking and language growth by embedding scaffolds and culturally responsive practices into lessons (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016).

Aligning Spaces and Schedules for Effective Co-Teaching

Shared classroom spaces and aligned schedules are required for effective co-teaching. While collaboration time is essential, it is not sufficient without other components of co-teaching (Vintan & Gallagher, 2019; Hendrickson, 2011; Bauler et.al., 2019; Beck & Pace, 2019; ASCD, n.d.). Teachers must also have access to a shared space with resources to fully implement co-

teaching instruction (Vintan & Gallagher, 2019; Brendle et al., 2017). Both teachers being visible in the shared classroom models a balanced partnership. Supportive school leadership plays a critical role in creating spaces and schedules that prioritizes time for collaboration (Box, 2023; Colorín Colorado, 2022; McTigue et al., 2023). Without this leadership support, co-teaching often collapses or becomes superficial. By embedding co-teaching into master schedules, school leadership can provide joint professional development and foster a culture of shared ownership (Colorín Colorado, 2022; Snyder & Bae, 2017).

Studies indicated that aligned schedules and collaborative spaces create instructional continuity for ELL learners. This structure fosters equitable access to grade-level standards and increases opportunities for scaffolding, which links to increased academic achievement and engagement. (Vintan & Gallagher, 2019; Brendle et al., 2017; Salend & Duhaney, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Furthermore, co-teaching teams collaborating in the same space model inclusive practices, fostering a welcoming classroom environment, which leads to ELLs demonstrating increased participation and social-emotional growth (Salend & Duhaney, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013).

Honigsfeld and Dove's Collaborative Instructional Cycle

The Collaborative Instructional Cycle is the foundation for elementary and ELL co-teaching practices. The four interconnected phases are co-planning, co-instruction, co-assessing, and co-reflecting. Co-planning builds the foundation, intentionally integrating content with language objectives. Co-instruction ensures students receive both content and language through aligned practices, using language data. Co-assessing builds on shared assessments that include appropriate modifications, and co-reflecting allows teachers to collaboratively review outcomes and adjust instruction. The phases are designed to make sure that elementary content and ELL

teachers share responsibility in language and content instruction (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Nordmeyer & Honigsfeld, 2020). Nordmeyer and Honigsfeld (2020) emphasized that the cycle supports ELL students' academic growth. Furthermore, the cycle promotes professional learning among teachers. When the cycle is implemented as designed and with administrative support, teachers and ELL students are supported in their language and content needs. While the framework's phases are designed to be cyclical, teachers have flexibility when it comes to implementing co-teaching structures—such as team teaching—to meet diverse student needs (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2020). When ELL and elementary teachers respect each other's expertise, they are more likely to engage in professional and reflective co-teaching practices.

Methodology

The qualitative study adopted an interview research design to learn about collaborative practices among elementary and ELL co-teaching teams. Researchers held two semi-structured focus group sessions via Zoom with five co-teaching teams representing a variety of settings and grade levels. The research questions and protocols were guided by Honigsfeld and Dove's Collaborative Instructional Cycle, focusing on their four interconnected phases: co-planning, co-instruction, co-assessment, and co-reflection. This intentional research design guided participants through consistent questioning while encouraging deeper exploration of individual experiences and reflecting on instructional decision-making. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic coding. Patterns were identified, categorized, and organized into themes aligned with the phases of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle. This research approach resulted in thoughtful and descriptive insights into how co-teaching teams integrate collaborative practices in their elementary classroom contexts with ELLs.

Research Positionality

From Co-Planning to Co-Reflection

As former K-12 educators, we recognize the intricacies of co-teaching to support content and language domains. Our lived experiences led to our inquiry into aligning co-teaching practices around the Collaborative Instruction Cycle. As current teacher educators, we are working to transfer the practice into higher education to prepare future teachers for effective co-teaching realities in today's classrooms. As practitioners-researchers, we are committed to understanding how successful K-6 co-teaching practices can inform our instructional practices. Facilitating focus groups comprised of elementary and ELL co-teaching teams has allowed us to amplify voices and best practices.

Participants

We reached out to elementary school administrators with a call for content and ELL co-teaching teams' participation. We intentionally focused on elementary co-teaching teams because we are currently teaching future teachers. Five co-teaching teams from different elementary schools participated in our study. All five teams were teachers in the Midwest.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the participants. Two of the co-teaching teams are situated in urban settings, two are in suburban settings, and one is in a rural setting. Three of the teams were in their first-year co-teaching together, one team was in their second-year, and one was in their eighth-year co-teaching together. Two of the teams were co-teaching in a fifth-grade classroom, one team was in a fourth-fifth grade split classroom, one was in fourth-grade, and one was co-teaching in a second-grade classroom.

Table 1-Teams and Grade Levels

School	Setting	Grade Level	Years Co-Teaching Together
G	Urban	4/5 split	1

K	Urban	5	1
N	Suburban	5	8
S	Rural	2	2
R	Suburban	4	1

We chose Honigsfeld and Dove’s Collaborative Instructional Cycle through which to analyze the data captured in our focus groups. As we created the two focus group interview protocols, we utilized the Collaborative Instructional Cycle model that outlines the four interconnected phases (i.e., co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess, and co-reflect). According to Honigsfeld and Dove (2015),

When teachers put in place all four components of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle—planning, teaching, assessment, and reflection—learning will flourish. The teachers have the opportunity to craft unit goals, lesson objectives, or learning targets with ELLs in mind (p. 57).

This framework highlights the positioning of content and ELL teachers as co-creators of plans, instructional practices, scaffolds for instruction, modified assessments for data collection, and reflection of data collected. To address our research question, *What role does the Collaborative Instructional Cycle have on collaborative practices for K–6 content and ELL teaching teams?*, the framework allowed us to navigate how the four phases of the cycle are evident in elementary co-teaching teams’ instructional decisions.

Data Collection

Using Honigsfeld and Dove’s Collaborative Instructional Cycle as the theoretical framework, the data analysis focused on exploring how elementary and ELL co-teachers engaged in collaborative practices. The four interconnected phases provided a lens to examine collaborative practices and instruction. Through thematic analysis, we first transcribed the focus groups and began the process of identifying codes by highlighting patterns that aligned with the four phases. The codes were sorted based on trends. As we continued to analyze the codes, themes emerged that reflected the Collaborative Instructional Cycle. The emerging themes that aligned closely with the four phases were: Shared Docs, Shared Vision: Convenient Co-Planning; Co-Teaching in Sync: Double the Minds, Double the Impact; Beyond the Test: The Power of Background Knowledge; and Quick Takes: On-the-Fly Reflections. To increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, a third researcher coded responses. We then compared our coding and discussed inconsistencies until we agreed on the final codes. This process enhanced inter-rater reliability. We also gave the focus group participants the opportunity to review the transcriptions to check for accuracy.

Findings and Discussion

Drawing from our focus groups, the analysis revealed several important findings: First, when co-teachers made time to plan together—incorporating common documents and shared planning times—their plans for instruction became more aligned. Second, co-teaching was best implemented when teachers worked together to define their roles and create a shared physical space. This provided the opportunity for one co-teacher to focus on content while the other co-teacher focused on language. Third, when teachers incorporated appropriate scaffolds into their plans, the assessments became more accessible for ELLs. Fourth, co-teachers recognized the value of co-reflection and showcased tremendous flexibility to engage in co-reflective practices.

These data helped us better understand best co-teaching practices and guided us in making suggestions for meaningful improvements. While there were multiple findings derived from the focus groups for each of the four interconnected phases, we chose to illuminate the findings that were coded most frequently.

Shared Docs, Shared Vision: Convenient Co-Planning

Based on focus group data, the top way that participants co-planned was the use of a collaborative Google document. When in-person co-planning was not possible, teachers use Google documents to co-plan. Implementation of a shared Google document included collaboratively typing and highlighting their contributions, allowing for asynchronous co-planning. This method helped them stay organized and ensured that both teachers could contribute to the planning process. Bauler et. al. (2019) and Box (2023) highlight that resilient co-teaching practices thrive even with minimal planning time, provided there is trust and shared responsibility. The use of Google Docs exemplifies this resilience and mutual commitment, allowing co-teaching teams to maintain instructional alignment despite scheduling constraints. The excerpts below derived from the focus groups showcase the use of collaborative Google documents to co-plan. We further identified if the speaker of each excerpt was the content or ELL teacher.

Unfortunately, in our PLCs, we do not really do much content talk. It ends up being a lot of other things. Then it is not even worth the co-teacher having to sit there and listen through all that. So, we tried a Google document. I would type something and highlight it, and then she would type something, highlight it. [Content]

We used to plan right after school. However, with family obligations, we work best from

home in the evenings. We use Google docs. [ELL]

Given the challenges with co-planning time evident in the excerpts, it is apparent that co-teaching teams must demonstrate flexibility using multi-modal planning tools. Intentional co-planning is foundational to the next interconnected phase.

Co-Teaching in Sync: Double the Minds, Double the Impact

During the focus groups, the participants discussed their clearly defined roles during instruction within common physical spaces. A notable feature of co-teaching through our data analysis was divide and conquer. The excerpts below are examples provided by the participants.

Because we had common planning, we could literally divide and conquer during instruction. We shared the space and we would pull kids left and right and work with kids that needed scaffolds and language objectives. [ELL]

Since we have been doing this for a long time, we can read each other like a book. We have things down to a science. She can walk in, and we can divide and conquer. I can be like, “Hey, based on yesterday’s lesson, can you do this?” [Content]

Since we had already created the color-coded lesson slides, I walked into her class with additional visuals like labeled diagrams, vocabulary images, and sentence frames to support language learners. [ELL]

The teachers’ collaboration and shared planning allowed them to divide instructional roles and responsibilities, provide additional support to meet student-specific needs, and communicate effectively as lessons unfolded. Participants discussed the implementation of color-coded slides to signal instructional transitions between the co-teachers. The visual color-coded system facilitated smooth coordination between the co-teachers and provided lesson continuity. This reflects the co-instruction phase of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle, where aligned practices

ensure delivery of both content and language. Martin-Beltrán et al. (2012) emphasize that defined roles and shared responsibility enhance instructional effectiveness for ELLs. The use of visual systems and shared space also supports Vintan and Gallagher (2019) who argues that aligned schedules and shared environments are essential for successful co-teaching. Intentional co-instructional practices mentioned above illuminated the importance of well-orchestrated transitions during co-teaching.

Beyond the Test: The Power of Background Knowledge

Analysis of the focus group on co-assessment revealed that pre-teaching content and exposure to background knowledge were identified as factors that the co-teachers suggested improved student assessment results. The following excerpts were derived from the focus groups and provide examples of co-assessing.

Prior to the test, the ELL teacher has been trying to build a little background knowledge, for example, a nonfiction topic we haven't covered very much. So, the kids know at least what they're reading about before they take the test. [Content]

In our classroom, all students are able to experience success because we recognize and validate their background knowledge, even if it is in their native language. [Content]

All students have prior knowledge gained from schooling and life experiences no matter where they occurred. Our students' schema provides a basis for learning. [ELL]

The implementation of background knowledge-building activities was a strategy the co-teachers included to optimize student performance on assessments. The focus group data suggested that validating student background knowledge supported content understanding and promoted equity on assessments by minimizing barriers associated with unfamiliar language and content.

This finding aligns with the co-assessment phase of Honigsfeld and Dove’s framework, which advocates shared assessments with appropriate modifications. The emphasis on validating students’ prior knowledge, even in their native language, supports Friend & Cook (2017) and Murawski & Bernhardt (2016), who argue that inclusive practices and culturally responsive instruction enhance student engagement and achievement. Additionally, Salend & Duhaney (2011) and Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2013) note that inclusive classrooms foster social-emotional growth and academic success, which is evident in this finding.

Quick Takes: On-the-Fly Reflections

One significant finding that emerged from the focus group data was the practice of on-the-fly reflection—quick, informal evaluative reflections that occurred during or just after instruction. Co-teaching teams shared experiences when they engaged in real-time conversations to reflect on lesson effectiveness. The following two excerpts from the focus groups highlight these informal reflections.

I’m really hoping we’ll be able to figure out something next year where we can have a little bit more time to work together and reflect. It’s a drive-by. [ELL]

We reflect when our students are packing up or during transitions. [Content]

These spontaneous reflective conversations served as a calibration for the co-teaching teams to adjust upcoming instruction, focusing on the critical and responsive elements of collaborative reflection. This practice exemplifies the co-reflection phase of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle, which encourages ongoing review and adjustment of instruction. Nordmeyer and Honigsfeld (2020) supports this by stating that the cycle promotes professional learning and responsive teaching. Moreover, Honigsfeld and Dove (2019) emphasize that mutual respect and

trust between co-teachers foster reflective practices, which are critical for continuous improvement.

Implications

As society grows more multilingual, the K–6 classroom reflects these specific diverse needs, requiring elementary and ELL co-teaching teams to revise and update their instructional approaches to meet the needs of all students. As we explored the data collected from our co-teaching focus groups, the findings indicated that there are manageable and quick modifications to current co-teaching practices that have the potential to increase student academic achievement. The following implications support each of the four interconnected phases.

For co-planning, the use of a shared Google document allows an elementary and ELL co-teaching team to construct lesson plans that support both content and language objectives. For example, when drafting a fourth-grade math lesson plan on classifying triangles and quadrilaterals, the elementary teacher might upload documents about lines and angles, while the ELL teacher adds a word bank for student responses. By contributing asynchronously, the co-teaching team ensures that the lesson includes appropriate scaffolds, despite the limited time available for in-person planning.

Regarding co-teaching, dividing roles and responsibilities allows both teachers to maximize instructional impact. For instance, during a fifth-grade science lesson on the solar system, the elementary teacher might begin a whole-group discussion prompted by color-coded slides to introduce key concepts. Based on the color of the slide, the ELL teacher leads an activity to introduce key vocabulary with visuals and native language support. Given that the co-teachers co-planned and identified transitions based on the color-coded system, they can shift

roles seamlessly. The elementary teacher is facilitating content exploration while the ELL teacher reinforces language objectives.

Co-teachers can intentionally connect to students' prior experiences to support assessment design and preparation. For example, before a third-grade reading assessment on fact and opinion, the elementary teacher might explain how an author uses facts to support specific points in a text, while the ELL teacher uses visuals to connect to students' prior experiences. The co-teaching team invites students to share their knowledge—even in their native language—to validate and activate prior knowledge.

In-the-moment reflections allow co-teaching teams to make immediate instructional modifications. For example, during a first-grade math lesson on addition strategies, the elementary teacher might recognize that the majority of the students are struggling with number lines. While students are lining up to go to lunch, the elementary and ELL teachers briefly discuss adding line charts and manipulatives for the next lesson. These quick, casual reflections support both teachers staying aligned, promptly responding to individual needs, and constantly making improvements without formal meetings.

Limitations

When researching co-teaching models, several limitations can affect the validity of the findings. One major limitation was the minimal number of participants involved in the study, which reduces the generalizability and reliability of the findings. Future studies could potentially increase participation by leveraging technologies, such as employing social media to digitally solicit participation.

Additionally, there was considerable variability in how co-teaching teams implemented the Collaborative Instructional Cycle, ranging from planning with digital tools to never finding

time to co-plan. This variability made it challenging to draw conclusions across the focus group data, as the effectiveness of co-teaching may depend largely on the specific context within which the co-teaching existed. Future studies could include additional contextual information about participants and their current co-teaching knowledge to make the data more uniform and potentially generalizable. For instance, researchers could add additional questions on the informed consent form to streamline participant familiarity.

Future Recommendations

Based on the findings from our focus groups, we suggest future research explore different co-teaching models and which models are most effective in different classroom and school contexts. Research could explore the impact of leadership and the nuances of co-teaching teams. For instance, research could focus on how the school context impacts the Collaborative Instructional Cycle.

Additionally, future research could place importance on missed opportunities for resources to support co-teaching teams. This could include research that focuses on professional development opportunities that district and school leaders could participate in to provide intentional and targeted support for effective co-teaching practices. For instance, research could focus on professional development available for leaders that makes co-planning a non-negotiable. These recommendations address some of the challenges illuminated through this study, which lead to improved co-teaching practices that respond to student academic needs.

Honigsfeld and Dove's Collaborative Instructional Cycle is designed to be flexible across all academic settings. Future research could also benefit from this study being replicated with secondary content and ELL co-teaching teams. At the secondary level, this model is even more necessary as the academic content and language demands are more rigorous for all students.

While logistically assigning an ELL co-teacher to all content areas is a challenge in the secondary setting, a study could navigate co-teaching through the lens of the four interconnected phases.

Conclusion

This qualitative study underscores the importance of effective elementary and ELL co-teaching practices, using Honigsfeld and Dove's Collaborative Instructional Cycle as a framework. Data derived from the focus groups explored the role of the four phases in authentic classroom settings. Findings highlight the importance of common planning practices, intentional roles and responsibilities during instruction, finding relevance in student's background knowledge, and flexible co-reflective practices. To meet the content and language demands of all learners, K-6 co-teaching teams must purposefully engage with all four interconnected phases of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle.

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An Analytical Examination of VoiceThread Engagement Patterns of Pre-and In-Service Teachers in an ESL Graduate Course: Investigating Posting Frequencies, Response Modalities, and Demographic Influences

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes graduate students' engagement with VoiceThread, a multimodal discussion platform that blends audio, video, and text. Drawing on data from 94 pre- and in-service teachers enrolled in an eight-week online *English Language Development* course, we examined three dimensions of participation: posting frequency, response length, and modality choice. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and ANOVA were employed to analyze 1,128 student comments across six sections. Results revealed a strong preference for audio contributions, which comprised 83% of postings and totaled more than 40 hours of discourse. A small but significant correlation indicated that frequent posting was associated with slightly longer responses, while variation in audio length across sections indicates the influence of instructor presence. High-engagement sections, where instructors modeled active use of the platform, yielded richer and longer contributions compared to low-engagement sections. These findings suggest that while VoiceThread's affordances facilitate interaction, meaningful engagement is shaped less by the tool itself than by instructional design and teaching presence.

Keywords: VoiceThread, student engagement, instructor presence

Introduction

Education rarely stands still. In recent decades, classrooms that once revolved around textbooks, chalkboards, and fixed routines have been given new life through the rapid growth of digital tools. For instance, online platforms can connect people across time and place and extend the boundaries of learning well beyond the walls of the classroom. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to adopt technology for their pedagogy rather than treat it as an optional add-on, while students, in turn, find themselves engaging with content and each other in many new ways with the help of technological tools. Among the technological platforms that have gained a foothold in higher education and teacher preparation programs is VoiceThread. Research across disciplines has confirmed that VoiceThread, a multimodal platform, can reduce transactional distance, stimulate collaboration, and promote autonomy (Bodis et al., 2020; Glick, 2021; Merriam & Hobba-Glose, 2021).

VoiceThread, with its blend of audio, video, and text, moves interaction beyond the flatness of text-only forums as it encourages participants to contribute with tone, gesture, and pace. These affordances, scholars suggest, can create the possibility for more meaningful exchanges and reflective learning communities (Acosta & Parra, 2023; Ching & Hsu, 2013; Delmas, 2017). In the context of an *English Language Development* course designed to prepare future teachers of English language learners (ELLs) in the U.S. P–12 classrooms, VoiceThread has been integrated not simply as a tool, but as a core element of pedagogy. Students are asked to comprehend content, share experiences, respond to peers, and critically reflect on teaching practice in ways that mirror the collaborative demands of 21st-century classrooms (Hawk & Coriasco, 2024; Sharoff, 2022).

However, enthusiasm for new platforms does not eliminate important questions, such as how students use such tools when they become part of coursework. Do the promised benefits of meaningful interaction translate into practice? Prior research has noted the

potential of multimedia platforms to support learning collaboration among learners and teachers (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011). However, less is known about the patterns of such participation within specific teacher education contexts. Some quantitative studies, for example, highlight how VoiceThread-mediated peer and self-assessment can yield measurable gains in oral proficiency and self-efficacy (Liao, 2025), while others show that reflective speaking tasks often remain at surface levels despite positive learner attitudes (Sojisirikul & Chanchula, 2023). Building on these insights, this study examines the following three dimensions of student engagement with VoiceThread in an *English Language Development* course: *the frequency of postings and responses, the relationship between postings and response length, and the proportion of contributions made in audio, video and text format.*

Literature Review

Digital tools have greatly influenced how teaching and learning take place in online higher education courses. VoiceThread (VT) is one of these tools and has become an important platform for interaction between students and instructors (Ching & Hsu, 2013; Delmas, 2017; Utami & Santosa, 2023). It encourages communication that feels more immediate and personal, strengthening the learning experience in virtual classrooms.

Multimodality of VoiceThread as An Interactive Tool

The value of VoiceThread as a multimodal interactive tool in online education is well documented (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011; Ching & Hsu, 2013; Saçak & Kavun, 2023; Utami & Santosa, 2023). Research shows that it creates a lively communication channel between students and instructors. The platform allows for the exchange of ideas, feedback, and discussion in an asynchronous setting. Multimodal responses in VoiceThread include audio, video, and text, which makes the interaction richer and more flexible. These modes give students different ways to contribute and allow teachers to respond in formats that fit varied

learning preferences. Research shows this variety strengthens the learning experience (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2017; Mejia, 2020). Each mode allows students to express themselves differently. Audio and video bring tone and presence. Text offers clarity and precision. Together, they support different learning preferences and add depth to classroom exchanges. This flexibility also makes the environment more inclusive, since students can choose the format that best matches their comfort and needs.

Ching and Hsu (2013) investigated graduate students' experiences using VoiceThread in an online course and found that half of the students felt more connected with their peers due to the multiple modes of interacting with their peers using VoiceThread. Utami and Santosa (2023) did a systematic review on the studies related to the use of VoiceThread to improve English as a foreign language speakers' (EFL) spoken English, and found that VoiceThread significantly contributed to the improvement of learners' spoken English, particularly because of its video and audio recording functions for interactions and feedback.

Student Engagement and Community Building through VoiceThread

Research has shown that VoiceThread helps instructors and students create a community in online courses with more student engagement (Chen & Bogachenko, 2023; Delmas, 2017; McMurray, 2024; Rabu et al., 2025; Walden & Hale, 2025). Student engagement on VoiceThread can be seen in both the frequency and the length of postings. These measures give a clear signal of participation in the learning process (Delmas, 2017; Fox, 2017). Both the number and the length of posts demonstrate the involvement of students in a course. These patterns can act as a barometer of involvement, linking the quantity of interaction to the quality of engagement with the course.

Compared with text-based discussion boards, VoiceThread allows students to feel the presence of their peers and instructor with the audio and video formats, and thus students turned out to participate more with VoiceThread in the online course, which contributes to

building an online community (Chen & Bogachenko, 2023). Delmas (2017) found that the majority of graduate students in the study felt more connected to their classmates and their instructor using VoiceThread and that VoiceThread helps create a sense of community among them.

More work is needed to understand how low and high levels of engagement shape the way students use VoiceThread. Prior research points to a complex relationship between engagement and posting patterns (Joiner & Patterson, 2019; Stamps & Opton, 2019). Some groups may post often but write briefly, while others may post less but offer richer comments. These differences suggest that targeted interventions may help teachers encourage more balanced and meaningful participation.

Research Gaps

VoiceThread has numerous benefits in online education, but important gaps remain. Most studies are qualitative, investigating instructors' and/or students' perceptions on using VoiceThread in their coursework (e.g., Ching & Hsu, 2013; Delmas, 2017; Gonzalez & Moore, 2018). A few studies are quantitative showing that VoiceThread contributes to students' oral English proficiency (Ibañez Vallejos, 2024; Liao, 2025). However, studies have not fully examined students' VoiceThread posting behavior. Therefore, our study fills in the gap by examining how patterns of VoiceThread posting behavior relate to different levels of participation and learning in virtual classrooms.

Methodology

The study used a quantitative design and collected data from 11 VoiceThread presentations of 94 graduate students, who were mainly pre-service or in-service teachers, across six sections of a graduate online ESL course. Both researchers, who worked as the teaching assistants of the graduate course, recorded all postings and responses in a Google Spreadsheet to maintain consistency and accuracy. They counted the number of posts,

measured the length of responses, and noted the format students used, including texts, audios, and videos. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured to meet ethical standards for research with human participants.

The data for this study were derived from VT interaction in an eight-week online *English Language Development* course offered in Fall 2023 (see Table 1). Curriculum-wise, each week is divided into two parts: Monday to Wednesday and Thursday to Sunday. The course is designed to build foundational knowledge and practice in second language instruction for P–12 settings. It primarily focuses on the early and middle stages of language development in children and adolescents. VoiceThread, the focus of this study, accounts for 40% of the assignments used to assess students' overall performance in the course.

Across the eight weeks, VoiceThread plays a central role in promoting discussion and reflection and is linked to the weekly content; each week, students' and instructors' interaction was recorded on a Google Spreadsheet by the researchers. The discussions progress in sequence, starting with questions such as “Who are ELLs?” and then shifting to legal issues, teacher knowledge, and case studies, including *Secrets of a Wild Child*. Later weeks address theories of cognition, oral language research, program models for bilinguals, and testing requirements (See table 1). The course closes with work on reading strategies and advocacy for ELLs. This structure helps participants connect theory with practice while they reflect on the needs of English learners across different contexts.

The study included 94 graduate students. Most were white female in-service teachers; specifically, we had 85 females, 8 males, and one nonbinary participant. Elementary school teachers comprised the largest group, accounting for 46.8 per cent of the total. English Language teachers, including those in dual language and bilingual roles, made up 30.9 per cent. The group was therefore weighted toward those working in the early grades. Other groups of participants include middle and high school teachers, graduate students, and a few

working in administration and higher education. During the self-introductions, participants shared their expectations for the course. Many wanted to strengthen their knowledge of ELL teaching methods and explore new tools that could support diverse learners. Others focused on applying cultural content in lessons and creating a conducive learning environment. Personal aspirations also emerged. A few participants wanted ELL certification and knowledge to advance their careers.

The data were analyzed with SPSS and Excel, drawing on descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and one-way ANOVA. These methods are used to identify general patterns of participation, test relationships between variables, and compare differences across groups (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Table 1

Weekly Themes of the English Language Development Course

Week	Theme
1A	Who are ELLs?
2A	History of Federal, State, and Local Laws and Policies for ELLs
2B	What do teachers need to know about language?
3A	Secrets of a Wild Child
4A	Cognitive Language Acquisition Theories
4B	Oral Language Development Research
5A	Program Models for Emergent Bilinguals
6A	Critical look at ELL testing requirements
6B	Reading <i>To, With and By</i> ELLs; Reading research for ELLs
7A	Writing Research, development, Standards, and Instruction for ELLs
8AB	Advocacy for ELLs

Results

Frequency of VoiceThread Postings and Responses

Findings show that VoiceThread engagement in the ESL course shows that students strongly favored the audio format for interaction over video and text formats (see Figure 1). Audio comments were the dominant mode, taking up 83%, with 941 out of 1,128 total comments. This far exceeded video comments at 13% (146) and text comments at 4% (41).

Video was used less often, and text was rare. This distribution suggests that students favour the ease and speed of speaking over writing or recording videos. The low number of text responses may reflect the fact that many students used the smartphone app, which made speaking more convenient than typing. Moreover, audio also stood out when measured by the total length (see Table 2). Students produced 941 audio comments that together reached 40 hours and 45 minutes. In contrast, video comments added up to only 5 hours and 29 minutes.

Figure 1

Frequency of Threads

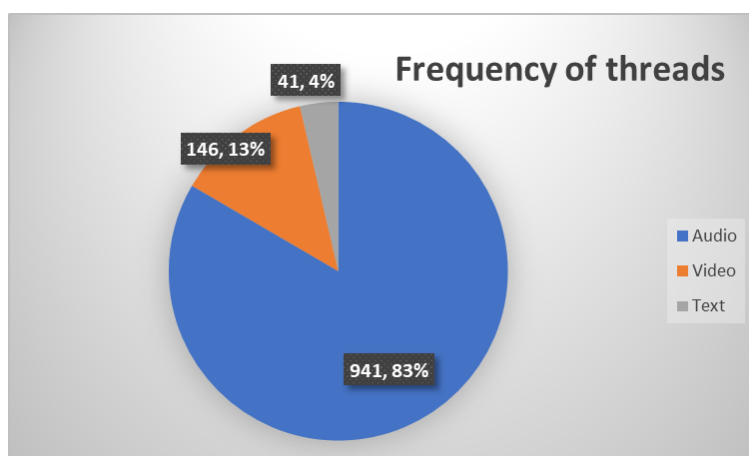


Table 2

Frequency of VoiceThread Engagement (n=94)

Week	Audio (Count)	Video (Count)	Text (Count)	Avg. Comment Counts	Avg. Audio (min)	Avg. Video (min)	Total Audio (hh:mm:ss)	Total Video (hh:mm:ss)
Week 1 A	90	18	1	3.28	1.38	1.66	4:47:30	1:01:04
Week 2 A	88	13	5	3.90	2.26	2.10	5:24:02	0:39:15
Week 2 B	86	16	8	3.75	2.13	2.29	5:04:10	1:01:31
Week 3 A	91	14	5	2.38	2.12	1.90	3:28:22	0:14:00
Week 4 A	92	16	2	2.19	2.22	2.11	3:22:00	0:18:20
Week 4 B	81	15	5	2.14	2.07	2.58	2:51:15	0:24:00
Week 5 A	87	13	3	2.56	2.42	3.13	3:25:00	0:31:14
Week 6 A	83	14	3	2.50	2.22	2.04	3:18:42	0:32:42

VoiceThread Engagement Patterns

Week 6 B	85	13	5	2.98	2.22	1.97	4:01:05	0:28:05
Week 7 A	88	12	1	2.45	2.09	3.10	3:30:35	0:19:00
Week 8 AB	70	2	3	1.04	2.90	2.86	1:15:00	0:02:00
Total	941	146	41	2.65	2.18	2.34	40:45:15	5:29:02

Average comment counts and lengths show a similar pattern. Students posted an average of 2.65 posts per week. The course required a minimum of two VTs for each lecture, which means that students slightly surpassed the threshold. Video posts averaged 2.34 minutes, while audio posts averaged 2.18 minutes. Video was less frequent, but when used, it was longer, which suggests deeper effort. Audio was the steadier choice across weeks. The highest average came in Week 2A (3.90). The lowest came in Week 8AB (1.04). These patterns suggest that audio provided convenience, while video invited more effort when students chose that mode.

Table 3

Average Comment and Audio Length Per VoiceThread Across Course Sections

Section	<i>n</i>	Comment Count (Mean)	Audio Length (Mean)
Section A	19	2.5879	1.6012
Section B	18	2.6152	2.528
Section C	16	2.5784	1.9353
Section D	16	2.8931	1.8094
Section E	12	2.5027	2.098
Section F	16	2.7996	1.4286
Total	94	2.6699	1.8944

Table 3 shows that students posted an average of 2.67 comments per section, with small variation across groups. Section D had the highest average comment count (2.89), while Section E had the lowest (2.50). Audio length also differed. Section B students produced the longest audio responses at 2.53 minutes on average, while Section F produced the shortest at 1.43 minutes. These patterns suggest that, although comment frequency was

fairly steady across sections, the amount of detail students provided in their audio responses varied more noticeably.

Relationship between the Students' Postings on VoiceThread and the Length of Their Responses

We also investigated whether students who posted more often on VT also gave longer audio responses. Pearson's correlation showed a small but positive link ($r(92) = .206$, $p = .046$) (see Table 4). This means that students who posted more frequently tended to leave slightly longer audio comments. The relationship was statistically significant, but it was weak. Other factors, such as individual communication style or the nature of the assignment, may have shaped response length in important ways. The pattern suggests that more frequent posting can support profound discussion, but the effect is modest.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation between VoiceThread Posting Frequency and Average Audio Length ($n = 94$)

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
VT thread counts × Average audio length	0.206	.046*	28.23	9.26
Average audio length	—	—	1.89	0.78

Note. $p < .05$.

Proportion of Student Responses in the Course Delivered in Audio Compared to Video Format

We also compared student response patterns in sections with high and low instructor engagement. Students in high-engagement sections posted an average of 2.98 comments per VT, while those in low-engagement sections posted 2.50 (see Table 5). Instructors also differed sharply, with high-engagement instructors averaging 14.09 comments compared to 7.29 in low-engagement sections. Student responses reflected these contrasts. For instance, students' audio comments in high-engagement sections were longer, with an average of 2.09 minutes, compared to 1.42 minutes in low-engagement contexts. Video comments followed

the same pattern. Students in high-engagement sections produced video comments averaging 1.24 minutes, while students in low-engagement sections averaged only 0.19 minutes. Instructors in low-engagement sections also provided no video comments at all, further underlining the difference in participation across the groups.

Table 5

High Versus Low Engagement Patterns on VoiceThread

Attributes	High Engagement Section (Students)	High Engagement Section (Instructor)	Low Engagement Section (Students)	Low Engagement Section (Instructor)
Average comment counts per VT	2.98	14.09	2.5	7.29
Average length of audio comments	2.09	2.3	1.42	0.29
Average length of video comments	1.24	2.1	0.19	0

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if average comment counts per VT differed significantly among the six course sections (see Table 6). Results indicated no statistically significant differences, $F(5, 88) = 0.50, p = .776$, suggesting consistency in the average number of comments students made across all sections. This finding is insightful despite variations in individual teaching styles or minor differences in course dynamics, and overall student engagement in terms of posting frequency remained remarkably uniform. Consequently, instructors might consider other factors (i.e., modality of responses or depth of interactions) rather than merely focusing on quantity when aiming to enhance student engagement.

Table 6

One-Way ANOVA for Average Comment Counts per VoiceThread among Course Sections

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	1.64	5	0.33	0.50	.776
Within Groups	57.84	88	0.66		

Total	59.48	93
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Note. $p > .05$, indicating no significant differences.

A one-way ANOVA tested whether the average length of audio comments differed across the six course sections (see Table 7). The results showed a statistically significant difference, $F(5, 88) = 5.15, p < .001$, with a moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = .226$). This means that students did not all use audio in the same way. Some sections produced longer and more developed comments than others. The variation may point to the influence of instructor style, class culture, or task design.

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA for Average Audio Length per VoiceThread among Course Sections

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Between Groups	10.2	5	2.04	5.15	< .001	0.226
Within Groups	34.74	88	0.4			
Total	44.94	93				

Note. $p < .001$, indicating significant differences; η^2 denotes a moderate effect size.

Discussion

This study examined VoiceThread engagement patterns among graduate students enrolled in an *English Language Development* course for pre-and in-service teachers. The study found that among the three VT formats - audio, video, and text, students favored the audio format the most, which dominated both the frequency (at 83%) and the lengths of their postings (totaling 40 hours and 45 minutes). Speaking is often faster than typing, and adds tone and presence, which text alone cannot capture. This aligns with the findings that students consider the multimodality of VT helpful for them to connect to each other and convey their emotions, better than the text-only discussion forum format (Ching & Hsu, 2013; Delmas, 2017). Ching and Hsu's (2013) study on VoiceThread also showed that students used the audio format the most, followed by the video and text formats.

The results also show that with more frequent posts, students tended to have slightly longer lengths of their audio posts as well. The correlation between posting frequency and response length was small but statistically significant. Students who posted more often tended to provide slightly longer audio comments. Although the effect was weak, it aligned with previous research suggesting that repeated interaction can encourage reflective and collaborative learning (Fox, 2017; Stamps & Opton, 2019). This finding also points to the role of habits, primarily that students who regularly engage may gradually expand the depth of their responses.

Instructor engagement also emerged as an important factor in this regard. In sections where instructors posted more frequently, students also contributed more comments and longer responses. We found that the more voice threads an instructor posted and responded to students, the more the students were engaged. For example, among the six sections, on average, in audio format, the highest engaged section had the instructor post 14.09 times and students 2.98 times, and the lowest engaged section had the instructor post 7.29 times and students 2.5 times. This implies that instructor engagement can lead to better student performance in online classes. This phenomenon supports the existing work on instructor presence, which has been found to influence participation, motivation, and satisfaction in online courses (Roque-Hernández et al., 2023; Sharoff, 2022). In other words, when instructors model active use of the platform and provide timely feedback, students are more likely to reciprocate with effort and consistency (Carless & Winstone, 2023). In contrast, sections with less instructor presence showed shorter and fewer responses, which reinforces the idea that teaching presence is central to sustaining dialogue in virtual classrooms (Garrison et al., 2010).

The preference for audio responses and the relatively steady posting rate also point to the practical choices students make. Most were practicing teachers, many of whom balanced

coursework with professional duties. Convenience, therefore, may have been a deciding factor. As other studies have shown, working professionals in graduate programs often adopt technologies in ways that minimize time while still meeting course requirements (Nguyen et al., 2022; Qureshi et al., 2023). The use of the VT mobile app, which made audio posting simple, likely encouraged these patterns of learning practice. Meanwhile, the variation across course sections in audio length, though not in frequency, could suggest that classroom culture and instructor style play a role in shaping learners' engagement.

In contrast, video postings were relatively rare, a trend also observed in prior research where students reported anxiety and workload concerns with video production (Chang & Windeatt, 2023). The significant ANOVA result for audio length indicates that some sections promoted more elaborate responses than others. This resonates with Liao's (2025) quantitative evidence, where structured peer/self-assessment scaffolds yielded higher oral proficiency scores ($F(1,34) = 15.603, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$), suggesting that the way instructors frame expectations, instructional design, task framing, and feedback practices influence learners' engagement (Clark & Mayer, 2023). In other words, when students perceive that longer, more detailed responses are valued, they may be more willing to extend their contributions. Sojisirikul and Chanchula's (2023) analysis of 156 VT reflections showed that without explicit prompting, 80% of responses remained at non-reflective levels; such an issue calls for instructional design rather than platform affordances alone to drive learning depth.

Conclusion and Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of research on VoiceThread by providing quantitative evidence of how graduate students in a teacher education program engage with multimodal discussion platforms. Results revealed a strong preference for audio contributions, a modest but significant link between posting frequency and response length, and notable differences in depth of engagement influenced by instructor presence. These

findings, therefore, echo prior work and show that multimodal tools alone do not guarantee meaningful interaction; rather, the extent and quality of instructor scaffolding determine whether students move beyond surface participation toward more reflective contributions. For example, in sections where instructors modeled active engagement by posting detailed audio responses and timely feedback, students reciprocated with longer, more thoughtful contributions. This phenomenon suggests that deliberate instructor presence can shift participation from routine compliance to meaningful academic dialogue.

Our study has implications for the practices of online instructors to engage their students via VT or other engagement platforms. Firstly, as our findings show that audio was the dominant format among the three formats - audio, video and text, instructors may consider diversify the requirements of the format choice of students' postings from week to week to encourage more videos and texts, as various formats/video format can contribute to community building in online courses when students do not have an opportunity to meet each other in person (Chen & Bogachenko, 2023; Delmas, 2017). Secondly, instructors who engaged more in the course with more responses to their students on VT ended up with more student engagement. Therefore, online instructors are encouraged to model for their students and show their presence, which can help make the class more engaging.

Furthermore, for teacher preparation programs, this study suggests that instructional design should integrate VT training, explicit prompts, feedback cycles, and modeling to leverage VT's affordances fully. In practice, this might mean requiring students to post an initial audio response and then a follow-up peer reply each week by using rubrics to promote meaningful reflection, and having instructors record model responses that demonstrate how to connect theory with classroom experience. Since this study was limited to a single program context, future research could compare outcomes across disciplines and explore ethnographic narratives to better understand how habits of participation improve over time. The current

study supports that technology is most useful for online learning and whatnot when paired with purposeful pedagogy, which could be delivered by improving teaching presence as a central driver of engagement in digital learning spaces.

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Features of English Medium Instruction Teachers Training

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ABSTRACT

English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries where it is not the predominant language. Its adoption is growing due to factors such as enhancing English language acquisition, providing a common language in multilingual settings, boosting economic competitiveness and global literacy, attracting international students, and improving university rankings. However, both educators and students often struggle with insufficient English proficiency. EMI programs typically prioritize content over language development, leaving instructors unprepared for teaching in a foreign language.

Kharkiv National Medical University (KhNMU) has a long history of implementing EMI, aiming to enhance student mobility and maintain competitiveness in the international education sector. The university employs a “full EMI” model, requiring faculty to meet a minimum English proficiency of B2. Recognizing the language challenges faced by instructors, KhNMU launched pre-service EMI teacher training programs. These programs address specific language needs, incorporating elements of EAP and ESP, while developing key EFL teaching skills. Effective EMI requires not only strong English proficiency but also the use of learner-centered, interactive teaching methods, making comprehensive teacher training essential for both language enhancement and pedagogical development.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI), Teacher Training, Professional Development, English Proficiency

The Global English Medium Instruction Context and Rationale

The global prominence of English as the *lingua franca* in fields such as science, technology, industry, and business has led to the growing trend of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in tertiary education. As Dearden (2014) explains, “the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English”. This development illustrates the growing demand for English-language education in countries where English is not the native language, as it increasingly serves as the primary medium of academic instruction to address both national and international educational requirements.

As a result, the popularity of EMI continues to grow, often positioned as an alternative to traditional instruction in the local language. Richards and Pun (2021) identify several key reasons for the adoption of EMI, particularly in universities aiming to stay competitive in a globalized education market. These reasons include:

- Improving English language proficiency among students.
- Providing a common medium of instruction in multilingual contexts.
- Attracting international students to enhance global appeal.
- Boosting institutional rankings and prestige.
- Promoting the development of global literacy and intercultural communication skills.

However, in the context of EMI, English is not just a medium of instruction but also a tool for transferring knowledge and ideas. As such, it is clear that English language proficiency plays a central role in the effectiveness of education delivered through EMI. Yet, as Kirkpatrick (2017) points out, in countries where English is not the official language, both faculty members and students often struggle with insufficient English proficiency, which can hinder their success in EMI settings.

Given this context, one of the key challenges in EMI implementation is that the focus tends to be on content rather than language. As a result, EMI teachers, many of whom have

not received prior training or access to resources for teaching in a foreign language, often find themselves delivering academic content in English without the necessary pedagogical support (Dearden, 2014; Walkinshaw et al., 2017).

The lack of content teachers who are proficient enough in English to teach their subjects effectively (Cheng, 2017), combined with the shortage of appropriate training opportunities for such teachers (Miller, 2020), further exacerbates the difficulties faced in some countries when implementing EMI programs.

Thus, training subject teachers for work in the EMI setting is essential for the development and success of EMI systems at universities in non-English-speaking countries. This article reports on the experience of Kharkiv National Medical University (KhNMU) in preparing its faculty to teach in English-medium environments. The core thesis is that effective EMI teacher training must address both language enhancement and pedagogical development to adequately prepare instructors for challenges of teaching in an English-language setting.

This conceptual piece outlines the rationale, design, and implementation of a pre-service EMI teacher training program at KhNMU. It focuses on the institutional context and theoretical foundations that informed the program's curriculum, rather than presenting empirical data on its effectiveness. The aim is to show how a balanced approach to language proficiency and pedagogical skills can contribute to the success and sustainability of EMI programs.

English Medium Instruction at Kharkiv National Medical University

Kharkiv National Medical University has been training international students for over 70 years, with EMI programs in place since 1996. Today, EMI students at the university can pursue degrees in three major fields: Medicine, Dentistry, and Nursing. The decision to implement EMI was driven by several key factors.

Until the early 1990s, international students were enrolled in Ukrainian universities under intergovernmental agreements within the Soviet Union. However, after Ukraine gained independence, universities gained autonomy in student enrollment, prompting a shift in how international students were admitted. To remain competitive and relevant in the evolving global education landscape, the university recognized the need to modernize and offer programs in English.

Key motivations for implementing EMI included the rise in global student mobility, increased international competition for students, and the university's desire to maintain financial stability. Additionally, as domestic student numbers declined due to demographic shifts, EMI offered a way to attract international students and improve the university's standing in global rankings. This shift was also part of a broader push for internationalization, with faculty being encouraged to improve their English proficiency.

By the early 2020s, the university had risen to second place in Ukraine in terms of international student enrollment, and was the leading medical university in the country for EMI students.

EMI at KhNMU has always been the so-called full EMI, that is English is used in all elements of instruction (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018).

According to the typology proposed by J.C. Richards and J. Pun (2021), the EMI model at KhNMU can be characterized as content, single medium, sheltered, selection, supportive, English competent, with content assessment, English proficient teachers, bilingual or English certified learners both experienced and inexperienced EMI learners, native-speaker and designed materials. A detailed description is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

English Medium Instruction typology at Kharkiv National Medical University

Criterion	Model	Description
Purpose	Content EMI	Learning academic content and skills through English
Assessment	Content EMI	Assessment based on content mastery
Curriculum models	Single medium Sheltered	All major content subjects except foreign languages taught in English Content teacher teaches a content course specially designed for L2 students
Introduction of EMI	Early EMI or Middle EMI or Late EMI	EMI commences in pre-school or primary school and continues to higher education EMI commences in secondary school and continues to higher education EMI occurs only in higher education
Access to EMI	Selection	Students must demonstrate a proficiency level in English
The English course and EMI	Supportive	The English course includes support for EMI
The EMI teacher	English competent	Teachers must pass a proficiency test to teach EMI or be assessed as having sufficient English proficiency for EMI
The English subject teacher	English proficient	Teachers are proficient speakers of English as L2
The EMI student	Bilingual (+) English or	Learners may be bilingual or multilingual, including English Learners must achieve a certain proficiency level

	English certified Inexperienced EMI or Experienced EMI	in English in order to take part in EMI Learners have no previous experience of EMI Learners have previous experiences of EMI
Instructional materials in EMI	Native-speaker materials and Designed materials	Materials designed for use in English-speaking countries for English native-speaker teachers and students Specially designed materials in English suitable for teaching content subjects in the EMI context

To clarify the key terms, the different types of EMI mentioned in the table can be defined as follows: Content-EMI refers to learning academic subjects and skills in English, with evaluations focusing on content understanding rather than language proficiency. This approach integrates English into the curriculum while prioritizing mastery of the subject matter. Single-medium EMI involves courses where all instruction, including lectures and assessments, is conducted entirely in English, with no additional support in the native language. Sheltered EMI is a more tailored approach in which major subjects, excluding foreign languages, are taught in English. The courses are specifically designed for second-language learners, with content instructors adapting the material to meet students' language needs.

At KhNMU, the primary goal of EMI is content mastery. Students' performance is assessed based on their ability to assimilate the subject matter, with no language other than English used in instruction. The students' experiences with EMI vary: some have been

educated in English from primary school, while others have no EMI experience prior to University. Admission is based on results from an English entrance exam. To support first-year students who need to adjust to EMI, a short English course is offered. This course introduces medical terminology and helps students consolidate or acquire the language necessary for subjects like Biology, Chemistry, and Anatomy which they would have studied in school. Faculty members' language proficiency is also assessed before they begin teaching in EMI. The study materials used are a mix of resources designed for English-speaking countries and those specially prepared by university faculty for EMI students.

English Medium Instruction Teachers at Kharkiv National Medical University

At KhNMU, English proficiency of the EMI subject teachers has always been considered critical and their language proficiency has always been evaluated before receiving permission to teach their subject in English. Notably, there is still no consensus on the level of English of EMI teachers. There is an opinion that the teachers applying for the work with EMI students should have a C1 (CEFR) or in other words advanced, level of English proficiency. This opinion is supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, although, according to the British Council, B2 (CERF), or upper intermediate, is a suggested minimum for effective teaching in the medium of English (Bolitho & West, 2017). According to the regulations of the university, the candidates for teaching in the EMI setting must have at least a B2 level of English which must be confirmed either by passing an internationally recognized exam (as a rule TOEFL, IELTS, Cambridge English, Pearson Test of English, APTIS) or by passing a university exam which tests reading, writing, listening, speaking, language use.

Unfortunately, English language proficiency in Ukraine has proven insufficient despite 11 years of learning English at school and a university course of English for specific purpose. In 2023 the position of the country in EF English Proficiency Index went down

significantly from 35 out of 111 in the previous year to 45 out of 113 in the world and 31 out of 34 in Europe, a “moderate proficiency” group (EF EPI 2023). These figures tell us that it may not appear an easy task to find a specialist (subject teacher) with an upper intermediate or higher level of English gained at school lessons, the fact that can hinder the development and expansion of this form of education in Ukraine. To compensate for these deficiencies KhNMU launched pre-service EMI teacher training in English.

Experience of training EMI teachers at KhNMU shows that many of them are struggling with language-related issues, stemming from language inadequacies, which make them feel insecure about their own linguistic performance and fear a loss of subject-content depth. They also tend to have concerns about pedagogy, seeing language and pedagogical challenges as a threat to learning outcomes. This proves that many EMI teachers need specialized support to increase their own proficiency and strategic behavior.

English Medium Instruction Students at Kharkiv National Medical University

According to the existing Ukrainian regulations, only international students can be instructed in the medium of English. EMI students at KhNMU are mostly from the countries where English is either L2 or a foreign language. The majority are from Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Middle East and North Africa (MENA). There are rarely students from the countries where English is an official language and those we have usually tend to be first-generation immigrants. The reasons why these students choose EMI are various, among them:

- 1) 1 year shorter and thus less costly course of studies (if an international student takes Ukrainian-medium, he/she has to spend one year doing preparatory course);
- 2) after graduating they will have to pass licensing exams in their country in English;
- 3) they are planning to move to an English-speaking country after the graduation;

4) they are afraid that they will not cope with mastering medicine in the medium of Ukrainian;

5) EMI can improve their job prospects;

6) they hope to improve their language proficiency studying within the medium of English.

The level of English proficiency of the students who gained entrance is variable but at least B1 (CEFR), or intermediate, because according to the rules existing at the university, this is the minimum level of English demonstrated on the entrance exam to be admitted. As it is seen from Table 1, EMI students represent a heterogeneous group. Some of them are bilingual with English as a second language (for example, the students from Nigeria, India), for the others, English is a foreign language which they learned at school and perhaps did not use outside the classroom (the students from MENA countries). Besides, some of them are late EMI students who started leaning in the medium of English after entering the university, which means that they entered the university without any experience of studying in English, do not understand the difficulties, have no strategies of EMI learning, in addition often lack the knowledge of the language of Biology, Chemistry, Physics – the subjects on which the 1st and 2nd year courses are based; they sometimes have insufficient EAP proficiency. Among the applicants there are students whose English proficiency was assessed by passing internationally recognized exams, for example the TOEFL or IELTS, while the rest were assessed at school.

The Design and Rationale of the EMI Teacher Training Course

The course is planned in the traditional way; the work is preceded by a thorough needs analysis. Besides the stakeholders, we also consider the opinion of those who took part in the translation/ proofreading /editing of the educational materials for the EMI students. In this way we obtain valuable information about the communicative genres most in demand

from the EMI teachers. The core of the course is general English with elements of EAP and ESP (medicine), the proportion of general English being dependent on the results of the mandatory placement test. The general English component aligns with the standard practices for adult foreign language instruction.

However, the English course for teachers has one feature which puts it apart from other courses of English. The fact is that simultaneously with subject material the students must acquire the language of the subject: technical words, collocations, communicative genres. In the medium of the mother tongue, this is the job of the subject teacher, which is done automatically. In EMI settings this is the responsibility of the EMI teacher. Besides, as you see from the description of our EMI students, this teacher will work with a mixed-ability group of students with different language proficiency and different experience of EMI, for some of them English is a foreign language. Thus, to accomplish the goals of the teaching process, the teacher should realize the linguistic problems of the students and be prepared to deal with them. As it was assumed “they (EMI teachers) would additionally need to find alternative ways of presenting academic material to students for whom English was also a second language. In which case similar skills required of an EFL teacher would need to be found in an EMI teacher. They would need to know how to modify their methods of input, assure comprehension via student-initiated interactional modifications and create an atmosphere where students operating in an L2 are not afraid to speak; all this whilst taking into account the many cultural differences present in the room and the potentially different language levels of individuals” (Dearden, 2014), otherwise “how students are supposed to understand lectures and classes if the EMI teacher does not help with their knowledge of English by paraphrasing, by teaching subject-specific vocabulary and technical terms” (Dearden, 2014).

Integrating EFL/Pedagogical Skills Development

The essential EFL teacher skills can be summarized as follows:

- 1) to overcome lexical difficulties of the students, to pre-teach vocabulary;
- 2) to present the material in different ways, to paraphrase;
- 3) to structure the information;
- 4) to receive feedback, to see if the students understand them;
- 5) to facilitate student's speaking using graphic organizers.

Development of these skills can be incorporated in the traditional classroom activities.

Let us consider how it can be done.

1. The EMI teacher should be able to explain the meaning of the unknown words in different ways (demonstration, explanation, synonyms and antonyms, exemplification). Development of these skills can be combined with numerous activities on vocabulary consolidation at the lessons of English. As for pre-teaching vocabulary, the teacher trainer can explain the advantages of these techniques as well as how to select the words for pre-teaching. Working in small groups, EMI teacher trainees can use short texts and make lists of words for pre-teaching.

2. Paraphrasing activities can be different: using the word with the same meaning, using the words with the opposite meaning, matching phrases with similar meaning, etc.

3. Structuring information is a skill which can be developed within EAP course when teaching how to make oral presentations. First, the teacher gives the list of the phrases which are used to make an oral presentation (e.g., *The purpose of my presentations is...*, *First, I am going to tell you about... Second, we will discuss...*). After that the trainees turn a text into an oral presentation using the phrases. This can be consolidated by a role-play when the trainees make a short presentation on any subject of his/her course for the group, and the rest of the group ask questions about the points they have not understood.

4. Receiving feedback can be accomplished using short tests after each chunk of information.

5. At the lessons with subject teachers the trainer should use different graphic organizers (tables, schemes, illustrations) to facilitate speaking. The EMI teachers can be asked to prepare similar tasks for their groupmates as homework.

Role-plays when trainees give short lessons on their course for the group consolidate both English language and EFL teacher's skills.

English Medium Instruction Pedagogy

EMI is a new phenomenon in education, thus it is obvious to expect that EMI pedagogy may have specific features. The recent publications on EMI have drawn attention to the fact that EMI classes lose interactivity. It was noticed that EMI teaching is less interactive than teaching in the native language (Pun & Macaro, 2019; Lo & Macaro, 2012).

The cited above report on the results of the investigation "English Language for Universities" conducted in Ukraine highlighted the need to change the teaching style "from a teacher-led transmission style to a more interactive one" (Bolitho & West, 2017).

The studies investigating interactive teaching of medical disciplines show that the majority of students feel the need for such classes, they result in statistically significant increase of the students' performance. The students involved in active learning were also shown to learn more versus the students participating in passive sessions. Interactive lessons encourage evaluation of the content material, application of the knowledge to other types of situations and evaluation of the studied material, which plays a role in forming problem solving, decision making and communication skills (Begum et al., 2020). The use of interactive strategies increases the volume of the acquired material, stimulates thinking, inspires and motivates students, increases attention (Gupta et al., 2015). It is stated that

interactive classes are equally effective in terms of students' scores, both at online and offline teaching (Veeraiyan et al., 2022).

On the other hand, lack of interactivity results in less opportunity for students to produce the knowledge of the subject in English, thus their role in the educational process becomes passive (Pun & Macaro, 2019).

Lack of active involvement in the classroom indicates the need for the right strategy to convey knowledge in English, as well as retain the concept as a whole to students. (Galloway et al., 2017).

In this regard, it is emphasized that special professional development programs, which will provide understanding of pedagogical strategies in EMI context and make the choice of such strategies more conscious, should be introduced for EMI teachers (Macaro et al., 2020). As it was mentioned in the recent work on EMI pedagogies “The more we can raise awareness of different styles of teaching and strategies that foster interaction, the more we are able to improve EMI delivery across a range of higher education institutions” (Sahan et al., 2021).

It follows that it is possible that improving English proficiency of subject teachers will not necessarily improve the quality of teaching, as EMI is not simply about changing the language of instruction; instead, it requires teachers to re-evaluate their existing pedagogy and change it to a learner-centered approach (Dang et al., 2021).

The findings suggests that improving EMI teachers' training should address both the language and pedagogy. Language enhancement should be integrated alongside pedagogical skills development, ensuring a holistic approach to teacher preparation.

Additionally, the language course for EMI teachers should be designed with an understanding of the specific typology of EMI at the institution, as well as the characteristics and needs of the EMI students at the particular university.

We suggest that activities to develop specific EMI skills be included in training EMI teachers; the possibility to incorporate pedagogy issues in the EFL lessons should be considered.

To conclude, this paper offers a conceptual case study of KhNMU approach to training pre-service teachers to deliver content in English. While this work does not constitute an empirical study, it offers meaningful analysis of course design and implementation within this particular institutional framework. These reflections may serve as a model for similar initiatives at other universities.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Iryna Korneyko is a Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages at Kharkiv National Medical University. She is an expert in language education, specializing in ESL, ESP, EAP, EMI, and the use of distance learning technologies in higher education. Her research focuses on innovative pedagogies for ESP instruction, particularly in medical education, and the linguistic and pedagogical aspects of EMI. She explores student-centered approaches, motivational factors influencing students' engagement, interactive teaching styles, and the role of teacher training in ensuring educational quality. Her research contributes to enhancing teaching practices and learning outcomes in multilingual and professional education settings.

Dr. Violeta Kalnytska is an Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages at Kharkiv National Medical University. She specializes in ESL, ESP, EAP and EMI, with a particular focus on integrating digital tools such as AI technologies to enhance English proficiency for online learners in higher education. Her research examines the application of AI-driven platforms in supporting language acquisition and improving student engagement in online settings. Dr. Kalnytska is especially focused on exploring how technology can help

connect language development with academic achievement. She investigates new online resources and digital teaching methods that enhance linguistic skills, boost student participation, and support retention within ESP and EMI programs. She contributed to this article as a co-researcher on the case study of EMI at Kharkiv National Medical University.

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Supervising TESOL Practicum at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I reflect on my experience as a TESOL practicum course professor supervising MA students who undertook service-learning-based practicum at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program (COP) I organized and offered in conjunction and concurrently with the course. Having explained how I followed Perren's (2013) Strategic Step framework for service-learning projects, I describe the roles I assumed (supervisor, mentor, and course professor), reflect on challenges I faced and how I overcame them, and note the benefits I incurred specifically those related to video-mediated post teaching reflections. I conclude with recommendations for teacher educators interested in offering service-learning-informed teaching practicums.

Keywords: TESOL teacher preparation; supervising practicum; video-mediated post-teaching observation conferences; service-learning, community-based ESL program

Introduction

My office was on the second level, but this evening like most other evenings over the last six years, I relocated to a hallway or an open classroom to be closer to the classrooms where my TESOL practicum students would be teaching their adult ESL community classes. With a list of participants in hand, I was standing behind large double doors scrutinizing everyone walking through trying to discern, in the waves of crowd, those coming for ESL lessons. I had met most of them during placement testing, but the several who completed the assessment with my students were new to me. The incoming

learners would give themselves away by their wandering eyes surveying the building entry and the hallway unsure which way to go. Once their gaze rested on my nametag and their eyes signaled they recognized my name, I would extend a welcome and show them to the classrooms where my practicum students were waiting. They were given a basic structure to follow, needs assessment administration, getting-to-know-you activity, a mini lesson on some language aspect that stood out in the placement tests, an introduction of a weekly packet with out-of-class tasks, and the freedom to decide how to go about creating and delivering each stage in their lesson. Despite this, the first day of class brought a mix of excitement and nervousness. Knowledge that they would be co-teaching with one or two other classmates did little to quell their anxiety. However, as more learners started filtering in and my students began to interact with them, it was noticeable that their nerves gradually settled and positive emotions took over. (from research notes, Spring 2018)

This article reflects on my experience as a TESOL practicum course professor supervising MA students who undertook their compulsory course fieldwork at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program (COP). This community-based ESL program is described in Author (2023), and its key features are summarized in this paper. This experience differed from other teaching practicum programs in which the instructor of record for the practicum course observes the student teachers (STs) at their placement site or has the observation task delegated to an adjunct or part-time mentor and in which STs are placed in existing classrooms to work with a mentor cooperating or to work independently with an established curriculum in settings such as Intensive English Programs on their home university campuses, community colleges, adult education settings (Farely, 2019). In our case, I, as a teacher educator (TE), set up the adult

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ESL community program as a field site for the students enrolled in the course, we shared the responsibility of conducting placements of program participants, and STs had a sole responsibility of developing and teaching their own 90-minute lessons once a week for 10 weeks.

The program design was informed by the service-learning pedagogy (e.g., Cooper, 2002; Lin, 2007; Perren, 2013; Rosenberger, 2000) viewed as “action and reflection integrated with academic curriculum to enhance student learning and to meet community needs.” (Rosenberg, 2000, p.24). Specifically, I followed Perren’s (2013) Strategic Step framework, a set of seven empirically grounded guidelines for planning, implementing, participating in, and evaluating service-learning projects that derived from research in intensive English courses for ESL students. Although the TESOL MA practicum course was situated in a different context, Perren’s model was useful in helping ensure the service-learning practicum model was consistent. I followed each step outlined by Perren, but my procedures diverged because of my student population, their goals for the service, and the absence of community partner organization. While the proposed framework was directed at ESL students in an intensive English program who were undertaking service-learning projects offered by community partners to improve their English language skills, the Adult ESL COP was created by the practicum course professor for ESL STs who were developing their English language teaching practice. Table 1 presents how the practicum experience at the Adult ESL COP was structured with reference to Perren's seven steps for implementing service-learning.

Before each Adult ESL COP iteration, STs were informed that the program had been created in response to a community need for affordable ESL classes and a student need for additional options for the practicum course field experience requirement. They were introduced

to the program features and requirements. For practicum at Adult ESL COP, STs were to focus on developing learners' communicative language skills and development of learner autonomy, one of the essentials for successful language learning (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). To that end, STs were asked to create lessons that integrated the skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing and had clear language targets and included instruction in language learning strategies. They were tasked with selecting a minimum of one book for extensive reading and creating weekly packets that participants completed outside of class. In terms of content, the weekly packet tasks were reviews and extensions of the previously studied material, previews of the subsequent lessons, and reflections on extensive reading. STs were informed that, in addition to planning and delivering lessons, they would create an instrument for a needs assessment and a situational analysis (Richards, 2017) for their class; design a course syllabus that drew on the results of the needs and placement assessments; integrate extensive reading, and create, select, and/or adapt instructional materials based on the needs of and resources available to their learners. STs agreed to submit their lesson plan outlines and weekly packets for my review two days before teaching and, need be, to make revisions before using the materials in instruction. They had the option to request copies from me a day before their ESL classes.

Classes were offered in the evenings and started the sixth week of the semester after key lesson planning concepts (e.g., backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe 2005)), principles of instructed second language acquisition (Ellis & Shintani, 2014), and curriculum design (Richards, 2017) had been reinforced. They concluded the final week of the semester. Not everyone in the practicum course was teaching in the Adult ESL program, but those who did received training in administration and interpretation of the results of a placement test used in the Adult ESL COP and review fundamentals of teaching adult ESL learners (Graham & Walsh, Supervising TESOL Practicum

1996; Murray & Christison, 2020). As STs were teaching their adult ESL classes, our lesson topics centered mainly on reflective teaching, ESL teachers' and student beliefs, classroom management, instructional modeling, collaborative learning and grouping structures, and professionalism.

Table 1

Adult ESL COP Procedures Using the Strategic Steps Framework (Perren, 2013)

Step	Project Specific Tasks
1	<p>Planning and Logistics</p> <hr/> <p>Scheduling (Time and Location) and Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TE scheduled the program to fit STs' class and community members' (work) schedules. • TE identified, connected with, and sought assistance from a staff member (within a home college/department) knowledgeable about university structures and able to help with securing classrooms. • TE collected information from the university parking services about free parking for community participants. <p>Advertising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TE created flyers for electronic and paper advertising that include the information about when the program is offered, who the ESL instructors are, how to register for the program, and how to contact the program supervisor. • With assistance of STs, TESOL MA program alumni, departmental colleagues, university faculty, staff, and marketing services, TE advertised the program using traditional and digital strategies (e.g., distributing electronic and paper flyers on campus and through local public school ESL programs, libraries, non-profit organizations, churches, cultural and medical centers, and personal connections; using university digital signage, event calendar, and employee weekly newsletter; maintaining presence on the department website and making posts on the department Facebook page) <p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TE sought administrator's assistance with cost center creation and/or program funding <hr/>

2 Obtaining Materials and Developing Background Information

For the Community Participants

- TE drafted correspondence for the prospective community participants (e.g., general program information; scheduling placement testing; parking information, etc.).
- TE obtained a campus map and marked the location of classes and parking lots (available free of charge) for distribution to community participants.

For the STs

- TE revised practicum course syllabus to include Adult ESL COP as a practicum field site.
- TE inquired about interest in the program from the TESOL MA candidates.
- TE collected teaching resources (textbooks and online materials) and made them available to STs at her office and through the course learning management system.
- TE selected, collected, created, and organized sample materials: needs assessments, lesson plans, weekly packets and weekly packet checklist

For both aforementioned groups

- TE adapted and created placement test and evaluation criteria.
 - TE built a list of extensive readers and sample items for the extensive reading library.
-

3 Preparing for Field Experience

Preparing Community Participants

- TE communicated about the program to the prospective participants (e.g., lessons taught by volunteer ESL instructors who are graduate students, cost, location, time, placement testing, lessons, parking) and STs (adult learners' characteristics, program requirements: planned lessons, weekly packets & extensive reading; team teaching).
- TE registered community members for classes.

Preparing STs

- TE communicated about the program to the STs (adult learners' characteristics; program features: planned lessons, weekly packets & extensive reading; team teaching; program requirements: submission of lesson materials for professor review prior to teaching).
 - TE discussed professionalism development including providing professional service to the community
 - TE trained STs on how to administer the placement test and interpret test results.
 - TE planned integration of assignments and reflective practices into field work
 - STs reviewed program requirements, resources, sample materials, and extensive reading principles.
-

4 Implementing Field experience & Civic Engagement

Team teaching

- TE formed teaching teams based on STs' preferences and at random, facilitated team collaboration

Placement Testing

- TE and STs shared the responsibility of placement testing: STs administered one or more placement tests whereas the supervisor administered all the remaining placement tests. Both reviewed placement test results and made placement recommendations.

Needs Assessment

- STs created and administered needs assessments under the mentorship and supervision of TE.

Planned lessons and Weekly Assignment Packets

- STs planned lessons, created weekly packets, and submitted both to TE for review prior to teaching. Need be, STs revised the aforementioned materials based on TE's feedback.
- STs made their own copies of lesson materials or requested them from TE.

Extensive Reading

- STs selected a minimum of one book for extensive reading to integrate in instruction and included readings in the weekly packets.
- Using the program fee and/or program funds, TE purchased extensive readers for the classes.

5 Reflecting and Connecting

- TE integrated ongoing reflective assignments to connect the course content and teaching practice at the Adult ESL COP: in-class discussions and reflection on field experience; (online dialogue) post-teaching reflections; two video-mediated post teaching reflections, one conducted during a post- observation conference and the other through a written report (i.e., teaching demonstration analysis paper); and an end-of-program reflection.
 - TE collected feedback on the ESL classes from community members and inquired about their interest in returning the following year.
 - TE reflected on the feedback received from the STs and community members to make improvements to the next Adult ESL COP iteration.
-

Another distinct feature of the program was its integration into the schedule for the TESOL practicum course. In the first five weeks of the semester, STs attended the practicum class for the full three hours. Starting the sixth week, they attended the class for the first hour and taught their ESL classes for the remaining 90 minutes.

Student Teachers

Between Spring 2015, when it was established, and Spring 2025, the Adult ESL COP has been offered to eight ST cohorts, that is, eight times, in spring in conjunction and concurrently with the TESOL practicum course. Out of 55 STs in the eight cohorts, 44 used the Adult ESL COP to fulfill the practicum course field requirement. To date, five cohorts (Spring 2018, 2019, 2023, 2024, 2025) comprised of thirty STs were asked to allow me access to their course-related submissions for research purposes and twenty-two agreed to participate. Their characteristics are broadly representative of the larger student group and described in the next paragraph. Illustrative samples presented in the following sections of the paper are drawn from the course work of this ST group only.

STs undertaking field work at Adult ESL COP had a range of backgrounds and teaching experience. Prior to enrolling in the practicum course, they had completed between 40 and 60 hours of course-related field experience. Fourteen earned or were on route to receiving ESL Specialist Certification, a required qualification for teaching multi-lingual learners in Pennsylvania's public schools. While most were domestic students, either American-born (n = 20) or naturalized US citizens (n = 1), there was one international student. STs spoke Arabic (n = 1), English (n = 19), Portuguese (n = 1), Russian (n = 1) as their native language. Their English teaching experience, outside the compulsory course-related field work, ranged from none to seven years, working with students ranging in age from preschool to university in ESL and/or EFL contexts. At the Adult ESL COP, they taught beginning (n=5), intermediate (n=11), and advanced (n=6) ESL classes.

In their end-of-program reflections (see Author, 2023), STs from Spring 2018 and 2019 cohorts reported that the teaching practicum at the Adult ESL COP offered a number of

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affordances (e.g., authentic teaching context to connect theory to practice; own classrooms to lead, opportunities to try various teaching techniques and hone teaching skills, supervisor's support, etc.) and was perceived as rewarding on a professional and personal level, but was also accompanied by few challenges. One was inconsistent homework completion; another major challenge was that the Adult COP learners were taking the classes voluntarily. Although it was communicated to them that attendance was expected and highly beneficial considering the class meetings were limited (one per week) and lasting a relatively short time (10 weeks), some were arriving late, and few stopped attending.

My Role as Supervisor

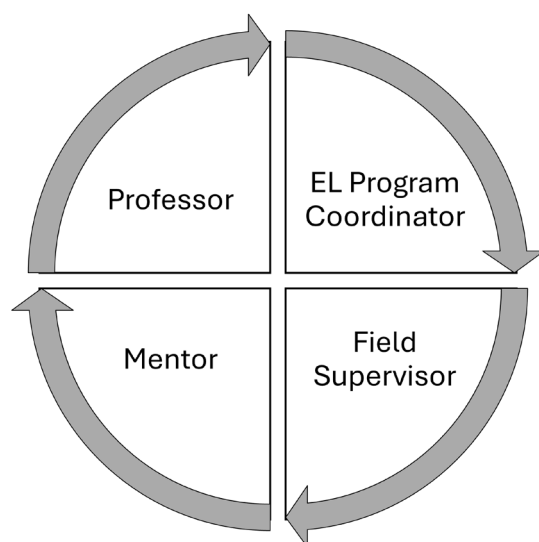
Supervision in TESOL teacher education typically includes observing a ST deliver a classroom lesson at their placement site, discussing this lesson with the ST, and making recommendations about what to continue and what to change (Baecher et al., 2024; Cirocki et al. 2020). While STs may teach their own ESL class independently (Arshavskaya, 2014; Numrich, 1998) or in teams (Golombek, 2015; Kamhi-Stein et al., 2021), they are commonly placed to work with a cooperating teacher who serves as their mentor (Farrelly, 2019; Swoyer & Lindahl, 2023; Walter, 2023). Teaching a practicum course may or may not involve supervision because the responsibility is often assigned to an adjunct or part-time mentor (Bailey, 2006; Baecher et al., 2014).

However, when supervision is delegated to university professors teaching a practicum course, the effectiveness of their work in schools and programs that serve as field placements has been questioned. In their examination of supervision in the context of K-12 teacher education, Wilkens et al. (2015) describe university supervisors' positions as "weak" with respect to field placements (and teaching) because their work takes place in schools "where they are not employed, using curriculum and materials over which they have no control,

under the day-to-day mentoring of cooperating teachers with whom they may or may not agree” (p. 332). Although gained through a review of studies in K-12 context, the insights are relevant to the area of TESOL teacher education. Similarly, professors of TESOL practicum tasked with ST supervision are likely to find themselves navigating often complicated roles between the university, school systems, and cooperating teachers' classrooms and may need to find the areas where their guidance can be applied to STs' practice.

Figure 1

Four roles of a TESOL professor supervising service-learning-informed practicum



Teaching a practicum course alongside organizing a program to serve as a field site requires professors to perform multiple interconnected roles (see Figure 1). As professor, in line with the practicum course objectives, I emphasized meeting learners' needs, reflective teaching, lesson planning, matching teaching actions with beliefs about professional trends, personal teaching philosophy, and personal values; developing awareness of how personal actions and attitudes as a teacher influence students' actions and attitudes; building personal skills in teaching ESL students; and developing professionalism including providing

professional service to the community. As program coordinator, I created flyers and marketed the program both independently and with the assistance of others. With administrative support, I secured technology-equipped classrooms and set up a cost center for payment deposit. I created a placement test and communicated with prospective participants about the program and placement test scheduling. While straddling both program coordinator and field supervisor duties, I created an ESL teacher resource library that included textbooks and online materials; an extensive readers recommendation list as well as an initial extensive reading library; and samples of needs assessments, lesson plans, and weekly homework packets. I trained STs to conduct placement testing and interpret the results. As supervisor, I monitored their lesson-planning and weekly homework packet creation, video-recorded and observed their classes, and held post observation conferences (POs). As mentor, I supported them in identifying ways of improving ESL COP lesson content and delivery, listened to their concerns about adult learners' attendance and homework completion, and guided them in finding solutions to dealing with learners' specific needs and resolutions to team-teaching issues with their peers.

Unlike the aforementioned practicum supervision of university professors, the service-learning-based practicum afforded me supervision at a program that the STs and I created, using the curriculum and materials that we could shape, and independent of the mentorship with which we might not align. When we shared feedback and solutions to problems, they were applicable to the teaching context. Although there was no lack of areas where my guidance could be applied to STs' practice and no need to navigate between the university, schools, and cooperating teachers' classrooms, the practicum model created challenges discussed in the next section.

Teaching a TESOL practicum course was not a new experience for me. I had taught the course first at the undergraduate level as a Teaching Assistant (TA) during my doctoral studies and then at the graduate level as a faculty member. The novelty, however, lay in the practicum course model that brought about new responsibilities (e.g., ESL program coordination, mentoring, supervising lesson planning, etc.). Another familiar experience was undertaking teaching practicum in a community-based program. During my graduate studies, I co-taught evening community adult ESL classes at an English language center where an Intensive English Program (IEP) was held during the day. Our learners had already been placed according to their levels. The professor of record taught the practicum course, observed our teaching, and provided post-observation feedback. The mentoring role was delegated mainly to a TA for the course and somewhat to IEP skill-area coordinators. Although my memory of the specific program features was hazy, I remembered its benefits to my professional development. As the practicum course was likely to become part of my regular teaching schedule, I wanted the course field-work component to be a meaningful and valuable experience for my STs similar to the one I had. I therefore set up a track in the practicum course to be integrally twined with the Adult ESL COP and my observations of the STs' classes. Course key assignments ((online dialogue) post-teaching reflections, substitute-teacher-ready lesson plans, and two video-recorded professor observations, one followed by a post-observation conference and the other by a written post-teaching self-reflection) were integrated in their field work with adult ESL learners from the community. It was also possible to build the professional portfolio artifacts assignment (Teaching Philosophy, job-ready CV, lesson plan(s) and any additional three ST-selected relevant items), another main course assignment, using the materials developed for teaching at the Adult ESL COP.

Overcoming Challenges and Incurring Benefits

Supervising the teaching practicum at Adult ESL COP, I dealt with several challenges, both unexpected and anticipated, and incurred professional and personal benefits. The most trying difficulty was recruiting enough participants from the community to form separate classes for the interested practicum students that would sustain looming absenteeism and attrition. Despite expressed interest in the program, there were ESL adults, including those from the university community, who were unable to join due to conflicting work and/or family schedules, and among those that did join, there were some who were occasionally absent from or late to class due to various reasons most often associated with their personal schedules.

The Adult ESL COP participants, like many other learners in community ESL classes (e.g., Carter et al., 2022; Guy, 2005; Orem, 2000), faced conflicting priorities. Juggling work and/or family responsibilities with ESL classes made it very difficult to commit to a regular class schedule. Although the program followed a fixed schedule in terms of timing and frequency to allow for room scheduling and lesson preparation time, STs were flexible in permitting participants' school-age children to work silently in the same classrooms where their parents were learning English to support those with childcare needs. When adult learners tried to participate, balancing personal lives and education was challenging because their schedules often continued to affect the ability to engage fully.

While revising this reflection and reviewing my students' reflections from the first few program iterations, I began to consider the possibility that initially, the target community may not have been fully aware of the program's existence. Despite what seemed like extensive outreach and marketing efforts, it was possible that the advertising might not have reached enough of the right audience. Although we all lived in the same area, the world in which the program was marketed and the world in which many of the prospective participants lived may

not have intersected greatly. This insight is supported by a reflection from a ST who, when describing advantages of teaching at the Adult ESL COP, pointed out the difference between environments in which they and the participants lived.

[. . .] I think the advantages were just getting to know people from the community that are ESL learners. It's nice to just get to talk with them and sharing our ideas, experiences, and stories. It is also interesting to hear about their lives in the area because it allows me to see the area that I grew up in my entire life in a new perspective. (post-teaching observation, Adult ESL COP 2018)

In the years that followed, the range of strategies for program promotion expanded from relying on social media, online presence, and flyer distribution to using personal connections and advertising through public services and businesses, among other approaches. Table 1 presents all the currently used strategies.

An additional unexpected challenge was classroom scheduling. As has been noted previously, ESL classes at the Adult ESL COP were to be integrated into the final 90 minutes of the graduate practicum class from the sixth to fifteenth instructional week of the semester. Our classroom had been scheduled for the practicum course, and we needed an additional two to three easily accessible technology-equipped classrooms nearby, preferably in the same building as my office, copier, and classroom supplies. The university provided a comprehensive web-based scheduling platform for viewing booked rooms and making requests for classroom spaces overseen by the Office of the University Registrar, but my submitting the criteria and preferences for Adult ESL COP program did not return the wanted

results: The program was scheduled outside the regular academic timetable and competing for limited classroom space during the early evening peak hours when undergraduate and graduate courses overlapped and student events were underway. The following excerpt from a post-teaching reflection gave a glimpse of the room scheduling challenge from the ST's perspective:

[. . .] 2. Honestly, the challenges of this lesson was that we had people coming in and out of both our lessons because they thought an event was happening in the room.

(Someone put on the WCU website that it started at 6 when it really started at 7. Since the event started at 7 and we had planned to go over our time, we ended up having to switch rooms in the middle of the lesson. After we switched rooms, we were able to continue the lesson, but it was still cut short and I was not able to finish it completely.

To make sure this does not happen again, we will have to make sure the room isn't booked after us if we want to extend our lesson time. [. . .] (post-teaching reflection, April 26, Adult ESL COP 2018)

One option I was offered was to circumvent the Registrar's online scheduling processes and reserve rooms internally at the university library. While on the surface, this seemed like a possible solution, in practice, the library study rooms, like most other rooms outside the Registrar's purview, would have been a poor fit for everyone involved. Tucked away from the main building hallways, stripped of appropriate classroom technology, and located relatively far from the practicum course classroom, the rooms were unsuitable for the ESL population mostly unfamiliar with the university campus and buildings, STs whose training needed to include using and navigating classroom technology (projector, internet, technological applications), and lastly, me, their supervisor who would be hauling video recording equipment for at least two thirds of program and may be asked to retrieve classroom

supplies or make last minute copies for the ESL classes.

It quickly became clear that integrating the intended community program schedule with the academic schedule could not be carried out independently using the available online scheduling resource nor could it be handled outside the centralized university's scheduling processes. I learned that it was essential to identify and communicate program needs to a staff member within my college's chain of command who was knowledgeable about university scheduling procedures and able to request appropriate rooms on my behalf. Further, it was necessary to prioritize among my preferences, and reserving rooms in the building where my office was located was not a priority. With the help of the administrative assistant to the associate dean who later became our department secretary and knew the university structures and process well, I was able to reserve easily accessible, fully equipped campus rooms near one another, and more recently, in the same building as my office, copier, and classroom supplies.

In retrospect, developing an understanding of my university's structures and learning how to navigate institutional constraints were important factors in the program's success. While learning about a home institution is something that often takes years (Seiden & Mitchell, 2017), in my case, as a result of establishing the service-learning-informed practicum option, this knowledge was gained within just a few months.

Unlike the previously noted challenges, communicating with prospective participants about the program in languages different from those I spoke was something expected. As native-Spanish speakers represented our largest target population, a former departmental colleague translated a program flyer to Spanish. I arranged with several of my departmental

colleagues teaching Spanish to interpret during phone inquiries and edit my e-mail responses put together using online dictionary and translation engines. Cognizant of my colleagues' limited time and aware of the predictability of program inquiries, I gradually began encouraging email correspondence with prospective participants and relying more heavily on online translation tools.

Supervision, among other aspects, often involves finding a balance between allowing STs the freedom to learn from experience and offering guidance to inform and refine their teaching practice (e.g., Gilliland, 2023; Bailey, 2006). This meant that my responsibility as a supervisor entailed giving STs space to search out solutions and find the processes for accomplishing goals on their own while, at the same time, stepping in when I noticed my support and guidance were necessary.

Teaching adults meant that the STs had to learn how to adapt their assumptions about teaching and lesson planning to a different set of student expectations within a particular teaching context. Most completed their previous field work observing and working in Pk-12 contexts and some were teaching their own elementary, middle-school, or high-school students. When they were assigned to a class of adult ESL learners in a university context, they quickly found that they needed to rethink their activities and materials to ensure they were suitable for the students' age and teaching context, an adaptation they perceived as an affordance of the placement site upon completion of the field work (see Colovic-Markovic, 2023). In the teaching demonstration analysis paper, STs were asked to reflect on their perceived growth during practicum, specifically between the two observation points. Upon watching the footage of the second teaching demonstration in Week 7 and comparing it to the first video from Week 4, a ST from the eight cohort noted the improvements in materials use and discussed the implications of the takeaways on his future

[. . .] Another improvement I noticed was my choice in materials and representations in the slideshow. I made sure to carefully reflect the meaning of words and concepts with appropriate graphics, unlike when I used an elephant to describe big in the previous demonstration. I also chose a reading about an immigrant adult bus driver, whereas last time I had created a less relatable story about a 12-year-old's birthday party.

[. . .] Moving forward, I would like to take these positive observations with me as I continue to lesson plan and teach in both my current foreign language classroom as well as my ESL classroom in the future. I will continue to make connections and tailor the lessons to my students' needs and interests, as it appears to be more motivating and engaging.

Most of the time, having received explicit direction, STs were able to make adjustments independently, but there were instances when I needed to provide reminders. One recurring issue, most frequently observed early in the fieldwork, was the inclusion of cute juvenile graphics and font types in lesson materials and/or weekly packets. The following email excerpt, illustrating such a reminder, was sent to one ST team as part of my feedback on their weekly lesson plan four weeks after the introductory session on working with adult learners.

[. . .] I've reviewed the PPT and the Handout and have few comments about the materials in the PPT slides:

[. . .] 2) All of the pictures in the slides need to represent adults and adult themes/activities, that is all childlike images need to be substituted. (from e-mail correspondence on 3/5/2025, Adult ESL COP, Week 2)

Teaching without a pre-selected ESL textbook or materials meant that STs needed to select, adapt, and/or create lesson materials. Although physical copies of ESL textbooks and links to vetted online resources (e.g., BBC Learning English, EL Civics for ESL Students, Voice of America Learning English, etc.) from which to draw relevant content were provided, STs had the freedom to create and use their own resources. Although they made every effort to check carefully the materials, there was a possibility of overlooking an error. At the level of lesson planning when we shared in the review of materials, I decided to step in if erroneous information was inadvertently included or when materials or activities did not seem to be appropriate for the teaching context and learners' age, as illustrated in the email excerpt below, referencing a weekly packet differentiated for the participants with low English proficiency.

[. . .] I'm in receipt of your copy request and wanted to ask for few updates before the materials listed in A-D below can be printed and copied:

[. . .]

A. Weekly Packet Low

1) Day 1 (Friday): Daily Routines Review

- First, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyxuPAdx460> (Youtube: Mastering Beginner Daily Routines in English)

The video needs to be substituted for one that considers adults' daily routines. [. . .]

(from e-mail correspondence on 4/15/2025, Adult ESL COP, Week 7)

Another, albeit less frequent, challenge was related to assumptions about our teaching context. Teachers in contexts such as public schools can usually lock their classroom to safeguard the property therein and lead students outside for lesson activities. STs did not have the keys to university classrooms. Taking participants outside would have become a major undertaking, possibly an inconvenience for all, participants who had to manage their

belongings, STs who additionally had to deal with technology, and me who in addition to balancing personal items and technology had to handle the video equipment. Teachers in other programs may also have a schedule that allows somewhat lengthy transitions between activities. STs at the Adult ESL COP, which was limited in duration as well as lesson length, had to maximize the utility of in-class time. If there were other areas that seemed needing improvement, I noted them down to reference while reviewing their post-teaching reflections, specifically the responses to questions about lesson successes, challenges, and improvement plans, and in preparation for post-observation conferences (POCs).

Although in class meetings, STs discussed successfully the critical role of contextual factors in student engagement and learning, during lesson planning, some tended to prioritize lesson topics and instructional strategies over the use of age-appropriate materials and consideration of instructional setting. This tendency emphasized the STs' need for opportunities for explicit feedback as well as time to apply their theoretical knowledge in authentic teaching situations (Arshavskaya, 2014),

I knew that when faced with the realities of teaching adult ESL classes, STs would likely encounter situations for which their previous experiences did not prepare them. To facilitate the process of finding solutions to problems, while also managing my time effectively, I set up post-teaching reflections as online dialogue journals where STs could share their own and respond to their peer's teaching challenges and successes as well as discuss their plans for navigating challenges. I kept a close eye on their weekly contributions and was able to relate with their struggles to make sense of their adult ESL classroom but continued to evaluate carefully when to stand on the sidelines silently cheering them on and when to intervene offering assistance.

Having taught the practicum course, I learned that for the benefit of the learners and Supervising TESOL Practicum

STs, when the STs' instruction needed to undergo major improvements, these changes needed to occur quickly and be maintained throughout the program duration. Highlighting the role of reflection as a cornerstone of experiential learning, Posner (2009) stated the following:

We do not actually learn from experience as much as we learn from reflecting on experience. Reflection on an experience, to put it most simply, means to think about the experience, what the experience means, how it felt, where it might lead, what to do about it. (p. 21).

To facilitate learning from experience, I incorporated multiple forms of reflection into the practicum course syllabus even before the Adult ESL COP which included regular written post-teaching reflections, oral reflections on lesson plan and delivery during in-class discussions, and reflections on two observed lessons, one as part of post-teaching observation conference with me and the other as a summative reflective paper. Additional opportunities for reflection were afforded through writing two substitute teacher ready lesson plans and teaching philosophy when STs were asked to make revisions/improve to the assignments based on their practicum teaching experiences. Each of the reflection forms continued to be implemented, but with the offering of the Adult ESL COP, regular post-teaching reflections changed to online dialogue entries and the observed lessons video-mediated reflections (Baecher et al., 2014), reflecting the collaborative, process-oriented, and current nature of the course. Although each of the practices seemed to have afforded STs with an opportunity to improve teaching practice, one that appeared most successful was a video-mediated POC conducted after the first teaching observation. In keeping with the conditions for a successful conference (Bailey, 2006), STs and I discussed the goals and procedures for the video-recorded observation and video-mediated POC prior to observations. In an attempt to achieve balance between maintaining structure to and consistency in the feedback while at the same time fostering

agency in STs, I used a feedback form to guide the POC discussion (Avineri & Martel, 2015). The form was presented to STs at the start of the semester. This was a scoring rubric that included two sections, one related to the procedures for observations (scheduling of the observation and post-observation conference, lesson plan outline and materials submission) and another focusing on the areas of lesson objectives; lesson plan stages; activity design and selection; interaction, lesson delivery specifically pacing, transitions, giving directions, modeling, and teacher talk; and lesson materials. STs received feedback without scores on teacher presence (professional, supportive, confident).

During the first three weeks of the Adult ESL COP, STs scheduled their first in-class video-recorded observation and POC with me. As described in the procedures for in-class observations, they submitted a lesson plan outline at least one day before the scheduled observation including the following: brief description of the teaching context (program and participants); standards and objectives; step-by-step procedures; contingency plans; and lesson materials (including differentiation, if needed). I was in class observing, taking notes, and recording their lessons to find out how STs interacted with learners, moved around the room, and monitored their learners working; to feel the culture of the class; to partake in group work, if/when invited; to build upon my knowledge about the participants initially gained through conducting or reviewing their placement test results. Within 24 hours from the observation, I made the video recording available to the STs. In preparation for the post-observation conference, STs examined and analyzed their own performance by watching the recording and conducting a self-evaluation using the observation rubric. Additionally, they prepared responses to the following questions: a) What went well in the lesson and how do you know?; b) What were the challenges in the lesson? How did you navigate them? How would you prevent and/or manage such challenges in the future? and c) What are your takeaways from Supervising TESOL Practicum

the experience? Alongside STs, I prepared for the POC. Rather than reconstructing the observed lesson based on my notes and memory of events, particularly if the feedback was critical, I watched the relevant video segments to pull specific evidence from the lesson for the commentary I was about to give and noted down the time stamps to facilitate rewatching, if necessary. To supplement my feedback, I compared it with the notes I had made during the review of each of the lesson plan outlines looking for patterns and revisited the information collected thought placement tests. While an hour was set aside for the POCs, they lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The longer conversations were most frequently associated with more extensive discussions about STs own interventions for their future practice.

Each conference began with a ST interpreting their actions and in-class events in relation to the three aforementioned questions while I was taking notes on their commentary and comparing it to my interpretations. In collaboration, we then examined each area of teaching in the rubric noting effective teaching, identifying less effective teaching, and discussing options for change. During the second video-recorded observation, STs had an opportunity to showcase improvement and in a written reflection following this observation (i.e., teaching demonstration analysis paper), to reflect on the lesson and their professional growth.

Although STs were never explicitly asked to provide feedback on the POCs or the video-recorded lessons, many usually did so. In their teaching demonstration analysis paper, one ST from the second cohort credited the video-mediated POCs with helping raise awareness of their in-class activities, specifically the amount of teacher talk.

Although I despise seeing and hearing myself on video, I believe that these videotaped observations are essential to improve teaching. The videotape doesn't lie; it records exactly what occurred. That is better than any post-lesson reflection that

relies solely on memory could ever be. It records the good and the bad. Therefore, if you're like me, and you tend to focus only on the bad things that occurred, the video helps to remind you that there were some good aspects to the lesson. Being able to see what worked well will help a teacher to reflect on why it worked and how its goodness can be replicated in future lessons. However, it also helps a teacher to see exactly why

something went wrong. Maybe the failure wasn't due to the material; perhaps it was just its delivery--or lack of student interaction. This brings me to the most important part of these observations--your feedback. If I had not had your honest feedback after that first observation, I would have continued to deliver mostly teacher-focused lessons because I did not realize how much we monopolized the conversation.... I realized that we needed to make it more student-centered, but I didn't realize to what extent we needed to change. However, after discussing this issue with you, my eyes were opened. When you explained that this class was one of our students' few opportunities to practice the language, I knew that we had to make a change. Our students deserved it. [. . .]

This ST's commentary resonated with what the other STs mentioned in their end-of-the-semester field experience reflections, teaching demonstration analysis papers, and/or course evaluations, and what I observed in the second part of the semester. The observations were very valuable in that they allowed STs to step back into the classroom as observers to appraise their performance which stimulated self-monitoring and motivation to improve their practice.

My experience working with STs underscored the importance of providing supervision during their teaching practicum, a notion emphasized by previous scholarship in teacher education (Capelo, 2020) and TESOL teacher education (Bailey, 2006). Through structured Supervising TESOL Practicum

collaborative reflection with peers, STs were open to seeking recommendations for improving their practice and willing to support one another by sharing strategies, offering feedback, and celebrating one another's successes. Through guided self-reflection as well as video-mediated post-teaching conferences, they were able to evaluate critically their own teaching practice, recognize the areas of improvement, and observe their professional growth.

What distinguished this teaching practicum from others I taught, participated in, and read about was the personal involvement of both STs and me as their supervisor with the practicum field site where we built a learning community. While leading their own classrooms made the practicum experience meaningful for the STs, it also added a responsibility to deliver quality lessons prompting them to work actively on improving their teaching (Colovic-Markovic, 2023). I was aware that the success of the Adult ESL COP depended on the individual success of each program iteration which was directly linked to the program satisfaction of both STs and community members. In retrospect, I believe that the gains I incurred from leading the practicum were on par with those of the STs who participated in it. Over the years, particularly with the inclusion of video-mediated POCs, my supervision skills honed and ability to elicit self-evaluation from the STs improved. Rather than relegating teachers to memory-based recall of events and my interpretation of these events, the videos allowed STs to see themselves in action, to view the lesson from the observer's vintage point, and, as needed, to rewind, replay, and reflect again.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Supervising a service-learning-informed TESOL practicum at the Adult ESL COP, a community-based program I set up as a field site for the STs in my course, has brought challenges, yet each one has helped me reflect and refine my practice to strengthen the model and improve the experience for the STs, community ESL learners, and me. Discussed in the

previous section are issues related to the planning, preparing for, and delivery of the program and my solutions to them. To illustrate how the program is operationalized, Table 1 outlines the tasks my STs and I completed, providing a reference for others who may wish to implement a similar program. Over the years, I have also learned some valuable lessons regarding the procedures that may be helpful for others who are considering a similar program, a selection of which is presented below.

For participant recruitment, spreading the word about the program widely was critical. Although many strategies were used, traditional advertising methods targeting relevant population emerged as more successful. These included distributing program details to the following:

- university units that articulated a need for ESL training (e.g., housekeeping, maintenance, food services, etc.);
- local community-based ESL programs where the Adult ESL COP was presented as supplementary to the current language training;
- personal connections who were looking for or knew others looking for ESL services;
- local ESL teachers who would pass on program flyers to their student families, and
- after the first program iteration, former program participants.

Additionally, for enrollment, maintaining the same schedule for the ESL program and consequently for the practicum course, from one year to another, seemed important. One year we lost a number of participants when the meeting day for the practicum course, and consequently for the ESL program, changed from that of the previous year. Community members, particularly previous participants, expected no change in instructional days and reported a conflict with the new schedule.

Managing communication with ESL community members and keeping a record of
Supervising TESOL Practicum

everyone interested calls for organizational and time management skills. Because prospective participants' inquiries are often predictable, initially asking for general program details (e.g., day, time, location, etc.) and as the start of the program is nearing, for placement testing scheduling, class location, and on-campus parking, in terms of time-management it can be useful to create template responses addressing each of the aforementioned so that they can be copied and pasted into e-mail responses. For record keeping, one inbox folder can be designated to the ESL community program where all of the prospective participants' e-mail inquiries are collected. For facilitating e-mail communication, their names and e-mail addresses can be inputted into a separate document (e.g., excel sheet).

An essential element is the preparation for the program for the STs and community members. STs need to receive as much information about the program requirements and learn about characteristics of their adult ESL learners including the limited time for studying, lack of opportunity to use English, and possible uncertainty about how to learn English. Similarly, the community participants need to understand that their classes are taught by volunteer ESL instructors who are developing their teaching skills and are expected to follow program requirements.

Reflection is a central component in service-learning pedagogy (Rosenberger, 2000) and an increasingly important activity in second language teacher education (Crandall, 2000; Farrell, 2025; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). Therefore, in designing service-learning practicum course work, reflection was integrated with mentored and supervised teaching practice. Various oral and written reflections, done independently and in collaboration with peers and supervisor, with and without video review, enabled the STs to gain perspectives on their teaching, instilling improvement in practices and contributing to professional growth. As noted previously, among the various forms, one that emerged as very useful, was POC video-mediated reflection guided

by a feedback form. Requiring teachers to deeply analyze their own practice prior to engaging in a POC can share the work of observation between the STs and their supervisor and serve as assessment of STs' views on their teaching.

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From Displacement to Empowerment: Challenges and Support System for Afghan Refugees Post 2021 in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted challenges faced by Afghan refugees resettled in the United States following the 2021 U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Drawing on recent studies, it examines the barriers to integration across key domains, including language, housing, employment, education, and cultural adaptation. Despite a relatively young and working-age population, Afghan refugees often encounter limited access to English instruction, inadequate translation services, and high rates of underemployment. Structural barriers such as unaffordable housing, poor transportation, and limited childcare options further hinder adjustment, particularly for women. Cultural misunderstandings, lack of ethnic enclaves, religious discrimination, employment barriers, anti-Muslim sentiment, restricted access to halal food, housing, and healthcare exacerbate social isolation. The paper highlights the compounding effects of trauma, legal uncertainty, and geographic placement on resettlement outcomes. While U.S. policy emphasizes rapid self-sufficiency, this approach often overlooks the lived realities of refugees. The findings highlight the need for long-term, culturally competent policies and support systems that address both structural and cultural dimensions of refugee integration.

Keywords: Afghan refugees, integration, language barriers, housing insecurity, U.S. refugee policy, cultural adaptation

Introduction

The U.S. military's withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 31, 2021, was poorly planned, resulting in a chaotic evacuation despite warnings of a rapid Taliban takeover. Although it was the largest evacuation in U.S. history, disorder was widespread. Still, junior and mid-level personnel helped prevent further chaos (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Minority Report, 2022). In response, the U.S. launched Operation Allies Refuge to evacuate over 80,000 Afghans, followed by Operation Allies Welcome to support resettlement. Yet over 70,000 evacuees remain in legal limbo despite receiving two-year humanitarian parole (Guelespe and Terrones, 2024). More than 76,000 were housed at nine "safe havens," many facing psychological stress and difficulties adapting to unfamiliar customs (International Rescue Committee). Afghans have the second-highest global resettlement needs (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024), but humanitarian parole offers fewer protections than refugee status, limiting paths to permanence (Gelatt & Meissner, 2022). Barriers in healthcare, housing, employment, and transportation remain widespread, though Afghan refugees demonstrate strong resilience (Reihani et al., 2021). Operation Allies Welcome launched on August 29, 2021, and processed evacuees under varying legal statuses at eight U.S. military bases (Ulintz et al., 2023). Even before the fall of Kabul, many Afghans who had allied with U.S. forces were already facing threats and displacement conditions that contributed to what later became known as the "Afghan refugee crisis" (Samber, 2021; Coen, 2022, p. 202). After resettlement, these individuals continued to encounter systemic barriers.

This article explores the multifaceted challenges faced by refugees, with particular attention to the realms of education, employment, housing, and access to support systems. While the study broadly examines the refugee experience, this study focuses primarily on Afghan refugees resettled in Indiana, while also considering the experiences, challenges, and population

numbers of Afghan refugees in other states. It explores the support they receive from local communities in these different contexts. My positionality as an Afghan refugee, having arrived in the United States in September 2021 and been resettled in Indiana since 2022, means that I approach this article not only as an academic but also as someone with lived experience in the subject matter.

Having previously worked as an English lecturer and advocated for Afghan women students in Afghanistan, I bring a nuanced understanding of the educational and social challenges that refugees, particularly Afghan refugees, encounter. This background informs my interpretation of the struggles faced by displaced individuals, especially when navigating new environments where systems of support may be unfamiliar, fragmented, or inaccessible.

In conducting this article, I draw upon both personal insight and academic inquiry to offer a more holistic perspective on refugee resettlement. By integrating these two lenses, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the barriers Afghan refugees face and, ultimately, to advocate for more effective support structures for displaced communities. My positionality allows me to critically engage with the existing literature while simultaneously offering a grounded perspective that is informed by my personal experiences as a refugee.

Research Questions

This paper explores the post-2021 challenges and opportunities Afghan evacuees face in the U.S., focusing on legal entry categories and addressing two main research questions:

- 1) *What social integration challenges, such as education and language barriers, employment, housing, and healthcare access, do Afghan refugees face in the United States, post-2021?*
- 2) *How effective are local community support systems, and how do they empower Afghan refugees in the U.S.?*

Literature Review

Cultural Foundations and Strategic Failures: Understanding the Afghan Refugee Crisis

Afghan refugees' experiences are shaped by the country's ethnic diversity, Islamic traditions, and prolonged conflict. Specifically, the population consists of Pashtuns (38%), Tajiks (25%), Hazaras (19%), and Uzbeks (6%), with female literacy rates particularly low (Giger & Davidhizar, 2002). Afghan families tend to be patriarchal and conservative, with women supporting household income through handicrafts (Firling, 1988). Indeed, Afghans possess a deeply rooted cultural system that nurtures resilience, mutual support, and emotional strength, qualities that continue to empower Afghan refugees as they rebuild their lives abroad. Their traditions of family unity, social responsibility, and faith-based community networks provide a foundation for recovery and adaptation in new environments. Although Afghan American refugees faced the trauma of displacement and the loss of social predictability, these same cultural mechanisms, collective solidarity, perseverance, and purpose serve as powerful tools for empowerment and healing in resettlement contexts. As Firling (1988) observed, Afghan families maintain strong emotional bonds and adaptive coping strategies even amid the immense stress of forced migration, reflecting a culture of endurance and dignity that enables them to thrive despite adversity.

Moreover, decades of war have disrupted traditional structures and heightened ethnic tensions, leading to emotional instability among refugees (Coleridge, 1999). Notably, Taliban ideology is not uniformly accepted, even within Pashtun communities. In addition, language and religion play key roles in identity. Pashto (32%), Farsi (27%), and Dari (26%) are the most common home languages, with Pashto most dominant among 2012 U.S. arrivals (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024). Islam shapes social values and decision-making through male-led jirgas and shuras. While gender segregation remains widespread, some women see veiling as a source of cultural identity rather than oppression (Coleridge, 1999). Therefore, understanding this cultural

complexity is vital to supporting successful refugee resettlement. Meanwhile, U.S. strategic failures during the withdrawal compounded these challenges.

Although the U.S. maintained military dominance in 2010, the Taliban's resilience weakened American leverage. Consequently, the Trump administration's urgency to exit further emboldened the Taliban (Khan, 2020). While the U.S. sought to promote peace and democracy (Anuka & Raymond, 2024), the Taliban viewed talks mainly as a means to secure U.S. departure (Malkasian, 2021). Critically, the Doha Agreement lacked enforceable ceasefire terms, undermining its effectiveness (Khan, 2020).

As a result, Taliban violations intensified the crisis. By November 2022, 90% of Afghans were food insecure, and 1.1 million children were severely malnourished (Anuka & Raymond, 2024). Additionally, President Ghani admitted that Afghan forces could not survive without U.S. support. Ultimately, on August 15, 2021, the Taliban retook control following the rushed U.S. withdrawal (Khan, 2020). In hindsight, Retired General Frank McKenzie spoke with VOA's Pentagon correspondent Carla Babb on June 10, 2024, stating that President Joe Biden picked the "worst of all possible worlds" when deciding how to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan (Bobb, 2024). Furthermore, the Taliban's return quickly reversed years of U.S.-backed human rights progress, especially for women, while relocation efforts for Afghan allies remain slow (Anuka & Raymond, 2024). Although President Biden set a September 11 withdrawal deadline, and 90% of troops had exited by July 6, interagency planning remained inadequate. The State Department could not track U.S. citizens or the 17,000 principal SIV applicants still in Afghanistan, and evacuation resources fell short. Consequently, after Kabul fell, thousands rushed to the airport. Thus, amid violence and confusion, U.S. forces prioritized evacuees based on proximity and status. However, gate closures and unclear protocols left many in danger. SIV holders struggled to gain entry, while some undocumented Afghans were mistakenly evacuated

alongside them. Ultimately, the disorganized withdrawal resulted in enduring humanitarian and strategic consequences for the United States (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022).

U.S. Immigration Policy and Afghan Refugee Resettlement: Legal Context and Challenges

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, U.S. immigration policy shifted heavily toward national security. Galus (2022) explains the increased focus on border protection and deportation of criminal noncitizens to prevent terrorism. The 2002 Homeland Security Act replaced the INS with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), overseeing Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Under Obama, policies shifted partially toward humanitarian relief with the implementation of DACA (2012) and DAPA (2014), which deferred deportation for long-time U.S. residents. However, Trump intensified enforcement, imposing travel bans on Muslim-majority countries and enforcing family separations. Biden has since reversed many policies, focusing on family reunification and easing restrictions, but immigration remains grounded in the 1952 INA, amended by the 2001 USA Patriot Act for counterterrorism. Permanent Resident Cards confer lawful permanent resident status, allowing indefinite residence and work, though serious crimes can lead to deportation; citizenship is possible later (Galus, 2022).

Legally, the Refugee Convention and UNHCR define refugees as individuals fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion (Coen, 2022). Felter et al. (2022) clarify that “migrant” is a broader, non-legal term for people crossing borders seeking safety or opportunity. This distinction became crucial during the Afghan crisis. Even before the Taliban’s August 15, 2021, takeover, Afghan allies of the U.S., such as interpreters and activists, faced mortal threats. Coen (2022) characterizes the chaos at Kabul airport as a symbol of

the broader humanitarian crisis, sparking renewed discussions about the U.S.'s responsibility to its Afghan allies, particularly those applying for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs). This overview situates Afghan refugees within evolving U.S. immigration policy, legal definitions, and humanitarian concerns. Regarding resettlement, Catholic Charities Community Services Arizona (n.d.) highlights that the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in 2021 led to the displacement of thousands of Afghans. While many now arrive in the U.S. through refugee resettlement as SIV holders, others, evacuated under urgent circumstances, bypassed typical refugee procedures, making their resettlement more complex. Indeed, in different States, some agencies help Afghan refugees with resettlement. Catholic, they are currently being processed abroad and will be paroled (admitted) into the United States for immediate humanitarian protection. Table 1 shows the number of Indiana immigrants based on the different categories (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

Indiana - Immigration Totals: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2022															
Year	Population	Lawful Permanent Residents						Nonimmigrant		Naturalizatio		Refugees		Asylees	
		Total	Rank	New	Rank	Adjus	Rank	Total	Rank	Total	Rank	Total	Rank	Total	Rank
2013	6,568,713	7,668	22	3,113	24	4,555	22	192,018	27	4,369	26	1,541	18	138	16
2014	6,593,644	8,008	22	3,230	24	4,778	21	193,849	28	4,274	25	1,614	17	52	25
2015	6,608,422	8,554	23	3,377	24	5,177	21	213,455	28	4,686	24	1,793	15	83	25
2016	6,634,304	9,946	23	4,302	24	5,644	20	229,334	28	5,113	23	1,893	17	67	27
2017	6,658,078	10,052	21	3,851	24	6,201	20	257,726	28	6,420	20	1,042	22	153	23
2018	6,695,497	9,741	21	3,755	23	5,986	21	273,334	28	6,578	22	493	16	347	16
2019	6,732,219	8,527	22	3,132	23	5,395	21	304,030	27	7,386	21	865	13	721	11
2020	6,788,799	6,551	22	2,088	22	4,463	20	142,063	26	5,107	23	323	14	557	12
2021	6,813,532	7,223	22	1,984	22	5,239	20	77,584	20	6,112	22	202	24	379	12
2022	6,833,037	8,681	21	3,594	22	5,087	20	179,552	27	8,330	22	538	19	430	15

Table 1. Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics analysis of Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of Justice data, and U.S. Census Bureau data (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

Resettlement of Afghan Allies and the Growing Afghan Diaspora in the U.S.

The U.S. differentiates Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Afghans who worked with U.S. forces and receive refugee benefits, from parolees, evacuees without formal refugee status who undergo background checks before work authorization (Catholic Charities Community

Services Arizona, n.d.). Established under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, the SIV program aimed to protect Afghan allies, though eligibility verification was challenging due to inadequate tracking. Table 2 shows a Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program, June 2020 (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022).

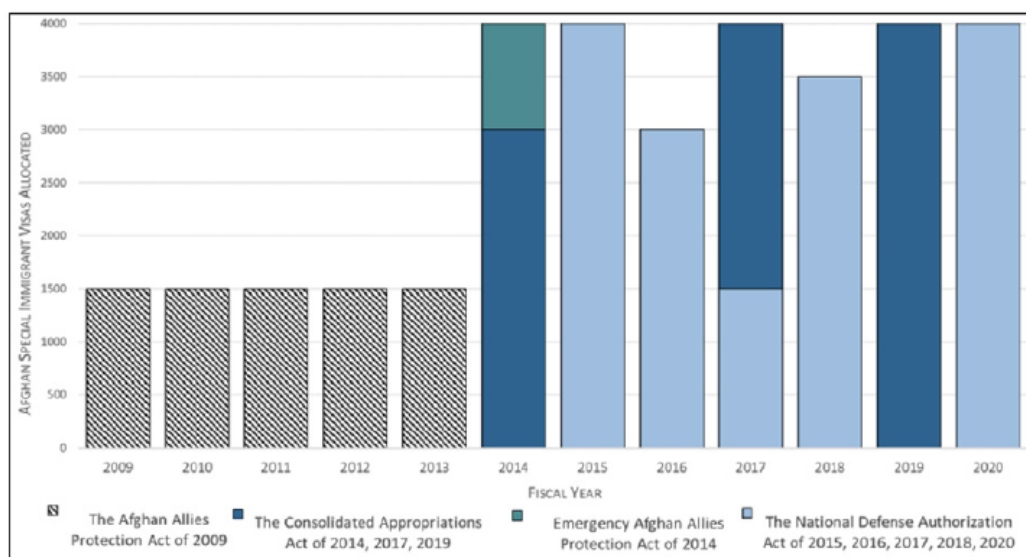


Table 2. Source: Department of State's Office of Inspector General's Report Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program, June 2020. (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022).

Operation Allies Refuge began evacuating eligible SIV applicants in July 2021, but by August 15, only about 2,000 had reached safety, despite over 17,000 still waiting for processing. The fall of Kabul exacerbated the situation, causing the backlog to surge to more than 35,000 cases by the end of the year (Roy et al., 2024). In response, the White House requested \$6.4 billion to assist parolees with welfare and identification, yet by December 2021, only 40% of the 74,000 evacuees were eligible for SIVs, and the processing stages remained uncertain (Patteson, 2021).

Following this, Operation Allies Welcome helped resettle 76,000 Afghan evacuees, many of whom were U.S. allies, emphasizing the nation's moral obligation (Coen, 2022). A significant portion of Afghan immigrants have settled in California (39%), Virginia (14%), Texas (10%), and New York (6%), with notable concentrations in counties such as Sacramento and Fairfax

(Montalvo & Batalova, 2024). Figure 3 from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) provides data on the U.S. immigrant population by state and county from 2018 to 2022.

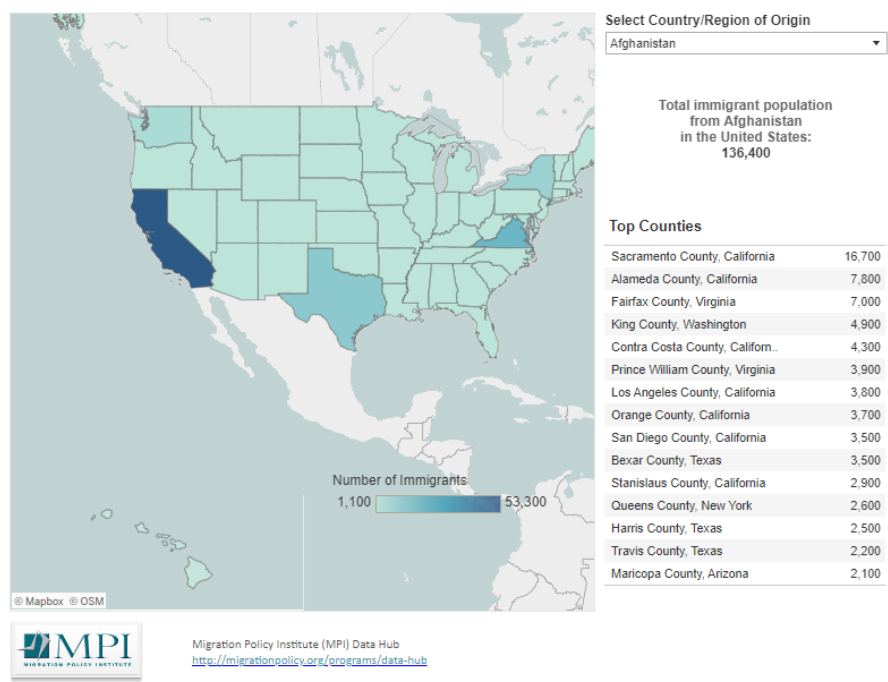


Figure 3. Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) U.S. Immigrant Population by State and County, 2018-2022 (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

The Afghan diaspora in the U.S. expanded significantly from the 1980s Soviet invasion and accelerated after the 2001 U.S. intervention, influenced by immigration policies shaping legal status and integration. The 2021 U.S. withdrawal displaced over 600,000 Afghans, adding to nearly six million globally displaced, consistent with the 1951 Refugee Convention's definition of refugees (Mohamed, 2023). Recent estimates place the U.S. Afghan diaspora at approximately 250,000, comprising Afghan-born individuals and those of Afghan ancestry (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

Afghan Refugees in the U.S.: Barriers to Integration, Economic Stability, and Well-being

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Afghan refugees have faced numerous challenges in adapting to life in the United States. One of the most pressing issues is

language barriers. Arun et al. (2022) highlight that work and family responsibilities often prevent refugees from attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, while inadequate interpretation services and a lack of awareness about available resources further impede their access to essential support. Housing is another critical concern, particularly in states like Indiana, where refugees are placed in large homes that are often unaffordable. Arun et al. (2022) call for more culturally appropriate housing placements and increased funding to improve these conditions (p. 6). Women face even more complex challenges, including issues such as childcare, lack of transportation, digital illiteracy, and trauma (Mohamed, 2023).

Geographic location plays a crucial role in shaping the resettlement experiences of Afghan refugees. Mohamed (2023) notes that those resettled in areas like Mississippi and Alabama, where ethnic communities are limited, often experience greater isolation and struggle to access support networks. In contrast, states like California, which is home to over 54,000 Afghans, offer more robust networks and services, facilitating smoother integration. However, Arun et al. (2022) asserted that refugees in less diverse regions frequently face challenges such as isolation, racism, and financial insecurity.

Language proficiency remains an ongoing challenge, with Montalvo and Batalova (2024) reporting that 56% of Afghan immigrants speak English less than “very well,” a figure that rises to 68% among women and more recent arrivals. This language gap also affects their ability to access counseling and mental health services. Firling (1988) observes that men tend to dominate these spaces, partly due to gender roles and the language barrier, which often results in the marginalization of women’s voices. In light of these challenges, Arun et al. (2022) emphasize the need for enhanced translation infrastructure to improve refugees’ access to services.

In addition to language and location, structural limitations around housing laws and transportation worsen integration difficulties. For example, Arun et al (2022) highlight how room

occupancy laws disproportionately affect large families. Without access to personal vehicles, many refugees rely on expensive markets or unreliable transit. These issues extend into food access. Goliaei et al. (2023) report that limited SNAP benefits and a lack of culturally appropriate food led to food insecurity and unhealthy eating. These material barriers are further complicated by cultural misunderstandings. As Coleridge (1999) argues, successful integration depends on refugees' ability to adapt to local norms; when these norms are misinterpreted, exclusion often follows, especially for women. In support of this, Saksena and McMorrow (2020) emphasize that resettlement programs should also nurture spiritual and social networks, which are critical for Afghan women's adjustment. To move beyond surface-level support, culturally competent care is essential. Giger and Davidhizar (2002) argue that service providers must understand refugees' unique beliefs, practices, and histories. For example, food restrictions present a significant challenge; Goliaei et al. (2023) note that shortages of Halal food strain both household budgets and religious observance.

At a broader societal level, anti-Muslim sentiment remains a serious concern. Alfonseca (2021), cited in Rai et al. (2023), documents how discriminatory policies and social attitudes threaten the safety and inclusion of Muslim refugees. This is especially urgent considering how rapidly the Afghan military collapsed post-withdrawal, within just 11 days (Lawrence and Sutter, 2021; Anuka and Raymond, 2024, p. 44). While many Afghans qualified for refugee status under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 (American Immigration Council, 2020), integration remains an uphill battle. Turning to education and employment, Afghan refugees continue to face serious disadvantages. Capps et al. (2015) explain that while education typically leads to better economic outcomes in the U.S., many refugees, despite having degrees, remain underemployed, especially in credential-driven sectors, and still, employment remains a major obstacle.

Although U.S. policy prioritizes rapid workforce entry, Stempel and Alemi (2021) argue that Afghan refugees, due to trauma, limited English, and lack of social networks, often struggle to secure stable jobs. Furthermore, those with higher education face difficulties transferring credentials into the U.S. job market. Notably, Afghan women experience particularly low workforce participation, as traditional gender roles shape family income strategies, especially in suburban areas like New Jersey, with employment rates as low as 46% and family incomes at just 68% of the local median.

According to Mohamed (2023), limited support and a one-time \$1,225 resettlement grant leave many vulnerable to homelessness. Legal status also plays a critical role. While SIV holders have a pathway to permanent residency, parolees face a complicated asylum system (Patteson, 2021). As Mohamed (2023) explains, Afghan refugee classifications include P-1 (referred to by the UN, US embassy, or NGOs), P-2 (U.S.-affiliated), and P-3 (family reunification) entries, each offering varying degrees of support. Furthermore, access to essential services shapes refugee adjustment. Reihani et al. (2021) identify public benefits, healthcare access, education, and care coordination as key facilitators of successful integration.

Services like SNAP, Medicaid, and culturally competent interpretation foster trust. Additionally, Afghan youth experience cultural tension in schools, where counselors are crucial in helping them navigate identity and family expectations (Rai et al, 2023). Stempel and Alemi (2021) observe that Afghan refugees struggle to re-enter professional fields due to limited networks and re-credentialing opportunities. Alemi et al. (2014) further highlight wide demographic variation among refugees, noting education levels ranging from no formal schooling to college degrees, with men generally more educated than women. Figure 4 explains the educational attainment of the U.S. population ages 25 and older by origin in 2022 (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

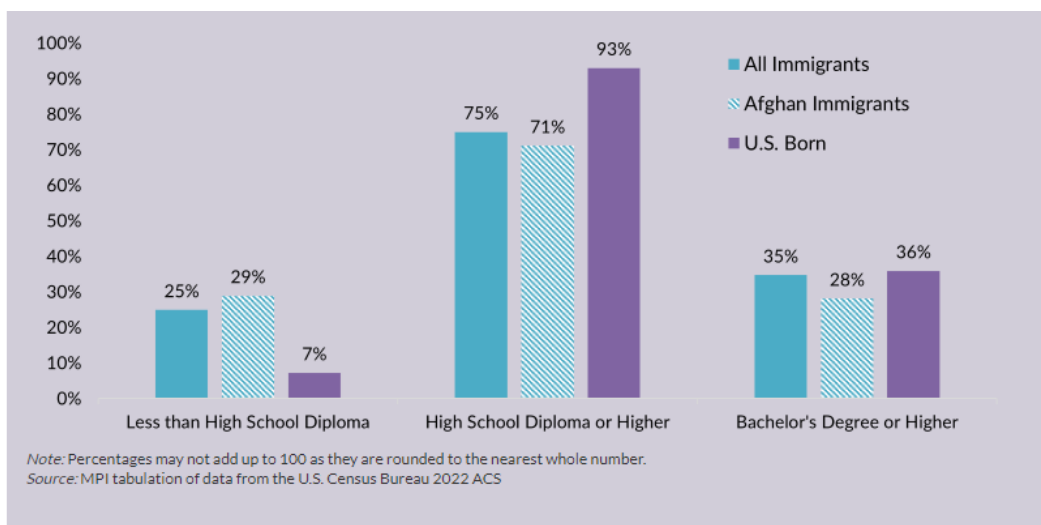


Figure 4. Educational Attainment of the U.S. Population (ages 25 and older) by origin, 2022. (Montalvo & Batalova. 2024).

This educational gap reflects broader demographic trends. Montalvo and Batalova (2024) find that Afghan immigrants are significantly younger than both U.S.-born and other foreign-born populations, with a median age of 31 and 30% under 18. However, education levels lag: 23% of Afghan men and 36% of Afghan women lack a high school diploma, while just 32% of men and 24% of women hold college degrees. Consequently, labor force participation remains low, 61% overall and only 37% for women, compared to 67% among all immigrants and 57% for foreign-born women.

Median household income stands at \$48,000, far below the \$75,000 average for U.S.-born and other immigrant households. Poverty rates remain high, affecting 39% of Afghan immigrants (p. 5). Figure 5. explained age distribution on the U.S population by origin, 2022 (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

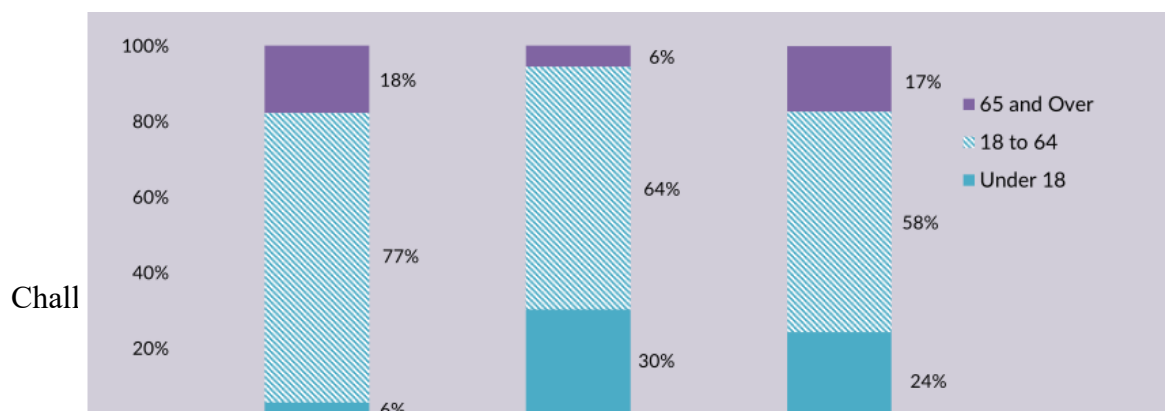


Figure 5. Age Distribution on the U.S Population by Origin 2022, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

These demographic shifts coincide with a sharp rise in Afghan migration. Montalvo and Batalova (2024) note that 72% of Afghan immigrants have arrived since 2010, yet only 37% have naturalized, compared to 53% of all immigrants. In 2022 alone, 14,200 Afghans gained lawful permanent residency, 81% through Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs). Between October and December 2023, another 6,200 entered under SIV status, mostly resettling in California, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Maryland. Yet alongside logistical and economic barriers, psychological challenges loom large. Firling (1988) reports that Afghan men often experience PTSD, insomnia, and withdrawal due to trauma and the pressure of supporting their families. Yako and Biswas (2014) add that acculturative stress and homesickness often lead to depression, confirming that transitions between cultures intensify emotional distress. Social and religious support networks, however, play a stabilizing role.

Despite this, mental healthcare remains difficult to access. Reihani et al. (2021) describe how stigma, fear of losing benefits, and language barriers discourage many from seeking help. An interpreter noted, “Most people don’t want to accept or share their mental health problems...” (p. 62). Miscommunication due to dialect differences, such as confusing “high stress” with “high blood pressure,” along with interpreter shortages, hampers care. Jongen et al. (2018) emphasize

that culturally competent providers significantly improve trust and outcomes. These challenges are compounded by daily realities. Reihani et al. (2021) share that even ambulance sirens can trigger traumatic flashbacks, while access to care is complicated by confusing systems, limited transportation, and the tension between Medicaid eligibility and employment.

According to Arun et al. (2022), such transit and safety issues are especially hard on women (p. n/a). Indeed, education systems also struggle to support Afghan children. While legally entitled to PK-12 education, many face trauma, language barriers, and disrupted schooling. Legal and policy guidance highlights the need for inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms (Crawford et al., 2024). Still, there are positive signs. Montalvo and Batalova (2024) report that 65% of Afghan refugees had public insurance in 2022, and only 8% were uninsured, surpassing rates among the broader immigrant population. Figure 6 explains the health coverage for Afghan immigrants.

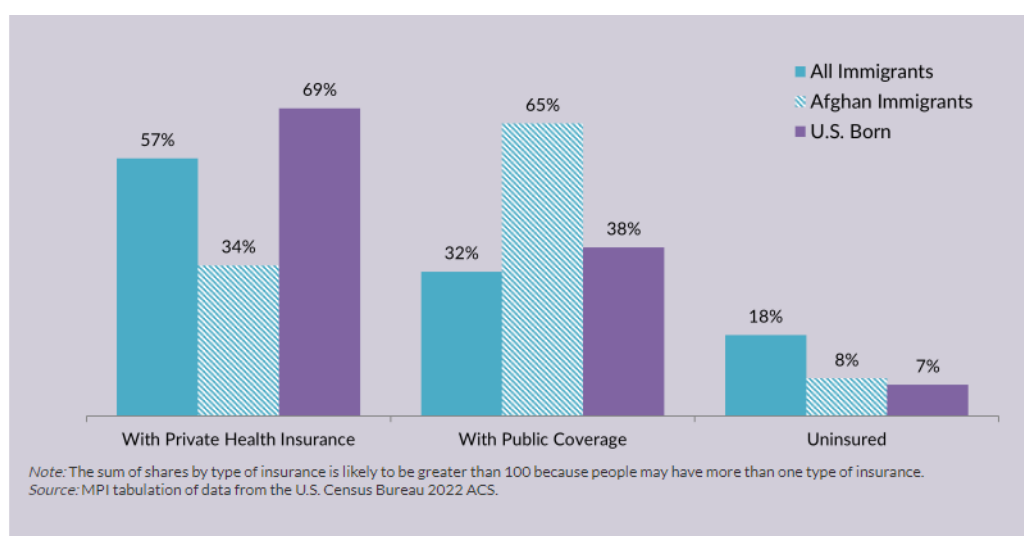


Figure 6. Health Coverage for Afghan Immigrants, All Immigrants, and U.S.-Born, in 2022 (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024).

Empowering Afghan Refugees through Social Support Systems and Resettlement Agencies in the U.S.

Despite complex challenges, Afghan refugees in the U.S. have received vital assistance from resettlement agencies since 2021. Rai et al. (2023) emphasized that these agencies play a

crucial role in empowering Afghan refugees through culturally responsive and trauma-informed care. Providers are encouraged to recognize the stress and anxiety refugees experience during intake and to use culturally appropriate tools such as the Refugee Health Screener to assess mental health, domestic violence, and family conflict (Hollifield et al., 2013; Rai et al., 2023, p. 394). By aligning services with Afghan cultural values and community structures, resettlement agencies foster trust, resilience, and self-reliance, enabling refugees to take an active role in rebuilding their lives and achieving emotional well-being (Huslage et al., 2021; Rai et al., 2023, p. 394).

Building on this, Arun et al. (2022) highlighted that social support networks further empower refugees by strengthening their integration and promoting independence. Community connections, particularly for women balancing domestic responsibilities, provide emotional relief and access to new opportunities. Despite barriers such as isolation and limited childcare, refugees demonstrate adaptability and determination, using these challenges as pathways to empowerment. Moreover, established organizations have expanded services to meet growing needs. For example, Catholic Charities Community Services Arizona (n.d.) has supported refugees since 1975 through housing, education, and job readiness programs, ensuring that Afghan families can access critical resources to achieve stability and long-term success.

In the same spirit, Exodus Refugee Immigration (n.d.), in Indiana, has become a model of comprehensive empowerment. In 2022, its Bloomington office resettled 44 clients while continuing to welcome Afghan evacuees through a wide range of services, including legal assistance, mental wellness support, extended case management, training and culture, the Match Grant program, women's and youth programs, asylum seeker services, legal aid, and translation of the BMV Manual. These initiatives collectively strengthen the foundation for Afghan refugees' social and economic advancement. Exodus's Employment Program enhances economic empowerment by offering personalized job training, career guidance, and workplace orientation,

equipping refugees with the skills needed for long-term self-sufficiency. Through the Language, Cultural Orientation, and Readiness for Employment (LCORE) initiative, refugees develop English proficiency and cultural understanding, fostering communication, self-advocacy, and confidence in navigating daily life (Exodus Refugee Immigration, n.d.).

Furthermore, Exodus's Women's Program promotes self-sufficiency and leadership by providing Afghan women with education, counseling, and vocational resources, empowering them to build independence and strengthen their roles within families and communities. Likewise, the Youth Program fosters empowerment among young Afghan refugees by providing mentorship, cultural guidance, and life-skills training that help them navigate dual cultural identities and prepare for successful futures. Additionally, Exodus's Mental Wellness Program focuses on culturally sensitive counseling that enhances emotional resilience, self-awareness, and coping skills, empowering refugees to heal from trauma and sustain long-term mental health stability. Together, these social support systems and resettlement agencies not only provide essential services but also cultivate empowerment, self-sufficiency, and resilience among Afghan refugees, enabling them to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose in the United States (Exodus Refugee Immigration, n.d.).

Extending beyond community and agency-level support, educational institutions also play a key role in empowerment. Crawford et al. (2024) emphasized that empowering refugee students begins with recognizing their resilience, cultural wealth, and capacity to thrive when given equitable educational opportunities. Although many encounter academic, cultural, and socio-emotional challenges such as trauma and interrupted schooling, these experiences also cultivate adaptability and determination. Educators and school leaders can transform these challenges into strengths by creating safe and inclusive environments that celebrate students' linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. By engaging refugee families and providing teachers with professional

development in culturally responsive practices, schools can shift from a model of support to one of empowerment, where refugee students are not merely integrated but are positioned as contributors to the learning community (Crawford et al., 2024).

Through the combined efforts of resettlement agencies, social support networks, and educational institutions, Afghan refugees in the U.S. are gradually transforming displacement into empowerment. These interconnected systems provide not only immediate assistance but also the long-term tools needed for independence, resilience, and meaningful participation in American society.

Refugee Task Force at Indiana University (IU)

According to Petranoff (2023), as Indiana prepares to welcome Afghan refugees, Indiana University (IU) has strengthened its commitment to supporting displaced students through the establishment of the Refugee Task Force. Historically, IU has provided a welcoming environment for refugees, asylees, and displaced persons, yet many newcomers continue to face barriers such as disrupted education, missing credentials, cultural adjustment challenges, and limited access to funding. Recognizing these obstacles, IU formed the Refugee Task Force in October 2021 to enhance access to higher education and create a coordinated support network guided by a steering committee composed of university and community representatives, including members from the Office of International Services (OIS), Office of Enrollment Management, Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc., and the Dean of Students Care Committee.

Petranoff (2023) noted that the Task Force focuses on outreach, ethical protection, and educational advocacy for refugees, ensuring that their unique academic and personal needs are met through collaborative partnerships. Drawing on best practices from universities, NGOs, and refugee organizations, it develops strategies to expand enrollment opportunities and improve communication about available resources. Regular reports are submitted to the Office of the Vice

President for International Affairs, with the Interim Associate Vice President for International Services serving as the primary liaison. Led by Rendy Schrader, Senior Director of Student and Scholar Programs, the Task Force was created in response to the growing number of displaced students from conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Ukraine, where more than 103 million people have been forcibly displaced globally. As of 2025, IU supports approximately 40 displaced students, offering full tuition and fee coverage for their first degree, along with housing and living expenses during the first year. Through an informal and indirect exchange, Schrader, who is knowledgeable about the Refugee Task Force and has been involved in its efforts, commented on the project from which I have received support: “We are in Year 3 of our services, to fund 40 displaced students per year, starting with Year 4. We fund 100% of our students’ tuition and fees for the duration of their first degree. We also fund housing and living expenses for year 1, but many students need help beyond that. I don’t have the heart to cut funding for those in need.”

Indeed, despite ongoing financial challenges, IU’s initiative has demonstrated remarkable success. Students such as Sharifi and others who graduated with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in 2023 have thrived academically, exemplifying the transformative potential of sustained institutional support. Some IU faculty members highlight that the lived experiences of displaced students enrich the academic community by bringing resilience, perspective, and cultural depth to campus life. Through ongoing fundraising and collaboration, the IU Refugee Task Force continues to expand its reach, ensuring that displaced students, particularly Afghan refugees, receive the educational empowerment needed to rebuild their futures and contribute meaningfully to society.

Theoretical Framework

To explore the displacement and empowerment of Afghan refugees post-2021, this article draws on Forced Migration Theory and Social Capital Theory. These frameworks offer a deeper understanding of the structural forces driving displacement and the social networks that promote

resilience and integration. Castles' (2003) attention to policy and structure, along with Vella's (2013) continuum of migration experiences, reflect the complex realities faced by Afghan refugees.

Forced Migration Theory

To begin with, Forced Migration Theory broadens the concept of displacement beyond narrow legal terms. UNHCR (2016), as cited in Stankovic et al. (2021), argues that labels like "refugee" or "stateless" oversimplify and exclude certain displaced populations. In addition, Cameron (2014) points out that such terms carry harmful assumptions that marginalize the vulnerable, while Hynes (2021) notes that phrases like "illegal" shape public attitudes and limit protection. Building on this, Vella (2013) presents migration as a continuum rather than a binary, offering a flexible model that better fits Afghan refugees' circumstances. Drawing from Dascal (2007), he advocates for context-sensitive interpretations (Dascal, 2007; Vella, 2013, pp. 10-11). Moreover, Castles (2003) links displacement to global systems of war, persecution, and inequality. He also emphasizes how migrants reshape host societies and calls for a migration policy rooted in human rights. Identity and belonging are central: displaced people construct new identities yet face deep inequality in global mobility. After 9/11, refugees were increasingly seen as security threats, and Global South migrants remain restricted despite their labor being essential (Castles, 2003).

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory provides a valuable conceptual lens for understanding how Afghan refugees navigate displacement through relationships and social networks. According to Bourdieu (1983), as cited in Hauberer (2011), social capital refers to access to shared resources derived from long-lasting social connections. He further emphasizes the interdependence between social,

economic, and cultural capital, arguing that group belonging and mutual recognition are central to accessing these resources (p. 38).

Moreover, Hauberer (2011) explains that individuals mobilize different forms of capital depending on their social group membership. For instance, the wealthy rely primarily on economic capital, whereas academics draw on cultural capital. In this sense, social ties can yield both symbolic and material benefits. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, maintaining social networks requires continual investment, often transforming economic capital into social ties, which in turn generate further value through solidarity and collective action. These relationships may even be mobilized by a representative figure to strengthen group cohesion (Bourdieu, 1986; Hauberer, 2011, p. 193). In the context of Afghan refugees, particularly after the 2021 crisis, social capital frequently becomes a crucial substitute for limited economic or cultural capital. Through interpersonal networks, many refugees access employment, housing, healthcare, and emotional support. However, it is essential to acknowledge that Afghan women often encounter additional barriers that restrict their participation in these networks.

Expanding on this theoretical foundation, Volker (2020) differentiates between micro-level ties, those that fulfill daily needs, and macro-level trust, which fosters broader social cooperation (pp. 1-3). Drawing from Coleman (1990), he introduces the notion of “credit slips,” a form of future-oriented reciprocity that sustains long-term relationships (Coleman, 1990; Volker, 2020, p. 4). Similarly, Axelrod’s (1984) concept of the “shadow of the future” illustrates how trust encourages continued collaboration within networks (Axelrod, 1984; Volker, 2020, p. 5). Together, these dynamics illuminate how Afghan refugees can rebuild social cohesion and resilience even amid displacement.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider critiques of the concept. Fine (2010) argues that policy applications of social capital often overemphasize community self-help, thereby

overlooking structural inequalities and power relations. Revisiting Bourdieu's framework helps reveal how social capital is embedded within broader systems of power and class. For Afghan refugees, therefore, social networks play a supportive role in adaptation and integration, but they cannot substitute for systemic reforms that ensure equity and protection. To conceptualize this relationship, Figure 7 presents a pyramid of displacement: at the top, Forced Migration represents involuntary movement; the middle layer, Human Rights, highlights access to legal protection and essential services; and at the base, Social Capital highlights the foundational role of social networks in fostering refugee integration, recovery, and long-term resilience.

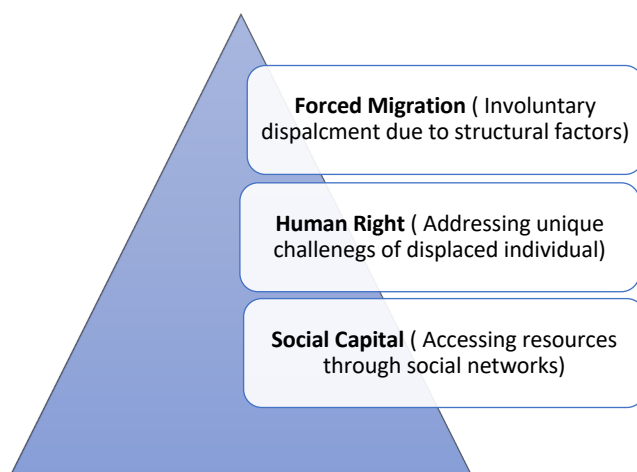


Figure 7. Theoretical Farmwork (Force Migration Theory & Social Capital Theory)

Method

This study employs a comprehensive literature review to examine the experiences of Afghan refugees, especially following the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Sources were selected from academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar), official reports, and refugee-led publications. Peer-reviewed articles and reputable materials from the last 20 years were prioritized, focusing on socio-economic impacts, integration challenges, and U.S. policy responses. Adopting

a liberation-centered and decolonial framework rooted in critical refugee studies, this article rejects extractive methods that position displaced people as passive subjects. Instead, it views knowledge as a product of lived experience, resistance, and cultural agency. The absence of interviews or direct observation reflects an ethical stance against traumatization and appropriation. Rather than treating refugee narratives as neutral data, this study engages with refugee-led advocacy reports, public testimonies, policy documents, and community-generated accounts as acts of resistance and survival. A critical thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns of systemic exclusion, resilience, and grassroots empowerment within the context of post-2021 U.S. immigration policies.

This methodology is guided by anti-oppressive ethics and researcher reflexivity. Recognizing my positionality, I approach the work as an ally rather than an observer, honoring community knowledge, resisting academic objectification, and fostering liberatory discourse. Empowerment is both a research theme and a methodological principle. While not claiming to represent all Afghan refugee experiences, the study seeks to elevate marginalized perspectives and expose structural power dynamics often omitted in dominant policy and academic narratives. Within this framework, research is reframed as an act of solidarity rather than a tool of surveillance.

Researcher Identity

As the sole author of this paper, the author is a Ph.D. candidate in Literacy, Culture, Language, and Education at the Indiana University. Drawing from, her own experiences as refugee, the author's paper is deeply informed by both academic training and personal lived experience. The dual perspective enables a nuanced understanding of the Afghan refugee experience, bridging scholarly insight with empathetic engagement.

Thematic Literature Review

This section presents findings organized thematically around the research questions (RQs) to reduce repetition and ensure conceptual clarity. The discussion integrates Forced Migration Theory and Social Capital Theory to interpret Afghan refugees lived experiences after the 2021 U.S. withdrawal.

Results

RQ1: Social Integration Challenges Faced by Afghan Refugees in the U.S. post-2021

The resettlement of Afghan refugees in the United States following the 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan reveals multilayered structural, legal, and social challenges. The evacuation process, hastily organized under Operation Allies Welcome, was marked by inadequate planning and coordination, leaving many evacuees in prolonged legal and psychological uncertainty (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022). Although many Afghans were relocated through the program (International Rescue Committee, 2022), nearly half remain without a clear path to permanent residency (Gelatt & Meissner, 2022). This legal limbo directly affects their ability to integrate into U.S. society, particularly in areas such as employment, education, housing, and mental health (Reihani et al., 2021).

Grounded in Forced Migration Theory, which emphasizes the profound and lasting impacts of involuntary displacement, and Social Capital Theory, which highlights the importance of community networks in fostering resilience, this analysis situates Afghan refugees' experiences within broader systemic contexts. In Indiana, as in other U.S. states, refugees confront persistent barriers related to legal status, language acquisition, and cultural adaptation (Ulintz et al., 2023). Nevertheless, both formal resettlement agencies and informal community networks play crucial roles in supporting newcomers and facilitating adaptation. These findings draw upon refugee-led

reports, public testimonies, and scholarly research that center on their lived experiences of displaced Afghans.

Legal and Structural Barriers to Integration

Since the 2021 U.S. withdrawal, legal ambiguity has emerged as a major obstacle to integration. The rapid evacuation left thousands of Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants unprocessed and field staff without clear guidance (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022). Although 76,000 Afghans were admitted under humanitarian parole, this temporary status provides no route to permanent residency (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024). Outdated, post-9/11 immigration laws and inconsistent enforcement across Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies further delay resolution (Galus, 2022).

Persecuted interpreters, activists, and civil society members depend on refugee status for protection (Coen, 2022), yet inconsistent U.S. policy has left many in a state of legal uncertainty (Catholic Charities Community Services Arizona, n.d.). This instability undermines both psychological well-being and long-term social integration. Despite meeting refugee definitions under international law, thousands remain without durable solutions or permanent residency (American Immigration Council, 2020).

Potential Policy Changes to Improve the Lives of Afghan Refugees

To address the systemic challenges Afghan refugees face in their resettlement, several policy reforms are necessary. First, establishing clear pathways to permanent residency would provide legal stability for refugees, alleviating the uncertainty that hinders their integration into U.S. society. As highlighted by the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2022), the rapid evacuation left many refugees in legal limbo, unable to secure permanent residency. This could be achieved by expediting the processing of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) and providing a permanent legal status for those on temporary programs like humanitarian parole (Montalvo &

Batalova, 2024). Additionally, expanding access to language acquisition programs, especially those tailored to refugee needs, is crucial, as Arun et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of providing more ESL programs to facilitate refugee integration. According to Reihani et al. (2021), policies aimed at recognizing foreign qualifications would allow Afghan refugees to contribute their skills and experience in the U.S. workforce, addressing the underemployment problem faced by many refugees. Furthermore, the affordable housing crisis and the lack of culturally sensitive mental health services exacerbate refugee challenges (Golizadeh et al., 2023). Policymakers should prioritize the development of affordable housing solutions and the creation of culturally competent mental health programs to better meet the needs of refugees (Rai et al., 2023). Lastly, fostering refugee-led community organizations and initiatives, as seen in successful models such as the Refugee Task Force at Indiana University, would empower Afghan refugees to contribute more actively to their communities and promote a sense of belonging and agency (Petranoff, 2023).

Language, Gender, and Cultural Barriers

Language proficiency and gender inequities further hinder integration. Many Afghan refugees face limited access to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (Arun et al., 2022), and the lack of strong ethnic networks in rural areas deepens isolation (Mohamed, 2023). Afghan women, in particular, experience lower English proficiency (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024), limiting access to employment, education, and community participation. Gender disparities also restrict engagement in counseling and leadership opportunities (Firling, 1988).

Cultural misalignment, Islamophobia, and insensitive resettlement practices exacerbate exclusion, especially for Afghan Muslim women (Coleridge, 1999). At a practical level, barriers such as unreliable transportation, limited affordable housing, and a lack of culturally appropriate food make everyday life more challenging (Golizadeh et al., 2023). These factors illustrate how social and cultural capital deficits intersect with structural inequalities, reinforcing marginalization.

Despite qualifying under refugee law, many remain in legal limbo without permanent solutions (American Immigration Council, 2020).

Economic, Educational, and Health-Related Challenges

Economic integration remains one of the most persistent barriers. Many refugees arrive with professional experience or technical expertise that is not recognized by U.S. employers, resulting in underemployment or unemployment (Reihani et al., 2021). Affordable housing shortages, particularly in cities like Bloomington, Indiana, increase dependency on overcrowded or substandard housing (Exodus Refugee Immigration, n.a).

In education, both adults and children often require extensive ESL support but are placed in under-resourced programs. These integration struggles are compounded by trauma and uncertainty, as Rai et al. (2023) note that long-term psychological stress undermines adjustment. These findings reflect Forced Migration Theory, where forced displacement leads to disrupted social, educational, and economic systems that cannot be easily rebuilt in host countries without systemic reform (Vella, 2013).

Moreover, Reihani et al. (2021) highlight key barriers to healthcare access, trust, miscommunication, and mental health stigma, though public support and coordinated care can help. Many Afghan refugees, for instance, avoid discussing mental health due to fears of job loss or losing benefits. As one interpreter explained, “Most people don’t want to accept or share their mental health problems... They think the information given to the doctor will affect their job or social security benefits” (p. 62). This highlights how structural vulnerability intersects with cultural stigma, limiting healthcare access and overall well-being.

RQ2: Effectiveness of Local Community Support Systems and Empowerment of Afghan Refugees

In contrast to structural exclusion, many Afghan refugees are finding strength and stability through community-based organizations and informal diaspora networks. Local refugee support systems, including volunteer-led initiatives, faith-based groups, and mutual aid circles, are essential in helping refugees access housing, legal aid, language classes, and emotional support. These grassroots efforts not only fill service gaps but also help rebuild a sense of belonging, identity, and autonomy among refugees, many of whom contribute back to the community despite their limited means.

The Refugee Task Force at Indiana University Bloomington exemplifies how academic institutions can support integration by fostering inclusivity and resource-sharing (Petranoff, 2023). As a refugee and student at Indiana University, I have personally experienced how the Task Force's support has helped refugee students cover tuition and living expenses. Without this assistance, life for refugee students would be extremely difficult. Each year, I applied for scholarships available to students with high GPAs and was fortunate to receive funding for two years of my Ph.D. studies. However, after administrative changes in the United States and reductions in scholarship opportunities, I was no longer able to secure funding. The Refugee Task Force helped me overcome this challenge and continue my education successfully.

The lens of Social Capital Theory, such as community networks, builds trust, reciprocity, and resilience. For Afghan refugees, these connections often prove more reliable than governmental aid. According to Bourdieu (1983), as cited in Hauberer (2011), social capital is intertwined with economic and cultural capital within social fields. Bourdieu (1983) defines capital as accumulated labor material or embodied that, though time-consuming to acquire, generates profit when reproduced (Bourdieu, 1983; Hauberer, 2011). These insights explain how Afghan refugees leverage social relationships to rebuild livelihoods and support others in their communities.

Refugees as Agents of Contribution, Not Just Victims

Afghan refugees in the United States actively contribute to their communities, challenging the misconception that they are burdens on society. Many bring professional expertise, entrepreneurial skills, and cultural insight that enrich local economies and civic life. This reality highlights the ethical responsibility of research and policy to recognize refugees as agents of change rather than passive recipients of aid. As an Afghan refugee, I have tried to make my own contributions to the United States. The Refugee Support Center has worked to assist refugees by helping them access food pantries, housing, and employment opportunities. Inspired by their efforts, I also tried to play a similar role by helping newly arrived Afghan refugees who were unfamiliar with their new environment. I welcomed them, took them shopping, showed them around the city of Bloomington, Indiana, and helped them obtain their student ID card. I also guided them through registering for their courses and credits via the student portal One.IU.edu.

Indeed, Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of community networks in enabling refugees to achieve economic and social integration (Volker, 2020). These networks foster resilience and facilitate meaningful participation in host societies. Castles (2003) and Vella (2013) advocate for inclusive policies that acknowledge refugee contributions, while Agadjanian (2013) argues that migration should be seen along a continuum shaped by socio-economic pressures, rather than rigid categories of forced or voluntary movement.

Globalization and Policy Context

Globalization further complicates migration dynamics. While skilled professionals benefit from global mobility, less-skilled migrants, especially those from the Global South, are often restricted despite their essential contributions to labor markets (Castles, 2003). This contradiction highlights the need for equitable migration and resettlement policies that recognize the value, resilience, and agency of all migrants, including refugees.

Afghan refugees, in particular, face a range of shared challenges as they adapt to new social, cultural, and economic environments. These challenges, such as language barriers, limited access to employment, and unfamiliarity with local systems, can hinder their ability to contribute effectively to their host communities. However, when refugees receive adequate support, they not only rebuild their lives but also actively enrich their new societies through their skills, perspectives, and community involvement. By recognizing these common challenges and Afghan refugees, policymakers, researchers, and community organizations can think more broadly and develop solutions that foster inclusion and participation. Supporting refugees in overcoming initial barriers is not merely an act of assistance; it is an investment in their potential to contribute meaningfully to the communities that welcome them. Through informed policy and strong community networks, host societies can help ensure that refugees are seen not as burdens, but as partners in building a more diverse, dynamic, and compassionate future.

Discussion and Implication

The post-2021 integration of Afghan refugees reveals layered legal, economic, social, and educational challenges shaped by both policy failures and the remarkable resilience of displaced communities. Many refugees were evacuated under temporary humanitarian parole, a status that offers safety but no pathway to permanence (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022). This condition exemplifies Forced Migration Theory's emphasis on disrupted legal and social systems resulting from involuntary displacement (Vella, 2013). Outdated immigration procedures further failed to support U.S. allies and civil society actors (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022), leaving numerous refugees without legal protection (American Immigration Council, 2020). Indeed, these legal uncertainties extend deeply into economic integration. Barriers such as unrecognized professional credentials, housing shortages, and limited English proficiency inhibit refugees' progress (Reihani et al., 2021). Employment remains restricted not only by legal

insecurity (Mohamed, 2023, p. 50) but also by systemic racism, which weakens refugees' professional networks and limits access to social and economic capital (Stempel & Alemi, 2021). Limited financial aid further contributes to housing instability (Mohamed, 2023), perpetuating socioeconomic vulnerability.

Similarly, access to healthcare is constrained by inadequate interpretation services, insufficient provider training (Reihani et al., 2021), and low cultural competence among medical professionals (Jongen et al., 2018). These barriers leave refugees underserved and mistrustful of the healthcare system. Despite these challenges, however, social and religious networks provide vital mental health support, while school counselors serve as key figures for Afghan youth navigating trauma and cultural adjustment.

Education emerges as a persistent and global barrier to integration. Only 61% of refugee children worldwide are enrolled in school, and merely 7% access tertiary education (UNESCO, 2023; Crawford et al., 2024, p. 120). Refugee students, especially Afghans following the Taliban's 2021 return, face both academic and emotional obstacles, even in systems where education is formally accessible (Crawford et al., 2024). Although scholarship programs exist, wage discrimination and employment barriers persist after graduation (Arar et al., 2021). Sherab and Kirk (2016), as cited in Avery and Said (2017), emphasize the need for flexible, multi-level funding models with diverse entry points. Yet, vocational and hybrid learning pathways remain underdeveloped (Arar et al., 2021), while gaps in cost-of-living support discourage participation and distort educational demand. Even with available aid, many refugee students struggle to access or sustain higher education opportunities.

Amid these barriers, Afghan refugees demonstrate agency and resilience. Rooted in Social Capital Theory, Bourdieu (1983), as cited in Hauberer (2011). Grassroots initiatives such as

Indiana University's Refugee Task Force illustrate how community-based organizations can bridge institutional gaps. These efforts reinforce the understanding of refugees as active contributors rather than passive beneficiaries. Consequently, meaningful and sustainable integration requires legal reform, long-term investment, and direct collaboration with refugee-led organizations to create inclusive, equitable, and ethically grounded migration systems.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study was the inability to conduct direct interviews or field observations with newly arrived Afghan refugees in the United States. Many individuals were hesitant to share their experiences due to trauma, emotional distress, and fear that participation could jeopardize their legal status amid uncertain immigration policies. These ethical and logistical challenges restricted data collection and led to the adoption of a non-extractive, literature-based methodology. While this approach ensured ethical rigor, it also limited firsthand narrative depth and the diversity of perspectives captured. Future research should therefore incorporate participatory and trauma-informed methodologies that prioritize safety, trust, and agency among refugee participants.

Conclusion and Direction for Future Research

This research has explored the complex journey of Afghan refugees following the 2021 U.S. withdrawal, using Forced Migration Theory and Social Capital Theory to analyze their experiences. As Vella (2013) suggests, forced migration is shaped by structural violence, legal uncertainty, and global inequality, all of which are evident in the Afghan case. The rapid evacuation, combined with outdated immigration policies, left many refugees in a precarious legal state, exacerbating their exclusion from societal opportunities (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022, p. 5). This research also highlights Bauman's (1998), as cited in Castles' (2003)

argument that refugees remain marginalized within global systems, even when they meet the criteria for protection. However, legal ambiguity continues to impede Afghan refugees' access to employment, while challenges such as racism, housing instability, and inadequate healthcare further hinder their ability to integrate (Reihani et al., 2021). Despite these obstacles, refugees display remarkable resilience, forming community-based networks that align with Social Capital Theory's focus on the power of social ties to foster empowerment and support (Bourdieu, 1983; Hauberer, 2011). The barriers to education are another significant challenge, as limited access to schooling and underfunded, inflexible systems leave many refugees without opportunities for long-term social mobility (UNESCO, 2023; Crawford et al., 2024). To address these disparities, a strengths-based approach that recognizes refugees' skills and challenges the structural inequities they face is critical (Fine, 2010).

For Afghan refugees to successfully integrate, systemic policy reforms are essential. Establishing clear pathways to permanent residency, expanding language acquisition programs tailored to refugees, and addressing employment underutilization through the recognition of foreign qualifications are all pivotal steps in enabling refugees to thrive (Montalvo & Batalova, 2024). Furthermore, policymakers must prioritize affordable housing solutions and the development of culturally competent mental health services, which are key to overcoming the current integration barriers (Goliaei et al., 2023). Additionally, empowering refugee-led community organizations, as demonstrated by initiatives like the Refugee Task Force at Indiana University, would further enhance Afghan refugees' sense of agency and belonging.

While these policy changes hold significant promise, they must be approached with caution, as the diversity of refugee experiences requires nuanced, adaptable strategies. Future research should continue to examine the impact of community networks and explore gender-specific barriers that affect integration outcomes. By focusing on these areas, we can ensure that

Afghan refugees and displaced populations globally are not only protected but also allowed to contribute meaningfully to their new communities, fostering a genuine sense of belonging and social cohesion.

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“Can I Take Your Order?”: Analyzing Language Needs in the Restaurant Industry

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the design of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course tailored for Latin American immigrants, particularly Mexican Americans, with experience in the U.S. restaurant industry. Despite their years of hands-on knowledge, many of these workers face linguistic barriers that restrict their participation in guest-facing roles. To address this gap, the course was developed through a targeted needs assessment combining survey responses from both restaurant managers and waitstaff in casual dining settings. The study identified key communicative challenges, including customer interactions, teamwork, and culturally appropriate service encounters. Drawing on stakeholder feedback and current literature in hospitality communication and computer-assisted language learning (CALL), the course offers a practical, research-informed approach that aligns instruction with real-world workplace demands. This article outlines the survey methodology and highlights how stakeholder perspectives informed each stage of course development. By centering the lived experiences and strengths of immigrant restaurant workers, the ESP course fosters professional advancement through focused, relevant language instruction. The project illustrates how needs-driven ESP design can be used as a tool for linguistic empowerment and social mobility. Implications are offered for educators seeking to create responsive, stakeholder-informed ESP curricula for other vocational contexts.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, adult ELLs, immigrant learners

Introduction

Immigrants represent a vital segment of the dynamic and diverse hospitality workforce in the United States. In 2024, approximately 2.5 million Latin American immigrants were employed in the food service industry (Morales, 2024). Aspiring waiters from Latin America bring the rich cultural heritage of their home country. Their unique cultural background, coupled with linguistic richness and strong work ethic, marks their determination to contribute meaningfully to the thriving American hospitality landscape. These characteristics represent both advantages and challenges in their educational journey. Their language proficiency is understood not only as a personal achievement but also as an asset in the broader context of the American hospitality industry. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses aim to empower learners who may be disadvantaged by a lack of specialized language skills. This course seeks to bridge linguistic gaps for Latin American immigrants, many of whom have professional backgrounds in their home countries but face barriers in the U.S. due to limited English proficiency.

The following ESP course for casual dining was designed with Mexican American immigrants as the target population. The course is best suited for immigrants who have worked in an American restaurant in some capacity for at least a year but are not currently part of the waitstaff. The journey of Mexican immigrants transitioning to work as waiters in American restaurants requires a nuanced and tailored educational approach. Understanding their needs, aspirations, challenges, and triumphs forms the cornerstone of this ESP course. By acknowledging their future role within the industry and recognizing their unique experiences, language instruction is designed to align with their current language abilities and future ambitions. The ESP course supports dedicated students in building the skills they need to succeed as waiters in the competitive environment of American casual dining establishments.

Literature Review

In today's digitally connected world, there are numerous online resources that make language learning more accessible than ever. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) strategies, such as audio and video integration through role plays and simulations, allow educators to overcome the limitations of asynchronous formats, especially for pronunciation and vocabulary development. Designing an asynchronous online ESP course for casual dining waitstaff requires a review of relevant literature, particularly in hospitality education and CALL. These studies offer valuable insight into effective instructional strategies for EFL learners in hospitality settings, the role of CALL in vocabulary retention, and innovative methods for developing speaking skills. While a significant portion of ESP research focuses on the hospitality and tourism industry, most of it centers on hospitality in general rather than restaurant service specifically (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020; Prabhu & Wani, 2015; Erazo et al., 2019; Amer & Amer, 2023). Additionally, much of this research has been conducted in Asia, primarily addressing the needs of non-native English speakers working in international hospitality settings (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020; Prabhu & Wani, 2015; Amer & Amer, 2023). In contrast, limited attention has been given to ESP instruction for English language learners employed in the U.S. restaurant industry. This project aims to address that gap by integrating needs assessment survey feedback from stakeholders in a local restaurant and current hospitality ESP and CALL literature. The synthesis of those findings will guide the design of an ESP course tailored to those specific communication needs. These recommendations will ensure learners receive practical, research-based training in English communication for restaurant service.

ESP for the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Most ESP research has focused on the hospitality and tourism industry. The reviewed studies indicate several relevant findings for the development of an ESP course for casual dining. Azizah and Sugirin's (2020) study explores the instructional strategies used by English lecturers in university hospitality departments in Indonesia. The researchers gathered data through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations involving department heads, two EFL lecturers, and 55 students (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020). Their study highlights how EFL instructors in hospitality programs implement approaches that prioritize authentic language use and student engagement. Another strategy that Azizah and Sugirin (2020) noted was "exploring various learning resources so that the students can then understand the form and function of the language" (p. 1721). Authentic materials, such as hospitality training videos, descriptive texts about hotels, promotional posters, and job application cover letters, were used so that students would learn how to use English specifically within a hospitality context. In the context of an ESP course for casual dining, authentic materials, such as menus, order pads, and training manuals, would be invaluable.

Azizah and Sugirin (2020) also noted several challenges in hospitality instruction such as limited vocabulary, insufficient communication strategies, grammar difficulties, pronunciation issues, challenges in appropriately responding to guest complaints, and limited cultural awareness. These are challenges to be aware of when planning an ESP course for casual dining. Similar difficulties related to communication were also reported in Prabhu and Wani's (2015) study, which analyzed challenges in language proficiency for hospitality students in Pune, India. The researchers conducted three separate questionnaires of hotel HR / training heads of five-star hotels in Pune and faculty members and students at the AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology. The results of the surveys show that "English communication helps in

securing job placement, promotions and building a personal brand” (Prabhu & Wani, 2015, p. 60). Both hoteliers and faculty members noted that new graduates and students lack proficiency in the following communication areas: spoken English, body language, personality, confidence, tone, and people skills (Prabhu & Wani, 2015). These results underscore the importance of navigating complex interpersonal relationships in English within the hospitality industry. However, despite the concerns of their professors and future employers, the students themselves felt confident in their ability to improve their English language proficiency. Results of the student questionnaires show that “of the challenges that deter students from spending time and effort on improving their English, lack of time was rated the major deterrent” (Prabhu & Wani, 2015, p. 62). The results of this study demonstrate that many non-native English speakers in the hospitality industry struggle with verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and confidence. An asynchronous online ESP course would provide waitstaff with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and bolster their confidence in a low-stakes, familiar environment.

A team of researchers in El Oro, Ecuador completed a similar study, where they interviewed 15 professionals, namely “five owners of tourism establishments, five professionals who graduated from an Ecuadorian University in El Oro, and five professors who specialized in Tourism from an Ecuadorian University in the province of El Oro” (Erazo et al., 2019, p. 159). After observing that many hospitality professionals lacked sufficient English proficiency, the researchers wanted to understand the needs and uses of the English language and its importance within the tourism industry of Ecuador. The results of the interviews revealed that speaking was the most important skill and that English is necessary in the hospitality industry because it is the lingua franca of the business world. The same is true of the restaurant industry in the United States. Looking forward, the researchers hope to develop an English for Tourism Purposes (ETP)

program at the university level so that students can receive specialized language training for a future career in hospitality and tourism.

A similar program is in place at the Higher Institute for Specific Studies-Heliopolis in Cairo, Egypt. Amer and Amer's (2023) study evaluated the effectiveness of speaking strategies, such as gap activities, think-pair-share, and role-play activities. The study evaluated 83 hospitality students that were divided equally into control and experimental groups. The experimental group received targeted instruction incorporating these strategies while the control group did not. Over 10 weeks, the experimental group showed significantly greater improvement in speaking proficiency with an 86% increase from pre- to post-assessment. The experimental group also outperformed the control group by 51% (Amer & Amer, 2023). Amer and Amer (2023) also conceded that speaking instruction presents challenges in asynchronous settings due to limited real-time interaction. CALL may provide key strategies for encouraging pronunciation practice in an asynchronous classroom setting.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in ESP Literature

CALL has grown considerably in the last few decades due to advancements in technology and digital media. Currently, language instruction does not exist solely within a traditional classroom setting but “has put thousands of language learning applications (or apps), electronic dictionaries and e-books in reach of everyone's pocket” (Thomas, Reinders, & Warschauer, 2014, p. 24). In asynchronous ESP classroom settings, CALL strategies, such as audio and video integration, can support pronunciation and interactive practice. Masuram and Sripada (2020) emphasized that speaking involves planning, editing, and simplifying utterances, all of which can be modeled and practiced through video-based activities and comprehension checks. To address the limitations of asynchronous environments, such as lack of real time

interaction, Davies and Pearce (2008) recommend role plays and simulations as useful instructional tools. Similarly, Lourdunathan and Menon (2004) advocate for restaurant-based task simulations involving dialogues with simulated coworkers and managers. While traditional think-pair-share activities are difficult in asynchronous settings, alternatives include partially completed scenarios, which require learners to use resources like glossaries and visuals to solve communication challenges. These activities promote real-world problem-solving skills relevant to the hospitality field.

As Azizah and Sugirin (2020) noted, adequate vocabulary retention remains a persistent challenge for English Language Learners. Loucky's (2006) study, "Maximizing Vocabulary Development by Systematically Using a Depth of Lexical Processing Taxonomy, CALL Resources and Effective Strategies," provides insight into the CALL strategies to address the issue of vocabulary retention. The study supports the use of structured vocabulary learning strategies for enhancing long-term retention and productive vocabulary use. Loucky (2006) identified 40 vocabulary strategies most used by the highest achieving cohort of 112 Japanese EFL learners divided into 5 groups. The study confirmed that the learners with the highest gain in vocabulary knowledge were those who engaged in deeper levels of lexical processing and demonstrated better vocabulary recall. Among the most utilized strategies were consulting English-Japanese and English-English dictionaries, inferring word meanings from context, and seeking clarification from instructors in the learners' native language (Loucky, 2006). Loucky (2006) also highlighted the value of learner-generated glosses, notes, and visual aids, particularly within CALL environments.

Further guidance on course design for asynchronous settings is provided in Scida and Jones' (2016) study. Their research highlights the benefits of self-pacing, daily exposure, repeat

submission opportunities, interaction with native speakers, video grammar tutorials, and immediate feedback. The study showed a 55.4% average improvement in listening comprehension (Scida & Jones, 2016). Drawing on the work of Adair-Hauck et al. (2000) and Bañados (2006), the authors emphasized the need for authentic oral, written, and visual input. The course design prioritized task-based learning through video and text, offering grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary practice with immediate feedback. Student feedback emphasized the benefits of daily immersion and the ability to track progress. One student noted, “I did notice an improvement in my learning because I was immersed in Spanish every day. It was easier for me to retain the information” (Scida & Jones, 2016, p. 189). The authors concluded that delivery format, constant reinforcement, and audio-visual content contributed the most to strong gains in L2 listening comprehension (Scida & Jones, 2016). Audio-visual content, such as video lectures and role-play skits, would be the foundation of an asynchronous online ESP course for casual dining. Additionally, an online Learning Management System (LMS) (i.e., Canvas) would provide learners with the opportunity to repeat assignment submissions, view feedback, and track progress.

Sato et al.’s (2017) study, “Integrating Digital Technology in an Intensive, Fully Online College Course for Japanese *Beginning* Learners: A Standards-Based, Performance-Driven Approach,” also gives suggestions for online course design. The course was built using the ACTFL 5Cs (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities). The study compared face-to-face and online cohorts, using integrated performance assessment rubrics to evaluate language function, text organization, communication strategies, comprehensibility, and grammar control. The online group outperformed the face-to-face cohort by 27% in communication strategies (Sato et al., 2017). The course applied task-based language teaching

and integrated observation of authentic texts, followed by problem-solving tasks. Post-course surveys revealed insights from learners and instructors regarding their experiences with digital tools. One instructor noted, “VoiceThread inherently promoted aspects of second language acquisition. Video recordings clearly illustrated that students unintentionally adopted gestures and suprasegmental phonological elements from their instructor and peers, thereby achieving natural intonation and tempo” (Sato et al., 2017, p. 767). One student commented, “Creating a video or audio recording feels less intimidating than spontaneously speaking face-to-face as a beginner,” and another shared, “Practicing aloud through recordings was very beneficial since face-to-face class time often did not allow enough opportunity to hear myself speaking other languages” (Sato et al., 2017, p. 767). Sato et al. (2017) also noted the benefits of material being delivered through digital tools such as Google Docs, VoiceThread, and Google Hangouts. Instructors considered these tools effective in fostering inductive learning. Additionally, interactions and conversations were facilitated through video presentations, wherein instructors prepared learners by introducing grammar, vocabulary, and discourse tools, such as interjections and sentence-final particles. This approach provided learners with extensive input and shaped the curriculum development of an ESP course for casual dining waitstaff.

Students gained exposure to authentic language usage when instructors offered spontaneous commentary on cultural and functional objects (e.g., cell phones, Japanese figurines) found in natural contexts. Sato et al. (2017) highlighted that such commentary enriched linguistic input regarding complexity, quality, quantity, variety, genuineness, and relevance, despite utterances occasionally being incomplete, rephrased, or repeated. Moreover, presenting specific phrases in meaningful chunks directed students' attention toward form, encouraging them to notice unfamiliar grammatical constructions, varied intonation, and non-

verbal cues. Additionally, students recorded output based on objects in their own environments, enabling peers to monitor and provide corrective feedback through text comments. For pronunciation practice, students recorded audio files, repeating them while simultaneously recording themselves via the commenting feature. Google Docs was implemented to encourage a sense of community, enhance cooperative language-based activities, and facilitate interaction with course moderators when necessary. Learners also responded to "Guess & Try" questions, prompting them to notice linguistic forms and engage in problem-solving, aligning with the principles highlighted by Lee and VanPatten (2003).

The reviewed studies highlight key considerations for designing an effective ESP course for casual dining, particularly within asynchronous learning environments. While much of the existing ESP literature focuses on hospitality and tourism more broadly, common themes emerge: the importance of contextualized language use, integrated skill instruction, and communication strategies tailored to real-world scenarios. CALL strategies, such as audio and video integration through role plays and simulations, allow educators to overcome the limitations of asynchronous formats. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research addressing the specific needs of English language learners working in the restaurant industry. In casual dining environments in the U.S., frequent and effective communication in English with both guests and coworkers is essential. By combining research-based strategies with input from current restaurant employees, the resulting course design aims to provide targeted, accessible, and practical language instruction that empowers learners to communicate confidently and effectively in the workplace.

Needs Assessment

A comprehensive needs assessment is the foundation of an effective ESP course. As Anthony (2018) states in *Introducing English for Specific Purposes*, "Needs analysis is the starting point of any ESP course because it is an understanding of the learner's needs" (p. 45). For Latin American immigrants working as restaurant waitstaff, a targeted needs assessment will determine their current English proficiency, the specific language skills required for their job, and their own goals and expectations.

Assessing Current Language Skills

The first step in a needs assessment is to evaluate the learners' existing English proficiency (Anthony, 2018). To address these questions, diagnostic questionnaires (Appendices A-C) were provided in English to the three groups of stakeholders for the prospective learners (the learners themselves, management and future coworkers) covering: basic communicative abilities in English, comfort levels with restaurant-specific interactions (e.g., greeting customers, taking orders, handling complaints), and perceived strengths and weaknesses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The survey questions were based on commonly accepted "steps of service" within the restaurant industry. Information regarding steps of service was taken from Cuboh and Restaurantowner.com. Both sources place emphasis on several key steps of service and provide more detail about their proper execution including: 1) The initial greeting, 2) Description of menu items, 3) Handling customer questions and comments, 4) Taking and confirming orders, 5) Delivering food and confirming accuracy, 6) Checking on customer satisfaction, 7) Presenting and processing the check, 8) Engaging in small talk with customers. While communicating effectively with coworkers, addressing and resolving disputes, and utilizing shorthand for note-taking are not explicitly addressed in either source they were noted

as areas of importance by managers and current servers who completed the needs assessments surveys (see Appendices A and B).

A critical component of ESP course design is ensuring that language instruction reflects real-world use. Upton and Connor (2012) summarize the work of John Swales and explain that an ESP course should align with the following: “A) research into language use should be descriptive; B) focus should be on the real language used by regular people (not famous or literary figures); C) current everyday language should be of primary importance; (D) language as it is spoken or written in specific contexts should be the focus of study” (p. 1). This course will incorporate real-world samples from restaurant settings, including workplace jargon and shorthand abbreviations frequently used for order-taking (e.g., "86" for an unavailable item, "sani" for sanitizer station, "2-top" for a table of two).

Understanding Workplace Expectations

Beyond learner self-assessment, input from restaurant management and current waitstaff is crucial (Anthony, 2018). Surveys for managers focused on 1) Key language skills expected for guest-facing positions, 2) Performance benchmarks used in mock service assessments before placing staff on the floor, and 3) Essential soft skills such as politeness, efficiency, and ability to handle guest concerns. Similarly, current wait staff were surveyed on 1) Common phrases used at different stages of service, 2) Communication patterns with customers and coworkers, and 3) Essential skills for effective service. In addition to technical language skills, "there should be an analysis of functional grammar along with the contextual factors that influence language use" (Swales, 2000, p. 60). This analysis of analysis of functional grammar and contextual factors includes an examination of politeness strategies, cultural interpretations of body language, and

common restaurant discourse patterns to ensure learners develop communicative competence beyond vocabulary memorization.

Addressing Learning Objectives and Methodologies

After receiving input from stakeholders, curriculum developers should analyze the language skills used by staff to decide on learning objectives and reasonable goals for the course (Anthony, 2018). Based on TESOL methodologies, the SIOP model will be applied to structure lessons in a way that integrates content and language learning (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework model consists of eight components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). This will involve vocabulary building through pre-teaching key restaurant terms, activities to practice customer interactions, and the use of real restaurant menus, sample dialogues, and authentic materials. Ormond (2010) explains that "not only do we need to teach language as it is actually used in specific contexts, but the focus of the instruction should take into account learners' needs and interests within those specific contexts" (p. 3). To support this, learners will have opportunities to provide feedback on the relevance of instructional materials. This democratic approach fosters learner engagement and motivation.

Course Evaluation and Assessment

The last question that Anthony (2018) posits is related to evaluation. He asks, "How will you know if the learners have achieved the goals of the course? How can you assess your own performance in the course as a whole?" (p. 45). Learners will be assessed in two ways: 1) Short quizzes and/or quick checks at the end of each module and 2) A longer cumulative test at the end of the course. After successfully completing the course, learners will have the opportunity to

submit a survey which may include self-reflections on their progress throughout the course and feedback on materials or course design.

Method

In total, the researchers produced three separate surveys. The surveys targeted the perspectives of stakeholders as well as both English-speaking and non-English-speaking restaurant employees. Surveys were collected from two native English-speaking managers, ten native English-speaking servers and six bilingual Spanish/English speaking support staff. The primary goal was to understand which communicative needs are the most important for restaurant staff in an English-majority country. Questions were formulated to determine the background knowledge of learners and their current self-assessed proficiency levels. Questions aimed at prospective learners considered 1) their background experience in the hospitality industry, 2) their confidence relating to several communications contexts that pertain to becoming waitstaff (i.e. Greeting customers, describing menu items, clarifying orders, handling complaints), 3) challenges they currently face when interacting with customers in English, 4) areas they desire the most improvement in, and 5) their perceived level of comfort pertaining to key performance indicators. In addition, questions which addressed language skills for waitstaff employees were included in both the management survey and the “current” waitstaff survey.

Results

Assessing the surveys revealed key findings about stakeholder expectations. Three areas of skill overlapped pertaining to management expectations, learner wants and current waitstaff skill prioritization. Each stakeholder cohort rated the following skills as top priorities in becoming a successful waitstaff employee; the ability to describe (and sell) food and drink items (“understanding food and cooking terms,” “[I would like to learn about] cocktails and special

drinks”), how to use professional language (verbal and nonverbal) to enhance rapport (“[I want to learn about] connecting with guests, make them feel comfortable,” and “[being] observant of body language and changes in energy [is crucial for success],” “have personality/smile and have fun [is crucial for success]”), and knowing how to clarify questions when they arise (“[a big challenge for non-native speakers is] not understanding what someone asked you to do,” “[you can improve communication through] asking clarifying questions,” and “when employees can communicate effectively with each other and guests there are less chances of mistakes and misunderstandings”). The management and waitstaff team also emphasized the importance of clear communication (pronunciation). Management ranked the two most important skills to succeed in the role as, “describing menu items” and “providing accurate service.” They also noted that the most critical language skills for the position were, “speaking clearly” and “using professional language.” One manager stated, “Better communication will improve guests' experiences.” Current servers also echoed the importance of pronunciation when they ranked “speaking clearly and professionally” as the most important aspect of being a waiter. When asked for further recommendations on how to improve employee-guest communication to say, “Asking clarifying questions is very important.” Finally, the importance of pronunciation was the similarly noted by non-native English speakers when they answered that they wished to, “speak[ing] with confidence,” and “use higher vocabulary.”

The following categories of describing food and drink, using professional verbal/nonverbal language to create rapport, and understanding how to clarify problems or misunderstandings can be divided into several smaller sub-categories for the learners to acquire each skillset (as seen below).

A. Describing Food and Drink:

- a. Food
 - i. Cooking Descriptions/Methods (verbs/nouns)
 - ii. Food Vocabulary (nouns)
 - iii. Food Descriptions (adjectives)
 - iv. Flavor Descriptions (adjectives)
 - b. Drink
 - i. Drink Vocabulary (nouns; wine, beer, cocktails)
 - ii. Flavor Descriptions (adjectives)
 - iii. Specialty Phrasing/Words to Promote a Sale
- B. Creating Rapport
- a. Non-Verbal
 - i. Body Language
 - ii. Personal Presentation
 - b. Verbal
 - i. Standard steps-of-service phrasing
 - ii. Open Ended Questions
- C. Clarification
- a. With Guests
 - b. With Coworkers

The proposed course design takes place over five modules which address the needed skills. Based on the overarching needs and their supporting skills, we have designed our course with five overall goals and modules. Each module has unique topics and activities that will be completed on Canvas.

**Proposed Course Design: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) – Becoming a
Successful English-Speaking Waitstaff**

Course Goals

By the end of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Accurately describe and recommend food and drink items using appropriate vocabulary and sales techniques.
2. Use professional verbal and nonverbal communication to establish rapport with guests and coworkers.
3. Clarify misunderstandings and answer guest inquiries effectively.
4. Improve pronunciation and fluency to enhance communication confidence.
5. Demonstrate culturally appropriate customer service skills aligned with industry expectations.

Course Modules

Module 1: Food and Drink Description – The Language of the Menu

Objective:

- Learners will develop the ability to accurately describe food and beverages, including preparation methods and flavors, using professional and engaging language.

Topics:

- Cooking Methods & Descriptions (baked, grilled, sautéed, seared, medium-rare, crispy, tender, etc.)
- Essential Food Vocabulary (proteins, vegetables, sauces, grains, etc.)
- Food & Flavor Descriptors (rich, tangy, smoky, umami, buttery, etc.)
- Drink Terminology (wine, beer, cocktails, spirits, soft drinks, etc.)

- Phrasing to Promote Sales (e.g., "Our chef's special today is...", "This pairs well with...", "I highly recommend...")

Activities:

- Menu Role-Play: Learners practice describing dishes from a restaurant menu.
- Taste & Describe Exercise: Learners describe flavors and textures using target adjectives.

Module 2: Professional Communication – Building Guest Rapport

Objective:

- Learners will practice verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to create a welcoming and professional dining experience.

Topics:

- Nonverbal Communication in Hospitality (body language, posture, eye contact, smiling, mirroring guests)
- Professional Presentation (dress code, grooming, carrying oneself confidently)
- Verbal Communication & Steps of Service (e.g., greetings, taking orders, handling requests)
- Using Open-Ended Questions to Engage Guests ("What brings you in today?" vs. "Do you want an appetizer?")

Activities:

- Body Language Role-Play: Practicing appropriate gestures and posture.
- Greeting and Service Flow Practice: Simulating interactions at different stages of service.
- Conversational Openers: Practicing effective open-ended questions to encourage guest interaction.

Module 3: Clarification Strategies – Resolving Guest and Coworker Misunderstandings

Objective:

- Learners will develop skills to clarify questions or misunderstandings with both guests and coworkers professionally.

Topics:

- Clarifying Guest Orders ("Did you mean you'd like your steak medium-well?")
- Handling Guest Questions & Requests ("Let me confirm with the kitchen to be sure.")
- Coworker Communication for Efficiency ("Behind you!" "Can you run this to Table 5?")
- Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers (paraphrasing, confirming understanding)

Activities:

- Clarification Role-Plays: Practicing polite ways to confirm orders and guest requests.
- Coworker Coordination Exercise: Practicing teamwork and language for back-of-house communication.
- Guest Complaint Resolution Simulation: Handling guest concerns professionally.

Module 4: Pronunciation & Fluency – Speaking Clearly with Confidence

Objective:

- Learners will improve their pronunciation and speech clarity to communicate confidently in fast-paced restaurant environments.

Topics:

- Common Pronunciation Challenges for Spanish Speakers (e.g., "v" vs. "b," final consonant sounds)
- Stressing Key Words for Clarity ("Would you like another drink?" vs. "Would you like another drink?")
- Speaking at a Natural Pace in Service Settings

- Active Listening Strategies (hearing and responding appropriately)

Activities:

- Shadowing Exercises: Repeating real restaurant interactions for natural fluency.
- Minimal Pairs Practice: Distinguishing between commonly mispronounced words.
- Service Speed Drills: Practicing clear and efficient speech during simulated rushes.

Module 5: Cultural Expectations & Professionalism in Hospitality

Objective:

- Learners will develop an understanding of cultural expectations in English-speaking hospitality settings, focusing on customer service excellence.

Topics:

- Understanding Guest Expectations (professional tone, friendly service)
- Cultural Differences in Customer Service (compared to Latin American norms)
- Dealing with Difficult Guests Professionally
- Understanding Tipping Culture & Handling Checks

Activities:

- Scenario-Based Discussions: Exploring cultural differences in service expectations.
- Difficult Guest Role-Play: Practicing responses to guest complaints.
- Service Review & Feedback Sessions: Evaluating real-world service interactions.

Conclusion

The review of several studies revealed a convergence of strategies that effectively supported both face-to-face hospitality training and CALL. Those strategies emphasize material authenticity, communicative interaction, explicit language instruction, learner autonomy, multimedia integration, and collaborative feedback—each contributing to the development of

professional communicative competence in real-world service contexts. All the studies emphasized the use of authentic materials to simulate real-life language encounters. Learners engaged with authentic texts and videos, which included unscripted speech containing incomplete phrases, repetitions, and rephrased statements. They reviewed written discussions of texts and engaged in forced output relating to plots and hospitality situations. Additionally, spontaneous cultural commentary also helped learners connect language with practical usage. These activities built the foundation for meaningful language practice that reflected the demands of hospitality environments.

Communicative practice was reinforced through role-play and simulation, both scripted and unscripted. Learners responded to guest complaints, addressed preferences, and explained responsibilities in hospitality roles, all within problem-solving and decision-making contexts. Many of these tasks encouraged learners to elaborate, hypothesize, and interact as they might in a workplace setting. Think-and-guess activities and hypothetical training scenarios also added to the depth of output by requiring learners to articulate their thoughts using precise vocabulary and phrasing. Vocabulary and grammar instruction were delivered through both direct and contextualized means. Learners were introduced to targeted terms through visual aids, unscripted commentary, and explicit grammar correction. Clarification of similar-sounding terms, use of English-English and bilingual dictionaries, and inference from context were among the most effective strategies for vocabulary development. Grammar was reinforced through video tutorials and student-to-student corrections that enhanced learners' control over form and structure in communication.

Learner-directed engagement was also a key feature through self-paced modules, daily content exposure, and the ability to revise and resubmit assignments. The use of recording

technology enables learners to monitor their own speech and compare it to benchmark models, which fosters greater awareness through self-assessment. Tools that allow students to generate digital notes, especially when paired with visual aids, support long-term retention and personalized study practices. Multimedia content also plays a critical role in the delivery of instruction. Learners are consistently exposed to native speaker input, including authentic speech patterns, unscripted explanations, and discourse markers common in casual and professional settings. This exposure helps bridge the gap between instructional materials and the real-world language demands of hospitality work.

Finally, collaborative learning was facilitated through chat-based communication tools that supported peer-to-peer interaction and instructor feedback. Learners engaged in asynchronous discussions, received immediate feedback, and participated in guided guess-and-try exercises that promoted exploration and refinement of language use. These interactions helped learners stay motivated while also providing them with a support system for clarification and reinforcement. In developing an ESP course for casual dining, all the observations gathered from previous studies will be utilized to ensure the course meets the learners' needs through pedagogically grounded principles which reflect the findings of the needs assessment.

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Appendix A

Survey for Management: Prioritization of Wait Staff Skills

This survey is designed to help us understand how management prioritizes the skills and abilities of waitstaff, including their technical and language skills. Your responses will guide curriculum development and support the creation of a program that ensures servers are equipped to perform their roles effectively.

Section 1: Importance of Skills

1. What do you consider to be the most important skills for waitstaff to succeed in their role? (*Rank these in order of importance, 1 being the most important*)

- Greeting and making a strong first impression _____
- Describing menu items and upselling _____
- Handling customer questions and comments _____
- Resolving disputes with customers _____
- Maintaining communication and teamwork with coworkers _____
- Providing consistent and accurate service _____

2. Which language skills are most critical for servers? (*Check all that apply*)

- Speaking clearly and confidently
- Understanding customer accents
- Using professional and polite language
- Handling misunderstandings
- Using shorthand for note-taking

3. What challenges do you see non-native English-speaking servers face most often?

4. How important are the following transferrable skills for waitstaff? (Rate from 1 = Not Important to 5 = Very Important)

- Dispute resolution with customers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Dispute resolution with coworkers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Clarifying areas of confusion: 1 2 3 4 5
- Using open-ended questions for customer engagement: 1 2 3 4 5
- Shorthand note-taking: 1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Evaluation and Training Needs

5. What do you think are the most common barriers to effective communication between servers and customers?

6. What are the most common barriers to effective communication between servers and coworkers?

7. What additional skills or training do you feel would benefit waitstaff in performing their roles effectively?

8. How would you describe the impact of improved language skills on the overall success of your business?

Optional: Additional Comments

9. Would you like to share anything else about the skills/training of your waitstaff?

Appendix B

Survey for Current Servers: Language Use and Job Priorities

This survey is anonymous and designed to gather insights into how you use language in your role as a server. Your responses will help us identify key areas for language training and develop a curriculum tailored to the needs of non-native English speakers. Please answer honestly and in detail where possible.

Section 1: General Information

1. How long have you been working as a server?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- More than 2 years

2. What type of restaurant(s) do you work in, or have you worked in?

- Casual dining
- Fine dining
- Fast casual
- Other (please specify): _____

3. Have you worked with non-native English speakers on your team?

- Yes
- No

Section 2: Language Use in Your Role

What common phrases or expressions do you use in the following situations?

4. The Initial Greeting (e.g., welcoming guests, introducing yourself):

5. Description of Items (e.g., describing menu items, specials, or drinks):

6. Handling Questions (e.g., answering questions about ingredients or requests):

7. Handling Comments (e.g., addressing feedback, complaints, or compliments):

8. Taking the Order and Clarifying for Accuracy:

9. Delivering and Confirming Order Accuracy:

10. Checking Back and Confirming Satisfaction:

11. Presenting the Check:

12. Processing and Delivering the Closed Check:

13. Closing Statements (e.g., thanking guests, inviting them to return):

14. Language for Interactions with Coworkers (e.g., coordinating tasks, clarification):

15. Do you use shorthand or abbreviations for note-taking? If so, please list examples.

16. What strategies do you use to clarify areas of confusion with guests or coworkers?

17. How do you handle disputes or conflicts with guests or coworkers?

18. Do you use open-ended questions with guests? If so, please list examples.

Section 3: Job Priorities

19. What do you consider the most important aspects of being a successful waiter?

(Rank these from 1 = Most Important to 10 = Least Important)

- Speaking clearly and professionally _____
- Making guests feel welcome and comfortable _____
- Explaining menu items accurately _____
- Resolving guest complaints or issues _____
- Clarifying orders for accuracy _____
- Communicating effectively with coworkers _____
- Checking on guests during their meal _____
- Presenting the check and thanking guests _____
- Staying organized during busy shifts _____
- Using time efficiently to serve multiple tables _____

20. Are there other aspects of your job that you believe are crucial for success?

Section 4: Additional Feedback

21. What do you think are the biggest challenges for non-native English speakers in your restaurant?

12. In what areas do you think non-native English speakers need the most training to perform their jobs effectively? (Check all that apply)

- Greeting guests
- Explaining menu items
- Answering guest questions
- Handling complaints
- Clarifying orders
- Talking with coworkers
- Resolving disputes
- Other (please specify): _____

13. Do you have any suggestions for improving communication between team members and guests?

Thank you for completing this survey! Your input is valuable and will help us create an effective training program.

Appendix C

Needs Assessment Survey for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course

This survey is anonymous and designed to help us understand your needs, goals, and current skills to create a course tailored for you. Please answer honestly. Your feedback will guide the development of this program.

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your native language?

- _____

2. How long have you been working in the restaurant industry?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- More than 2 years

3. What is your current position in the restaurant?

- Busser
- Host/Hostess
- Food Runner
- Line Cook
- Other: _____

4. Have you worked as a waiter before?

- Yes, in my home country
- Yes, in the U.S.
- No

Section 2: English Proficiency

5. How would you rate your current English-speaking skills?

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced

6. How confident are you in the following areas of English? (*Rate from 1 = Not*

Confident to 5 = Very Confident)

- Greeting customers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Describing menu items: 1 2 3 4 5
- Answering customer questions: 1 2 3 4 5
- Clarifying orders: 1 2 3 4 5
- Handling complaints: 1 2 3 4 5
- Talking with coworkers: 1 2 3 4 5

7. What challenges do you face when speaking English at work? (*Check all that apply*)

- Understanding customer accents
- Finding the right words to say
- Speaking confidently
- Explaining menu items clearly
- Understanding coworkers
- Other: _____

Section 3: Goals and Needs

8. What areas of English would you like to improve the most? (*Check all that apply*)

- Greeting customers and making a good first impression

- Describing menu items and daily specials
- Answering customer questions about food or drinks
- Handling customer complaints and resolving problems
- Clarifying orders for accuracy
- Checking on guests during their meal
- Presenting the check and closing statements
- Talking with coworkers and managers

9. What do you think is most important for being a successful waiter? (*Choose up to 3*)

- Speaking clearly
- Using polite and professional language
- Explaining food and drink options
- Solving problems calmly
- Making customers feel welcome
- Communicating effectively with coworkers

10. Are there specific phrases or situations you struggle with in English?

- Yes (please describe): _____
- No

Section 4: Work-Related Skills

11. How comfortable are you with using shorthand or abbreviations for taking orders?

- Not comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Very comfortable

12. Do you feel confident in resolving disputes with customers or coworkers in English?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

13. Would you like to learn more about how to:

- **Use open-ended questions to engage customers?** Yes / No
- **Handle confusion or misunderstandings?** Yes / No

14. What other skills or topics would you like to learn in this course?

Thank you for completing this survey! Your input is valuable and will help us create an effective training program.

Variations in the Teaching of Writing in the United States and China

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on English writing courses in three distinct contexts, universities in China, Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the United States, and English writing courses for undergraduate students in the United States (U.S.), aiming to foster transparency and collaboration within the English language writing teaching community. While writing courses at universities in China and IEPs initially focus on foundational writing skills before transitioning to more advanced tasks such as research papers, U.S. writing courses emphasize sophisticated writing abilities and critical thinking from the outset. Assessment criteria varied, with courses at the universities in China prioritizing language accuracy, IEPs focusing on lower-order writing concerns, and U.S. writing courses emphasizing higher-order skills. Despite these differences, a developmental approach to assessment, emphasizing student growth and improvement over time, emerged as a common thread. Writing instructors across all contexts valued multiple drafts, revisions, and holistic grading in fostering student development. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of clear communication, organization, and critical thinking in student writing, irrespective of context.

Keywords: L2 writing, composition, writing curriculum, writing syllabus, EFL, intersectionality, writing assessment

Introduction

As instructors of English writing courses in the United States, our student body consists of a myriad of students with varying backgrounds. As we engage with the English linguistic abilities of our multilingual students, we are interested in the students' linguistic background, the previous learning circumstances that preceded the students' experiences in our courses, and we value what we can gain from that knowledge. Additionally, we value a spirit of collaboration knowing that as English language writing instructors globally, we are a community with a shared practice and desire for greater transparency and collaboration between our varied teaching contexts.

In that spirit, this study investigates the curricular practices of English language instructors in three mediums: English writing courses in China, English writing courses in Intensive English Programs (IEP) in the United States, and English writing courses for undergraduate students at universities in the United States. Recognizing that writing instructors in these contexts have valuable experiences and knowledge of the curricula of the courses, we sought out instructors in these contexts for their insight. Though we came to the task with our individual experiences teaching in one or more of these contexts, we hoped that this study could be a conduit for further conversations between these contexts and promote the benefits of a shared community of practice.

Before we began our research, we acknowledged that each of the contexts has an established though evolving practice based on different though interrelated theories: composition theory, language acquisition theory, and sociocultural theory. We also acknowledged that our own experiences teaching in these contexts influenced our perception of how writing is taught

while also recognizing that the writing students in each of our contexts are diverse with diverse backgrounds, expectations, and goals.

Literature Review

Composition Theory

Composition theory, developed in the academic field of composition studies, focuses on the study and teaching of writing, rhetoric, and the processes involved in composing texts.

Drawing from linguistics, psychology, education, communication, and other related disciplines to understand how writing is learned, practiced, and taught, composition theorists study a wide range of topics, including writing processes, rhetorical theory, literacy studies, and the use of technology in writing instruction. Some key concepts include process writing, rhetoric, genre theory, critical pedagogy, and multimodal composition. Process writing emphasizes the importance of multiple drafts, revision, and recursive writing processes in the development of proficient writing. Rhetoric looks at the principles of persuasive communication and how they apply to discourse. Genre theory investigates how diverse types of genres of writing function within specific contexts and communities. Critical pedagogy explores the social and political dimensions of writing instruction and is concerned with issues of literacy education, power, access, and identity. Finally, multimodal composition looks at the integration of various modes of communication, such as images, sound, and digital media, into the writing process.

Some influential scholars in composition theory include Bitzer, Elbow, and Burke. Bitzer (1968) is known particularly for his essay “The Rhetorical Situation,” which studies the dynamic between audience, purpose, and context within rhetorical acts. Elbow (1998) is well-known for his contributions to process-oriented writing pedagogy and emphasizes the importance of freewriting, feedback, and the development of a writer’s individual voice. Burke is known for his

book *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), which is a rich text that investigates the intricacies of language, motives, and human communication. This work encourages readers to consider the underlying motives behind discourse and the symbolic nature of language in shaping human interaction.

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second language acquisition (SLA) theory draws on linguistics, education, psychology, and sociocultural studies to understand how people learn to write in an additional language and how teaching practices can best support that process. Some key concepts in second language writing include language transfer, cultural rhetoric, multimodal writing, feedback practices, translanguaging, and critical language awareness. Language transfer refers to how learners' first-language structures influence their writing in a second language. Cultural rhetoric considers how cultural norms and values shape the ways writers organize, express, and support ideas. Multimodal writing involves composing texts that blend written language with images, audio, or other media. Feedback practices focus on the different ways teachers and peers respond to writing to promote rhetorical and linguistic development. Translanguaging highlights how multilingual writers draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning, while critical language awareness examines how language use reflects broader issues of power and identity.

Some influential scholars in the field of SLA theory include Canagarajah, Hyland, Ortega, Manchón, and Matsuda and Silva. Canagarajah (2011) focuses on the translanguaging practices of L2 writers and the sociopolitical dimensions of language learning. Hyland (2013, 2021) examines academic discourse and writer identity, emphasizing stance and engagement. Ortega (2018) highlights the global, longitudinal, and ecological nature of second language development, and Manchón (2017) illustrates how L2 writing develops across tasks, contexts,

and time. Complementing these perspectives, Matsuda and Silva (2005) provide foundational research insights for classroom instruction, shaping understandings of L2 writers' needs, process-oriented pedagogies, and the distinct disciplinary identity of second language writing. Additionally, Lightbown and Spada (2020) synthesize decades of research on cognitive, social, and instructional factors that influence additional language learning. Scholars have examined differences in rhetorical traditions, exam-driven writing cultures, process pedagogy adoption, and the shifting expectations of multilingual students (Li & Casanave, 2012; Zhang, 2016).

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, rooted in the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), is a framework that emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in the process of learning and cognitive development. Sociocultural perspectives draw on insights from psychology, linguistics, and education to understand how writers use literacy within specific communities. Some key concepts include the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), mediated action, collaborative learning, language as a cultural tool, and the role of social context in shaping writing development. The ZPD refers to the distance between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable other. Mediation describes the process through which human thinking and learning are shaped by cultural tools that structure how individuals interact with the world. Collaborative learning emphasizes how knowledge is constructed through social interaction, highlighting the role of dialogue, shared problem-solving, and joint engagement in developing understanding.

Some influential scholars in sociocultural theory include Lantolf and Thorne, Daniels, and Shooshtari and Mir. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) extend sociocultural theory to second language development, illustrating how multilingual writers grow through scaffolded interaction,

collaborative dialogue, and participation in authentic literacy practices. Daniels (2001) applies Vygotskian principles to pedagogy, demonstrating how guided participation and culturally responsive instruction support learners' access to valued literacy practices. Shoostari and Mir (2014) further discuss sociocultural theory in L2 writing contexts by showing how peer and instructor scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development supports writing strategy use and writing quality development. These scholars deepen our understanding of writing as a socially situated, culturally mediated, and interaction-driven process.

Research Questions

As we thought about the curricular and cultural aspects of each context, we desired to learn more about assignments, course objectives, and assessment practices in each context. We also wanted to understand similarities and differences in teaching writing in these contexts as well as note themes and any pertinent variances between contexts. With that in mind, we had two overarching research questions.

1. What are the similarities and differences in curricular design specifically related to course objectives and assignments in the three contexts?
2. What qualities of writing do the instructors consider when evaluating writing?

Methods

Research Context

This research focused on three contexts for teaching writing: English writing courses taught at universities in China (context 1), advanced English writing courses taught in Intensive English Programs in the United States (context 2), and Rhetoric and Writing courses for undergraduate students in the United States (context 3).

Context 1

College students are from science-focused universities in China. Most students have learned English as a second language for 6 years before being admitted to the college, however, the English language learning is focused on reading comprehension and syntax. At the college level, English writing is a core course for college students. Normally, the instructors will teach a class of 40-50 students.

Context 2

IEP writing courses are provided to help international students meet the language requirements set by the university in the United States. The learning environment was in an English-speaking context. Most students have 3-6 years of English learning experience in their home countries, but writing for academic purposes was not a focus or was not introduced to them in their home countries. IEPs want to prepare students for academic courses; thus, basic writing requirements are a crucial objective in the IEP writing course. The IEP instructors usually teach a class of 10-15 students.

Context 3

Rhetorical and writing is a University Core Curriculum (UCC) course in an American university. Most of the students will be English-speaking students, with a few international students. The UCC course has a comprehensive set of objectives for the instructors to follow. Normally, the instructors teach a class of 25-35 students.

Participants

A total of nine English writing instructors participated in the study, with three instructors representing each of the above-mentioned contexts. The instructors from the Chinese universities all identified as bilingual speakers of Chinese and English. Their teaching of English writing

experience ranged from four to sixteen years, and all three had taught required writing courses at the university. The IEP instructors reported varied educational and linguistic backgrounds. Their teaching of English writing experience ranged from ten to thirty years in a variety of contexts in the United States. The rhetoric and writing instructors all identified as a native English speakers and taught in higher education settings. Together, these nine instructors provided a diverse and experienced sample representing three distinct instructional environments. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the three contexts. Table 2 provides demographic information of the 9 participants. Table 3 provides the pseudonym assigned to each participant and in which context they teach.

Table 1

Description of 3 English Language Writing Class Contexts

Course Name	Context	Required or elective	Average Age of Students	First Language of Students
English Writing	Universities in China	Required	18-20	Chinese
Level 6 Writing (advanced)	Intensive English Program/U.S. University	Elective	18-20	Non-English
Rhetoric and Writing	Undergraduate course/U.S. university	Required	18-22	English and non-English

Table 2

Participant Demographics by Instructional Context

Participant Group	Educational Background	Linguistic Identity	Years Teaching English Writing	Previous and Current Teaching Contexts
China University (n=3)	3 MA in Applied Linguistics	All 3 identified as bilingual (L1 Chinese, L2 English)	16 years; 8 years; 4 years	Chinese universities
Intensive English Program (n=3)	2 MA TESOL 1 PhD in English (Composition and Rhetoric)	2 identified as native English speakers; 1 identified as bilingual (German and English)	30 years; 16 years; 10 years	U.S. Middle school; high school; IEPs in the U.S, and U.S. universities
Rhetoric and Writing (n=3)	2 PhD in English (Rhetoric and Composition) 1 PhD in English (Literature)	All 3 identified as native English speakers	22 years; 10 years; 8 years	U.S. small liberal arts colleges, regional public universities, and community college

Table 3

Pseudonyms Assigned to Participants Aligned with Teaching Context

Universities in China	Intensive English Programs/U.S.	Composition courses/U.S.
Participants A, B, and C	Participants D, E, and F	Participants G, H, and I

Procedures

Participants were provided with open ended interview questions and asked to share the following artifacts: course syllabi, course resources, and sample course assignments. Interviews were conducted online using the Zoom platform, and each audio was transcribed. Interview recordings lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. Part of the interview asked the participants to rate

three sample essays provided to them before the interview. The interviews were transcribed, and the artifacts were collected for analysis.

Data Analysis

We approached the data using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, drawing on Charmaz's (2024) iterative strategies for qualitative analysis. After transcribing the interviews and gathering all syllabi and course documents, we spent time reading through materials several times to gain a broad sense of the data. Throughout this process, we kept notes to capture early ideas, questions, and patterns. The coding began with line-by-line coding, a process Charmaz describes as essential for staying close to participants' meanings and identifying actions or processes embedded in the data. These codes were intentionally descriptive and grounded directly in participants' words to avoid forcing premature categories onto the data.

As we moved into focused coding, we began comparing codes within and across the three instructional contexts. Following Charmaz's (2024) constant comparative method, we examined which initial codes were the most significant or representative of emerging patterns across interviews and syllabi. These stronger codes were refined, grouped, and expanded into broader analytic categories, with multiple returns to earlier transcripts as our understanding shifted. This recursive process of comparing, note taking, and refining continued until the categories stabilized, and we approached theoretical saturation.

From this process, three central themes emerged: (1) course learning objectives, (2) writing genres, and (3) assessment practices. These themes were not predetermined; they developed gradually as we compared interviews, syllabi, and memos. The final set of themes reflects both what participants emphasized in their descriptions of writing instruction and the curricular priorities documented in their course materials. These themes align with the study's theoretical

framework. The focus on learning objectives and genre expectations reflects composition theory's view of writing as a purposeful, process-oriented activity shaped by rhetorical and disciplinary conventions. Attention to assessment practices and language development resonates with SLA theory, which emphasizes how multilingual writers learn through feedback and scaffolding. These themes connect to sociocultural theory by showing how writing development is shaped through mediated interaction and culturally defined genre practices.

Results

Interview Questions about Course Curriculum

1. What are the outcomes/objectives for your writing course?
2. What type of writing assignments do you require in your course?

Course Objectives

The participants were asked about the course objectives in the interview and asked to provide their course syllabi, including the course objectives. Writing instructors from the universities in China stated that the course objectives focused on basic writing grammar and syntax (Participant A), writing in different genres and writing structure (Participant B), and a focus on logical and independent thinking (Participant C). Participants B and C noted that one main goal is to convert the student's practice of writing for the Chinese audience to writing for a broader global audience. Students are asked to learn about different global genres of writing to enlarge their own writing style. This list is a synthesis of the objectives from the writing class syllabi from Participants A, B, and C.

- Master basic knowledge of English writing, including grammar and syntax.
- Understand and express in English the concepts and terminology discussed in the textbook.
- Memorize and grasp the basic theories of English writing and master the requirements of different genres and styles of English writing.

- Explain personal views in a reasoned and well-founded manner based on one's own position.
- Write in a variety of genres, including short essays, descriptive, expository, argumentative, book reports, and abstract.
- Write with substance, correct views, and clear organization.

In the IEP writing courses, the overarching goal is to prepare students for academic-level writing in undergraduate or graduate-level courses. The primary objective of the IEP course includes writing an argumentative essay with appropriate sources (Participants D and E). Another objective includes paraphrasing and summarizing (Participant F). Students are asked to provide persuasive evidence in writing and include thoughtful and accurate evidence. Critical thinking is another objective mentioned in the IEP course (Participant E). This list is a synthesis of the objectives from the writing class syllabi from Participants D, E, and F.

- Write an argumentative essay evaluating multiple ideas and values.
- Incorporate appropriate sources to support argument.
- Effectively paraphrase and summarize texts.
- Demonstrate vocabulary development, control of grammar, organization, idea development, and critical thinking.
- Organize writing to promote clarity and consistency of ideas.
- Follow guidelines given in class for structure and conventions in writing including following a pre-determined format and understanding and recognizing aspects of plagiarism.

In the composition courses, the objective is to train students to develop comprehensive writing abilities that can persuade and inform readers (Participant G). Composition instructors hope to instill the principles of rhetoric to apply in the student's everyday life (Participant H). Developing ideas involves peer support, providing reliable evidence, and thinking critically (Participant I). Additionally, there is an emphasis on individual and group work as well as writing with a variety of mediums (Participants G, H, and I). This list is a synthesis of the objectives from the writing class syllabi from Participants G, H, and I.

- Understand the rhetorical situation and employ it while writing in various genres.
- Compose texts using various media.

- Develop effective strategies of invention, drafting, and revision.
- Integrate primary and secondary research as appropriate to the rhetorical situation.
- Employ critical thinking in evaluation, speculation, analysis, and synthesis.
- Employ format, syntax, punctuation, and spelling appropriate to various rhetorical situations.
- Employ critical thinking in evaluation, analysis, and synthesis.

After reviewing the three sets of objectives, the writing classes at the universities in China focus on students' initial mastery of basic English writing knowledge, including understanding concepts and terminology, grasping theories, and expressing personal views coherently. It emphasizes foundational skills and understanding. The IEP objectives expand on the initial mastery and require students to develop advanced writing skills such as creating arguments, organizing ideas effectively, evaluating sources, incorporating them into writing, and understanding intellectual property. It emphasizes practical application and critical thinking. The composition courses in the U.S. require further advanced writing skills, including understanding persuasion, developing effective rhetorical strategies, composing texts in various media, integrating research, becoming critical readers, and demonstrating professionalism in writing. It emphasizes creativity, audience awareness, and collaboration.

Writing Genres

The writing instructors were asked about the type of writing assignments assigned to students. The question was open-ended and could include in-class writing assignments, drafting, and graded and un-graded assignments of any genre. We also reviewed each participant's syllabus, which contained information on the writing assignment genre. The responses demonstrated that writing assignments in the three contexts varied to some degree.

Writing Courses in China. The writing syllabi reflect a highly structured, skill-based approach to writing instruction that relies heavily on guided practice and teacher-led activities, a pattern reinforced throughout faculty interviews. Class sessions focus on foundational elements

such as sentence formation, paragraph construction, vocabulary use, and punctuation, supported by thinking questions, pre-class preparation, and small-group analysis of model texts. Instructors described a consistent emphasis on teaching paragraph patterns, such as cause-and-effect or time-sequence organization and reinforcing the expected structure of a topic sentence followed by supporting details. One syllabus noted that students complete 15 minutes of in-class writing to practice the specific rhetorical pattern introduced that day. The instructor then collects a sample of drafts, identifies common issues, and uses subsequent class time for collective error analysis, making teacher-led correction a central component of the course. Specific major writing assignments include reader response, narrative, an observational essay, and an argumentative essay.

Faculty also explained how writing assignments progress across levels. Participant B and C noted that in beginning level composition courses, assignments are intentionally “not so challenging, sentence writing or paragraph writing,” whereas advanced writing courses require “whole composition writing,” often centered on argumentation. Genre practice is explicitly structured across the curriculum; as Participant B explained, students are required to write “narration, exposition, argumentation and description.” Although extended writing projects are relatively rare, advanced students “might have some chances to do some project, like conduct a survey on this topic to get the material before they write the whole composition,” (Participant C) suggesting limited opportunities for process-based or research-informed writing. Writing development in this context is embedded in incremental, text-based, and error-focused activities designed to build linguistic accuracy, control of rhetorical patterns, and mastery of foundational writing skills rather than through long-form, process-oriented writing projects.

Writing Courses in IEPs. The course requirements as noted in the syllabi include writing a research paper and participating in timed writings. Additional homework assignments are given to practice specific writing skills. In-class activities consist of exercises from textbooks or assignments, reading sources, timed writings, journal entries, and discussions. Homework includes assigned readings, reflections, outlining papers, and developing essays piece by piece. The research paper focuses on factual content and source searching, moving away from personal opinions. The final exam prompts students with advance notice, but they are expected to produce a spontaneous first draft. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking and independent writing skills, encouraging students to demonstrate their real performance. The instruction covers various essay structures, including introductions, supporting ideas, and conclusions, with students developing each part gradually. Activities also involve creating outlines, devising hooks to engage readers, and searching for sources. Specific major writing assignments included a narrative, a cause-and-effect essay, and an argumentative research paper.

Faculty reinforced the structured nature of the IEP writing curriculum while highlighting daily writing practice, scaffolded instruction, and sustained work with academic genres. Participant D explained that the course “required a research paper and timed writings” confirming the emphasis on academic preparation reflected in the syllabi. Participant E described a classroom environment where writing occurs continuously, noting that “every day in class, students write something and discuss the writing.” Participant F also described a highly scaffolded approach to essay structure, emphasizing that students develop “introduction, supporting ideas, and conclusion alongside practice in outlining, generating hooks, and locating credible sources. Interview data portray an instructional environment that blends structured academic expectations with intensive daily practice, step-by-step scaffolding, and an emphasis

on building multilingual learners' rhetorical confidence, source-based writing skills, and readiness for mainstream university courses.

Composition Courses in the United States. The composition course instructors provided assignments in a range of writing genres. The instructors mentioned writing projects such as summaries, cause and effect analyses, compare essays, synthesis papers, in-class argument papers, out-of-class papers, and research papers. Reading assignments were also required, which included students engaged in reading for discussion, analysis, and response. Informal writing assignments were also mentioned. These assignments include journals, reading reflections, in-class writings, or smaller pieces intrinsic to major research projects. They serve to help students process course content and plan their course projects. Specific major writing assignments include the narrative essay, rhetorical analysis essay, argumentative research paper, and a multimodal rhetorical project.

Faculty interviews revealed a rhetorically diverse and process-oriented approach that moves students through a sequence of academic genres while cultivating broader rhetorical awareness. Participant H explained that students begin with summaries and then progresses to cause-and-effect and compare-and-contrast essays. Participant G emphasized helping students see writing as a social practice, noting that “arguments, research, and rhetoric are ubiquitous” and shape everyday interactions. Interestingly, Participant I shared that the peer review process was an assignment to build “confidence through practice.” Participant I focused on developing writing skills over completing projects indicating that the peer review process helps students understand the requirements of the assignment while working on confidence and sense of connection to purpose of the assignment. Instructional practice links diverse writing genres with

systematic scaffolding, reflective practice, and collaborative feedback, supporting students' growth in rhetorical flexibility.

The Research Paper. All contexts discussed the research paper as one type of writing assignment. All instructors in the writing courses at the universities in China spoke of a research paper or an argumentative paper. Participant A states that the culminating assignment is the argumentative essay after the student has had extensive instruction in paragraph design. Participant B discusses an observational research paper where the student is required to observe something in nature and discusses how they used their senses to observe which will lead to the student writing about their impressions. Participant C stated, "they have to conduct a survey on this topic to get the material before they write the whole composition.... and the advanced writing course, they're still mainly focused on the argumentative writing." Similarly, writing instructors in IEPs stated that the research paper was required: "the goal is to write a research paper, so students need to be able to make an argument and use sources" (Participant D); "students write a research paper... [the students] focus on facts and source searching; moving away from personal opinions" (Participant E); and "students need to produce academic research paper of 5-6 pages, including a certain number source" (Participant F). U.S. composition instructors mentioned a synthesis paper: "So we start out with a synthesis paper where they're kind of combining a couple of different sources, and then we have, again, an in-class argument paper and an out-of-class argument paper, and then a research paper" (Participant H). Participant G noted that "four or more writing projects, approximately three to four pages each that address different rhetorical situations" are required while Participant I defined those writing projects "such as narrative essay, rhetorical analysis essay, argumentative research, and multimodal rhetorical project." For all, the culminating essay focuses on finding resources, summarizing and synthesizing resources,

and using those resources to support writer positions. One difference of note is that in the writing courses at the university in China and the US IEP courses, the initial focus is on basic sentence structure and paragraph design, moving into one research paper. Though the U.S. composition courses indirectly focus on these items: “smaller pieces that lead to the major writing assignments, class writings, or smaller pieces intrinsic to major research projects” (Participant G), course time is spent on writing the entire essay, and in the case of our composition participants, four essays are required in one semester period.

Interview Questions about Assessment Practices

1. How do you assess your students' work?
2. What are three main qualities you look for in a qualified paper?

Assessment

The writing instructors provided insight into the assessment methods and practices of the courses. Overall, writing courses taught at universities in China rely on closed-book examinations and regular assessments, with a substantial portion of the grade coming from final examinations (Participants A, B, and C). The IEP and U.S. composition courses use a variety of assessment methods, including homework, research papers, quizzes, tests, and engagement in class activities (Participants D-I). For all courses, assessment criteria included essay structure, grammar, content, and critical thinking. Instructors use rubrics and holistic grading, focusing on both lower and higher-order concerns in writing. The importance of multiple drafts and revisions was also highlighted. The writing instructors were also given three writing samples before the interview and asked to evaluate each. Each writing sample demonstrated varying degrees of writing quality, and each was between 325-425 words. As part of the interview, the writing instructors were asked to provide verbal feedback for each writing sample.

Sample Writing 1. The responses show a range of perspectives on student writing, with some evaluators prioritizing language accuracy and others focusing more on the content and critical thinking aspects. Many respondents (Participants A, C, D, F, G, and I) mentioned issues with spelling and grammar. Participants C and D note that language issues, especially misspellings, can impede clear communication. There is a consensus about the importance of clear structure and organization in writing. Participants A, C, D, and H expressed concerns about the lack of clear paragraphing or organization in the writing sample. The lack of structure, as mentioned by Participants D and H, makes it hard for readers to follow the writer's main points.

The diversity in feedback and assessment criteria reflects different educational backgrounds and teaching philosophies among the respondents. The feedback ranges from critical analysis of weaknesses to constructive suggestions for improvement, indicating varied approaches to pedagogy and student development. Participants H and I offer more constructive advice, suggesting ways to improve the structure and clarity of the essays, while Participants A and D focus more on pointing out the flaws without much guidance on improvement.

Sample Writing 2. The writing instructors generally agreed on the importance of clear content and organized structure but differed in their assessment of how well the student achieves these. Participants A, C, D, E, F, G, and H noted issues with the clarity of the content and the organization of the essay. There is a shared concern about the lack of a clear thesis or argument, particularly in addressing the essay “prompt” directly. Several writing instructors (Participants C, G, and I) acknowledged language skills compared to the previous sample, particularly noting the absence of spelling mistakes.

The responses reflect varied educational priorities and perspectives: some focus on linguistic competence and clarity, others on argumentative structure and adherence to the

prompt. Participant H finds it hard to follow the idea, while Participant C and I appreciate the student's communicative ability and use of examples. Participants G and H focus on the essay's inability to make a clear claim. Participants A and G commented on problems with paragraph structure and coherence, while Participant I pointed out the organization of the paper into smaller passages for clarity.

Sample Writing 3. For this writing sample, there is a consensus on the improved structure and organization of the essay, with respondents appreciating the clear division and logical flow. Many respondents (Participants A, C, G, H, and I) recognize and appreciate the clear structure of the essay, noting the use of logical markers and a traditional essay format (introduction, body, and conclusion). Respondents recognize the writer's effort in language use and variety, though they note minor errors. Participants A, C, and D note the use of simple, understandable language and a wider range of vocabulary and grammatical patterns despite minor errors. Most writing instructors (Participants A, C, E, F, G, and H) comment on the content in terms of how well it addresses the prompt, with some noting the effective use of examples.

Writing instructors differ in their views on how effectively the essay addresses the prompt and the clarity and relevance of the content and examples used. Participants A and E critique the relevance and clarity of examples used, while Participants C and I appreciate the use of examples and coherence in expressing ideas. Participants D and H asked how well the essay responded to the prompt, while Participant I felt it responded more directly than the previous samples. Participants F and G express concerns about the persuasive strength of the essay, while Participants E and H note issues with the writer's understanding of key concepts (facts vs. ideas).

Table 4 synthesizes the major areas of feedback provided for each of the three writing samples. The table highlights broad patterns in how instructors assess content, organization, and language use, while also noting points of convergence and divergence across Chinese university faculty, U.S. Intensive English Program instructors, and U.S. first-year composition faculty.

Table 4

Summary of Cross-Context Evaluator Feedback Across Three Writing Samples

Writing Sample	Main Areas of Feedback	Points of Agreement	Points of Disagreement
Sample 1	language accuracy (spelling, grammar); lack of structure; unclear ideas; weak organization	spelling and grammar errors impede clarity (A, C, D, F, G, I); structure is weak or missing (A, C, D, H)	focus on identifying flaws (A, D); offer constructive suggestions (H, I)
Sample 2	difficulty addressing the prompt; unclear thesis; weak organization; variable content development	content and structure are unclear (A, C, D, E, F, G, H); concern about a missing or weak thesis (C, G, I)	some see language as improved (C, I) others see coherence issues (H, G)
Sample 3	clearer structure (introduction–body–conclusion); logical flow; improved language variety; varying views on argument strength	improved structure and clarity (A, C, G, H, I); logical markers and standard essay format	relevance of examples (A, E vs. C, I); evaluation of persuasive strength (F, G)

Evaluation of Composition: Desired Qualities

The research yielded interesting findings concerning the ideal qualities that instructors seek when evaluating papers. Specifically, it was common over all three categories of participants to underscore the importance of student growth and improvement over time, suggesting a more developmental approach to assessment. However, the writing instructors in China and the IEP instructors in the U.S. were more concerned with lower-order skills such as grammar, word choice, and spelling, while the U.S. writing instructors prioritized higher-order

skills such as sophisticated use of sources to support a claim, the rhetorical situation, critical thinking, and overall paper organization.

The instructors at the universities in China who participated in this study, all of them non-native English speakers teaching English composition, appear to have a dual focus on the ideal qualities that they look for in papers. The primary focus is lower-order skills such as vocabulary and sentence accuracy, and the secondary focus is on logical reasoning. The lower-order skills are ranked most important among participants teaching at the universities in China in this study. Participant A stated that in-class writing in their classroom focuses on language proficiency, with the goal being 80% accuracy. This instructor said that “the structure will be 25% and language will be 25%, I tend to focus on the language...[the] language will take around maybe 80%” (Participant A). Participant C argues the same point, that logical reasoning is important but emphasizes vocabulary and sentence accuracy, “I mean, the choice of vocabulary, the choice of sentence accuracy, diversity of sentence organization, logical reasoning, so on, so forth” are the most important qualities in a paper (Participant C).

However, it is important to note that all the participants in this group favor a more developmental approach to assessment, in which the emphasis is on lower-order skills at the beginning of the course but moves to an emphasis on higher-order skills by the end. One participant argues that the focus in paper assessment is more on the “big picture” things such as structure, organization, logical reasoning, and support of claims, but this emphasis comes after the new writers have mastered sentences, paragraphs, and topic sentences (Participant B). This participant states that they look for “just whether this student has a really good diction or has been really good master of freedom speech or the fluency, coherence and cohesive and things like that. But as to the essay writing, then we just look at all-around global structure, context,

thoughts” (Participant B). Therefore, the emphasis is on how students evolve as writers and on the importance of student growth and improvement over time, with a definite movement from lower-order concerns to higher-order concerns over the duration of the course.

The IEP instructors who participated in this study, all of whom are instructors in U.S. universities teaching English as a second language, echo the dual focus of the instructors who are teaching at universities in China, and they also echo the emphasis on lower-order writing concerns being the priority. Participant E starts with a focus on lower-order concerns such as “grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structures” (Participant E), with a movement toward higher-order concerns such as organization and critical thinking coming later in the course and with more support. Participant D claims that “structure, grammar...and then strong ideas” are most important in the evaluation of papers, “but fluency and source utilization are also important” (Participant D). The outlier here is Participant F, who states that higher-order skills are their priority in writing: “structures of the paper; cohesiveness of the writing, transition devices” are their main foci (Participant F). A broader assessment of IEP instructors would be necessary to establish the patterns of IEP paper grading more firmly, but the case studies here allow for the beginning of an understanding of the major differences in the teaching of early college-level composition.

Writing instructors in U.S. universities outside of IEP programs focus on more sophisticated, higher-order skills in their assessment of papers. When Participant G discusses paper evaluation, there is no mention of grammar, “I’m looking for the ability to think critically as they follow instructions, focus on sophisticated skills such as introduction strategy, understanding the audience and appealing to a specific audience, being able to make strong claims...and sophisticated use of sources with specific details for support” (Participant G).

Participants H and I echo these ideals: “Does the student have something worth saying? What is the claim? Is the paper organized to support the claim?” (Participant H). Participant I adds: “Most sophisticated skills are privileged: engaging reader interest, conveying ideas clearly, effective organization” (Participant I). Grammar and other lower-order skills are mentioned as valued, but at a much lower level. Participant H mentions “a focus on mechanics and spelling” but only after speaking at length about having a sophisticated claim, organization, and proper source support. With Participant I, as well, grammar is a secondary priority (Participant I).

Implications

One overall desired outcome for this research was to discover complementary relationships between these contexts and consider how this information can inform our own teaching to improve the learning opportunities of L2 writers. Here are some possible queries to consider.

Review Curriculum

Consider your current curriculum and how it may bring in aspects from the three contexts. Consider looking beyond your current needs and reach around to different English language writing courses. Experiment with a shared curriculum at least in the aspects of assignments if possible.

Potential questions of query:

- a. What assignment structures may be familiar to your students?
- b. What assignment structures are in other contexts that may benefit the course?
- c. What added value would adopting these assignments bring to the classroom experience?

Create Communities of Practice

Collaborate with colleagues in varied contexts of composition instruction. If your university has an IEP, meet with the composition instructors and vice versa. Consider doing a combined assignment with both courses. Consider sharing assignments, assessment practices, and overall curricular goals. Consider creating a community of practice within your contexts that involves writing instructors in various departments including education, English, and IEPs.

Though finding international faculty to join your discussions may be challenging, consider reaching out to international faculty at your institution (even outside of your department). They may assist in connecting you to international English writing faculty. Consider joining international organizations and reaching out to published authors in international academic journals.

Assessment Practices

Self-evaluate your own assessment practices. How do your assessment practices look in relation to practices of other colleagues? When assessing writing, how can you build upon the assessment practices of other contexts? Within a community of practice, consider participating in a grade norming activity.

Conclusion

Our investigation into the curricular practices of English language instructors across three diverse teaching contexts has revealed valuable insights into the teaching of writing. Through interviews with writing instructors from universities in China, Intensive English Programs (IEPs), and undergraduate composition courses at universities in the United States, we have uncovered a tapestry of approaches, objectives, and evaluation practices. Our exploration of the writing assignment genres highlighted significant variations across the three contexts. From the

structured emphasis on argumentative writing at universities in China to the multifaceted requirements of research papers in IEPs and U.S. composition courses, we note that each context prioritizes distinct skills and objectives tailored to their student demographics and academic goals. Our analysis of course objectives underscored the evolving nature of writing instruction, moving from foundational mastery of English writing knowledge in writing courses in China to the development of advanced writing skills and critical thinking in IEPs and U.S. composition courses. These objectives reflect a progression from lower-order concerns, such as grammar and vocabulary, to higher-order skills, like critical analysis and effective use of sources.

Moreover, our examination of assessment methods and desired qualities in student writing revealed nuanced perspectives among instructors. Nonetheless, a common thread emerges in all contexts: a developmental approach to assessment that values student growth and improvement over time. In essence, our study highlights the importance of understanding the unique pedagogical approaches and cultural contexts that shape writing instruction across different educational settings. By fostering greater collaboration and dialogue among instructors from diverse backgrounds, we can enhance the effectiveness of writing instruction and better support the diverse needs of students in today's globalized world.

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