KOTESOL Proceedings 2025

Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI:

Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation

Volume 2

Proceedings of
The 32nd Korea TESOL International Conference
May 10 & 11, 2025; Seoul, Korea & Online

Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
(Korea TESOL / KOTESOL)

Edited by Dr. David E. Shaffer

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Foreword

The 2025 Korea TESOL International Conference was the annual highlight among the many professional development events organized by KOTESOL throughout the year. In the post-pandemic era, the conference was pleased to return primarily as an in-person event. Centered on the theme "Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation," the conference took place over the weekend of May 10–11, 2025, at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, Korea.

The opening plenary session was delivered by Dr. Luciana C. de Oliveira, former president of TESOL International Association, while the Sunday plenary was presented by Dr. Nam-Joon Kang of Sookmyung Women's University.

The conference featured an impressive lineup of speakers, including Dr. Robert Stroud, Dr. Alvaro Fuentes, Dr. Milan LaBrey, Dr. Mark Carver, Dr. Maria Teresa Martínez García, Dr. Richard Rose, Dr. Diane Rozells, Michael Griffin, Anna Loseva, Ida Kymmer, Cheryl Woelk, Ashley Ford and Kinsella Valies, and Jared McKee and Han Zheng.

Over the two-day event, the conference showcased more than 200 in-person sessions alongside 25 online presentations. With over 15 hours of programming, the event attracted nearly 600 participants representing 35 countries worldwide. The presentations reflected the broad scope of English language teaching, encompassing research reports, workshops, panel discussions, roundtables, poster presentations, and pecha kucha sessions.

This volume, Volume 2 of *KOTESOL Proceedings 2025*, features 24 reports drawn from workshops, panel discussions, techniques and approaches sessions, poster presentations, and roundtables delivered at the conference. Volume 1 includes 35 papers – comprising 7 invited speaker papers and 28 concurrent-session papers based on topics addressed in research presentations at the conference. Both volumes reflect the diverse interests and scholarly work within the field of TEFL.

Both the conference and these proceedings serve as valuable sources of cutting-edge research, thoughtful reflection, practical teaching strategies, and readily applicable classroom practices. Many sessions explored developments in artificial intelligence, while many also emphasized the equally vital theme of humanity – an essential element that must remain central to language education. Taken together, the conference was widely regarded as a resounding success by both participants and organizers.

It is anticipated that this success will continue with the 2026 Korea TESOL International Conference, themed "Criticality, Innovation, and Compassion: Rethinking Language Education in Times of Change," which is scheduled to take place in Seoul on May 16–17, 2026.

David Shaffer
Editor-in-Chief
KOTESOL Proceedings 2025

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Workshop Reports

AI Cheating: How to Respond as Teachers and as Institutions

Stewart Gray
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AI can be a powerful tool for learning. However, students often use AI in ways that allow them to avoid learning and cheat on assessments. As educators, how can we respond to this? This writing reports on a workshop in which the presenter outlined his experiences as an undergraduate teacher dealing with AI-facilitated academic misconduct. Three domains are at issue: (a) detecting AI-facilitated cheating, (b) responding to cheating, and (c) designing assessments to prevent/discourage cheating.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years or so, I have grappled with the impact that innovations in AI have had on assessment. I am sure many practicing teachers could make the same claim. In my work context – an undergraduate program focused on language, linguistics, literature, etc. – essays have always been a core assessment form. When tools like ChatGPT entered the mainstream, the effect was immediately visible. I began receiving essay submissions in the now well-recognized GPT style: perfect English, vacuous content. Eventually, it became clear to me that a minority of students were using AI tools to generate their essays without writing so much as a word themselves. I found this fact intolerable, and I still find it so.

As a teacher, AI-facilitated cheating seems to me to undermine everything I do. I operate on certain principles, for example, that learning is a wonderful thing, that participation in learning activities can promote personal growth, and that writing – like speaking – is a medium of thought and self-expression. Insofar as new tools enable students to learn even better than they might unaided, I am happy to embrace those tools. What concerns me is not constructive uses. In this workshop (and this writing), I am concerned with cheating or "academic misconduct." This is when students use AI tools to produce work and then submit it for assessment as if they had done it themselves. By doing this, students exempt themselves from participation and learning. As a teacher, I cannot abide this. Thus, I felt motivated to prepare this workshop and engage in discussion with other professionals in the field.

While I have no definitive solutions, I have accrued substantial experience with AI-facilitated cheating in recent years. Concurrently, my university has enacted policies to address novel technological challenges. My goal in this workshop/writing is

to share those experiences and policies, hoping that attendees/readers will derive workable insights for their own practice.

ADVICE FROM ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Generative AI tools make cheating more accessible than it was, but the degree of accessibility depends on the assessment format. For example, AI has long since proven itself capable of writing short-form, undergraduate physics essays to a high standard. Such essay forms may be obsolete beyond recovery (Yeadon et al. 2023), and in general, a shift away from essays towards diversified, alternative assessment formats (e.g., public performance) may be desirable (Sweeney, 2023). However, some sources argue that essays are still potentially viable for the time being if suitable adaptations are made (Suleymenova et al., 2024; Sweeney, 2023; Yeadon et al., 2023). For example,

- Essay questions should be written in such a way that students must engage in higher-order thinking corresponding to the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Suleymenova, et al., 2024), which are evaluation and creativity (Armstrong, 2010).
- Students should be required to include contents like personal reflections and references to recent real-world events in essays (Ofgang, 2024), as AI may struggle to produce such writing convincingly.
- Students should be required to cite specific sources in their essays (Sweeney, 2023).
- Essays should be written in an invigilated setting (Yeadon et al., 2023).

In my view, the question of whether these adaptations successfully prevent or discourage cheating remains open, as does the question of whether near-future developments in generative technology will render these adaptations ineffective. Amidst this uncertainty, my aim here is to contribute some of my own observations about what may be effective or not.

THE PRESENT WORKSHOP

In this workshop, I focused on three areas of concern related to AI-facilitated cheating:

- Detecting such cheating when it occurs
- Responding to identified cases of cheating
- Assessment design approaches to prevent/discourage cheating

All of the following contents relate directly to my own experiences. The ideas I present are not meant to be exhaustive or indisputable. I accept that readers may find faults or omissions. My hope is that the ideas I present may be of use to teachers even if only as material for critique.

Detection of AI-Facilitated Cheating

In recent years, I have graded many hundreds of essays. While doing so, I have identified numerous essays that I suspected were produced wholly or in large part by AI. Based on personal reflection, I produced the following list of features in essays that may indicate misconduct:

- Grammar and vocabulary are perfect (high-level, superficially academic), but the essay is nonetheless vague.
- Writing resembles an encyclopedia entry.
- The writing/project is not feasible for this particular student.
- Essay contains outright factual errors.
- Essay contains errors or other contents that are inexplicable in human terms.

While some or all of the above features are discussed in the academic literature, I produce this list here entirely from personal observation. The point about perfect grammar matched with vague discourse is perhaps the most salient of all. Consider the following example adapted from a real literature analysis essay:

> Through a Feminist lens, “The Handmaid’s Tale” is a powerful critique of Western society, highlighting the deep seated issues of class and gender oppression. The narrative, while centered on the female experience, resonates with the broader themes of identity struggle, liberation, and the dehumanizing effects of religious fundamentalism.

As readers of this extract, what do we learn about the story being analyzed? What substantive insights are presented? My personal answer to these questions is that there is none, nothing, no evidence of analysis or thought. The prose is superficially reasonable with no language errors and some seemingly relevant terms like “narrative” and “oppression.” Yet, it is incredibly vague. It more closely resembles an encyclopedia entry than a piece of analysis. I submit that this is reason to suspect misconduct.

Another category of suspicious features is erroneous or improbable content. Detecting this requires careful observation by the person grading the work. Classic examples include

- fabricated references in the reference list
- fabricated quotations not found in the source text
- fabricated data not corresponding to any real-world people or material

These elements are hard – or sometimes impossible – to explain in human terms. For instance, why would a student make up a quote when correctly quoting the original text would be easier and more appropriate? Current generation AI frequently makes things up, so the presence of false quotes, references, etc. is a strong indicator of inappropriate AI use.

I present another illustrative example for the reader's consideration. The following is all my own words, but it describes a real piece of coursework:

> Student M submitted a piece of undergraduate research coursework. M claimed to have conducted a survey study at UNNC with 150 respondents. M recruited these respondents in the following way: She posted a notice in a public space inviting anyone who wished to complete the survey to email M directly. More than 150 respondents did so. M then selected 150 suitable individuals and sent them the survey to complete. The respondents' demographic information indicates they were overwhelmingly science students with majors such as physics and biology.

Perhaps the reader will agree that there are several suspicious elements in this example, simplified though it is. I will highlight two issues. The first is the improbable manner in which participants were recruited. Most students conducting a survey study in my experience will publicize a link or QR code for their survey so that anyone can access the survey directly. The idea that more than 150 students took it upon themselves to write an email to Student M and volunteer to take part for no reward is, in my context, unbelievable. The second issue is respondents' majors: UNNC does not offer some of the majors listed. Thus, Student M's "project" is unlikely in some respects and impossible in others.

Responses to Cheating

In addressing AI misconduct, we can consider how teachers should respond, and what attitudes and policies our employers should adopt. My university, UNNC, recently prepared a general AI-use policy and publicized it to students (Student Communications Officer, 2024). Additionally, UNNC recognizes that acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI vary by module. Therefore, teachers are expected to prepare a clear standard for AI use in their own modules and to make students aware of this standard. As one such teacher, I applaud this approach and recommend it widely. It makes sense to have both a general policy and context-specific policies in place, and to make every effort to publicize them. This establishes clear expectations and reduces the probability of innocent infringement by students.

When cheating is suspected, UNNC allows teachers to file a report. If a school administrator agrees that suspicion is warranted, a meeting in convened where the accusing staff member and the student present evidence before a panel. I have been through this process often, and I am glad that a reporting system exists, though I confess it is difficult to present evidence of cheating while in the room with the very student I suspect to have cheated.

A final question is what standard of evidence should be used to determine a

student's guilt or innocence. A common concern I hear from teachers in China and Korea is AI cheating is hard to prove. In this respect, I believe UNNC's standard is a good one. Misconduct is judged "on the balance of probabilities." It is not necessary to definitely prove a student used AI – that would be impractical or impossible. Instead, the panel weighs evidence and decides based on probability. This imposes a partial burden of proof onto the student, that is, they must prove they produced their work honestly. I believe this indicates the way forward for essays and other assessments. Students should be expected to prove authorship. For example, if students conduct research, they should submit original data in some form along with a full account of their methodology. In an age where AI can generate data from nothing, it is no longer reasonable to trust in students' honesty. Regrettably, greater accountability and bureaucracy are now needed.

Anti-Cheating Assessment Design Approaches

At present, I still expect students in all of my classes to electronically submit written work. With time, that may change. I may revert to invigilated assessments (Yeadon et al., 2023). In the meantime, I have participated in several attempts to proof coursework against AI cheating. I will highlight three attempts here:

- Requiring students to refer to particular sources (Sweeney, 2023)
- Focusing assessment on personal experiences (Ofgang, 2024)
- Diversifying assessments, using alternative formats (Sweeney, 2023)

On the first point, I have acted as a marker in a module where another staff member – my colleague, Derek Irwin – designed an essay assessment in which students analyze a highly specific source. At present, I believe it is practically impossible for AI to cheat at this effectively. The source in question is almost certainly not within the training data of large language models, nor is it easily presented to an AI for analysis. Moreover, the use of a specific source makes it easier to verify honest writing. Explicit references made to the target source can be checked to see that they actually correspond to that source and are not the hallucinations of GenAI.

In my own classes, I have tried other approaches. For instance, I recently required students to include accounts of personal experience in an essay. This is something I find AI still struggles to do convincingly. Moreover, when students reference experiences that occurred in my class or that I can otherwise confirm objectively, this provides another means of verifying honest writing. I have also implemented alternative assessments. For instance, I recently presented students with Kachru's (1992) three-circle model of English and asked them to produce a model along similar lines for another language. I gave them time to do some of the work on the model in class, then had them submit it later for grading and feedback.

Did these approaches prevent AI-facilitated cheating? In a word, no. Some students cheated in all the assessments described above. Despite the fact that AI was

not able to complete the assessments properly, some students tried to use it anyway. The design approaches made it easier to detect cheating to a degree but did not prevent cheating entirely.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

My experiences encountering AI cheating have led me to some final considerations. First, I believe there are students who are desperately out of their depth at university, and might not be able to complete assessments honestly even if they wished. Whereas they might previously have sought help or dropped out, now they have the option of using AI to keep coasting along. It is these students who are most in need of supportive intervention.

Second, many students cheating with AI do not really know how to use it. Happily, this makes detection easier, but it also indicates there is potential for pedagogical interventions. It may be wise for us teachers to take more time to help students develop their skills with AI tools such that they facilitate learning rather than preclude it.

Third, I believe the most important thing we can do is try to recapture the humanity of assessment. At present, there are students for whom assessment is nothing but a burden and a barrier – an unpleasant thing to be overcome by the easiest method possible. There are students who do not perceive a difference between writing an essay and generating one with AI – or if they perceive a difference, it does not trouble them. As teachers, we need to make clear that there is a world of difference. An essay written by a student can be an expression of thought and learning. From my perspective, that is something truly beautiful. I would rather have an essay riddled with errors that a student actually wrote than a perfect, pointless piece of emptiness from an AI. Perhaps, if we can help students see that their own writing is valuable, it might go some little way towards encouraging them to spend the time and do it themselves.

THE AUTHOR

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Prompt Crafting for AI in the Language and Literacy Classroom

Mi-Hyun Chung
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As generative artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly transforms current society and educational practices (Harari, 2024; Khan, 2024), teachers across all grade levels seek a practical guide to integrate AI tools into instruction. This report presents a workshop designed for language teachers to explore the significance of prompt-crafting as a means to foster critical thinking and enhance language instruction. The workshop shares a lesson framework with the PREP model (prompt, role, explicit, parameters) to scaffold AI prompting in language classrooms. This paper also argues that constructing the right prompts can enhance student engagement and stimulate critical thinking. It concludes with reflection prompts and instructional implications for teachers in this new era of AI and human learning.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Dall-E, and Elicit marks a pivotal moment in teaching and learning (see Bowen & Watson, 2024; Watson et al., 2024). Teachers at all levels are grappling with how to use these tools for educational purposes. Prompt-crafting, or the design of questions and instructions for generative AI, provides a concrete strategy for aligning AI use with instructional goals. This paper builds on a workshop presented at the Korea TESOL International Conference 2025, offering a model to support language teachers in crafting effective prompts for literacy lessons, using a book response as a critical social practice (Leland et al., 2023). The workshop, “Prompt-Crafting for Language and Literacy Education,” was designed for K–12 teachers and faculty in higher education. Participants explored generative AI platforms, practiced writing prompts using the PREP model (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023), and collaborated on planning a lesson in small groups. The participants, mostly teachers, were directed to develop lesson objectives focusing on four language skills. The lesson plan may guide students to integrate reading, writing, researching, and critical thinking.

PROCEDURE: WORKSHOP FLOW

Types of Generative AI

At the beginning of the workshop, the participants shared their background, including where and at what grade levels they taught. This was to refer to their experience forming small groups later.

The Art of Prompt Crafting

Next, the types of generative AI were introduced, categorized as follows: text to text, text to images or videos, text to audio, audio to text, image to text, and research tools, all with at least one sample AI tool that may be used to enhance language education.

Then, the PREP model (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023) was explained to the participants. The PREP model offers a scaffold for creating effective prompts for using AI in a lesson (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. PREP Model

Component	Description	Guiding Question
Prompt	Introduce the question with a prompt	What do you want the AI to do?
Role	Give it a role or voice	Who should the AI be?
Explicit	Be explicit in your instructions	What specific instructions should it follow?
Parameters	Set the parameters of the answer	How long or in what format should the response be?

Planning a Lesson: Small Group Practice

The participants were then asked to design a lesson plan with AI incorporated for the grade level of their choice and to teach at least one language skill. With a lesson planning template (see Appendix), the participants applied the PREP model to develop custom prompts aligned with the lesson objectives. Two sample lesson plans using Little Red Riding Hood were provided for the participants as follows:

Lesson One: In this lesson, 2nd- and 3rd-grade students read the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* and identify character traits. Using AI tools like ChatGPT or Character.AI, the students role-play a friendly conversation between Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. They then write a short dialogue and practice speaking it aloud. Language objectives include reading comprehension, writing simple sentences, speaking with a partner, and listening to model responses.

Lesson Two: In this secondary-level lesson, students analyze *Little Red Riding Hood* through a critical literacy lens. Using AI to interview Wolf, they reflect on issues of voice, power, and bias. Students then rewrite a scene of the fairy tale from Wolf's perspective, emphasizing persuasive and reflective writing. Language objectives include analyzing the narrative perspective, developing argumentation, and oral discussion.

Reflection and Discussion

At the end of the workshop, two key reflection prompts were used for further discussions:

1. In what ways can prompt-crafting shape the quality of student learning with AI tools in language and literacy classes?
2. What challenges and opportunities do you foresee in using AI-assisted activities in your specific teaching context?

CONCLUSION

The participants' responses to the workshop highlighted both excitement and concern: While the participants saw value in guided AI use, they also raised questions about the amount of freedom and restrictions younger students may be allowed, appropriate faculty professional development, and ethical implementation. Generative AI presents both a challenge and an opportunity for educators. A simple AI-integrated lesson framework provides a powerful way to bring intentionality, not only convenience or trendiness, to using AI. By aligning AI prompts with clear pedagogical goals, teachers can support literacy development, language education, and critical thinking across different educational levels.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX

Lesson Planning Template

Grade Level:
Text or Theme:
Literacy Objective(s):

Language Objective(s) (Reading, writing, speaking, listening):

Assessment (What will students produce?):

Student Learning Task (How will students interact with AI?):

Suggested AI Tool(s) (e.g., ChatGPT, Character.AI, Elicit):

PREP Model – Craft Your AI Prompt

P - PROMPT (What do you want AI to do?):

R - ROLE (Who should the AI pretend to be?):

E - EXPLICIT (What important instructions/details should you include?):

P - PARAMETERS (How long, what level, what format?):

How does this AI interaction support your literacy objectives? Please explain:

Fashioning the Future: A Makeover for Project-Based Learning Experiences

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This workshop shared the collaborative course redesign project of an EAP speaking and listening course for fashion business and design majors at an American university branch campus in South Korea. The redesign focused on transitioning from textbook-led instruction to immersive, project-based learning (PjBL). Three innovative projects were introduced: a collaborative murder mystery film, a character and costume redesign pitch, and a group persuasive campus improvement speech. The redesign emphasized student engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking. The report outlines the theoretical framework, rationale for the shift, and implementation process, offering reflections on the process, outcomes, and future directions. It also discusses how AI tools were integrated to support project planning and resource development. This report aims to inspire educators to humanize language education through authentic, project-based learning tailored to their students' academic and professional goals.

INTRODUCTION

TESOL education is evolving to meet the demands of increased internationalization, globalization, and rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), providing an opportunity for educators to adapt, innovate, and lead by reimagining English-language education and integrating emerging professional skills and knowledge (Cahyani, 2021; Guo et al., 2020; Saad et al., 2024; Suradika et al., 2023). A future-oriented approach centers student needs and prioritizes 21st-century skills, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Cahyani, 2021).

Project based learning (PjBL) has gained renewed attention as a highly interactive, student-centered method fostering deep learning (Cahyani, 2021; Guo et al, 2020; Jalinus et al., 2017; Suradika et al., 2023). Though rooted in Dewey's action-based learning and Kilpatrick's project method, PjBL's relevance has grown alongside technological advancements and shifting sociocultural demands (Beckett, 2002; Petersen and Nassaji, 2016). As workforce expectations rise, English for academic

purposes (EAP) courses must evolve in tandem with broader curricular reforms (Guo et al., 2020; Jalinus et al., 2017; Saad et al., 2024; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). In response, many educators are replacing outdated assignments with creative, real-world PjBL experiences that foster critical thinking, collaboration, and communication (Cahyani, 2021; Cahyono et al., 2024; Saad et al., 2024).

This shift is particularly important for EFL/ESL students, as the authenticity of PjBL supports more natural language use and smoother transitions to real-world communication (Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). Ultimately, this approach equips learners with essential 21st-century competencies needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape (Saad et al., 2024).

This workshop emerged from a collaborative course redesign of an EFL/ESL academic English course in speaking and listening at an American university's branch campus in Korea. It aimed to share practitioner experiences with implementing a PjBL curriculum, offer practical insights, and encourage continued exploration of innovative, student-centered approaches in language education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Project-based learning (PjBl) is a constructivist, discovery-based pedagogy that centers students in their own learning, positioning instructors as facilitators, advisors, and evaluators (Jalinus et al., 2017; Saad et al., 2024). This learner-driven model fosters innovation, engagement, and motivation by shifting the focus from rote memorization to real-world application (Almulla, 2020; Cahyani, 2021; Cahyono et al., 2024; Jalinus et al., 2017; Saad et al., 2024; Suradika et al., 2023). In TESOL, particularly in developing speaking skills, PjBl emphasizes authentic or near-authentic contexts that promote comprehensible output and integrated language learning (Beckett, 2002; Sirisrimangkorn, 2024). Projects are typically sustained, student-led tasks culminating in a tangible product, encouraging creativity, design, decision-making, and development of community (Guo et al., 2020; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Thomas, 2000). Compared to task-based learning, PjBL offers a more process-oriented, long-term approach, though interpretations of "project" may vary among instructors (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016).

The seven steps of PjBL (Jalinus et al., 2017), outline three key phases: skill competency debriefing, project execution, and final evaluation or presentation. Other models, such as those suggested by Liu and Hsiao (in Cahyani, 2021) or Kajcik and Shin (in Guo et al., 2020), emphasize reflection and self-assessment but share core principles: student responsibility for learning, formative assessment throughout the process, and summative evaluation at the end. Research consistently shows PjBL enhances creativity, independence, engagement, and critical thinking in language learners (Cahyani, 2021; Guo et al., 202; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Suradika et al., 2023; Thomas, 2000).

CONTEXT

The course redesign project presented in this workshop took place at an international education hub in Korea hosting multiple foreign branch campuses, including a U.S.-based institution recognized globally for its vocational and technical education in fashion. The Korean branch offers associate degrees in fashion design and fashion business management, adhering to the academic standards and curriculum of the campus in the United States. All instruction is in English. While some foundational courses support EFL/ESL learners, most follow the curriculum intended for American students, requiring high-intermediate to advanced levels of English-language proficiency.

English courses at the institution emphasize academic writing and presentation skills, exceeding the level typically taught in Korean schools, reflecting students' preparation to transfer to the U.S. campus to complete additional degrees. However, many of the course materials available locally are outdated and misalign with the home campus's current general education requirements. Students and instructors alike widely viewed the culminating EFL/ESL speaking and listening course as ineffective and overdemanding. A curriculum review revealed issues, including repetitive assessments, excessive workload, and limited real-world relevance, especially problematic for a vocational institution expected to align with both student needs and industry demands (Jalinus et al., 2017). In response, newly assigned instructors launched a collaborative course redesign in Fall 2024 to better meet institutional standards, increase student engagement, and reduce task overload.

RATIONALE AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

The primary motivation for the course redesign was to address the overwhelming workload previously placed on students. Earlier versions of the course required four individual and four group presentations, four assessed in-class writing tasks, and a textbook-based final exam, all within two contact hours per week over a 15-week semester. This structure raised concerns about time management, cost-effectiveness, and the imbalance between the quantity and quality of assessed work. In response, the redesign focused on consolidating tasks into fewer, more integrated projects, emphasizing depth over volume and laying the groundwork for a project-based learning (PjBL) approach.

Additionally, prior iterations of the course lacked clear relevance to the fashion industry, raising concerns about the real-world applicability of the skills taught. As a vocational institution, the curriculum is expected to support both practical industry competencies and the academic preparedness required for transfer to the U.S. home campus. Thus, the redesign aimed to improve student engagement through relevant, skills-based projects that developed language proficiency, professional competencies, critical thinking, and collaboration. Developed collaboratively by a newly assigned

instructional team with institutional support, the redesign reflected a shared commitment to high-impact, student-centered learning.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

Following a brief overview of the course context, guiding concepts, and rationale for the redesign, the workshop introduced the three core post-redesign projects: a Murder Mystery Movie, a Character and Costume Redesign Pitch, and a Campus Research Speech. For each project, workshop participants were invited to reflect on how the activity could be adapted to their own teaching contexts. This was followed by a stepped explanation of the development process, from initial concept to classroom implementation. The session concluded with small-group activities, with participants engaging in a condensed version of the design process, applying it to their individual instructional settings.

Project One: Murder Mystery Movie

The Murder Mystery Movie project replaced a traditional narrative speech assignment and was designed to develop students' storytelling skills relevant to fashion branding and marketing. While not explicitly fashion-focused, the project allowed students to incorporate their fashion knowledge creatively, which many did. Beyond storytelling, the assignment fostered key professional competencies, including role-play, collaboration, creative scripting, and video production. In teams, students developed original scripts, filmed their scenes, and presented the final products during an in-class "movie day." The results exceeded expectations, demonstrating significant growth in leadership, genre awareness, and creative content development. Future iterations would benefit from additional scaffolding in time management, speech preparation, and role distribution within teams.

Project Two: Character and Costume Redesign Pitch

The Character and Costume Redesign project replaced a traditional persuasive report speech, challenging students to reimagine a popular character from English-language media with a redesigned costume promoting diversity, inclusion, and reducing stereotypes. Presented as a persuasive pitch, the project built key professional skills aligned with students' future careers, while fostering research, cultural analysis, and ethical use of generative AI in design. In addition to meeting these goals, students demonstrated unexpected growth in stereotype awareness and creative expression. However, future iterations would benefit from increased scaffolding on concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as clearer guidance on the responsible use of AI tools.

Project Three: Campus Research Speech

The final project, the Campus Research Speech, was a group assignment culminating in a persuasive presentation based on student-led action research addressing campus issues. Although not fashion-focused, the project aimed to develop transferable skills essential for research-based speaking in professional contexts, including market research, collaboration, critical thinking, and evidence-based communication. It also encouraged greater awareness of students' campus environment, access to resources, and their ability to contribute to positive change. For future iterations, the project is planned to be reframed to emphasize community-building and promote solution-oriented thinking, as some groups focused more on critique than constructive engagement.

Implementation and Collaboration

The collaborative course redesign was made possible by a newly assigned teaching team and substantial institutional flexibility in meeting course objectives. While some elements of the project-based learning (PjBL) approach drew on existing resources, the curriculum was largely built from the ground up, including shared project packets, assessment criteria, rubrics, and timelines.

To manage the scope of the redesign, generative AI, specifically ChatGPT 4.0, was used primarily to restructure and re-theme assignments, support brainstorming, and generate starter materials. AI assistance was particularly helpful in exploring themes, refining prompts, and drafting sample content, drawing on prior materials shared among collaborating educators.

In Fall 2024, the course was co-taught across three sections, serving approximately 70 students. Ongoing instructor check-ins and shared analysis of student outcomes supported an iterative design process, leading to refinement in scaffolding and pacing throughout the pilot semester.

Workshop Participant Engagement and Outcomes

During the workshop, participants explored how to adapt the PjBL approach to their own teaching contexts. Discussions focused on modifying projects to suit their students' needs, such as generating character redesign options or anticipating classroom cultural or conceptual challenges. One participant later reported successfully implementing a modified version of the Murder Mystery Movie project in their course.

The final activity involved a guided GenAI prompt to help participants collaboratively design a context-appropriate project: "Can you suggest a list of creative and motivating speaking projects for a _____ class, focused on _____, where students work in small teams and have limited public speaking experience as non-native English speakers?" This exercise sparked insightful discussions, as GenAI

generated suggestions participants had not previously considered. Many found the AI-assisted ideas encouraged more creative engagement with key topics and skills than their previous designs. The unconventional approach was well-received, with participants recognizing its potential to support more engaging and adaptable project development.

REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the collaborative redesign project was a success. Students found the projects engaging and often exceeded expectations, with some even flying drones over campus to capture footage for their Murder Mystery Movies. Future iterations will continue refining and expanding the PjBL approach.

A key area for improvement is introducing and scaffolding project-based learning. Effective implementation requires explicit training in project cycles, especially for students unfamiliar with student-centered methodologies (Beckett, 2002; Jalinus et al., 2017). This is particularly important for learners from educational backgrounds less exposed to such approaches (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Saad et al., 2024). Time management also remains a challenge in PjBL, necessitating careful planning to accommodate extended project timelines (Suradika et al., 2023).

As with any course redesign, aligning pedagogy with students' language learning goals is essential (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016). Ongoing instructor training and engagement with current research are also critical for effective PjBL implementation (Cahyono et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

In today's evolving educational landscape, project-based learning (PjBL) offers an effective framework for aligning instruction with real-world skills and student engagement. By fostering critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, PjBL addresses shifting learner needs and professional demands. Even small, intentional curriculum changes can enhance outcomes, particularly when paired with the ethical use of generative AI to inspire creativity and streamline material development. With institutional support, instructor collaboration, and a commitment to improvement, PjBL prepares students to meet complex challenges beyond the classroom.

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Unlocking the Potential of AI for Self-Directed Language Learning

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This article outlines an interactive workshop demonstrating how AI tools can enhance self-directed language learning. It explores the rationale for incorporating AI, highlighting both its advantages and disadvantages, and showcases practical strategies for learners to integrate AI into their self-directed learning routines. Workshop participants experienced hands-on simulated activities employed in a real self-directed learning course, including writing effective prompts, generating custom study materials, building personalized chatbots for conversation practice using Zapier, practicing speaking with ChatGPT, and creating AI-generated podcasts using NotebookLM to improve listening skills. By empowering learners to use accessible AI tools responsibly, educators can help them take ownership of their learning, strengthen their language abilities, and develop consistent study habits.

INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of International Social Sciences at Gakushuin University is a specialized department for social science majors. The majority of classes are taught in English using CLIL methodology and the first year is dedicated to improving their English skills in order to be successful in these CLIL courses. One of the required preparation courses is Self-Directed Learning. There are 14 sessions in total in which students create and execute two learning plans based on their individual language learning goals.

Before discussing the benefits of AI in self-directed language learning, it is essential to first acknowledge its disadvantages overall. One major concern is its environmental impact. Training and running large language models (LLMs) requires significant energy, which contributes to increased carbon emissions and sparks questions of long-term sustainability (Bhaskar & Seth, 2024). There are also concerns about the heavy use of water to cool its servers (George et al., 2023). Additionally, over-reliance on AI may discourage learners from engaging in authentic human interaction, which is essential for developing real-world communication skills (Al-Tkhayneh et al., 2023). There is also controversy over how LLMs are trained using intellectual property without permission (Strowel, 2023).

However, given that AI is becoming an integral part of everyday life and education worldwide, it is neither practical nor productive to avoid it completely. Rather,

the more responsible approach is to teach learners how to use it thoughtfully. AI tools can support Japanese students learning English by providing a safe, private space for practice. It also allows for flexible, self-paced learning, which is especially valuable for students balancing busy schedules and limited financial resources. By guiding students to critically and ethically engage with AI tools, educators can prepare them not only to improve their English skills but also navigate a world where AI is increasingly unavoidable.

RESOURCES

ChatGPT for Custom Materials

A powerful way to use AI in self-directed learning is by teaching students to create their own study materials. Students have already developed their own language learning plans with SMART goals. With guidance, they can create custom materials that align with their individual objectives. This process not only builds language and digital literacy skills, but also helps them save money on materials they might otherwise have to purchase or rely on a teacher to provide.

To start, I guide students to identify the topic, language level, and desired format of the material they wish to create. For example, if a student's goal is to improve vocabulary, they can ask ChatGPT to create a list of 10 topic-related words, each with a definition, Japanese translation, and an original sentence. Students can use this to create their own flashcards, or write their own sentences using the words and have ChatGPT correct their mistakes. For students needing to improve their grammar, I show them how to prompt ChatGPT to explain a grammar rule in simple terms or in their native Japanese, and then create practice questions with an answer key. Some students want to improve their reading skills for proficiency tests like IELTS or the TOEIC, so I show them how to generate reading passages in the style of the test they want to take, with comprehension questions and an answer key, or writing prompts that they can then answer and receive personalized feedback on.

At first, I provide fill-in-the-blank templates for various types of prompts so students don't feel overwhelmed. We also practice rewriting vague prompts into more clear, specific ones that generate better results. They save their favorite prompts in a Google Doc for easy access. I also encourage the class to contribute to a shared "prompt bank," which encourages collaboration and peer support. Eventually, students get used to the specific structure needed for an effective prompt, which helps them use ChatGPT more quickly and efficiently.

ChatGPT for Speaking Practice

Another useful AI tool is ChatGPT for conversation practice. Many students have used ChatGPT to get information or generate text, but they often do not realize

that ChatGPT can handle voice input and output. Thus, they fail to maximize the benefits of the tool as a conversation partner.

I start by modeling a short role-play on my own smartphone. I clearly state the important information needed for ChatGPT to understand its role, such as the context, specific objectives of the role-play, and style of speech ChatGPT is to use. I then conduct a short role-play conversation with ChatGPT for a minute so that students can hear how natural the conversation is and how the AI responds to me.

Because learners often have many extracurricular responsibilities that limit their time, such as part-time jobs, club activities, and homework from other classes, I encourage only short, consistent sessions around three minutes per day. To get the most out of each short session, I encourage learners to reflect on their conversation afterwards, jot down new phrases they learned, and/or note where they struggled. Because ChatGPT records the conversation as text, learners can also visually notice where any breakdowns in communication occurred. I also encourage my learners to check any words that ChatGPT didn't understand, so that they can have targeted pronunciation practice. The goal is not to achieve a native-English-speaking accent but rather to improve their intelligibility. This reflection is also private, reducing the fear of public embarrassment while still encouraging metacognition. This approach helps learners build speaking confidence incrementally without the risk of losing face in social settings.

Zapier for Chatbots

Outside of class, students might not have the ability to practice English conversation due to time constraints or their environment. For instance, students who live with their family might not be able to speak out loud during their convenient study time as their family members may be sleeping. Others might have long commutes in which they are not able to speak out loud on the train. Although oral conversation practice is necessary to help learners build spoken fluency, practicing conversation through text can be a useful alternative. However, practicing directly through ChatGPT can feel artificial, as its interface is clearly an AI program. Furthermore, users need to type a prompt at the beginning of each session, or save their conversation thread and search for it every time they log in. This extra step can be discouraging for those who lack confidence with technology. Zapier solves both of these problems by allowing users to set up free personalized chatbots with a one-time directive that is saved permanently. The chatbots' visual design also mirrors real text conversations, making practice feel more authentic.

I first prepare a general directive for Zapier in a shared Google Doc. Students simply copy and paste it into their individual chatbot's directive box, and from that point on, they do not have to retype anything. The chatbot automatically remembers their name, their language level, and that it is acting as their conversation partner. Every time a student clicks their unique link, the chatbot is already ready to converse in

English. Over time, this consistent practice helps students develop confidence, fluency, and the ability to respond naturally in spoken conversations.

If desired, students can further personalize their chatbot directive to focus on the SMART goals they've set earlier in the course, focusing on specific language skills like asking and answering questions, extending conversations, or practicing specific functional phrases. Since their chatbot is always "ready" for them, they're more likely to build a regular speaking habit. My students have often told me that talking with their Zapier chatbot felt like messaging a real person, since they named their chatbots and put a link to their chatbot directly on their home screen as a widget.

Notebook LM for Custom Podcasts

The final resource I introduce to my students is customized podcasts. Podcasts are an invaluable resource for language learners. Unlike traditional listening materials, podcasts expose students to natural conversations on real-world topics. For Japanese students who often lack opportunities to hear and use English outside the classroom, podcasts offer a convenient way to immerse themselves in the language. However, many authentic podcasts are too challenging because they often feature fast speech, idiomatic expressions, and complex vocabulary and grammar that can feel overwhelming, especially for lower proficiency learners.

AI-generated podcasts offer a practical solution. By letting students adjust the speed, vocabulary, and complexity of the content, podcasts become more accessible. Although AI-generated podcasts may not include a variety of accents, they still provide clear, natural English input. They can also serve as a stepping stone, helping students gradually get used to following the flow of podcasts and conversations involving two or more speakers. This makes them especially valuable in self-directed learning, as students can control the language level, choose topics that interest them, and revisit their podcasts as often as they like.

First, I have students choose topics they care about or are interested in. We then look for a range of source materials, such as news articles, blog posts, and YouTube videos. I explain that it is fine if the materials are a little too difficult for them because Notebook LM will adjust the content in the podcast to match their needs. I then show students how to upload these sources into Notebook LM and prompt the AI to simplify the language based on their level. Next, I walk them through generating a natural-sounding podcast. Finally, I show them how to download the audio and upload it back into Notebook LM so that a transcript is produced that they can use to read along while listening.

We also explore different ways to use their podcasts, such as shadowing to improve pronunciation and rhythm, dictation to sharpen listening accuracy, and comprehension practice by cross-checking with the transcript or uploading the transcript to ChatGPT and creating study questions. I encourage them to create a habit of listening to the podcasts they create during their most convenient times, such as their train commutes.

CONCLUSION

While it is important to remain mindful of the ethical and environmental concerns surrounding AI, it is impossible to deny the significant potential it holds for enhancing language learning when used thoughtfully and responsibly. AI tools like ChatGPT, Zapier, and Notebook LM provide flexible, accessible, and cost-effective resources that can support self-directed learning. Students can tailor their language practice to their individual needs and SMART goals. These technologies give learners opportunities to build confidence, fluency, and independence in ways that traditional methods cannot always provide. By equipping students with the skills to critically and responsibly use AI, they are prepared not only to succeed in their courses, but also to navigate a world where AI is increasingly embedded into their education and professional and personal lives. The ultimate goal is not for students to rely on AI indefinitely but to use it as a springboard to improve their own autonomy and increase meaningful engagement with English in the real world.

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Is Less More? Deep Learning Through Focused Tasks and Reflection

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This workshop report considers how reducing task overload through streamlined, process-focused course design can promote learning and student well-being. Drawing on a university-level course redesign, the session explored the benefits of project-based learning, scaffolding, and guided reflection on reducing perceived burden while enhancing engagement, creativity, and skills development. Participants engaged in structured discussions in an intentionally ironic, fast-paced format. Practical strategies, sample materials, and reflective tools were shared to support the development of student-centered instructional designs. This paper offers insights and applications for educators seeking to promote meaningful learning while addressing the cognitive and emotional needs of students in overloaded educational contexts.

INTRODUCTION

How should we define productivity in the classroom? Is it the number of completed tasks, or the depth of understanding students gain? Measuring academic achievement is increasingly complex, shaped by ever-evolving personal, social, technological, and environmental factors (Madigan & Curran, 2021). Yet one constant remains: Student well-being is strongly linked to academic achievement (Madigan & Curran, 2021).

Educators face the challenge of assessing abstract skills, often using externally imposed criteria, leaving both instructors and students navigating confusing expectations. External demands, from institutions, labor markets, and cultural constructs, add to the pressure. Academic burnout is increasingly recognized as a global concern (Almasitoh et al., 2024; Madigan & Curran, 2021), even before accounting for individual student stressors, such as socioeconomic factors, family responsibilities, and cultural context (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2025).

Students report struggling to balance academic and personal obligations, with homework and assessment overload cited as major sources of stress. Pérez-Jorge et al. (2025) found task overload to be a top situational academic stressor, findings made more urgent by the reported growing assessment loads in response to AI concerns (Rowsell, 2025). Adding to these concerns, a recent U.K. survey highlights how rising living costs have increased term-time employment, reducing time spent on independent study (Student Academic Experience Survey 2025, 2025).

While we cannot control the pressures students face outside the classroom, we can reduce the burden within it. Through intentional course design, instructors can maintain academic standards while supporting student well-being (Almasitoh et al., 2024; Pham Thi & Duong, 2024). A shift in focus from quantity of output to the quality of the learning process can promote deeper, more meaningful learning with fewer, better-designed tasks.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

The workshop was structured around a series of small-group guided discussions on expectations and goal setting, task overload, task design, scaffolding, and reflective practice, and included the presentation of a course redesign project with accompanying sample materials.

Expectations vs. Goals

Attendees reflected on students' daily demands, instructional expectations, and long-term language learning goals, revealing a misalignment between required output and desired outcomes. External pressures on students and the resulting impacts on performance were acknowledged as often overlooked in course design in favor of content coverage and deliverables. The discussion emphasized the importance of balancing academic rigor with student well-being. Educators must critically consider how expectations, workload, and support interact to create environments where academic success is possible without undue strain.

The Problem of Task Overload

Task overload arises when students have too much to do, too little time, and insufficient support (Pham Thi & Duong, 2024). This universal experience contributes to academic burnout, characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy, which negatively affects learning and engagement (Madigan & Curran, 2021; Pérez-Jorge et al., 2025). Excessive tasks and tight deadlines can also result in chronic stress and emotional, physical, and mental health issues (Almasitoh et al., 2024; Madigan & Curran, 2021; Pham Thi & Duong, 2024).

Cognitive load theory offers a useful framework for examining these challenges, distinguishing between intrinsic load (task complexity) and extraneous load (inefficiencies in instructional design) (Hadie & Yusoff, 2016). Streamlining instruction reduces extraneous load, freeing cognitive resources to focus on content (de Bruin & van Merriënboer, 2017). Effective course design, therefore, supports high-quality outcomes while reducing cognitive load.

Participants considered how personal teaching practices might unintentionally contribute to overload. Prompting questions included have you ever spoken for the

entire class period, tried to cover a whole chapter in one session, rushed an activity just to complete it, and added last-minute homework to get something done.

One discussion point sparked debate: Have you ever given multiple repetitive activities in a single class? The consensus reached was while repetition can support practice in TESOL contexts, if tasks lack progression or connection to course goals, they may increase perceived burden. Another prompt – Have you ever expected students to listen, read, speak, and write at the same time? – resonated deeply, with participants sharing personal insights on their language learning experiences and feeling overwhelmed.

The session encouraged reflection on what students gain and potentially lose through such practices.

Can Fewer Tasks Result in Deeper Learning?

The presenter introduced a course redesign for a university-level, presentation-focused EAP class meeting two hours weekly over 15 weeks. Previously, the course required four group presentations, four individual presentations, a textbook-based final exam, multiple timed in-class writing tasks, and additional weekly homework tasks. Both students and instructors found this overwhelming, resulting in superficial task completion and limited engagement.

To address this, a project-based learning (PjBL) approach was adopted. PjBL, increasingly utilized in TESOL, emphasizes real-world application and 21st-century skill development (Beckett, 2002; Cahyani, 2021; Saad et al., 2024). As a discovery-based pedagogy, it centers the learner and values process development over product, through the development of a project over an extended period (Jalinus et al., 2017; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016).

The redesigned course reduced assessments to two group presentations, one individual project, a reflective video, and post-project, in-class, timed written reflections. Textbook-based tasks and the final exam were removed. This shift allowed students to focus on delivering quality output by dramatically reducing the quantity demanded. The results were more complete, creative, and communicative work, and greater engagement, aligning with findings from Pham Thi and Duong (2024).

The redesign emphasized the importance of identifying student needs and aligning content and process accordingly. A similar redesign for an EAP writing course was briefly shared to illustrate broader applicability.

Breaking It Down with Tea

While this discussion has focused thus far on reducing the number of tasks, the goal is not simply to assign less work but a reconceptualization of how tasks are designed and structured. A PjBL framework encourages extended projects composed of interrelated progressive tasks rather than isolated assignments solely for assessment (Jalinus et al., 2017; Pham Thi & Duong, 2024). This approach shifts the

emphasis from task completion to skill development and process-oriented learning (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016).

An analogy used during the workshop likened this process to making a cup of tea or coffee: While the outcome may seem simple, it involves many smaller, sequential actions. Similarly, breaking larger projects into manageable steps allows students to build toward a cohesive final product.

Scaffolding is central to this model. Structured outlines, guided drafts, editing instructions, reflective worksheets, and peer/self-assessment checklists support learners at each stage. When paired with discovery-based methods like PjBL, scaffolding promotes skill development in a supportive, structured way (Awadelkarim, 2021).

Although seemingly counterintuitive, breaking tasks into smaller, purposeful steps actually reduces perceived burden. Framing tasks as parts of a meaningful final project not only reduces cognitive load but also increases opportunities for feedback and reflection, providing students clarity on progress (Rowsell, 2025).

Integrating Reflection

In the course redesign, regular opportunities for reflection were included throughout the projects: during concept development, after completion of key stages, and on the final product. Reflection is often a core element of the PjBL approach, as it inspires student autonomy and responsibility for learning (Cahyani, 2021). Encouraging students to reflect increases awareness of skills being developed and shifts focus from task completion to understanding gained.

Although reflective practice has long been valued in education, there is little consensus on ideal implementation (Bennett & Yarwood, 2021). As reflection is itself a skill to be developed, students require guidance and scaffolding to engage effectively, or reflection remains superficial.

Early in the course, guided reflection worksheets help students identify what to observe and consider. During the workshop, participants were provided with examples of these tools. With repeated practice, scaffolding can gradually be reduced, allowing for student autonomy and creativity. Bennett and Yarwood (2021) found that frequent reflection activities, particularly when collaborative, build student competence, self-awareness, and autonomy.

Ultimately, scaffolded reflection deepens engagement and reinforces key learning outcomes, enabling students to develop a more conscious, intentional approach to learning.

Workshop Participant Engagement and Outcomes

The workshop concluded with small-group discussions on potential applications to participants' own contexts. Several attendees questioned the rapid pace and density of tasks, expressing that they felt pressured to produce responses

within limited timeframes. This intentionally paradoxical structure had been introduced at the start of the workshop as a deliberate choice to simulate task overload. The intent was to allow participants to experience the kind of strain students often face. One attendee compared the experience to responding to their young child's constant questions at home, an experience that had made him more mindful of the burden instructional choices can place on learners.

REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

The course redesign increased student engagement and self-reported gains in key skills through reflective assignments, with output often surpassing expectations. In future iterations, the balance of streamlined output, scaffolding, and reflection will continue to be refined.

Effective scaffolding remains essential, especially for students unfamiliar with discovery-based learning (Beckett, 2002). Cultural and educational backgrounds must be considered when implementing these approaches (Bennett & Yarwood, 2021; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Saad et al., 2024). Transparent course design and clear mapping of tasks to learning outcomes help students connect the process to the purpose, vitally reducing perceived task burden.

Awadelkarim (2021) noted that instructors often overestimate their ability to apply scaffolding intentionally. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development in designing and implementing scaffolded instruction.

CONCLUSION

Task overload and academic burnout are critical concerns in education. As instructors, we must prioritize both our students' education and their mental health. Through intentional instructional design to reduce unnecessary burden while upholding academic rigor, we can support both student well-being and deeper learning, an outcome worth pursuing.

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Comprehensive Mentoring Model for Study Abroad Success

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This paper introduces a high-touch mentoring model supporting international and study abroad students both pre-departure and post-arrival. Initially developed at an East Coast R1 university for international students with low-to-mid intermediate English-language proficiency, the program emphasized academic preparation, cultural orientation, and wellness. This paper adapts the 14-week program into an 8-week pre-departure format, featuring workshops, mentoring check-ins, and hybrid follow-up meetings. Demonstrated gains in GPA, retention, and social integration in initial programming suggest broad applicability. The session offered a scalable, culturally responsive framework adaptable to diverse institutional contexts.

INTRODUCTION

International and study abroad students in the U.S. face challenges beyond language proficiency, including cultural adaptation to pedagogical norms and academic expectations. For example, Korean students often struggle with classroom integration due to differing participation norms and professor–student dynamics. Yet pre-departure programs often prioritize logistics over cultural preparation. This workshop-based paper presents a high-touch, community-based mentoring model, originally implemented at a rural East Coast R1 university, to support both pre-departure and post-arrival adjustment. Combining academic and cultural mentoring by trained peers, the program is adaptable, scalable, and responsive to institutional needs. Key design elements, outcomes, and short-format adaptations are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research consistently shows that international students report lower levels of social satisfaction, belonging, and perceived respect compared to domestic peers, even when academic performance is comparable (Van Horne et al., 2018). These disparities are frequently linked to cultural and linguistic distance, limited intercultural engagement, and insufficient support structures. Scholars emphasize the value of targeted academic interventions, intercultural dialogue, collaborative leadership, and

faculty–student interaction in promoting psychosocial adjustment and academic success (Brunsting, 2018; García, 2019; Glass, 2011).

Peer mentoring, in particular, has demonstrated measurable benefits, including reduced test anxiety (Collings et al., 2014; Demir et al., 2014; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003), improved integration (Collings et al., 2014), higher academic performance (Budny et al., 2006), and increased retention (Collings et al., 2014). Despite this evidence, few institutions extend such support to outbound study abroad students. Pre-departure programming remains limited, typically consisting of one to three sessions, often as single-day intensive sessions or asynchronous modules. More comprehensive training is rare and generally limited to high-risk destinations.

THE 14-WEEK MENTORING PROGRAM

Program Design

The mentoring program was originally developed at a U.S. R1 institution to support international students with TOEFL scores between 70 and 80, whose academic performance aligned more closely with scores in the 60–65 range. It was introduced following the termination of a credited summer bridge program, eliminated due to visa policy changes that barred conditional admissions. The revised model included a two-week language and culture bootcamp followed by a semester-long mentoring component. Mentees enrolled in a zero-credit support course, while peer mentors earned credit through a two-credit training seminar. This low-cost structure fostered participation and accountability. The curriculum integrated academic skills development, cultural orientation, and wellness education, supplemented by community-building events.

Mentors were upper-level undergraduates previously enrolled for at least one full academic year at the university, many of whom were alumni of previous support programs. All mentors received training in best practices, campus resource navigation, intercultural communication, and emotional support strategies.

Core Activities

The program began with a two-week series of workshops focused on foundational academic writing and cultural readiness. These sessions introduced U.S. academic conventions such as email etiquette, reflective writing, essay structure, and basic citation practices. Concurrently, cultural orientation sessions addressed classroom norms, academic integrity, and campus life, often facilitated by guest speakers from various student support departments. These interactions enhanced students' awareness of institutional resources and offered targeted guidance to support their academic and cultural transition.

Following the initial workshops, students engaged in 12 weeks of ongoing mentoring, adjusted for academic breaks and activities. Each mentee received both one-on-one and small group sessions, fostering early peer connections and offering sustained guidance through structured activities. Mentoring was further supported by community-building events, such as bonfires, ice cream socials, and group outings, which cultivated a sense of belonging and promoted informal cultural learning.

Observed Outcomes

The program demonstrated strong outcomes during its first two years. Mentees reported increased confidence in navigating U.S. academic systems, a greater willingness to support peers, deeper engagement in campus life, and improved self-care practices. Many formed meaningful connections with mentors and staff, enhancing their sense of belonging and integration. This ongoing cycle of engagement established a sustainable mentoring loop, with former mentees returning to serve as mentors. Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, over 78% of mentors were program alumni. Although participation declined immediately post-COVID, mentor return rates have since rebounded and continue to rise.

Quantitative data further illustrate the program's impact. Among mentees, 85% achieved a first-year GPA of 3.0 or higher, compared to 55.88% of students who received only language support and 61.9% of those who tested out of such support. Retention rates, or the percentage of students who return to an institution for their second year, followed a similar pattern: 85% for program alumni, 76% for language support recipients, and 71% for unsupported students.

SCALING FOR PRE-DEPARTURE PREP

Rationale for Adaption

As study abroad remains a principal component of international education, institutions are increasingly exploring support programs to enhance student preparedness. However, implementation is often constrained by staffing limitations, time restrictions, and budgetary concerns, making full-semester preparation programs difficult to sustain. In contrast, short-term formats, such as 4- to 8-week pre-departure programs offered during winter or summer terms, or as partial-credit courses, present a more feasible alternative. These models can provide targeted academic and cultural preparation, supporting more effective student integration into host environments.

Model Adaptations

To preserve the program's high-touch mentoring approach within a condensed timeline, the following pre-departure structure is proposed: weekly one-hour

workshops that focus on academic culture, safety protocols and information access, mental wellness, and communication strategies, with mentor-led discussions integrated whenever possible. Complementing these sessions, students engage in low-intensity mentoring activities, including 30-minute one-on-one FAQ meetings, small-group discussions, and workshop breakout sessions.

Two community-building events, such as a kickoff mixer and closing celebration, foster relationships between mentors, mentees, and students from partner institutions. Condensed worksheet packets and readiness checklists frontload essential content, prompting students to locate and reflect on critical information independently.

A volunteer mentor system is to be established, with mentors receiving advanced training in frequently asked questions and cultural coaching. Mentors continue to support mentees remotely throughout the first semester, sharing individual experiences, facilitating Q&A sessions, and guiding students through cultural adjustment and early-stage culture shock.

Sample 8-Week Program Flow with Semester Support

Week 1: Mixer and first 1:1 mentor meeting.
Week 2: Culture shock workshop and small group mentoring.
Week 3: Academic Success panel and 1:1 check-in.
Week 4: Health and safety simulation and Q&A session.
Week 5: Travel prep and final celebration and reflection.
Week 6: 1:1 mentoring check-in via Zoom.
Week 7: Small-group Zoom meetup: challenges and breakthroughs.
Week 8: 1:1 mentoring check-in via Zoom.
Week 9 to End of Semester: Optional meetups scheduled weekly but not mandatory, communication support through use of social media or online group chats, wellness surveys, etc.

IMPLEMENTATIONAL CHALLENGES AND INFORMING BREAKTHROUGHS

Implementation Challenges

Scaling the program presents challenges related to mentor training, language support, and sustained engagement. Recruiting enough mentors and maintaining consistency across cohorts requires early administrative planning and coordination. It is advisable to recruit mentors from those returning from study abroad, while simultaneously promoting the program during pre-departure to build early connections. Program alumni who have not previously served as mentors, with sustained institutional ties, may also serve as effective mentors.

In this short-term model, language instruction becomes a secondary concern; instead, emphasis is placed on helping students understand the operational norms of the host campus. This focus has proven to be one of the most impactful elements of the original program. Students who gained confidence in their academic and wellness-related "survival skills" were better positioned to integrate into the broader campus community with fewer challenges.

Breakthroughs Informing a Short Program

Key insights from the original program can inform the development of a short-term study abroad mentoring model:

- *Mentor Continuity*: Many mentors were former mentees who remained engaged, enabling the formation of a reliable, self-sustaining volunteer pool with strong institutional knowledge, even in early implementation stages.
- *Condensable Content Modules*: The original 14-week curriculum, spanning academic, cultural, and wellness topics, can be effectively condensed into targeted sessions based on mentor input and observed student needs.
- *Accelerated Community Building*: Social bonding activities proved effective in fostering trust and openness, even within compressed time limits.
- *Pre-Scripted Tools and Checklists*: Resources such as visa guides, housing checklists, and communication templates helped streamline mentoring sessions and support student readiness.
- *Hybrid Support Models*: The success of the COVID-era cohort demonstrated the viability of hybrid and synchronous online mentoring, which continued to provide meaningful support post-arrival.

Together, these elements ensure that a short-term program can retain the relational and practical benefits of a longer model while meeting institutional constraints.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This mentoring program underscores the need to move beyond language proficiency by offering international and study abroad students a holistic, culturally responsive foundation for success. By integrating academic, wellness, and social support, the model could equip Korean students with the confidence and resilience needed to navigate U.S. study abroad and international programs. The pre-departure adaptation enhances the model's accessibility and sustainability, making it a practical option within varied institutional contexts. Future research should examine long-term impacts on GPA, retention, and student well-being. Institutions aiming to internationalize student services may benefit from adopting similarly structured, peer-led mentoring programs tailored to the needs of their outbound student populations.

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Teaching L2 Pragmatics in the Age of AI

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L2 pragmatics is an area in language teaching that learners do not acquire naturally due to the cultural and social nuances associated with it. It is also a part of language teaching that is overlooked, especially in EFL contexts. Some English teachers are hesitant to teach pragmatics because they do not feel the need to teach it, lack training as to how to do so, and are not equipped with quality materials. Also, with the current global English-speaking atmosphere where non-native English speakers dominate, teaching native English pragmatic norms seems outdated. In the age of AI, where language education is being replicated by apps and bots, pragmatics is the area of language learning that is not easily replicated by AI due to its subtle and complex nuances. These factors contributed to the creation of this workshop, where remedies for these impediments were explored.

INTRODUCTION

L2 Pragmatics is particularly challenging for learners to acquire naturally, as it is deeply tied to culture, relationships, intention, and social norms. EFL and ESL contexts often lack pragmatic instruction. As an ESL learner from Sri Lanka, L2 pragmatics was not a part of my formal English education. The pragmatics I acquired was implicit through English television shows that were telecasted in Sri Lanka. Hence, when I moved to Japan, communicating with English-speaking foreigners proved to be a bit of a challenge.

Now, being an English teacher in the Japanese EFL context, my students are experiencing the same problem. They often sound impolite or rude and are sometimes misunderstood because they are not taught L2 pragmatics. As I delved into this issue, I discovered through the existing literature and my own research that, in EFL contexts like Japan, pragmatic instruction is overlooked for several reasons. Some English teachers are hesitant to teach pragmatics because they do not feel the need to teach it. Although some teachers feel the need to teach it, they lack clear a understanding or training as to how to do so, and in some cases, even though teachers want to teach pragmatics, they are not equipped with the necessary resources, such as quality material.

Also, using native speaker standards as the basis for teaching pragmatics seems outdated in a global atmosphere where non-native English speakers dominate.

Moreover, in the age of AI, pragmatics is the area of language learning that is not easily replicated by AI due to its complicated nuances.

All of the above factors contributed to the creation of this ELT professional development workshop, where we explored what L2 pragmatics is, what kind of teacher knowledge is needed to teach it, how teachers should teach it, and how to make materials and lesson plans to teach pragmatics were discussed and practiced in the workshop.

KEY DIMENSIONS OF L2 PRAGMATICS IN ELT

L2 Pragmatics

A crucial component of communicative language competency is pragmatic competence, which is the ability to decipher a message's intended meaning by looking beyond its literal meaning (Ishihara, 2010). The two subfields of pragmatics are sociopragmatics, which examines how participants' social perspectives affect how communication activities are perceived and executed, and pragmalinguistics, which examines communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings (Taguchi & Kim, 2022; Kasper & Rose, 2001). The term "pragmatic variation" describes how language is employed differently in various social groupings, settings, and cultures. This diversity encompasses variations in speech acts (such as compliments, apologies, and requests), conversational norms, non-verbal communication cues, and politeness strategies. Pragmatic variation significantly impacts L2 learners by influencing their ability to communicate effectively, integrate socially, and achieve a high level of language proficiency. Understanding and teaching these variations is essential for comprehensive language education.

The Importance of L2 Pragmatics

L2 pragmatics is essential to teaching English because it provides students with the tools they need to use the language correctly in a variety of social settings. Pragmatic failures lead to misunderstandings, social exclusion, perceived rudeness, and a decline in the self-confidence of English language learners. Gaining an understanding of pragmatics helps students to communicate effectively and courteously, negotiate cultural nuances, and appropriately grasp and convey intended meanings. Beyond grammatical accuracy, this competency enables students to manage discussions, make requests, apologize, and give compliments in manners that are appropriate for the culture and context. Comprehensive language education requires an understanding of and commitment to teaching these variances.

Professional Development in L2 Pragmatics

The research on teacher education in L2 pragmatics is still in its early stages, as noted by Ishihara and Cohen (2022). Teachers should be well-versed in teaching and assessment techniques, as well as how to convey the importance of having a competent pragmatic ability in L2, how to direct students' attention to sociocultural context features, and elicit and evaluate students' pragmatic language use (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Teachers should have the knowledge and abilities to create learning activities in addition to receiving training in teaching pragmatics (Bachelor, 2022). Generally, textbooks cannot be relied on for pragmatic input in classroom language learning because textbooks fail to present or represent speech acts accurately, do not provide information about the interlocutors and the context of textbook conversations, and do not provide sufficient contextual information (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Therefore, there is a crucial need for teacher education in teaching L2 pragmatics.

L2 Pragmatics and ELF

The role of pragmatics is becoming more important in contemporary international communication, where users of different L1s use their L2 as a common language. In today's multilingual society, the goal of language learning is to be an intercultural speaker who can communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Therefore, reconceptualizing pragmatic competence is important from a wider perspective of intercultural communication (Taguchi, 2017). The ability of an ELF speaker (a speaker who uses English as a common language with speakers of different first languages) to adjust to the situation and the interlocutor, as well as the capacity to employ a wide range of communication strategies to anticipate and resolve comprehension issues, is referred to as ELF pragmatic competence (Chen, 2021). With users of many L1s using their L2 as a common language in modern international communication, pragmatics is playing an increasingly significant role. Being able to converse across linguistic and cultural barriers is the aim of language acquisition in today's multilingual world. Thus, from a broader perspective of intercultural communication, it is crucial to rethink pragmatic competency (Taguchi, 2017).

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Part 1: Priming Awareness and Activating Schemata

The first step of the workshop consisted of activating the existing pragmatic awareness of the participants as a warm-up activity. A few short video clips were shown, which depicted pragmatics-related incidents that participants discussed and wrote down their thoughts on each clip. Following this activity, the participants recalled

pragmatic incidents that they had experienced in their teaching and personal lives that had caused misunderstandings or communication breakdowns.

Part 2: Conceptualizing Pragmatic Competence for Instruction

In this step, the concept of L2 pragmatics was discussed. What pragmatics is in language learning, the importance of including pragmatics in language curricula, and how teachers teach pragmatics were explored. It was highlighted that teacher knowledge necessary to teach pragmatics without adequate teacher training is often implicit. Therefore, this step also involved participants reflecting on their teacher beliefs in teaching pragmatics as well as the challenges they face in teaching pragmatics.

Part 3: Core Competencies for Pragmatics Instruction

This step focused on the types of knowledge needed by teachers to teach pragmatics. These types of knowledge were identified as subject matter knowledge, which consists of pragmalinguistics (linguistic forms for expressing intentions) and sociopragmatics (social norms guiding language use); pedagogical content knowledge; and knowledge of the learners and the teaching contexts. The participants completed a task on context-mapping of different pragmatic incidents, where they had to assess the power balance, and the distance between the interlocutors and the intensity of the situation. Different types of speech acts that are common were also discussed in terms of pragmalinguistics.

Part 4: Lesson Planning for L2 Pragmatics

From this stage the workshop focused on effective material design for pragmatic instruction. The participants went over a sample lesson plan and engaged in micro-teaching in small groups to teach the contents of it. Different groups took slightly different approaches depending on their learner participants was noticeable. Following this activity, in the groups, participants made their own lesson plans based on a speech act they had chosen that was more relevant to their actual teaching contexts. This step was concluded by a couple of groups presenting their lesson plans and getting feedback from other groups.

Part 5: Emerging Directions

As the last portion of the workshop, the need for multiple models for teaching L2 pragmatics was emphasized as opposed to the native speaker model to reflect the reality of the current global usage of English as a lingua franca. It was also emphasized that the assessment of L2 pragmatics could be more flexible to accommodate learner agency rather than focusing on just accuracy to be more culturally sensitive,

considering both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic dimensions, and align lesson content with learners' real-life communication goals in teaching and assessment of L2 pragmatics.

CONCLUSIONS

L2 pragmatics remains a crucial part of language learning despite the challenges that language educators face in teaching it, especially in EFL contexts. This workshop was designed for educators to gain a better understanding of teaching and developing instructional materials in L2 pragmatics. Both theoretical foundations and practical approaches to teaching L2 pragmatics were explored. The need for more realistic models for teaching pragmatics to global English users and the importance of inclusivity were also discussed. In conclusion, L2 pragmatics is an important and deeply humanistic aspect of language; hence, it cannot be easily replicated by AI.

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Maximizing EFL Adult Classrooms with Multi-Skills Textbooks and AI/Non-AI Resources

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This paper explores a practical approach to teaching adult learners English as a foreign language (EFL) by combining multi-skills textbooks with AI and non-AI digital tools. Based on classroom experiences at a Korean university, the study demonstrates how a textbook covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing can be enhanced through grammar instruction and digital resources such as YouTube, Google Docs, QuizN, and ChatGPT. The approach is tailored for Generation Z learners, focusing on motivation, collaboration, and digital fluency. Integrating traditional and technological tools offers a balanced, engaging learning experience. This study aims to provide language educators, researchers, and practitioners with ideas for practical implementation in diverse EFL settings. In addition, it encourages further exploration of AI-assisted instruction to support learner engagement and classroom effectiveness. The paper contributes to the ongoing conversation on modern EFL pedagogy by emphasizing the evolving role of digital tools in language education.

INTRODUCTION

Adult learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms present unique needs, experiences, and learning goals. Unlike younger students, they bring diverse life experiences, varying educational backgrounds, and strong intrinsic motivation – often related to career development, migration, or personal enrichment. However, teaching adults, particularly digital-native Generation Z learners, introduces challenges. This group is accustomed to multitasking, visual input, and interactive media. Therefore, integrating traditional textbook instruction with AI and digital tools can help bridge generational and pedagogical gaps.

This paper explores a case study conducted at a Korean university. In this study, a multi-skill EFL textbook is combined with digital resources – including ChatGPT, YouTube, and collaborative platforms – to increase learner engagement and improve language outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – is essential in EFL pedagogy. Sadiku (2015) emphasized that incorporating all four

skills enhances learners' comprehensive communication ability. Rian (2019) highlighted the value of well-structured textbooks in facilitating balanced skill development.

However, for Generation Z learners (born after the mid-1990s), traditional textbooks alone may not suffice. These learners thrive on technology-rich environments and visual stimuli (Lopez Bonguit & Abadiano, 2023). Educators must adapt their methodologies to accommodate these preferences, blending print materials with engaging digital content.

Motivation is a key factor in Gen Z's learning success. Doimer (2022) argued that interactive and personalized learning experiences are essential for sustaining motivation in this demographic. ChatGPT and other AI tools offer opportunities for responsive practice tailored to individual learner needs. Using the theory of planned behavior, Stamp and Clemons (2021) found that Gen Z learners' willingness to use technology in learning is directly influenced by its perceived usefulness. Therefore, AI-supported instruction may enhance both learner engagement and retention.

METHOD

This study draws on classroom observations and reflections from a one-semester, university-level EFL course in South Korea. The study involved a cohort of 180 university freshman students in their early 20s, systematically distributed across six distinct classes, each comprising approximately 30 individuals. Notably, two of these classes included a proportion of international students, representing countries such as Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Nepal. Each class was composed of students of the same major or of two different majors. The course used a core textbook, *People and Life: 1*, by Jack McBain (Darakwon) that integrated grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, and writing exercises.

To enrich instruction and support diverse learning preferences, several digital tools were introduced:

- ChatGPT: Used for brainstorming, writing assistance, and grammar explanations
- YouTube: Incorporated for listening practice and visual exposure to real-life English use
- Google Docs: Enabled collaborative writing and peer editing
- QuizN: Used for interactive vocabulary

Learners were encouraged to use printed materials and digital tools during in-class activities and with homework.

RESULTS

The integration of AI and multimedia tools led to several noticeable outcomes:

- *Increased Engagement*: Students actively participated in activities that combined visual, auditory, and written input, consistent with findings from Mayer's (2009) *Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning*, which emphasizes that combining multiple modes of input enhances learner engagement and retention.
- *Improved Writing Fluency*: Learners demonstrated greater confidence in completing written assignments after using AI tools for brainstorming and revision, aligning with Godwin-Jones (2023), who found that generative AI tools like ChatGPT can scaffold learner writing through structured prompting and feedback.
- *Enhanced Collaboration*: Google Docs fostered peer interaction, especially among students from different cultural backgrounds. This also helped build classroom community (Kessler et al., 2012; Wang, 2023).
- *Motivation and Autonomy*: Learners appreciated the flexibility of using tools like Papago, Google Translate, ChatGPT, and YouTube. This is consistent with findings by Bai and Wang (2021), who highlighted how digital tools enhance learner autonomy in language learning contexts.

However, the findings and results from the investigation into AI and multimedia tools, particularly AI, indicate potential drawbacks when integrating these methods into the classroom.

Firstly, technical issues can arise. For example, with tools like Google Docs, it can become problematic if the teacher forgets to enable sharing or if students need to download the document first. This is similar to issues faced with tools like ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Papago. Based on my experience, Google Docs can be challenging if students cannot access it. This concern Chen et al. (2021) raised regarding barriers to tech adoption in EFL contexts.

Secondly, when students are placed into teams and required to collaborate and answer questions using Google Docs, it often mirrors traditional methods like handing out worksheets or blank papers for students to write on. However, this can also result in only one student doing most of the typing, which limits the participation of others.

Translation tools like Google Translate and Papago are practical, but ChatGPT is the best tool for writing tasks. However, my students are still relatively new to ChatGPT, so the results are not optimal.

Lastly, while QuizN is beneficial for students, it can be time-consuming for teachers to create quizzes and Q&As. Although QuizN is user-friendly, it does require a significant investment of time.

DISCUSSION

This case supports the argument that combining traditional and technological resources can enhance EFL instruction, especially for adult Gen Z learners. AI tools offer timely, tailored feedback, while non-AI tools like YouTube provide contextual and cultural exposure.

On the other hand, the downside is that AI tools like ChatGPT can reduce cognitive engagement, potentially harming critical thinking and memory. A study by Noy and Zhang (2023) at MIT found that students using AI to complete writing tasks showed reduced cognitive activity and recall. This highlights the need for incorporating critical digital literacy (Fessakis et al., 2022). This suggests that over-reliance on AI might lead to skill atrophy and reduced creativity.

Therefore, highlighting the need for critical digital literacy instruction is crucial. Educators must actively scaffold students' use of digital tools, ensuring that learners understand when and how to use them effectively. While tools like ChatGPT can accelerate learning, they should not replace foundational language skills. Instead, they should serve as supplements that enhance motivation and participation.

Furthermore, this blended approach aligns with Gen Z's digital fluency and their expectations for personalized, tech-integrated learning environments.

CONCLUSION

As EFL classrooms become more diverse in age, background, and technological familiarity, instructors must adapt their methods. Integrating multi-skill textbooks with AI and non-AI digital tools offers a flexible, effective framework for engaging adult learners, especially those from Generation Z.

This study demonstrates the potential of combining traditional resources with AI to create an interactive, student-centered environment. Educators can better prepare learners for academic, professional, and everyday communication in English by promoting collaboration, autonomy, and digital fluency.

Future research should explore how to balance AI use with language skill development and how to train educators to integrate these tools responsibly and creatively.

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Language Acquisition and Learning Through Theme-Based and Project-Based Education

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This workshop provided EFL educators with practical strategies to transform textbook lessons into dynamic, theme-based, and project-driven learning experiences. Using real-world overarching themes, participants were introduced to integrating grammar, vocabulary, and cultural content through a unifying lens. The session presented tools for designing essential questions (EQs) to promote inquiry and critical thinking across all proficiency levels. Participants explored adaptable project ideas, such as board games and interactive presentations, that boost creativity, collaboration, and purposeful language use. Whether teaching children or adults, these strategies can be tailored to diverse classroom contexts. The workshop emphasized the teacher's role as a facilitator who fosters student autonomy, engagement, and voice. Attendees were provided planning templates, scaffolding techniques, and reflection tools to implement theme-based and project-based learning in their own classrooms. The session aimed to inspire teachers to help students not just learn English but use it to think, connect, and lead.

INTRODUCTION

In South Korea and many other contexts, EFL instruction is heavily textbook-driven, focused on grammar presentation and test preparation. While this model may support exam success, it often falls short in building confidence, curiosity, cognitive understanding, and communicative competence. Many students struggle to see the relevance of their studies, particularly in classrooms where content is disconnected and learning is passive. Teachers, too, face limitations due to rigid curricula, limited flexibility, and large mixed-level classes.

Theme-based learning (ThBL) and project-based learning (PBL) provide an engaging alternative. In this workshop, participants examined how thematic frameworks and inquiry-based projects can unify disconnected textbook units, encourage student-led exploration by using essential questions (EQs) to foster sustained inquiry, and provide relevant language practice. Through case studies, sample units, and interactive planning exercises, participants experienced how ThBL and PBL can shift their classrooms from content coverage to deep, purposeful learning. These learner-centered approaches prioritize inquiry, autonomy, and authentic output. Rather than viewing language as isolated grammar rules, students engage in big-picture thinking, critical questions, and real-world challenges. ThBL organizes lessons

under long-term, interdisciplinary themes, while PBL culminates in student-created projects that synthesize knowledge and skills. Both approaches align with 21st-century goals: communication, creativity, collaboration, and global citizenship.

Participants were guided through the rationale, planning process, sample projects, assessment tools, and real-world applications of this learner-centered methodology. Drawing from phenomenon-based learning practices in Finland, universal design for learning (UDL) to help diversify learning and address different learning domains, and understanding by design (UbD), the workshop modeled how to transform classrooms into dynamic spaces of inquiry and purpose.

What Are ThBL and PBL?

Theme-based learning is an instructional approach where learning is organized around a central, unifying theme. The theme functions as a thread connecting the various aspects of instruction: language skills, vocabulary, grammar points, and subject content. Rather than treating each textbook unit as an isolated section, themes allow teachers to interlink lessons in meaningful ways. For instance, an overarching theme such as “The Environment” can integrate vocabulary from food units (sustainable agriculture), grammar from weather units, reading content from recycling articles, and engage in critical thinking about how weather and pollution impact food production and communities.

Project-based learning (PBL), by contrast, focuses on student inquiry and output. In PBL, students engage in extended, real-world tasks that culminate in a final product or presentation. These tasks are not limited to rote repetition or multiple-choice tests but involve deep investigation, teamwork, and creative expression. Projects such as designing board games, creating awareness posters or comic strip-style stories, diorama presentations, or filming videos are commonly used.

Together, ThBL and PBL create a cohesive, student-centered environment where learning becomes purposeful. Themes give structure to the curriculum, while projects provide the practical outlet for applying what has been learned.

Why Use ThBL and PBL in EFL?

ThBL and PBL resolve several common obstacles in EFL classrooms. For example, student motivation is often low when lessons feel disconnected from real life. By grounding instruction in real-world themes, such as global citizenship or health and wellness, THBL makes content more relevant. Similarly, when students create projects that reflect their understanding, they move from being passive recipients to active participants.

Rather than following a scripted curriculum, teachers can tailor instruction to their students’ needs and interests. Instead of focusing solely on correct answers, students are challenged to ask questions, examine perspectives, and construct their own understandings. ThBL and PBL also promote autonomy, which is particularly

important for adolescent learners seeking independence.

The benefits of these approaches include (a) encouraging critical thinking and independence by inviting learners to analyze problems, make decisions, and form opinions, (b) making language learning relevant by embedding it in real-world issues and topics of personal or global significance, and (c) supporting intrinsic motivation by providing a sense of purpose and ownership over learning.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of ThBL and PBL are based in constructivism and social constructivism. Constructivism, which asserts that learners build knowledge through active engagement with content and context (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Social constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the role of social interaction, culture, and language in the construction of knowledge (Seifert & Sutton, 2009). Engrained in the works of Lev Vygotsky, it argues that learning is not just an individual cognitive process but a collaborative and culturally embedded activity (Vygotsky, 1978). John Dewey emphasized experiential education, advocating that students learn best through doing and reflection in real-world contexts (Dewey, 1938). Comparatively, Lev Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), highlighting the importance of social interaction in learning. ZPD is the range between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with help (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Support is temporarily provided to help learners perform tasks just beyond their current ability. As learners grow more competent, support is gradually withdrawn (Seifert & Sutton, 2009).

Experiential learning theorist David Kolb (1984) further supported ThBL and PBL, as both methods emphasize hands-on, reflective learning. Learners become co-constructors in their education by actively participating in meaning-making by engaging in dialogue, asking questions, and reflecting, so learning becomes reciprocal (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. ThBL and PBL mirror this cycle by involving students in projects where they experience, reflect, conceptualize, and then apply their learning (Seifert & Sutton, 2009).

Universal design for learning (UDL) principles were also referenced during the workshop to ensure that instruction remains accessible to learners with varying needs. UDL promotes accessibility by offering multiple means of representation (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic), expression (e.g., drawing, writing, speaking), and engagement (CAST, 2018). ThBL and PBL align well with UDL by enabling students to demonstrate understanding in diverse ways (Meyer et al., 2014).

Understanding by design (UbD), developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), was referenced as a framework to strongly support PBL, since it focuses on identifying desired learning outcomes and designing instruction backward from those goals. UbD operationalizes this through three backward planning stages:

- Identify Desired Results: Define enduring understandings (e.g., “Environmental stewardship requires interdisciplinary solutions”)
- Determine Acceptable Evidence: Design rubrics for eco-projects assessing content mastery and language use
- Plan Learning Experiences: Sequence EQ-driven activities (e.g., community mapping)

Directly linked to second language acquisition theory supporting ThBL and PBL, Krashen’s input hypothesis supports language learning through exposure to meaningful, comprehensible input in low-anxiety environments (Krashen, 2011). ThBL and PBL create such conditions by making language use purposeful and collaborative. The affective filter hypothesis also underscores the importance of student motivation and emotional safety, both fostered in theme-based classrooms.

Krashen’s (2011) hypotheses also support ThBL/PBL through the following:

- Comprehensible Input: Themes provide rich, contextualized language (e.g., debating plastic bans using modals: “Companies should reduce packaging”) (Krashen, 1982)
- Affective Filter: Collaborative projects lower anxiety; improvements in motivation, self-efficacy, and collaboration (Chung, 2021)

These tools, used together in a classroom, help students to work in groups to solve a problem. Rather than receiving direct instruction, they discuss ideas, compare perspectives, and arrive at a shared understanding. The teacher guides the process without dictating outcomes.

Theme-based learning complements models like content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and phenomenon-based learning (used widely in Finland). These approaches integrate subject matter and language development, offering a holistic and authentic context for learning.

Essential Questions (EQs)

In the workshop, educators analyzed and revised example questions using templates. Essential questions (EQs) were embedded into daily routines, project prompts, and reflection activities. EQs are fundamental, open-ended questions that promote inquiry and stimulate deep thinking. Unlike factual questions with definitive answers, EQs are meant to be revisited throughout a unit. They guide students to consider multiple perspectives and make connections between what they learn and their lived experiences.

EQs are powerful because they (a) encourage exploration rather than recitation, (b) support critical thinking and discussion, and (c) provide a framework for curriculum planning. The characteristics of strong EQs are that they (a) encourage sustained inquiry and discussion, (b) connect content to student lives and broader contexts, (c)

drive assessment and curricular design, (d) have no single correct answer, (e) encourage sustained discussion and reflection, (f) connect to students' lives and real-world issues, and (g) frame assessments and unit goals.

EQs are a foundation of inquiry-based units, provoking critical thought and guiding reflection. Examples EQs include the following:

- "What can we learn from nature about diversity?"
- "How is your community connected to others?"
- "What does it mean to be a global citizen?"
- "How do our choices impact the planet?"
- "What does it mean to be a responsible global citizen?"
- "How does where we live influence how we live?"

In practice, EQs should be visible in the classroom (posted on the wall), used to start class discussions, revisited throughout the unit, and reflected upon during or after projects. They help unify the learning experience by acting as conceptual "anchors." Projects can be designed to help students answer these EQs through discovery and presentation.

Setting Up Themes

Implementing a theme-based unit begins with selecting a relevant and engaging topic. Teachers may choose themes based on student interests, current events, or school-wide initiatives. Once a theme is chosen, teachers identify textbook units that can be integrated, develop EQs to frame the inquiry, and map vocabulary and grammar points to specific projects or tasks.

For example, if the chosen theme is Eco Education, the teacher might align units about food, weather, and community. Vocabulary related to nature and pollution would be emphasized. Students could create public service announcements or design clean-up campaigns. Throughout the unit, the EQ "What can we do to protect our environment?" would serve as a focal point for class discussion and assessment.

Flexibility is key. Teachers can reorganize textbook content, adjust or expand tasks, and adapt lessons based on student feedback and interest. Thematic learning is dynamic, and teachers are encouraged to allow room for student input in shaping both the learning and final project.

A flexible blueprint for planning ThBL/PBL units includes the following:

- **Select High-Impact Themes**: Topics like eco education, global citizenship, or mental health align with ESD and student interests.
- **Cluster Textbook Units**: Group 2–3 lessons under a single theme (e.g., weather + food + travel = global lifestyles).
- **Design EQs and Vocabulary Banks**: Identify academic and social language related to the theme.

- **Scaffold Tasks**: Move from structured activities (e.g., rewriting dialogues) to creative outputs.
- **Design Projects**: Create authentic deliverables (e.g., podcasts, campaigns, exhibitions).
- **Integrate Reflection**: Use journals and discussions to revisit EQs and evaluate growth.

Classroom Examples

In elementary grades, a theme such as Food and Culture might connect textbook lessons on meals and traditions. Students could create international recipe books, plan a multicultural food day, or film a mock cooking show. EQs such as “What does food tell us about culture?” could prompt rich language use.

Middle school students exploring Global Citizenship might analyze the roles of community helpers, research local charities, and produce posters or infographics. The EQ “What does it mean to help others?” could guide inquiry and reflection.

High school learners investigating “Mental Health” might create awareness campaigns, conduct peer surveys, or produce podcasts. EQs like “How does mental health affect our relationships and identity?” provide personal and societal relevance.

Project Formats and Textbook Adaptation

Project Types

ThBL and PBL allow for a wide range of project formats, ensuring inclusivity and creativity. Projects are multi-modal and highly adaptable:

- **Adapted Performances**: Skits or TED-style talks using grammar structures.
- **Board games**: Engage vocabulary and systems thinking. Students review vocabulary and grammar while designing and playing games on themes such as environmental protection.
- **Interactive Dioramas**: Utilize visual and oral presentation skills. Hands-on projects that illustrate habitats, communities, or historical events, with students presenting in English.
- **Interactive storytelling**: Re-enactments or dramatic readings based on textbook content, rewritten to fit a theme.
- **Surveys and graphs**: Students collect and present data on topics such as waste habits, water usage, or daily routines, combining language with numeracy.
- **Data Storytelling**: Graph interpretation using comparatives.

Each project format allows for different modes of expression, artistic, verbal, and kinesthetic, and offers a platform for both individual and group success.

Adapting Textbooks

Adapting textbook content through TBLT and PBL methods can increase student agency, contextual relevance, and engagement in Korean EFL classrooms (Lee, 2014; Park & Thomas, 2021). Although Korean textbooks are typically theme-based at the unit level, they are often short-term and content-specific. Teachers can broaden and deepen these by (a) rewriting dialogues to reflect student interests and local contexts, (b) turning reading passages into think-aloud sessions followed by critical writing prompts, (c) restructuring the order of units to better suit a larger theme, (d) linking grammar to meaningful use, such as using conditionals to speculate about climate change, (e) re-sequencing grammar instruction by thematic relevance, and (f) developing performance tasks that repurpose textbook content; for example, units on weather, food, and holidays could be organized under the theme “Global Lifestyles,” culminating in a cultural festival project.

TABLE 1. Sample Project Types

Project Type	Skills Targeted	Example
Eco Board Games	Vocabulary review, decision-making	Green City Challenge
Interactive Dioramas	Oral presentation, science integration	Rainforest habitat with labeled models
Survey & Graph Projects	Data collection, comparatives, writing	School lunch survey with bar graph
Adapted Performances	Dialogue creation, pronunciation, and fluency	Rewriting a textbook story as a drama skit
Digital Storybooks	Narrative writing, technology integration	Story about “A Day Without Plastic”

Theme Development and Unit Design

Theme selection, backward design, and the integration of essential questions allow for coherence across tasks and promote deeper understanding (Lee & Kim, 2019; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). TBL and PBL approaches support both top-down and bottom-up planning while encouraging authentic language use (Stoller, 2002).

Step-by-Step Planning Framework

1. **Choose a High-Impact Theme**
   Select themes relevant to student lives and global contexts. Popular themes include Eco Education, Global Citizenship, Mental Health, Cultural Identity, and Digital Literacy.
2. **Identify Textbook Connections**
   Look across multiple units for opportunities to connect lessons thematically. For instance, units on food, transportation, and pollution can be clustered under Sustainability.
3. **Design EQs and Vocabulary Banks**
   EQs guide the unit’s inquiry. Alongside them, teachers identify vocabulary

and grammar targets embedded in the textbook and plan how to extend them contextually.

4. **Scaffold Tasks**
   Begin with structured activities (e.g., vocabulary mind maps, dialogue practice), then progress toward open-ended projects that synthesize learning.
5. **Assign Authentic Projects**
   Culminating tasks (e.g., podcast series, infographics, digital storytelling) give students the opportunity to apply what they've learned meaningfully.
6. **Integrate Reflection**
   Students reflect on their growth and return to the EQs. This could be through journaling, small-group discussion, or self-assessment forms.

Age-Appropriate Implementation Examples

PBL allows age-appropriate differentiation by varying language demands, scaffolding levels, and project complexity (Beckett & Slater, 2020; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). Each level adapts the complexity and language demands of tasks while maintaining inquiry-based structure and collaborative engagement (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Age-Appropriate Implementation Examples

Grade Level	Theme	EQ	Project Examples
Elementary (4–6)	Food & Culture	How does food shape identity?	Recipe books, cooking shows, culture maps
Middle School	Global Citizenship	What does it mean to help others?	Brochures, fundraising drives, role-play interviews
High School	Mental Health	How does language affect well-being?	Wellness podcasts, anti-stigma campaigns

Assessment Framework

This workshop provided example assessment strategies for ThBL and PBL. Assessment in a theme- and project-based classroom moves beyond standardized tests to focus on the demonstration of learning. In ThBL and PBL, assessment is performance-based, reflective, and integrated throughout the unit. It supports the development of transferable skills and values the learning process as much as the final product. Assessment in ThBL and PBL should include ongoing formative strategies, peer/self-evaluation, and reflection to support both academic and socioemotional growth (Andrade, 2010; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Larmer et al., 2015). Teachers can implement both formative and summative assessments that are student-friendly and performance-based.

Formative assessments might include

- peer interviews to practice speaking,
- concept maps for organizing knowledge,
- bingo or scavenger hunt games to review vocabulary,
- graphic organizers like KWL charts or Venn diagrams,
- graffiti walls, where students add comments, ideas, and questions about the theme, or
- exit tickets: short, reflective responses at the end of a lesson.

Summative assessments can include

- class presentations (individual, pairs, or groups) with rubrics,
- collaborative projects like posters, videos, dioramas, podcasts, or digital slideshows,
- class exhibitions or gallery walks,
- written reflections or journal entries tied to EQs, or
- performances or dramatizations.

Rubrics should evaluate not only content mastery but also language use, collaboration, creativity, and effort. Teachers can involve students in co-creating rubrics or self-assess against the criteria that increases ownership and metacognitive awareness (Andrade, 2010).

FIGURE 1. Sample Unit: Eco Education

THEME: ECO EDUCATION

EQs

- "How do individual choices impact global ecosystems?"
- "Why is biodiversity everyone's responsibility?"

Textbook Units Integrated: Environment, food, and transportation

Projects

- **Multilingual Posters**: Persuasive language + data visualization
- **Footprint Calculators**: Comparative grammar + math integration
- **Dioramas**: Oral descriptions + habitat vocabulary

Outcomes

- At XYZ Elementary, a student-led plastic reduction campaign decreased waste by 38% over three months.

Inclusive and Differentiated Learning

One of the key strengths of ThBL and PBL is their adaptability to meet the needs of diverse learners through multiple entry points and flexible outputs. Students of varying levels, including those with learning difficulties, and learners across a range of cognitive, linguistic, and sensory-motor domains can access content through multiple modes. This is supported by the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) by offering multiple means of representation, action/expression, and engagement (CAST, 2018), and supports Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences and Bloom's taxonomy

in practice. Some examples follow:

- **Visual Processing Domain** (Visual-spatial intelligence; UDL – representation): Learners benefit from graphic organizers, diagrams, and image-rich presentations to access and process abstract content.
- **Linguistic-Verbal Domain** (Verbal-linguistic intelligence; Bloom – understand/analyze): Learners deepen comprehension and critical thinking through storytelling, debate, journaling, and collaborative dialogue.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Domain** (Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; UDL – action/expression): Learners engage through building, acting, movement-based tasks, and hands-on exploration that deepen conceptual understanding.
- **Emergent Language Proficiency Domain** (Aligned with affective engagement; UDL – engagement): Learners at earlier stages of English proficiency access content via simplified texts, realia, gestures, multilingual support, or peer scaffolding, lowering the affective filter (Krashen, 1982).
- **Interpersonal Domain** (Interpersonal intelligence; UDL – engagement): Collaboration in groups fosters communication, empathy, and peer-supported learning, essential for developing both academic and social skills.
- **Intrapersonal Domain** (Metacognitive skills; Bloom – evaluate/create): Opportunities for reflection and self-assessment build learner agency and goal-setting, essential for personal growth in PBL contexts.

Group projects offer opportunities for learners to assume roles based on their strengths. For example, a shy student might design visuals, while a more confident peer presents findings. This structure promotes equity, collaboration, and mutual respect.

ThBL and PBL naturally align with inclusive and differentiated teaching practices, empowering all learners to access the curriculum, build meaning in culturally responsive ways, and demonstrate mastery using their strengths. In South Korea's EFL classrooms – often marked by large class sizes and wide-ranging proficiency levels – these methods offer multiple entry points and varied ways for students to engage.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Action

UDL calls for diverse means of access and expression (CAST, 2018). In the ThBL/PBL classroom, these may be included:

- **Visual supports**: Graphic organizers (e.g., mind maps, Venn diagrams), labeled visuals, color-coded sentence frames
- **Verbal expression**: Storytelling, podcast creation, debate panels
- **Kinesthetic tasks**: Diorama building, interactive games, physical role-plays

- **Scaffolds**: Sentence stems, word banks, translation tools, bilingual glossaries

Group Roles Based on Strengths

Assigning students collaborative roles within groups can enhance engagement and accountability. When roles align with students' strengths and interests, participation improves, confidence grows, and a culture of mutual support emerges (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014). Students may be assigned such collaborative roles as (a) researcher – finds facts and supports inquiry, (b) designer – creates visuals and designs slides or posters, (c) presenter – leads the presentation or performance, and (d) editor – proofreads language, organizes writing.

Supporting Neurodivergent and Struggling Learners

Students with dyslexia, ADHD, or general language delays benefit from

- multi-sensory input (video, hands-on materials, auditory reinforcement),
- chunked instructions and visual checklists,
- opportunities for choice and movement, and
- predictable project timelines and flexible deadlines.

These inclusive strategies, grounded in UDL principles and neurodiversity research, are not limited to special education as they benefit all learners by reducing cognitive load and barriers to engagement (Denton, 2017; Rose et al., 2006).

Education for Sustainability

Theme-based learning is particularly effective for addressing education for sustainable development (ESD), which UNESCO has identified as a global priority (UNESCO, 2020). Themes such as Climate Action, Responsible Consumption, and Global Cooperation naturally lend themselves to interdisciplinary exploration.

Students can engage with EQs such as "How are humans and nature connected?" and "What changes can we make to build a better future?" Class projects might include (a) researching and writing eco-hero biographies, (b) designing school recycling campaigns, or (c) creating bar graphs that compare waste levels in different countries. By participating in these tasks, students gain both linguistic and civic competencies (Cates, 2013; UNESCO, 2017).

Practical Tips for Teachers

For teachers new to THBL and PBL, it is best to start small. One EQ and one project within a textbook unit can already make a difference. Teachers can

- use brainstorming charts or mind maps to introduce themes,
- offer sentence starters and scaffolds for writing,
- encourage student reflection after each activity, and

- collaborate with colleagues to design cross-curricular projects.

Themes can align with holidays, school-wide events, or national initiatives, making learning relevant and connected (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Teachers can build thematic units that span a month, two months, or a semester.

CONCLUSION

Theme-based and project-based learning are not fleeting trends – they represent a fundamental shift in how we perceive language education. Instead of viewing language learning as memorizing grammar, ThBL and PBL invite students to think, question, and engage in a global context (Seifert & Sutton, 2009). Through ThBL and PBL, EFL educators can offer students authentic, inclusive, and empowering learning experiences.

This workshop offered not only theory but also actionable tools: planning templates, adaptable scaffolds, essential question models, and project rubrics. As one teacher reflected, “We’re not just teaching English – we’re teaching learners to think, connect, and lead.”

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Building Student Relationships for a More Fulfilling Career

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This paper plays on the theme of “Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI” by exploring the motivations that lead to connection and to learning. The foundation of education is connection, however, in the age of AI, connecting with students is increasingly difficult. The lure of role-playing games, the instant gratification of ChatGPT, and other modern conveniences are hard to compete with. This paper showcases how real-world activities outside of the classroom, informed by student interests and input, can spark engagement and increase learning. It also explores how designing lesson plans that broaden the scope of the textbook to engage with students outside of the classroom may enhance an educator’s professional and private life. According to Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2025), “Improving students’ relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students’ academic and social development” (para. 1).

INTRODUCTION

Love or hate their job, for most expat educators, career advancement is but a distant dream. This means the same students, curriculum, and books day after day, semester after semester, making career fulfillment also virtually out of reach.

Therefore, educators who have determined to make South Korea home long term often begin searching for ways to fight the inevitable stagnation that comes with even the best jobs here in the ROK, in order to not only have a more fulfilling career but a fulfilling life. Because a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) certification still gets one’s foot in the door, instructors usually start with a master’s degree. Those with the time, the money, and the fortitude go for a PhD. Depending on the institution, both degrees may offer a bump in pay, prestige, and some form of advancement. Parsons (2023) stated, “If you want to teach English abroad, you should get TEFL certified regardless of your education level. All things being equal, having an MA along with a TEFL certification will put you in a great position to teach English in up to 80 countries worldwide, and your MA will give you a leg up on those with just a BA or no degree at all, even if your degree is not in education” (para. 14).

THE PROFESSIONAL IS PERSONAL

Once the educator has obtained a master's or a PhD, they take up their position, often with new responsibilities, sometimes without. In the beginning, things are shiny and new. The educator approaches the job with fresh eyes and fresh resolve, but then slowly, despite the hard-earned postgraduate degree, the reality of the limits of the E-2 or other restricted visas becomes evident. Once again, the educator finds themselves wondering about the quality of their life abroad. If work hours are spent teaching the same materials over and over, ad nauseam, in spite of the advanced degree, and if they are fortunate to have been able to avail themselves of regular travel, what's left?

What's next? Experts would argue that this is the perfect time to couple the professional with the personal. By finding ways to enhance life inside and outside of the classroom with activities that stimulate students and the educator, the instructor may discover new and unexpected satisfaction. Cui (2022) stated,

> Career wellbeing among educators is linked to optimal mental functioning, and their positive career experience is characterized, in terms of the existence of constructive dimensions like enthusiasm at the workplace. (para. 1)

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are two ways to approach this. Instructors can tap into past experience with students and connect them to their own interests. For example, let's say a particular class responded well to a unit on business and start-up companies, and the instructor has a certification in project management. A lesson can be designed around the subject, which includes a Saturday afternoon trip to a new coffee shop where students discuss how the business was launched. This makes for a fun alternative to the classroom and a lively, interactive discussion.

The other approach is to survey student interests at the beginning of the semester and then have them vote on one or two out-of-classroom lessons they would like to pursue. This gives students a measure of control and ownership of the lesson and of their learning. Both methods have their merits and depend on time constraints and student participation. Both are also strong ways for an educator to enliven ordinary processes. According to Why Strong Teacher Student Relationships Matter (n.d.), "Building positive relationships with students can help teachers, too. 25-40% of new teachers are likely to leave the education field within five years. But positive relationships with students can reduce this number and show teachers how their career changes lives" (para. 15).

Altering even one or two lessons, researching the surrounding community, tapping into what hobbies and forgotten interests engaged them before the ho-hum of daily life took over, and connecting with students on a deeper level, can invigorate

teachers. It may also remind them of what they appreciate about living abroad and love about teaching.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Opening up the classroom to the outside world may also help educators, if not win, at least get on the board of the motivation game. Consiglio (2022) said, “Previous research has shown positive teacher-student relationships promote student academic achievement, such as better grades and test scores, but a new study at the University of Missouri found positive teacher-student relationships lead to better teaching as well” (para. 1).

Perhaps a teacher’s number one issue, after classroom management, is student motivation. The struggle is real. Every semester, every summer break, teachers cast about for ways to tweak, revamp, and overhaul their curriculum or lessons in order to make a dent in the new semester’s student ennui. One tried-and-true method, which usually works on students and laymen alike, is simply to focus on them. Drawing students in by appealing to their own self-interest is a wonderful way to spark motivation. Instead of merely learning the textbook, students are able to tap into favorite games, movies, cafes, and more, connecting them to what they may think of as otherwise dry or irrelevant content. In the process, they share something of themselves, calm their nerves, and find commonalities among their classmates and with their teacher.

Soon after landing my dream job at my university, I pitched English Conversation and Cocktails (C&C) to my department. Once a semester, students gather for an hour and a half at a local bar. They purchase a beverage of their choice (alcoholic or non-alcoholic), we provide snacks, and we chat. It is an opportunity for the students to practice English in a more relaxed setting, as well as get to know classmates and professors.

One particular standout memory is when one student overcame his shyness and a slight speech impediment and joined the spring C&C event. A freshman, he confessed that it was his first time socializing at university. He stayed for the entire event, speaking to multiple students of varying ages, across various backgrounds and majors, and with professors. After attending, throughout the semester he spoke up in class, pushing past nervousness and fear of making mistakes. As Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2025) stated,

> Improving students’ relationships with teachers has important, positive, and long-lasting implications for both students’ academic and social development. Solely improving students’ relationships with their teachers will not produce gains in achievement. However, those students who have close, positive, and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships. Positive teacher–student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn. (para. 1)

CONCLUSION

The student-centered activities outside of the classroom explored in this paper benefit educators. They think beyond the curriculum and textbook, with the potential to develop a variety of activities, such as language exchange events at local restaurants, boardgame nights, and team sports (see Appendix). Educators are able to bond with students, lowering students' socio-affective barriers and infusing excitement into their strategies and methods. Students are able to connect their real-life experiences and interests to the classroom, allowing them to connect education to the real world, which encourages the motivation to learn. Consiglio (2022) wrote,

> She [Christi Bergin] explained that these high-impact teaching practices are often hard to implement, as they take a lot of effort and do not happen frequently in classrooms. The study provides evidence that one way to activate high-impact teaching practices is to promote caring teacher-student relationships. (para. 6)

Naturally, anything considered needs to be approved by the boss or administrators at the institution, especially if the students attend a public school or *hagwon*, but in the end, the sky is the limit. Digging deep to build student relationships for a more fulfilling career**,** meeting students outside the classroom to engage in fun, stimulating activities, is at the core of what humanity is and what it does, which is connect and grow together.

Developing relationships outside of the classroom in the age of AI by focusing on the student *and* the educator leads to a richer student classroom experience and a more fulfilling work life for teachers. In the age of AI, it's certainly worth a try.

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APPENDIX

Potential Events and Ideas

- Language meet-ups
- Writing contests
- Film festivals
- Movie days
- Board game afternoons
- Café hops
- Neighborhood explorations
- Event poster design

Being Hu-Man (休滿) in the Age of AI: Incorporating Trauma-Informed Education

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This workshop looked at what trauma-informed education (TIE) is, why we need TIE, and how we can incorporate it into our classrooms. TIE refers to a change in perspective of what we have traditionally called “difficult” classroom behaviors, such as disengagement, belligerence, and even aggression. With the prevalence of trauma, our students may be communicating through such behaviors that they need help. These “bad” behaviors may actually be coping strategies. Using TIE, we can stop affixing labels on our students but rather seek to provide a learning sanctuary for all. When we can tweak classroom practice to incorporate this new viewpoint, we can empower our all our students to thrive and reach their full potential.

After a conflict in the Middle East erupted in 2023, one of my brightest students at Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada, disappeared from the classroom. I knew that “Jay” (pseudonym) was working part-time supporting his family, who had newly come to Canada as refugees, so I initially thought that he might be working more. After a full week had passed and no “Jay,” I started to ask around to find out what had happened to him. He showed up a week later, looking haggard and ten years older than his tender age of 20. After class, he came up to me to apologize for missing two assignments, then started weeping. He told me that although he and his family had made it out of that war torn region because they had an older brother living in Europe, others had not been so lucky. His childhood best friend had been killed during one of the attacks in this war.

Although “Jay” started the semester as one of my best students, by the end of the 14 weeks, he barely passed the course.

Thinking about my students through the years, I realized that this was a sad, recurring pattern. Domestic violence, cyber bullying, economic impoverishment (some students were refugees to Canada), residual effects of war, suddenly becoming a minority in an unfamiliar country as new immigrants, and, of course, COVID-19 were some of the traumas that the students faced. In the process of dealing with such trauma, their learning was adversely affected.

Some may feel that this topic is not relevant for them – that a country like Korea is not a traumatic place. Others may feel that students in Korea (or other affluent Asian countries we teach in) haven’t dealt with nor are they dealing with trauma in their lives, as most of them come from middle-class families that support their education 100%.

Be that as it may, anyone who has lived through COVID-19 has experienced a major traumatic event. The reality in Korea is even starker, though. The Korean Institute of Health and Social Affairs reports that the average Korean will experience 4.8 major traumatic events in their lives (Chae, 2022).

In essence, whether we teach in a public school, in an after-school academy, in a university, or everywhere in between, we need to be aware of trauma and how it affects the learning outcome.

Trauma-informed education (TIE) originated from trauma-informed care practiced by doctors, nurses, and hospital staff as medical practitioners started to realize the prevalence of trauma. Most laypeople may think of trauma as one major cataclysmic event, such as war (e.g., PTSD). However, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines *trauma* as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Trauma and Violence, 2024). Thus, trauma can be an event (e.g., death of a loved one, a car accident, war), a set of circumstances (e.g., economic hardship due to job loss, broken family due to divorce), or intergenerational circumstances (e.g., systemic racism, sexism). Trauma is prevalent in all parts of the world. Dr. Nadine Hunter (2022), in a groundbreaking TED Talk, explained that trauma not only inflicts suffering during the event, but continues to wreak havoc on mind and body long after the traumatic event has passed.

This is troubling because trauma and stress affect what happens in the classroom. Imad (2022) summarized that when stress overwhelms our nervous system as in the case of experiencing trauma, our bodies cannot function normally, which, in turn, causes more stress. But what happens in our brain is even scarier. As we experience trauma, our brain shuts down all but the essential areas needed for survival – the brain stem and the limbic system. The prefrontal cortex part of the brain, where attention, motivation, decision-making and problem-solving lie, get overruled by the limbic brain. No wonder our students dealing with trauma cannot focus, cannot comprehend, cannot respond, and cannot learn.

Munro (2022) pointed out that because trauma continues to shape a person's reality long after the event has passed, it often shows up in behaviors that are usually labeled "difficult." Hunter (2022) gave some specific examples of how trauma can manifest itself in a student's behavior. The student may seem disengaged, distracted, antagonistic, or angry, but in reality, they may be dealing with the effects of trauma.

This does not mean that we give a free pass to students who exhibit the above behaviors. It does mean that the underlying causes of these behaviors need to be acknowledged and, if possible, dealt with by a mental health professional. Our job as teachers is not to spot students dealing with trauma. We are not mental health counselors. Nevertheless, by increasing our understanding of the relationship between stress, trauma, and so-called "difficult" behavior, we may be able to assist our students to get to the bottom of what they are dealing with.

Then, as teachers, what can we do in the classroom? First and foremost, Johnson and Gianvito (2022) suggested that we remove “deficit-based and pathologizing” beliefs about our learners and consciously refuse to label them as “difficult” or as a “problem child.” Instead, we can assume people’s behavior has a purpose. In cases of residual effects of trauma, these anti-social behaviors may be a survival/coping strategy. Realizing this, we can then reframe the behaviors for what they really are – a form of communication.

In addition, within the organizational constraints of our given institution, we can build in some flexibility. Flexibility could mean negotiating deadlines, providing different options for classroom lessons, building choice into assessments and activities, or even just being more mindful when presenting possible retraumatizing content and provide an opt-out or warning for students before the class. Munro (2022) has a list of suggestions, such as emphasis on feedback rather than grading, that can be incorporated into any classroom at any level. Imad (2022) introduced a framework based on cultural humility with the four key elements of safety, empowerment, community, and meaning as the building blocks of TIE.

Given that we want to understand our students’ motivations, we must make sure our students also understand that there are two lanes of communication in our classrooms. Thus, it’s imperative that we build trust at the beginning of the semester. Imad (2022) stressed the need to make the first interaction with students inviting. Students have to feel that when they enter the classroom, they are in a safe place where they can let their mental guard down and be open to learning. We can create that atmosphere of acceptance by what we say and how we say it.

In the age of AI and the supercomputer, our humanity is our superpower. Our empathy and genuine concern are what will elevate learning in our classrooms above the tailored, individualized learning that AI will make possible. Nothing will ever replace the warmth of a human teacher’s smile and encouragement. Specialized tailored lessons will make learning efficient but will never take the place of the bond that can form between student and teacher. The synergy from that connection may be just what our students need to overcome the effects of trauma.

In the plenary talks given at the Korea TESOL International Conference, it was made clear that our students want to learn from a human teacher, not just from a snazzy computer program. Students commented that they liked hearing the teacher say “Well done,” or receive a beaming smile of approval. This is why our classrooms must foster a sense of inclusivity for all the students.

Trauma-informed education makes clear the educational axiom: Maslow before Bloom. If we want real learning to take place in our classrooms, we need to make our classrooms a learning sanctuary, a safe place where our students learn, thrive, and belong. If each of us can start the TIE conversation with our colleagues and our institutions, we can initiate change. Supervisors can create systems within the school to incorporate TIE and perhaps even help for teachers dealing with vicarious trauma.

These are baby steps as we navigate through an unknown path forged by AI’s increasing influence, climate change, shifting geopolitical terrain, and economic uncertainty. By making sure that our teaching is trauma-informed, we make a

sanctuary for learning in our classrooms. This will give our students a chance to reach their full potential. In essence, we are making our classroom full of rest, or in Korean "*hu* (休= rest)" + "*man* (满 = full of)."

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Ellen Park has been teaching ESL for the past twenty years in Canada. Most recently, she taught for over 13 years at Sheridan College, Ontario, where she developed an interest in trauma-informed education. Before that, she taught at various schools and colleges ranging from teaching TESOL students to foundational ESL classes. Currently, she works as an IELTS examiner and materials developer. Her areas of interests are maximizing AI for ESL, learner autonomy, empowerment of students through assessment and feedback, and designing learning materials for senior learners. Email: epark21@protonmail.com

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Supportive Language Education Utilizing Technology and Differentiation Strategies

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This workshop presented inclusive, adaptable English language instruction strategies using low-cost technologies and domain-based differentiation. Grounded in universal design for learning (UDL) and constructivist pedagogy, it addressed challenges in Korean classrooms, including cultural stigma around neurodivergence. Participants explored evidence-based, motivation-driven techniques and assistive tools such as speech-to-text (STT), text-to-speech (TTS), tiered tasks, and multimodal tasks like color-coding and sand tray activities. Rejecting outdated "learning styles" theories, the session focused on practical, flexible strategies to support a wide range of learner needs – from beginners to advanced students, including those with dyslexia, ADHD, or language anxiety. Differentiation strategies were framed through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning domains, with an emphasis on personalized, reflective, and emotionally supportive instruction. The workshop also addressed cultural barriers, offering stigma-free solutions to create inclusive learning environments. Attendees left with tools to empower all students to thrive in language acquisition through accessible, engaging, and equitable classroom practices.

INTRODUCTION

Language educators frequently encounter students who face barriers to learning – not only due to language acquisition challenges but also due to neurodivergence, including dyslexia, ADHD, and other attention or processing differences (International Dyslexia Association, 2023). In South Korea, these difficulties are often compounded by cultural stigma, limited diagnostic pathways, and institutional constraints. Teachers are often discouraged from suggesting evaluations, and parents may resist formal diagnosis.

As a Canadian educator teaching in Korea for over 16 years, I have experienced the limitations of this system firsthand. Despite these barriers, I have developed and implemented inclusive teaching practices that empower students without the need for formal diagnosis. This workshop, presented at the 2025 Korea TESOL International Conference at Sookmyung Women's University, addressed practical methods for supporting such learners using differentiation strategies, free technology tools, and the framework of universal design for learning (UDL).

English language classrooms in South Korea, particularly at the middle school level, are increasingly characterized by diversity in language proficiency, learning

needs, and cultural backgrounds. Teachers face the dual challenge of meeting curriculum standards and supporting students with undiagnosed or unaddressed learning difficulties, such as ADHD or dyslexia, often without specialist support. Traditional teaching models, such as presentation–practice–production (PPP), frequently fall short in engaging all learners or supporting deep, transferable skills.

Context and Purpose

The workshop "Supportive Language Education Utilizing Technology and Differentiation Strategies" was developed to equip EFL teachers with practical, research-based methods for building inclusive, motivating, and effective classrooms. Emphasis was placed on leveraging accessible technologies, particularly speech-to-text (STT) and text-to-speech (TTS) tools, as well as differentiation strategies grounded in universal design for learning (UDL) and constructivist principles (CAST, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014).

In South Korean public schools, teachers often encounter students with diverse learning needs, including those with undiagnosed neurodivergent profiles such as ADHD or dyslexia. Due to cultural stigma that deters parents from seeking formal assessments needed to gain specialist support, these students are frequently underserved (Moats & Dakin, 2008; Shaywitz, 2003). As a Canadian educator teaching in Korea for over 16 years since 1997, I have witnessed these limitations firsthand. In contexts where teachers are blocked by school and the Ministry of Education's policies from recommending parents seek formal diagnoses for their child, UDL offers a proactive approach to support all students, without requiring labels, through universally beneficial, flexible, and inclusive instruction (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Theoretical Foundations

Constructivism and Social Learning

The workshop drew on constructivist, social constructivism, and experiential learning principles. Constructivism emphasizes the importance of learners actively building knowledge through interaction with content and peers (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) reinforced the role of scaffolding and collaboration. Dewey (1938) and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model further supported the workshop's emphasis on hands-on learning, reflection, and contextualized instruction.

- **Constructivist Learning Theory:** Based on the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, constructivism posits that learners actively build knowledge through meaningful engagement with content and context. Social constructivism, particularly Vygotsky's ZPD, highlights the importance of collaboration and scaffolding in language learning.
- **Experiential Learning:** Dewey's "learning by doing" and Kolb's experiential

learning cycle (concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, experimentation) underpin the workshop's approach, emphasizing authentic, hands-on activities and reflective practice.

CURRICULUM DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL principles advocate for multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, ensuring that instruction is accessible to all learners, regardless of ability or background. Developed by Rose and Meyer (2002) and further expanded by CAST (2018), UDL offers a proactive framework for inclusive education. It encourages educators to design lessons that provide multiple means of

- **representation**: presenting information in various formats (e.g., text, visuals, audio, kinesthetic input);
- **engagement**: stimulating interest and motivation through choice, emotional connection, relevance, and challenge; and
- **expression**: allowing students to demonstrate understanding in diverse ways (e.g., written, oral, artistic, or gestural formats).

In the workshop, UDL was emphasized not as a model for remediation but as an equity-based approach that benefits all learners. By anticipating learner variability, educators can design instruction that supports students without singling out those with learning difficulties (Meyer et al., 2014).

The Need for Differentiation

Differentiated instruction, as promoted in this workshop, involves proactively adapting teaching methods, content, and assessment to meet the diverse needs of all learners, while also ensuring that no student feels singled out or treated differently (Tomlinson, 2014). It recognizes that students vary in readiness, interests, and learning profiles, and seeks to provide multiple pathways to success. When implemented across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), differentiation fosters inclusive, flexible, and holistic learning experiences that enhance student engagement, access, and achievement.

As emphasized in the workshop, differentiated instruction effectively complements universal design for learning (UDL) by offering responsive, learner-centered approaches that align with students' strengths and challenges (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).

Key Principles and Examples

- **Flexible Content Delivery (visual, auditory, kinesthetic):** Differentiated instruction involves presenting content through various modalities to ensure accessibility for all students (CAST, 2018). For example, some learners may benefit more from graphic organizers and color-coded texts, others from podcasts or text-to-speech tools, and more from hands-on activities such as texture tool modeling or sentence strip manipulation (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).
- **Varied Grouping (individual, pair, small group, whole class):** Teachers can group students flexibly based on task, interest, or ability, allowing for targeted support and peer collaboration (Tomlinson, 2014). For instance, independent work might include personalized vocabulary lists, pair work could involve peer editing or think–pair–share, small groups might tackle project-based tasks, and whole-class activities could feature debates or vocabulary games (Tomlinson, 2014).
- **Multiple Assessment Formats (oral, written, project-based):** Assessment should be varied to allow students to demonstrate understanding in ways that suit their strengths (CAST, 2018). Oral assessments may include presentations or interviews, written assessments could involve essays or digital quizzes, and project-based assessments might include posters, videos, or creative models (CAST, 2018).
- **Student Choice and Autonomy:** Providing students with choices in how they learn and demonstrate understanding increases motivation and ownership (Tomlinson, 2014). Examples include offering choice boards or menus of activities, allowing students to set personal learning goals, and giving options for final products, such as a travel brochure, video, or diary (Tomlinson, 2014).

Understanding Neurodivergence in Language Education

Neurodivergent learners, including those with dyslexia and ADHD, process language and classroom environments differently. Dyslexic students may struggle with phonological awareness, decoding, or spelling (Moats & Dakin, 2008; Shaywitz, 2003), while students with ADHD often experience difficulty with sustained attention, task initiation, and emotional regulation.

In many Korean classrooms, these students are often still perceived as “lazy,” “disruptive,” or “not smart” – labels that are damaging and inaccurate. In one example from my teaching experience, a student who was labeled as “unintelligent” showed tremendous engagement and leadership during summer camp classes that were under themes of baking or cooking. The student thrived when instruction was hands-on and multisensory, staying on-task and doing extra work to help without being asked. These moments revealed that the issue was not student capability but access to the right kind of instruction.

The lack of diagnosis should not mean a lack of support. Universal strategies benefit everyone and reduce stigma. Tools like speech-to-text (STT), text-to-speech (TTS), visual scaffolds, and flexible grouping are helpful for all students (especially language learners), not just those with recognized needs.

Technology Integration

- **Assistive Technology:** Tools such as STT and TTS are increasingly recognized for their role in supporting students with reading, writing, or attention difficulties, including English language learners.
- **Active Learning and Differentiation:** Technology enables flexible grouping, multimodal content delivery, and personalized learning paths, thereby supporting differentiation in both content and process.

WORKSHOP DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Workshop Goals

1. **Increase Teacher Awareness:** Highlight the diversity of student needs in EFL classrooms, including hidden or stigmatized learning difficulties.
2. **Introduce Technology Tools:** Demonstrate practical applications of STT and TTS, as well as other digital resources, for language support and differentiation.
3. **Model Differentiated Strategies:** Provide hands-on experiences with differentiated lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management.
4. **Foster Reflective Practice:** Encourage teachers to reflect on their own practices and adapt strategies for their unique contexts.

Workshop Structure

The 80-minute workshop included the following eight phases:

1. Introduction and Needs Analysis

Teachers reflected on their own classrooms and shared experiences. This opened a discussion about stigma and hidden learning difficulties.

- The workshop began with a brief introduction to the session's goals and the importance of supportive, differentiated language education.
- Participants were given some time to look at nine case study summaries around the room and told to choose one. Later, they discussed how they would approach having such a student in their class.
- Participants briefly shared their experiences with differentiation and using

technology in the classroom.

- Teachers shared brief anecdotes about challenges they faced with diverse learners, such as students with undiagnosed dyslexia, ADHD, or language anxiety.

2. Theoretical Overview

Participants explored why the popular theory of “learning styles” lacks empirical support and were introduced to more effective, research-based alternatives such as universal design for learning (UDL) and domain-based differentiation (CAST, 2018; Krathwohl, 2002; Pashler et al., 2008). A short presentation reviewed the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning domains and their relevance in EFL instruction.

- This segment grounded the workshop in current research and best practices.
- A short introduction to constructivist learning theories (Dewey, Vygotsky, Kolb) and their relevance to language education.
- Discussion of UDL principles, with examples such as offering multiple means of engagement and assessment.
- Overview of why “learning styles” is not supported by evidence and a focus on more effective, research-based differentiation strategies (Pashler et al., 2008).

3. Technology Demonstrations

Participants were introduced to practical technology tools that support language learners, especially those with neurodivergent needs.

Demonstrations focused on the following:

- Speech-to-Text (STT): Tools such as Google Docs Voice Typing, Microsoft Dictate, smartphone/tablet apps, and built-in accessibility tools were shown.
  Live demonstration of STT using Google Docs Voice Typing and smartphone/tablet apps such as Live Transcribe to show how students with dysgraphia, dyslexia, limited motor skills, or language learners with poor spelling skills can compose text.
- Text-to-Speech (TTS): Programs like Natural Reader and built-in accessibility tools such as TalkBack were introduced.
  Walkthrough of TTS tools such as Read&Write and built-in device features to illustrate how struggling readers can access written content.
- Color Coding and Kinesthetic Tools: Teachers experimented with visual scaffolds (highlighting grammar patterns) and tactile activities (using plushies for storytelling and speaking focus assists).
  Introduction of color-coding tools in Google Docs and Microsoft Word to support students with organizational challenges.
  Introduction to simple tactile focus assists such as textured writing tools, plush toys/balls for speaking activities, and virtual whiteboard activities for kinesthetic and visual engagement.

4. Domain-Based Strategies in Action

Participants examined strategies categorized into three domains – the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains:

Cognitive Domain: Thinking and Language

This domain focuses on intellectual skills and knowledge acquisition. Many students, especially English language learners (ELL), struggle with vocabulary retention, grammar accuracy, and text organization. ELLs with dyslexia or memory focus difficulties also benefit from structured and visual input.

Strategies

- Tiered vocabulary tasks with L1 scaffolds (Kauss, 2025)
- Graphic organizers (Gomez et al., 2011)
- Sentence scaffolds and guided writing
- Mind-mapping tools (MindMeister, Coggle)
- Bilingual glossaries and Quizlet decks with images and audio
- Apps: Quizlet, Coggle, MindMeister

(See Appendix for an example lesson employing domain-based strategies.)

Why It Works

- Tiering addresses varying proficiency levels.
- L1 scaffolds reduce cognitive load for beginners.
- It allows all students to access content at a meaningful level, supporting UDL and differentiated instruction.

Affective Domain: Emotions and Motivation

This domain focuses on emotional responses, attitudes, and engagement. Students who have faced repeated failure often experience low confidence, anxiety, or withdrawal (Bandura, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Zangari, 2020).

Strategies

- Tools: Padlet, Flip, discussion cards
- Student-led storytelling
- Project-based learning with choice
- Journaling or emotional check-ins
- Role-playing to build empathy
- Positive reinforcement and reflection

Example: After a test, students participate in a role-play where one plays a discouraged student and the other a supportive teacher. This activity, used in the workshop, builds both language and emotional resilience.

Technology Tool Spotlight: Padlet provides a low-pressure space for students to share opinions, reflections, or questions anonymously, or to share

images, voice notes, or video. This space can easily be monitored by the teacher and access can be limited to school participants.

Psychomotor Domain: Movement and Hands-On Learning

This domain involves physical activity and sensory interaction. Many students, especially those with attention challenges, benefit from kinesthetic approaches.

Strategies

- Total Physical Response (TPR) activities
- Gesture-based vocabulary (e.g., miming *climb*, *mix*), tracing activities
- Using hands-on materials (cards, puzzles, sentence strips) for activities
- Tracing letters in sand trays or in the air
- Color-coded grammar patterns

Example: When teaching action verbs, students perform the gestures (*jump*, *throw*) while saying the word. This connects muscle memory with vocabulary retention.

Technology Tool Spotlight: Using a camera or tablet, students can record themselves performing gestures, then narrate their actions (a great blend of psychomotor, cognitive, and expressive language use).

5. Hands-On Activities

Participants actively experimented with tools and strategies, simulating student experiences.

Examples

- Participants tried out STT and TTS tools on their own devices, practicing reading, writing, and pronunciation tasks.
- Small groups used color coding to break down a sample reading passage or vocabulary list by word class (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives).
- Participants discussed how they might revise their earlier approach to the case study summaries of students with learning challenges using tools, techniques, technology, or theories presented in the seminar.
- Role-play scenarios were acted out where participants (a “teacher”) support a “student” with a specific learning challenge using the demonstrated tools.

6. Collaborative Lesson Planning

Participants worked in small groups to discuss possible support plans for students using domain-based differentiation and technology tools, and how to integrate the tools into lessons for all students’ use.

- STT dictation for students with writing anxiety or who avoid writing
- Emotion charts combined with visual sentence builders

- A student who fidgets (standing desk + gesture-based vocabulary practice)
- A student who struggles with multi-step directions (visual checklist + TTS instruction support)

Educators discuss how they could work with colleagues in their school to integrate technology and differentiation into lesson plans tailored to their classroom contexts.

- Participants discussed how to incorporate STT/TTS and hands-on strategies as regular tools into their classes (STT journaling + emotion check-in chart).
- Participants brainstormed ways to differentiate for a mixed-ability class, including options for students with visual, auditory, or cognitive challenges.
- Participants discussed formative assessment ideas that allow for multiple means of expression (oral, written, visual).

7. Reframing Differentiation as Equity

A key theme of the workshop was the importance of reframing differentiation and support strategies as a matter of equity, not exceptionality. Rather than being seen as “special treatment,” inclusive tools, such as speech-to-text, text-to-speech, captioning, or alternative formats, were presented as universally beneficial practices that allow more students to access and succeed with the same content. Also presented was how to explain the use of tools and technology to co-teachers, coworkers, and administrators in ways that work around stigma, sensitivities, and school policies, such as “Giving captions or flexible formats doesn’t change what I teach – it helps more students reach it.”

This approach is particularly vital in the South Korean educational context, where institutional policies may discourage teachers from recommending evaluations, and cultural stigma around disability can limit both school and family engagement (Gay, 2010; Moats & Dakin, 2008). Participants also discussed how to align accommodations with curriculum outcomes and how to collect informal data (journals, observations, rubrics) to justify alternative strategies.

Addressing Cultural and Institutional Barriers

The workshop provided strategies for working within school systems where formal learning support is limited or discouraged:

- Avoid diagnostic labels; use portfolios, rubrics, and anecdotal observations to document student needs and progress.
- Offer flexible task options; students can type, draw, act, or record their responses.
- Use multimodal materials such as diagrams, color-coded visuals, and gestures.
- Normalize assistive technology by making tools like STT and TTS available to the whole class, not just select students.

The key message was clear: “These aren’t exceptions. These are strategies that support everyone.”

Navigating Pushback and Promoting Inclusion

When facing resistance from co-teachers, coworkers, or administrators, the workshop emphasized the value of positioning differentiation as curriculum-aligned and data-informed.

- Collect informal data through classroom observations, work samples, or journaling to show growth and engagement.
- Use student reflections and self-assessments to demonstrate metacognitive development and learning outcomes (Kirkpatrick & Zangari, 2020).
- Show how differentiation aligns with national curriculum goals by offering universal access, not content dilution.

Suggested response to resistance: “Giving extra time or captions doesn’t lower expectations – it ensures more students can meet them.”

By highlighting the universal design nature of these supports, educators can advocate for inclusive practices while minimizing stigma and institutional pushback (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).

8. Reflection and Q&A

The seminar concluded with guided reflection and an open Q&A, allowing participants to consolidate their learning and plan for classroom application. Activities included

- a “3-2-1” reflection, where participants identified 3 strategies they plan to try, 2 anticipated challenges, and 1 support they need;
- small-group discussion on potential barriers, such as stigma or limited resources, and brainstorming of potential appropriate solutions for their school contexts; and
- An open Q&A session that gave participants space to clarify key concepts, share classroom experiences, and explore adaptations for their unique teaching environments.

Practical Applications in Korean EFL Contexts

Addressing Classroom Diversity

South Korean EFL classrooms, particularly at the middle school level, present a range of challenges that require responsive, inclusive teaching strategies. These include the following:

- Wide Range of Language Proficiency: Classes often include students with English abilities ranging from A1 to B1+ on the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), meaning that teachers must accommodate both beginners and more fluent speakers within the same lesson (Council of Europe, 2020).

- Undiagnosed Learning Difficulties: Conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia, and processing disorders are frequently overlooked due to cultural stigma, lack of training, and institutional reluctance to pursue formal diagnosis (Moats & Dakin, 2008; Shaywitz, 2003).
- Lack of Specialist Support: Teachers are typically expected to manage all students, including those with neurodiverse profiles, without access to aides, co-teachers, or individualized education plans (IEPs).
- Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: An increasing number of multicultural students (e.g., children from multi-ethnic or immigrant families) add further complexity, requiring culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010).
- Structural Constraints: Middle school students typically see their foreign English teacher only once per week for 45 minutes in classes of 12–30 students, with instruction tied to nationally mandated textbooks and assessments.

In this context, teachers must balance curriculum requirements with the needs of students experiencing literacy challenges, attention difficulties, or anxiety, necessitating flexible, differentiated approaches that promote access and engagement for all learners without singling out students with learning challenges.

Outcomes and Impact

Teacher Feedback

- Increased Confidence: Participants reported greater confidence in using technology to support differentiation.
- Practicality: Participants valued hands-on practice and real-world examples, noting immediate applicability to their contexts.
- Collaboration: Sharing experiences and strategies with peers fostered a sense of professional community among the participants.
- One participant: “I didn’t know these free tools could be used this way.”
- Another participant: “I feel less alone in trying to support struggling students.”

Observed Benefits for Students

- Greater Engagement: Students show increased motivation and participation when technology and choice are integrated into lessons.
- Improved Access: Learners with reading, writing, or attention difficulties are better able to access content and demonstrate understanding.
- Enhanced Inclusion: Multilingual and culturally diverse students benefit from materials and assessments tailored to their needs.

Challenges and Considerations

- Technology Access: Some schools or students lack reliable access to devices or the internet, requiring creative solutions or alternative strategies.
- Teacher Training: Ongoing professional development is needed to build teacher capacity and confidence in using new tools.
- Assessment Alignment: Standardized testing formats may limit the use of differentiated or technology-based assessments, highlighting the need for advocacy and policy change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practical Tips for Teachers

Start Small

Integrate one new technology or differentiation strategy at a time, building on successes. *Example:* Begin by introducing a simple STT tool, such as Google Docs Voice Typing, for writing assignments. Once students are comfortable, gradually add a TTS tool for reading support or experiment with color coding for grammar instruction (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).

Leverage Built-In Tools

Many devices have free, built-in STT and TTS features; explore and share these with students. *Example:* Demonstrate how to use the built-in TTS function on smartphones or tablets to have English texts read aloud. Encourage students to use these features at home for reading practice or listening comprehension (Edyburn, 2013; Rose & Dalton, 2009).

Promote Student Autonomy

Offer choices in how students access content and demonstrate learning. *Example:* Provide a choice board for a unit project: students can write an essay, create a video, record a podcast, or design a poster to show their understanding. Allow students to select whether they read a text independently, listen to it via TTS, or work with a peer (Meyer et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2014).

Reflect Often

Encourage journaling and goal setting.

Collaborate with Colleagues

Share resources, lesson plans, and strategies to build a supportive teaching community. *Example:* Set up a shared online folder or group chat for teachers to exchange differentiated lesson plans, technology tips, and student success stories.

Organize monthly meetings to discuss what's working and brainstorm solutions to common challenges (DuFour, 2004; Hattie, 2009).

For Schools and Policymakers

Increase Access

Support device and internet equity. Invest in devices and infrastructure to ensure all students can benefit from technology-enhanced learning. *Example:* Allocate funding for a classroom set of tablets or laptops, and ensure reliable internet access in all learning spaces. Provide headphones for students who benefit from audio support or noise-cancelling headphones for students who are sound sensitive (Edyburn, 2013; UNESCO, 2021).

Provide Training

Focused professional development on UDL and assistive tech. Offer regular, practical professional development on technology and differentiation. *Example:* Organize hands-on workshops where teachers can practice using STT/TTS tools, explore UDL principles, and develop differentiated lesson plans. Invite guest speakers with expertise in inclusive education and assistive technology (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).

Review Policies to Support Inclusive Assessment

Allow flexibility in assessment methods. Advocate for assessment policies that allow for accommodations and alternative formats. *Example:* Allow students with dyslexia or other learning differences to complete oral assessments or submit audio/video responses instead of written tests. Develop guidelines that permit the use of assistive technologies during standardized exams, and educate parents about the benefits of inclusive assessment (Edyburn, 2013; Rose & Dalton, 2009).

By implementing these recommendations, teachers and schools can create more accessible, engaging, and equitable language learning environments for all students.

CONCLUSION

Supporting diverse learners doesn't require labels – it requires intention. Inclusive classrooms are not about making exceptions; they are about designing lessons that anticipate and embrace diversity. Through universal design for learning (UDL), low-cost and accessible technologies like STT and TTS, and differentiation across learning domains, educators can create empowering environments where all students, not just those who "fit the mould," can access, engage with, and thrive in English language learning.

These strategies are not "extras." They are essential practices that foster

resilience, participation, and confidence for all learners. As CAST (2018) affirms, “Good teaching is good for everyone – and essential for some.”

The “Supportive Language Education Utilizing Technology and Differentiation Strategies” workshop demonstrated the transformative potential of integrating technology and differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms. Grounded in constructivist and UDL principles, the approach equips teachers with practical tools to design inclusive, engaging, and effective learning experiences. While challenges remain – particularly regarding access and institutional policies – continued collaboration, critical reflection, and innovation are key to building truly inclusive classrooms that serve all learners.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX

Example Lesson Employing Domain-Based Strategies

For a lesson on weather, students move from picture–word matching to cloze sentences, to STT-based journaling about personal weather experiences.

Lesson Theme: Weather Vocabulary
Grade Level: Korean Middle School, Mixed Proficiency (A1–B1)
Objective: Understand and use basic weather-related vocabulary
Language Focus: *sunny*, *rainy*, *cloudy*, *snowy*, *windy*, *stormy*

Tier 1: Recognition (Low-level learners)

Task: Picture–word match

- Students match English weather words to pictures
- Provide **L1 (Korean) glosses** under each word (e.g., “snowy 눈 오는”)
- Use a bilingual word bank on the worksheet

Scaffolds: Korean translations, visuals, simplified instructions

Tier 2: Comprehension (Mid-level learners)

Task: Cloze sentences

- Fill in blanks using weather vocabulary
  “Today is _____ and cold.”
- Provide a word bank with L1 translations as support

Scaffolds: Sentence frames, bilingual word bank

Tier 3: Production (Higher-level learners)

Task: Personalized writing

- Write 3 sentences about the weather in their hometown or dream travel destination
- Encourage use of adjectives and reasons
  “I like snowy weather because I can go skiing.”

Optional scaffolds: L1 brainstorm chart, weather vocabulary mind map with L1 definitions

Techniques and Approaches Papers

AI-Generated Picture Books in ESL: A Practical Guide for Educators

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This practical guide outlines the design and execution of an AI-assisted picture book project in an undergraduate English as a second language (ESL) course. Students collaborated to write and illustrate children's stories using Microsoft Copilot's generative AI tools, developing skills in narrative writing, digital literacy, collaboration, and creative thinking. Drawing on project observations and student reflections, this paper provides guidance for educators seeking to integrate AI-supported multimodal storytelling into language learning contexts. Challenges and recommendations are discussed to support effective implementation and maximize educational outcomes, with examples from classroom practice to illustrate key points.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies presents new opportunities for creative engagement in language education. In particular, ESL classrooms can benefit from projects that integrate linguistic and visual storytelling, enabling students to build narrative skills, develop digital literacies, and collaborate creatively. Despite the growing presence of AI tools, practical models for classroom implementation remain limited. While theoretical discussions of AI's educational potential are increasing, teachers still require concrete, field-tested examples of how such tools can be harnessed meaningfully.

This paper aims to address that gap by providing a detailed, experience-based guide to implementing an AI-supported picture book project, drawn from a case study at a Japanese university. It highlights both the educational benefits and practical challenges, offering step-by-step recommendations to support successful classroom adoption and providing illustrative examples of student experiences throughout.

BACKGROUND: WHY INTEGRATE AI IN ESL STORYTELLING?

Digital storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach, particularly in language education contexts where combining text and images allows for richer expression. Research by Robin (2008) and Rowsell and Walsh (2011) emphasized how multimodal projects can engage learners, enhance

motivation, and support deeper comprehension. For ESL learners, in particular, multimodal storytelling provides opportunities to express meaning when linguistic ability alone may be limiting (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009).

Generative AI tools like Microsoft Copilot add a new dimension to this process by enabling students to create personalized visual content to complement their narratives. Scholars such as Shneiderman (2022) and McCormack et al. (2019) stressed that AI should amplify, not replace, human creativity. When thoughtfully implemented, AI-supported storytelling projects foster student autonomy, critical thinking, and multiliteracies, as emphasized by Cope and Kalantzis (2009). However, successful integration requires careful pedagogical design to balance technological affordances with educational objectives, ensuring that students retain meaningful creative control over their work.

Importantly, the use of AI in education also prompts discussions about authorship, originality, and ethical engagement with digital tools – critical conversations for developing informed, reflective learners prepared for an increasingly technology-mediated world.

PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The project was carried out with 37 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a Media English course at a private university in Japan. The students were grouped into teams of three or four and tasked with producing an original English-language picture book intended for children aged three to six. Assignment guidelines (see Appendix A) emphasized the importance of developing a coherent narrative structure, selecting a clear and appropriate theme, tailoring language for young audiences, and ensuring visual consistency across AI-generated illustrations.

Before beginning, the students participated in a workshop introducing Microsoft Copilot and the basic principles of prompt engineering. They were shown examples of how small adjustments in prompt wording could lead to significant variations in AI-generated output. In addition, the students were advised to plan their stories carefully before beginning image generation, considering elements such as character appearance, setting consistency, and thematic tone.

Each team was required to document the prompts they used, encouraging reflective practice and allowing for later analysis of how students interacted with the AI tool. The final products were presented in a classroom storytelling session, where students introduced their books, read them aloud, and answered peer questions. This performance aspect added an additional layer of communicative practice and audience awareness.

The students engaged deeply with both the creative and technical aspects of the project. Throughout the process, they navigated challenges related to narrative coherence, visual consistency, and collaborative decision-making. A post-project questionnaire (see Appendix B) gathered student reflections on their experiences,

providing valuable insights into their perceived gains, frustrations, and strategies for overcoming obstacles.

OBSERVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Analysis of the students' picture books revealed a wide range of creative outcomes. Some teams produced original and emotionally resonant stories that demonstrated imaginative thinking and sensitivity to the needs of young readers. For example, *Lost Item* told the story of a raccoon searching for its dropped acorns, reflecting themes of loss, perseverance, and belonging. A student on this team commented, "We didn't want a typical happy ending. We wanted the reader to feel sadness and hope together." Similarly, *Cloud Chris Cry* depicted a small cloud's struggle to find acceptance, covering themes of diversity and resilience.

However, several groups fell back on familiar narrative templates, often closely modeling their stories on well-known fairy tales or movies. *Staying at Home* largely replicated the structure of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats*, while *Clear Clean* employed the common trope of a "bad dream" moral lesson. In the post-study questionnaire, one student remarked, "It was too difficult to think of something completely new, so we based it on a story we already knew and just changed some parts." Another student candidly reflected, "When we got stuck, it was easier to copy than to risk making something strange."

Language simplification posed a significant challenge for many students. Although capable of writing in English, students often defaulted to complex sentence structures and abstract vocabulary unsuited for young audiences. One participant shared, "At first, we wrote difficult sentences, but when we practiced reading them, we realized kids would not understand. We had to cut and rewrite a lot." Others noted that the act of simplifying language made them more aware of rhythm, sound, and emotional clarity in English storytelling. One student remarked, "Making sentences simple but interesting was very hard."

Technical issues also emerged, particularly regarding character consistency. Many students struggled to maintain a stable appearance for their main characters across multiple illustrations. In *My Friend Is Ghost*, for instance, the protagonist's appearance changed dramatically between pages, confusing the narrative (see Figure 1). One student explained, "Even if we wrote 'the same boy with a red scarf,' the AI sometimes gave us a totally different boy. It was frustrating." Students adapted by refining their prompts, adding details such as "red scarf, same hairstyle, same clothes," but results remained inconsistent. Some teams experimented with regenerating multiple images and manually selecting the ones closest to their vision, a process that required patience and negotiation among team members.

Despite these hurdles, engagement with the project remained high. When asked about their favorite aspect, a majority of the students cited the moment when their text and images finally came together to form a coherent storybook. One student

summarized the experience: “It was amazing to see our story come alive. We started with just an idea, and now we have a real book.” Others appreciated the collaborative aspect, with several noting that resolving creative disagreements helped them improve their communication skills. A student reflected, “When we disagreed about the character design, we had to listen carefully and find a compromise. I think that made the book better.”

FIGURE 1. Example of Issues Regarding Visual Consistency

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Findings from this project underscore the considerable educational value of AI-supported multimodal storytelling, while also revealing areas where additional scaffolding and instructional support can enhance student outcomes. First, fostering creative originality requires more than simply assigning an open-ended task. Structured brainstorming activities, story mapping exercises, and analysis of diverse narrative models can encourage students to move beyond imitation. In future iterations, incorporating short creative exercises, such as “create a new fairy tale villain” or “invent a world where normal rules do not apply,” could help stimulate more divergent thinking.

Second, addressing technical challenges with AI tools demands explicit instruction in prompt engineering. Providing students with examples of both successful and unsuccessful prompts, followed by opportunities for guided practice, can demystify the process and reduce frustration. In addition, introducing a simple checklist – such as ensuring character description, clothing, and setting details are consistently included – can help students achieve greater visual coherence.

Third, collaborative structures should be intentionally designed to promote meaningful teamwork. Assigning specific roles within groups (e.g., lead writer, prompt designer, editor) can clarify responsibilities and reduce conflict. Facilitating peer review sessions at multiple stages of the project can also encourage deeper engagement with both narrative content and visual storytelling.

Finally, framing AI use within broader discussions about creativity, authorship, and ethical technology use can enrich students' critical digital literacies. Asking students to reflect on questions such as "Who is the author of an AI-generated story?" or "How can we make AI work for our creativity, not replace it?" fosters thoughtful engagement and prepares learners for responsible participation in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

CONCLUSION

AI-supported storytelling projects offer a powerful means of cultivating creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy in ESL education. When designed with clear objectives, thoughtful scaffolding, and opportunities for reflection, such projects can engage students deeply, prompting them to navigate linguistic and technological challenges in innovative ways.

The case study outlined here demonstrates that while technical hurdles and creative limitations exist, these challenges are surmountable with targeted instructional support. Student reflections revealed that even imperfect outcomes can provide meaningful learning opportunities, including enhanced audience awareness, critical thinking about language, and a growing appreciation for the complexities of digital creation. Future work could expand the project to diverse educational contexts, experiment with different AI platforms, and explore longitudinal impacts on student learning. With mindful integration, generative AI can be harnessed not merely as a technological novelty but as a meaningful pedagogical tool for empowering ESL learners in the digital age.

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APPENDIX A

Assignment Guidelines

In a group, you will create a picture book aimed at a specific type of reader (consider age and reading level). You will need to think about the themes or messages you wish to express as well as the complexity or simplicity of the story, the language, and the images.

Purpose

- To demonstrate understanding of the balance between education and entertainment.
- To demonstrate consideration of the capabilities of young learners.

Requirements

1. Create a picture book.
    a. Must have a clear theme.
    b. Must follow the basics of the narrative arc (introduction, inciting action, rising action, climax, falling action, conclusion).
    c. Must have images and language appropriate to the target audience.
    d. Must include the English prompts you used with Copilot to generate each image in the storybook. Paste them into the Speaker Notes section of each slide.

2. Perform a reading of your storybook in class.
    a. Content of performance
        i. Brief introduction of the book (the theme, the target audience).
        ii. Read out the story to the audience in engaging style, as you would read it to a child.
        iii. Answer one or two questions from the audience.
    b. Guidelines
        i. Story reading should be 3–4 minutes in length.
        ii. All members of the group should participate.
        iii. Must pay attention to presentation skills (eye contact, gestures, fluency, intonation).

We will be using Microsoft's Copilot to create our images for this project. You need to create an account (if you already have a Hotmail account, you can use that), but it is free to use:
https://copilot.microsoft.com/

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire Distributed to Students

AI Storybook Project: Participant Questionnaire

I would like to ask you to help me by answering the following questions regarding the storybook project. This questionnaire is being conducted as part of a research study.

This questionnaire is not a test, and I truly value your feedback. Please give your answers honestly to maximize the benefits of this study, and try to answer each question in detail. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Did you enjoy making the picture book? (Yes or No)
2. What did you enjoy most about creating the children's picture book?
3. What did you find most challenging about creating the children's picture book?
4. How user-friendly did you find the AI tools you used for generating images?
5. Were there any technical difficulties you encountered? How did you overcome them?
6. What new skills or knowledge did you gain from this project?
7. How well did you and your group members collaborate on this project?
8. If you could redo the project, what would you do differently and why?

Universal Design to Enhance EFL Course Material Accessibility

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With the demands for inclusive and universal education increasing, the need for accessible materials has never been higher. In an effort to create barrier-free English language teaching (ELT) materials, the researchers have developed evidence-based guidelines and templates to help teachers create classroom materials that are more accessible and less cognitively demanding for students. This paper outlines the process, design, and creation of ELT materials using the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) and explains the step-by-step process used to establish guidelines, create templates, and refresh pre-existing materials to be more accessible and less cognitively demanding. These guidelines incorporate research-based practices to inform the best use of font sizes and styles, images, color schemes and palettes, intuitive icons for task identification, and specified layout parameters to reduce cognitive load.

INTRODUCTION

As learning disabilities become more widely diagnosed and efforts are made to de-stigmatize them and welcome learners with various abilities to higher education, it is imperative to adapt best practices for inclusivity. The COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 saw a mass move towards online teaching and learning using digital learning management systems (LMSs), resulting in an increase in onscreen materials being used at educational institutions. This shift brought attention to a new set of challenges with the implementation of digital materials, and in recent years, many new design practices have emerged to help facilitate teaching and learning in a digital language learning environment. Furthermore, research into materials design for language learning asserts that learning materials for language learners should be language-supportive and reduce cognitive demand. Drawing from principles for barrier-free design, the universal design for learning (UDL) framework, and criteria for designing language-supportive learning materials, this paper suggests a system for improving accessibility of onscreen materials such as documents and slides. Adopting UDL principles is not only important for supporting students with disabilities and L2 learners, but benefits all students and teachers.

OVERVIEW OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

UDL is a framework for creating inclusive and barrier-free learning environments and materials. The term was coined by Rose and Meyer (2002) and named after "universal design in architecture." It has a positive impact on affective barriers by increasing accessibility to materials for students to use (Meyer et al., 2014). A strong argument can be made for implementing UDL to curriculum materials to "amplify natural abilities and reduce unnecessary barriers" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 10) in general for the majority of students, which then gives teachers more flexibility to modify materials for any learners who require additional assistance beyond what is already built into the materials.

Current Issues

A study analyzing educational websites using the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) found that most of them do not meet the standards set forth in their guidelines (Campoverde-Molina et al., 2020). It is therefore critical that educational institutions take initiative in improving the accessibility of online and onscreen materials, "bearing in mind that, in education, accessibility contributes to creating better opportunities for students" (Campoverde-Molina et al., 2020, p. 19).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to incorporate UDL and language-supportive principles into the design of online teaching and learning materials for the benefit of learners and teachers, and to create templates that could easily be used to convert existing materials to a more accessible, barrier-free format. This would decrease the burden on most learners while also affording teachers more time and attention to spend on learners who require additional support.

BACKGROUND

The research was conducted at a four-year university in Japan, where students major in languages and international communication. Students are mostly Japanese but are also occasionally from international backgrounds. In all cases, English is not their native language. In their first and second years, all students take compulsory English courses that have a focus on listening and speaking or on reading and/or writing. These courses are taught by teachers working in the university's English Language Institute (ELI). The number of courses has fluctuated over the 35-year history of the ELI, starting from one course to over 20, and more recently they have been condensed into six core courses. During that period, courses have evolved based on the growing needs of the university and with oversight from those in

leadership positions in the ELI. The materials for the courses are all made in-house by the instructors working in the ELI. With teachers on limited-term contracts that have ranged from 3 years to 10, there has been a large number of teachers over that time who have had input into the lesson materials. The materials, which are shared on a digital platform, are available for all teachers to use. While the lessons are designed with specific learning outcomes in mind, the actual worksheets and slides have become quite an eclectic collection of styles in terms of lesson layout and design, both within and across courses.

In recent years, through course meetings and talking to new instructors entering the ELI, it became clear that teachers were spending a lot of their time not only on planning their lessons using the shared materials but also on re-designing materials. Of course, everyone has a style that they prefer; however, it was clear that the materials were not just inconsistent but also beginning to appear out-of-date. An additional issue arose several years ago when the materials were converted from Microsoft Word documents to Google Docs. This conversion modified the formatting substantially, having the largest effect on tables, charts, and images. Teachers often stated that the lack of consistency in design was one of the main reasons that they spent so much time editing the materials. Rather than using the materials available on the shared platform, some incoming instructors were asking incumbent instructors for their revised materials, often to save them the time they would need to do it themselves.

More recently, through an unrelated research project, materials were shown to learners to get their feedback on what student learning outcomes they were able to identify by looking at the materials for specific courses. It became apparent that newer materials that had been designed with some UDL principles in mind, were much easier for students to navigate. These two things became the driving force behind bringing together a group of instructors who were interested in making the course materials more accessible for the learners and instructors. The goal was to make the design user-friendly and attractive so that new teachers would be more willing to use the materials in addition to making them more accessible to learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to meet the goal of making the design user-friendly and attractive, the researchers first reviewed literature related to UDL followed by best practices for accessible document design.

Key Features of UDL and Online Learning Material Principles

According to Meyer et al. (2014), there are three core UDL principles. The first principle is to include multiple means of engagement that will clearly communicate classroom routines for learners and help increase learner interest in activities. Second, multiple means of representation should be used, offering multiple modes of

instruction supports students with different learning needs in learning more effectively. Finally, students should be provided with various ways to demonstrate their understanding of the material. These core principles improve ease of use of materials for everyone, with research suggesting that it can be particularly effective for learners and teachers with neurodivergent conditions such as autism (Denning & Moody, 2013).

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (2025) suggested the following for online UDL: (a) transcripts should be provided for audio-only materials, (b) documents should use headings and subheadings, (c) any hyperlinks should provide a description of the site to which they link, and (d) PDFs should be fully accessible and able to be read by a screen reader. Furthermore, for formatting, they suggested providing text descriptions of graphics and images and choosing accessible fonts and colors that contrast sufficiently.

The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (n.d.) provides a series of guidelines for web designers to apply UDL principles to on-screen materials such as websites. These guidelines include using multiple modes to convey information, such as (a) labeling images, (b) ensuring meaning is not conveyed through color alone, (c) grouping information with headings and spacing, and (d) making sure that navigation is consistent and easy to follow.

Based on these general principles of UDL, the rest of the literature review has been divided into the following sections: design for on-screen accessibility, design for cognitive impairments and neurodiversity, and design for language learners.

Best Practices in Accessible Document and Slide Design

The following sections summarize the literature on best practices for supporting learners' access to digital media. The first section, design for visual accessibility, details the literature on screen reader accessibility and color accessibility. This is followed by design for neurodiversity, which illustrates the important considerations to make when designing materials for users with dyslexia, autism, and/or ADHD. The final section, design for language learners, gives suggestions for addressing the needs of foreign language learners.

Design for Visual Accessibility

A study that reviewed over 30 on-screen learning sources for learners found that on-screen reading of texts longer than 1,200 words can be physically and cognitively demanding, depending on the design and navigational ease of the material. The study concluded that materials should be designed to reduce cognitive load (Nichols, 2016). The use of on-screen materials contributes to eyestrain, so digital materials should be designed to reduce this risk as much as possible. Accordingly, they should be made with attractive, functional layouts when printed for learners who may prefer or require printed versions (Johnston & Salaz, 2019). Several studies have examined the effects of font types and sizes for improving on-screen accessibility; findings indicate that fonts designed for screens, larger font sizes and sans serif fonts

can reduce the mental load on computer users and increase readability for the visually impaired (Ali et al., 2013; Banerjee et al., 2011; Beveratou, 2016).

Screen Reader Accessibility

On-screen materials should be designed to accommodate the use of screen readers. Since scans or images, for example, are not readable, PDFs and other document types that contain them can be converted for compatibility using an optical character recognition (OCR) tool or they should include text descriptions of images to make them readable (Arzola, 2016; Brauner, 2024).

Screen reader accessibility guidelines also recommend avoiding the use of tables unless necessary, since tables make it difficult for screen readers to accurately convey information to the user. When tables are used, their structure should meaningfully represent the relationships in the data; a table should utilize a simple, clean design and use clearly labeled columns and rows (University of Colorado, 2016; University of Minnesota, 2025). Cells that do not contain information should be labeled as “N/A” or “none” to avoid confusion (University of Minnesota, 2025).

Color Accessibility

Colors and color palettes should be chosen with visual accessibility in mind. Information should not be conveyed via color alone; for example, information that is color-coded could also include numbers, shapes, or some other indicator to aid users with color-related vision impairments. When colors are used, the color scheme should be easily identifiable and the colors should be described in the text (Ichihara et al., 2008; Ito & Okabe, 2008; Ryan, 2023). Online tools are available to test accessibility of color palettes, or pre-existing palettes specifically designed for color accessibility can be used (Tigwell et al., 2017). The contrast between background and text should also be considered to maximize readability; lighter backgrounds such as white or light yellow with a dark font color, such as black, are best (W3C, n.d.; Zorko et al., 2017).

Design for Neurodiversity

Materials for neurodivergent users should focus on layout and established visual hierarchy (Stan, 2022). Text should use simple language and familiar terms; larger blocks of text should be broken into smaller sections with clear headings and use bulleted or numbered lists where appropriate to do so (Lupton, 2024). Images with image descriptions should be included to support the text. Icons and spacing should be used to create familiar patterns and visual hierarchy that is easy for users to understand (Stan, 2022).

Design for Dyslexia

Studies on fonts for readers with dyslexia have concluded that sans serif fonts with larger text sizes are best (Kuster et al., 2018; Maceri, 2003; Rello & Baeza-Yates, 2016). The length of each line of text on the document should be kept short (Schneps et al., 2013) and should not be justified or hyphenated (Brandão & Paulo, 2020).

Information should be laid out in chunks with a clear hierarchy, simplified design, and limited visual distractions (Maceri, 2003). Italics are difficult for people with dyslexia to read and should be avoided (Rello & Baeza-Yates, 2016).

Design for Autism

Documents should be designed with simple, clear layouts and include meaningful visual stimuli that minimize distractions (Lian et al., 2023). For example, Walsh and Barry (2008) recommended using plain white or light pastel backgrounds for documents. Bright colors should also be avoided, but users should be able to customize color choices to suit their needs. In general, minimalistic designs free of clutter and distracting animations are best.

Guidelines for improving document readability for people with autism recommend including images and icons to help support the ideas in the text. These images should be grouped as closely as possible to the text to which they relate and should have a direct connection. Images that are too abstract or do not directly relate to the text should be avoided, as they cause confusion and distract the reader (Yaneva et al., 2015).

Design for ADHD

In a similar fashion to documents designed for users with autism, documents intended for users with ADHD should minimize distraction as much as possible. Layouts should be structured, simple, and easy to read; the use of clear, large fonts is again suggested (McKnight, 2010). Information should be organized by using headings, bulleted or numbered lists, and have key information bolded or highlighted (Kusumasari et al., 2018). Instructions should be clear and concise and use simple language, with tasks broken down into manageable steps (Kusumasari et al., 2018; McKnight, 2010). It is also recommended that materials be offered via multiple modes for users with ADHD, for example, in both audio and visual forms that can be used in tandem (Kaldonek-Crnjakovic, 2021; Kusumasari et al., 2018).

Design for Language Learners

Research on design of language learning materials suggests that certain design elements can decrease the cognitive load for students and increase motivation. Aesthetically pleasing, easily accessible materials can positively impact affective and cognitive filters, directly affecting interest, self-confidence, and value for the learner (Mishan & Timmis, 2015).

Large assignments should be broken down into smaller parts to promote comprehension and work completion (Parker & Kamps, 2011), and activities should be clearly separated through the use of visuals and icons (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). Cohesive devices such as headings and subheadings, bold, numbering, paragraphs, and bullet points should be used to break down the text and ensure instructions are clear (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017).

For language instruction, explicit directions and procedures can provide students with the tools, guidelines, and support to complete tasks and assignments (Franzone, 2009). The University of Bristol (2017) suggested that to make texts as language supportive as possible, texts and sentences should be kept short, and unnecessary academic vocabulary and grammatically over-complex sentence structures should be limited. When new or difficult vocabulary is introduced, it should be either explained or have an accompanying visual; key terms should likewise be illustrated with visuals and should be repeated (University of Bristol, 2017).

DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Presently, the creation of classroom materials is a shared responsibility among all teachers in our institution. This has made it more feasible to create, update, and maintain a large number of materials in a reasonable time frame. However, the dissemination of classroom materials development among numerous teachers and coordinators has made the content, style, and design of materials largely inconsistent.

Our task group, after considering input from new teachers, and feedback from veteran teachers, felt that these inconsistencies could make the materials visually, cognitively, or otherwise difficult to access for students, especially those who have specific learning needs. Thus, the need to standardize the way materials were designed and establish style guidelines became evident. In response to this need, our task group carried out a multi-step process to establish guidelines for better materials production.

The primary goals of this process were to provide templates, create new materials development guidelines, and adapt existing materials to be more accessible. This involved five steps: (1) identifying cognitive and visual challenges in existing materials, (2) discussing ideas and building consensus among team members, (3) establishing formal guidelines for materials development, (4) creating templates and materials, and (5) establishing visual and instructional consistency across materials. These are described in more detail below.

Step 1: Identifying Cognitive and Visual Challenges in Existing Materials

Task group members met to examine the challenges that students may experience when using classroom materials. These included visual challenges such as color blindness and other visual impairments, cognitive load issues such as textual density and wordiness, and neurological issues related to disorders such as dyslexia, ADHD, ASD, in addition to neurodivergence related challenges.

Step 2: Discussing Ideas and Building Consensus Among Team Members

After identifying challenges, task group members discussed which challenges to research and explored the relevant literature. Smaller groups were then designated a specific classroom material type, documents or slides, to research further and to begin creating cohesive guidelines.

Step 3: Establishing Formal Guidelines for Materials Development

Following the comprehensive research process, members reconvened to create a system of research-based rules and parameters for classroom material design. These guidelines established parameters for font style and size, color palette usage, icons for task recognition, line spacing, bullets and numbering, and number of words per line of text (see Appendix A for a sample). By clearly establishing guidelines for documents and slides, a system was implemented that would allow creation of consistent materials that would be more accessible for students.

Step 4: Creating Templates and Materials

To provide a streamlined process for teachers to create materials, the task group members developed templates for both Google Docs (see Appendix B) and Google Slides (see Appendix C). These templates were designed with pre-set design features for easy and immediate use. We decided to produce pre-set templates, as it would allow teachers to begin creating materials without having to manually adjust the settings for each new material, which would save them time and effort.

Step 5: Establishing Visual and Instructional Consistency Across Materials

After establishing guidelines and creating templates, the final step was to apply the guidelines to the existing learning materials to be in line with the UDL guidelines.

This material development task is still being carried out by some of the initial task members, along with additional team members who have since joined them. The templates were also shared with all teachers so that they could use them when making new course materials. By producing/updating materials using the new guidelines, the ELI's shared materials are becoming not only more consistent but also more accessible for all students.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring that universally accessible documents are available to students is imperative for an inclusive learning environment that better supports students of all

abilities. By considering diverse needs in educational materials, universities can remove barriers to learning and foster equal opportunities for success. Many educators may feel worried about the time needed to dedicate to redesigning educational materials to be more inclusive. In fact, when the task development group started to redesign the materials (documents and slides) based on the guidelines, many in the group were surprised by how long adapting the materials took. However, once this task commenced, modified materials became easier and faster to complete with each subsequent document. Having UDL guidelines for educators to follow when adjusting materials to fit the needs of students, along with practice, makes the process more manageable. Therefore, we recommend allowing larger chunks of time when adapting materials, and to remember that the process does become more easily accomplished with experience.

Incorporating UDL not only benefits students by accommodating their individual needs but also enriches the academic community as a whole by promoting diversity and understanding. Ultimately, prioritizing accessible design is a crucial step toward achieving equity, empowering every student to reach their full potential.

Future Directions

In applying UDL to educational materials, future research should focus on comprehensive user testing to better understand the diverse needs of students. Thus, student involvement in either piloting or reviewing materials redesigned according to UDL would be the next step to consider. Additionally, targeted teacher training programs should be developed to address the skills and awareness needed to implement accessible practices consistently, while also acquiring feedback from teachers on their perspectives on incorporating UDL to the material design of educational materials used in their own classes. Finally, tracking student performance and engagement can provide data necessary to refine designs and measure student learning outcomes. Furthermore, applying UDL to materials does not only benefit EFL classrooms. By scaling and adapting this application to other contexts, it is possible to broaden the reach of accessibility and foster inclusive learning environments across diverse settings beyond higher education.

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APPENDIX A

Guidelines

Title: 27 Point Bold, Color Option (dark 1,2, or 3), Center Alignment

Heading 1: 23 Point, Bold, Title Case

Heading 2: 19 Point, Only first letter capitalized

Heading 3: 16 Point, First letter capitalized, sometimes bold (never if more than one line)

Body text: 13 point, normal.

This is body text. **This can be made bold for instructions or questions**, but whole paragraphs of text should never be completely bold. Do not use underlining. If you highlight text, only use colors from the Google Palette that are from the lightest row (light xxxx 3).

Line spacing is custom: 1.2 with a space after at 5pt.

📖 Samples of text types (Heading 2)

1. Activity Sample

This is an example of instructions for the activity in a list format.

- Use the imperative. Keep your instructions brief (**15 words or less**), but if they do go over multiple lines, add bullet points and "add space after list item" (a space after at 5pt), grouping the items of the list together.

1. Question sample
   a. Multiple choice/matching options sample

Bullets Sample

This is an example of instructions for the activity in a bulleted list format.

- Start here. Remember to keep your instructions brief (**15 words or less**), but if they do go over multiple lines, "add space after list item" (a space after at 5pt), grouping the items of the list together.
- Then do this

APPENDIX B

Sample Document

Text, Subtext and Context

360° Visual Media

Warm-up

What did we learn about text, subtext and context in visual media? Please try to summarize. Talk with a partner or partners in English. Take notes; no need to write in full sentences.

Text	
Subtext	
Context	

Activity

1. **Text:** Looking at the chorus, what direct, surface meanings are you getting from the lyrics? Talk with your partner or partners.

2. **Subtext:** Looking at the chorus, what indirect, deeper meanings are you getting from the highlighted lyrics?

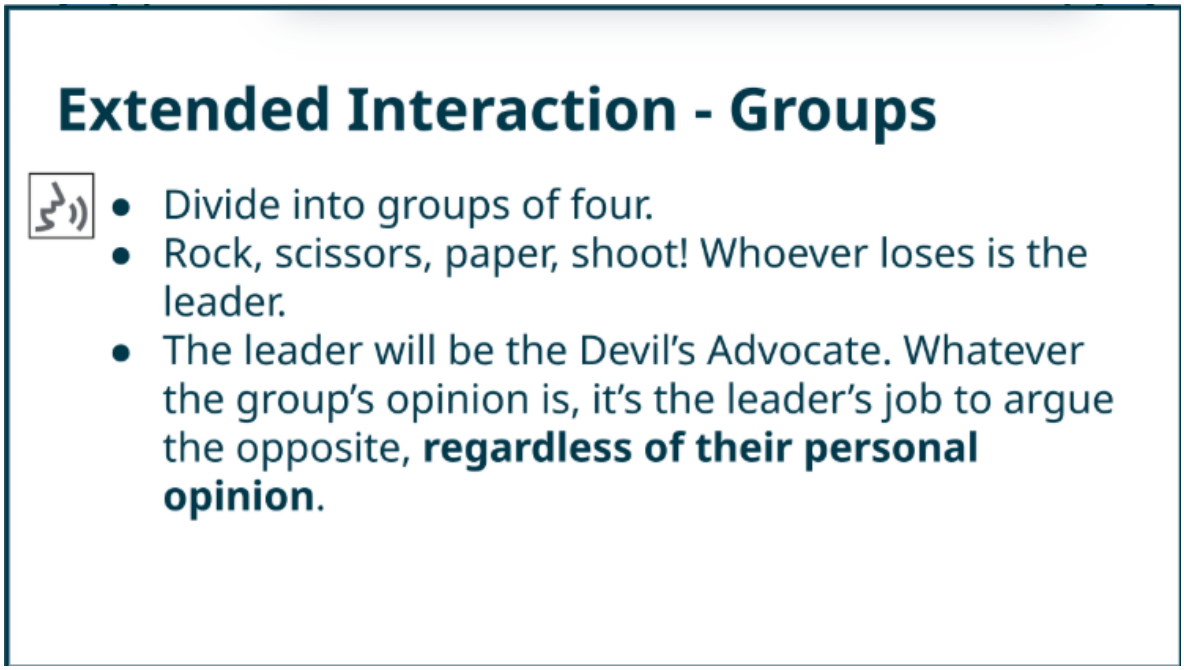
Project

You will create a short presentation with visual aids that analyzes the text, subtext, and context of a piece of media.

- To demonstrate your understanding of the basic vocabulary of media literacy.
- To show your research and critical thinking skills through analysis of the text, subtext, and context of a piece of media.
- To review and practice your presentation skills.

APPENDIX C

Sample Slide



Enhancing Intercultural Competence Through Okinawan Literature: A CLIL Approach

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In this paper, intended for practitioners, the author introduces an approach to teaching Okinawan literature to Japanese university language majors and foreign exchange students. The aim is to promote intercultural competence (IC) through the combined use of Hoff's intercultural reader (IR) framework and content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Although several approaches to fostering IC exist in the Japanese context, such as international exchange and collaborative online international learning (COIL), the approach outlined here is distinct. It seeks to decolonize the curriculum of culture-based content courses by incorporating minority literature within a structured, dual-framework design. This paper begins by introducing the rationale for the approach, then describes the teaching context, explains the rationale for the selected frameworks, presents the materials and tasks used, discusses the assessment methods, and concludes with implications for practice and future research.

INTRODUCTION

As Japanese universities respond to the demands of globalization, the development of intercultural competence (IC) has emerged as a core objective within higher education, particularly in language and culture-based programs. IC broadly refers to the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for effective and appropriate interaction across cultural boundaries. In support of this goal, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology has launched initiatives such as the Top Global University Project, the Global 30 Project, and the Inter-University Exchange Project (Support for Internationalization of Universities, n.d.), which aim to foster globally competent individuals (global *jinzai*). In response, many institutions have begun embedding IC into their curriculum, especially within English-medium instruction (EMI) and international exchange programs.

While international exchange and collaborative online international learning (COIL) are commonly used to foster IC, these approaches often rely on institutional partnerships or external resources. This paper (based on a poster presented at the 2025 Korea TESOL International Conference) introduces a classroom-based alternative that draws on Japan's internal cultural diversity to promote IC through literature. The approach combines Hoff's (2016) intercultural reader (IR) framework with content and language integrated learning (CLIL; Coyle et al., 2010), providing

both linguistic and cultural learning outcomes. The CLIL model is particularly effective in classes that include exchange students, as it facilitates the use of English as a lingua franca and encourages inclusive, content-driven communication.

Additionally, this approach is especially relevant in the context of English-medium instruction (EMI) at Japanese universities, where there may be a tendency for more traditional and well-known Japanese culture to be taught (Groff, 2020). EMI programs may risk promoting cultural essentialization, thereby limiting students' understanding of multicultural realities within Japan. Efron's (2020) discourse analysis of Japanese EFL materials reveals that when Japanese culture is taught in English, it often centers a dominant monocultural identity and excludes minority voices. Such portrayals perpetuate the notion of Japan as culturally homogeneous, a view that has been critiqued for decades (Weiner, 1996).

To counter this, the approach introduced in this paper centers on Okinawan literature in English translation. The selected texts were chosen because they are culturally dense, emotionally impactful, historically charged, and include portrayals of intercultural interaction between Okinawans, mainland Japanese, and Americans. By highlighting Okinawa's distinct historical and cultural identity, the course challenges monolithic representations of Japan and provides a decolonial, critically engaged entry point for exploring Japanese culture in English. Task and assessment design is informed by Rodríguez and Puyal's (2012) study on promoting IC through literature in CLIL contexts, while Hoff's IR framework positions literature as a site of intercultural dialogue (Hoff, 2016).

The following sections describe the teaching context, explain the rationale for combining CLIL and the IR model, outline the sequence of tasks and assessment tools, and conclude with implications for teaching practice and future research.

Course and Learner Context

The teaching approach outlined in this paper was implemented during Weeks 8, 9, and 10 of a fifteen-week elective undergraduate course at a Japanese prefectural university. The course was designed to promote intercultural competence (IC) through the study of Okinawan culture, language, and literature. It was open to second-year students majoring in foreign languages and to overseas exchange students, resulting in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom. English was the medium of instruction, and students' proficiency levels ranged from CEFR B2 upward, allowing for meaningful engagement with literary texts in translation and active participation in class discussion.

The overall course structure was divided into three phases. Weeks 1 to 5 introduced foundational concepts, including culture, identity, intercultural communication, and cultural diversity in Japan. Weeks 6 to 10 examined Okinawa as a case study, focusing on its history, identity, language, and literature. Weeks 11 to 15 guided students through a poster presentation project as a capstone assessment.

The three-week sequence described in this paper took place in the final part of the Okinawa case study phase. The focus during this period was on integrating pre-reading cultural preparation, guided literary analysis, and post-reading reflection. These lessons were designed to support the development of IC by combining a content-rich cultural lens with structured language learning. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are discussed in the next section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The pedagogical approach implemented in this course draws on two complementary frameworks: content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and Hoff's (2016) intercultural reader (IR) model. Together, these models support both the integration of subject content and language development, and the systematic cultivation of intercultural competence (IC) through engagement with literature. The following subsections explain each framework and how they were applied in the context of the three-week teaching sequence.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL is an instructional approach that integrates content learning and language development and is particularly suited to English-medium instruction in multicultural classrooms. The version of CLIL used in this project is based on Coyle et al.'s (2010) 4Cs framework, which includes four interdependent components: content, communication, cognition, and culture. A fifth component, context, encompasses and connects all four, reflecting the real-world setting in which learning occurs.

In this course, each of the 4Cs was purposefully incorporated into the task design. Content referred to Okinawan cultural topics, such as burial practices, ancestor worship, and intergenerational differences in beliefs. Communication was developed through guided discussions, text analysis, and reflective activities conducted in English. Cognition was addressed through higher-order thinking tasks, such as metaphor and simile analysis, narrative interpretation, and cross-cultural comparison. Culture was emphasized through exploration of Okinawan perspectives and their comparison with students' own cultural backgrounds. The surrounding context, a multilingual, multicultural classroom, supported the use of English as a lingua franca and provided authentic opportunities for intercultural exchange.

The CLIL model also aligns with broader educational goals identified by Coyle et al. (2010), including improving students' academic performance in both content and language subjects, enhancing proficiency in both their mother tongue and the target language, developing intercultural understanding, and strengthening social and cognitive skills. These aims correspond directly to the goals of the course and informed the design of the three-week sequence.

The Intercultural Reader Framework

The Intercultural Reader (IR) model developed by Hoff (2016) expands on Byram's (1997) model of the intercultural speaker by shifting the focus from direct interpersonal interaction to mediated intercultural communication through literary texts. Hoff positions the act of reading as a form of intercultural dialogue in which students engage with the cultural complexities embedded in texts and reflect on their own perspectives in the process.

The IR framework promotes deep, reflective, and analytical engagement with literature. It emphasizes emotional and intellectual responses to narrative conflict and ambiguity, encourages readers to consider perspectives beyond their own, and supports the development of critical and creative thinking. Unlike Byram's intercultural speaker, who operates primarily through direct interaction, the intercultural reader engages in multilayered communication with narrators, characters, authors, other readers, and other texts. This orientation makes the model particularly well suited to EFL and EMI contexts where intercultural experiences are often mediated through texts rather than lived encounters.

Hoff's model is structured around three progressive levels of communication. The first level, engagement with voices within the text, involves responding emotionally and analytically to the narrative, characters, and authorial voice. The second level, consideration of other readers' perspectives, encourages students to imagine how individuals from other cultural or historical backgrounds might interpret the text differently, often facilitated through classroom dialogue. The third level, juxtaposition with other texts, asks students to compare the focal text with others across genres, time periods, or cultural contexts, fostering intertextual and intercultural awareness.

In this course, the CLIL and IR frameworks were used in combination to support the integration of language development, cultural content, and intercultural reflection. CLIL provided a structure for balancing content and language objectives within a multilingual classroom, while the IR model offered a clear pathway for engaging with translated literature as a site of intercultural communication. Together, these frameworks informed the design of the three-week teaching sequence described in the next section.

TASKS, ACTIVITIES, AND ASSESSMENT

This section outlines the sequence of pre-reading, main reading, and post-reading tasks implemented over three weeks to support the development of intercultural competence through literature. It also details the assessment tools used to evaluate students' engagement with both the literary content and intercultural learning objectives. The materials and activities were designed to integrate the 4Cs of CLIL (Coyle et al., 2010) with Hoff's (2016) intercultural reader framework. In addition,

the overall design drew on the pedagogical model proposed by Rodríguez and Puyal (2012), which advocates for a structured sequence of pre-, main-, and post-reading tasks to scaffold intercultural reflection in literature-based CLIL contexts.

Week 8: Pre-Reading Tasks

The pre-reading phase was introduced in class and completed as homework. It aimed to build background knowledge of the historical and cultural context surrounding turtleback tombs, a distinctive burial practice in the Ryūkyū Islands. Students read a short informational text on the topic and completed a timeline activity comparing burial practices in different cultures. A gap-fill task was also assigned to summarize the plot of "Turtleback Tombs," the main reading text for the following week. These tasks addressed the content and cognition elements of the CLIL framework and supported engagement with cultural context before approaching the main text.

Week 9: Main Reading Tasks

In the main reading phase, students engaged with an extract from "Turtleback Tombs" by Tatsuhiro Oshiro (originally published in Japanese in 1966 and translated into English in Molasky & Rabson, 2000). This lesson was conducted in class and focused on the first two levels of Hoff's (2016) intercultural reader model:

- **Level 1** (Engagement with voices within the text): Students analyzed figurative language (e.g., similes and metaphors), examined character motivations, and explored how cultural beliefs shaped behavior and narrative development.
- **Level 2** (Consideration of other readers' perspectives): Students reflected on how different cultural backgrounds might influence interpretation of the story. They discussed the text in groups to compare interpretations and reactions.

Language support was provided through a vocabulary glossary and guiding questions to scaffold analysis. This phase fostered communication and critical reflection, while developing higher-order thinking skills and cultural understanding aligned with the CLIL and IR models.

Week 10: Post-Reading Tasks

The final phase focused on Hoff's (2016) third level of intercultural communication: juxtaposition with other texts. Students compared the main text with an extract from "About My Mother" by Susumu Higa (originally serialized in Japanese between 1992–1997 and published in English in Higa & Allen, 2023). Through guided class discussions and follow-up reflective activities, students examined

- how language, themes, and cultural attitudes differed or overlapped between the two texts,
- how Okinawan identity was portrayed through different genres (literary fiction and manga), and
- how narrative techniques influenced cultural representation and reader engagement.

This phase deepened students' ability to think intertextually and interculturally, culminating in reflective writing based on the discussion.

Assessment

Assessment in this teaching sequence was designed to evaluate students' engagement with both the literary content and the intercultural learning objectives outlined in the CLIL and intercultural reader frameworks. A combination of formative and summative tools was used to assess student performance, focusing on critical engagement with texts, use of language, and depth of intercultural reflection.

The primary assessment tasks consisted of a post-reading discussion activity and a reflective worksheet. These tools evaluated the level of student engagement with Hoff's (2016) three levels of intercultural communication through literature. In particular, students were assessed on their ability to

1. respond emotionally and analytically to the voices within the texts (Level 1),
2. consider the perspectives of other readers from diverse backgrounds (Level 2), and
3. compare and interpret intertextual connections between the two works studied (Level 3).

Classroom observation during the post-reading discussion allowed for formative assessment of students' oral contributions and collaboration. Meanwhile, the reflective worksheet, completed individually after the discussion, provided evidence of each student's analytical thinking, intercultural insight, and engagement with the texts.

Students' written and spoken responses were also evaluated for correct use of key vocabulary and literary concepts, such as figurative language, metaphor, and simile, introduced during the main reading task. To further assess intercultural development, a short questionnaire adapted from Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) was administered. This instrument provided insights into students' perceptions of the texts, the cultural content, and their own learning experiences.

Together, these assessment methods offered a holistic view of students' linguistic, literary, and intercultural growth and aligned with the overarching goals of the course.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of this approach, blending content and language integrated learning (CLIL) with Hoff's intercultural reader (IR) framework, demonstrated clear potential to systematically promote intercultural competence (IC) through literature in English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts. Several pedagogical implications emerge that may inform future practice in similarly diverse educational settings.

First, the use of a pre-, main-, and post-reading task structure, aligned with the 4Cs of CLIL and the three communicative levels of the IR model, offers a clear, replicable pedagogic sequence. Teachers working in multilingual or multicultural classrooms can adopt this model to scaffold complex cultural and linguistic content while encouraging deep engagement with literary texts.

Second, the emphasis on figurative language, particularly simile, metaphor, and culturally embedded narrative devices proved effective in enhancing both text appreciation and higher-order cognitive skills. Through explicit instruction, glossaries, and contextual usage, students gained both linguistic accuracy and cultural insight, demonstrating the value of vocabulary support tailored to literary interpretation.

Third, the choice to center literature from an underrepresented minority group (Okinawans) in Japan challenged dominant cultural narratives and encouraged reflection on internal diversity. Comparative and intertextual analysis between "Turtleback Tombs" and "About My Mother" allowed students to explore multiple perspectives and deepen their understanding of cultural complexity. This suggests that similar frameworks could be applied to other marginalized literatures, such as Pacific Islander works in the Hawaii-American context or Ainu narratives in Japan.

Additionally, the structure supported active reflection and personal connection through the IR framework's progression, from engaging with characters, to imagining diverse reader perspectives, to connecting across texts. These activities encouraged empathetic and critical responses, supporting IC development beyond superficial cultural knowledge.

Finally, future directions for this line of teaching include empirical research to evaluate the efficacy of this approach. While qualitative evidence from classroom observation and student responses was promising, systematic studies involving pre- and post-assessment of intercultural competence would offer deeper insight into student development and pedagogical impact.

This project highlights the value of using translated minority literature in a structured, theory-informed way to promote intercultural learning. It invites further experimentation, adaptation, and research across diverse teaching contexts, particularly within EMI and CLIL-based curricula that seek to go beyond essentialist representations of culture.

THE AUTHOR

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From Prompt to Presentation: Streamlining Educational Materials

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This paper presents a practical framework for using generative AI, specifically ChatGPT, to rapidly develop engaging, context-appropriate, and reusable teaching materials. The approach integrates prompt engineering with existing Microsoft Office tools to produce slide presentations, readings, quizzes, and comprehension activities in a fraction of the time traditionally required. Grounded in constructivist pedagogy and supported by emerging research on AI in education, this method offers educators – particularly those in under-resourced or linguistically diverse contexts – a powerful means of augmenting instruction while maintaining pedagogical integrity.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into education is rapidly transforming how teachers design, deliver, and adapt learning materials. With the emergence of large language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, educators now have access to real-time generative tools capable of producing teaching content at scale. While much recent scholarship has examined the ethical and epistemological implications of AI in education (Holmes et al., 2019; Selwyn, 2019), less attention has been paid to the practical workflows educators might adopt to incorporate these tools into everyday instructional design.

This paper outlines a flexible, repeatable method for using ChatGPT to generate classroom-ready PowerPoint presentations, reading passages, and associated comprehension activities. It is particularly suited to instructors working in English as a foreign language (EFL) and other content-limited environments where access to professionally designed materials may be limited. By combining prompt specificity with conventional office tools such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, educators can streamline content creation, personalize instruction for learner needs, and maintain consistency across courses and semesters.

INTEGRATING CHATGPT INTO INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN: A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

A central premise of this approach is that effective AI integration depends on the quality of user input, commonly referred to as "prompt engineering." Recent research in AI-assisted education emphasizes the importance of clear, contextually rich instructions for generating useful output (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Educators adopting this model begin by framing their instructional goals through highly specific prompts that outline the teaching context, learner profile, desired language level, and output structure. This specificity allows ChatGPT to generate more relevant, accurate, and pedagogically sound materials, in line with the ideas of differentiated instruction practices (Tomlinson, 2014).

For example, an EFL instructor teaching low-intermediate learners might prompt the model to generate an eight-slide presentation on climate change using only vocabulary from the New General Service List (NGSL 2,000). The same prompt might also request each slide to include five bullet points and a bolded summary line, reflecting a structured presentation style appropriate for language learners. By embedding clarity and detail into the prompt, the teacher ensures alignment between the generated content and student learning objectives.

Once the content has been created in ChatGPT, it can be formatted in Microsoft Word using heading styles to distinguish between slide titles and content. This practice leverages existing Word-to-PowerPoint conversion tools and exemplifies how educators can blend AI with familiar digital workflows (Holmes et al., 2019). This process not only reinforces digital literacy among teachers but also democratizes access to advanced educational content design, making it feasible even for instructors without graphic design or instructional technology training.

Importantly, this method extends beyond slide creation to encompass the generation of reading passages, quizzes, and comprehension questions. Teachers may instruct ChatGPT to generate readings based on a particular topic, audience, and vocabulary range, followed by comprehension tasks that emphasize main ideas, vocabulary in context, or inferencing. In doing so, educators uphold principles of scaffolding and formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009), while maintaining control over content complexity and tone.

These materials can then be downloaded, edited, and imported into learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle. Once uploaded, they become "evergreen" assets – customizable, repeatable resources that retain relevance across courses and semesters. This aligns with broader goals of reusability and modular design in digital pedagogy (Weller, 2020). Moreover, teachers may progressively build entire units, course modules, or full-semester syllabi using these same prompting techniques, effectively scaling their material development over time.

From a theoretical perspective, this workflow reflects the principles of constructivist learning theory, which holds that learners build understanding through interaction with content and context (Fosnot, 2013). By using ChatGPT to create

adaptable, student-centered materials, educators are able to respond more effectively to learner variability. This approach also supports universal design for learning (UDL) frameworks by enabling flexible representation of content and differentiated paths to engagement (Meyer et al., 2014).

Rather than replacing the educator, AI in this model functions as a cognitive partner – supporting creativity, reducing repetitive tasks, and allowing instructors to devote more time to facilitation, feedback, and student interaction. As Popenici and Kerr (2017) argued, such augmentation models offer a more realistic and ethical approach to AI integration in education, one in which human pedagogy remains at the center of technological innovation.

AI and the Evolution of Instructional Design

The broader integration of AI into instructional design must be understood in the context of how educational technologies have historically evolved. Where early digital tools offered static content or learning management system (LMS) delivery platforms, current AI models enable dynamic, dialogic interaction with content generators. This shift aligns with the move toward open educational practices, where learners and educators alike contribute to the design and evolution of materials (Weller, 2020). Generative AI stands at the forefront of this transition, offering not only content creation but also iterative collaboration, personalization, and responsiveness. Within this paradigm, the teacher's role transitions from content deliverer to learning experience designer – one who curates, modifies, and moderates AI-generated inputs.

The flexibility of ChatGPT and similar tools provides an opportunity to integrate AI into content delivery as well as reflective pedagogical processes. Teachers can engage in a form of rapid prototyping – generating lesson variants, comparing approaches, and adapting material in real time. This process fosters teacher agency, as it allows practitioners to test instructional decisions in a low-risk environment while maintaining alignment with curriculum goals and learner profiles.

Implications for Teacher Professional Development

The implementation of AI in the classroom is not only a question of access and design, but also one of professional identity and teacher training. As Selwyn (2019) and Holmes et al. (2019) pointed out, educators often experience uncertainty or resistance when asked to incorporate technologies they perceive as opaque or overly technical. To mitigate these concerns, professional development should include concrete, hands-on activities that demystify AI use and emphasize educator control. For instance, prompt-writing workshops can demonstrate how nuanced phrasing yields pedagogically valuable outputs. Likewise, peer sharing of successful prompts and use cases can help develop a collective knowledge base among staff.

Furthermore, institutional policies and curriculum standards must evolve to support AI-enhanced workflows. This includes offering guidelines on ethical AI use,

promoting transparency in content development, and ensuring that the use of generative tools aligns with academic integrity. As Popenici and Kerr (2017) emphasized, the productive use of AI requires a pedagogical lens – one that reinforces human judgment and values while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of technological agents.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined a practical, research-informed approach to using ChatGPT for efficient and pedagogically sound lesson material development. By combining prompt specificity with Microsoft Office tools and constructivist principles, educators can generate slide presentations, readings, and assessments that are responsive to learner needs, contextually relevant, and reusable across time and platforms. The method holds particular promise for under-resourced teaching contexts and for educators who may lack formal training in instructional design or educational technology.

Importantly, this model reinforces, rather than replaces, the teacher's role. ChatGPT becomes a co-author in lesson development by speeding up production without sacrificing quality. As generative AI continues to evolve, equipping educators with the knowledge and tools to harness its capabilities will be critical. The approach presented here offers a three-pronged pathway toward that goal: grounded in practice, informed by research, and driven by the enduring values of effective teaching and learning.

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Adding R and R to Your Classes: Recording and Reflection

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The value of self-observation has long been established in ELT (Farrell, 2015; Richards, 1996) and in education more broadly (Tripp, 2010). This article will detail the author's experience in engaging in sustained self-observation between June 2024 and June 2025. The rationale for engaging in self-observation is provided. A non-exhaustive description of benefits follows. The author illustrates his typical procedures for engaging in self-observation coupled with immediate reflection related to a single lesson. The article concludes with key caveats intended to help interested readers optimize the potential of this beneficial practice.

INTRODUCTION

Self-observation has many advocates (Tripp, 2010). It provides feedback that is both credible and contains "irrefutable evidence" (Brinko, 1993, p. 579). This article describes my experience engaging in consistent self-observation from June 2024 until June 2025, lists a series of perceived benefits, and provides an illustration of engaging in self-observation focused on a single lesson. The article concludes with caveats and advice for implementing self-observation into one's professional practice.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

I have worked at the same foreign language high school since 2014 and have occupied the role of head teacher of native-speaking English teachers since 2015. My classes are 50 minutes long and have 11 to 13 students in each class. I teach the same exact lessons to ten different groups of learners. Thus, recording my lessons provided me with an excellent chance to make substantial revisions to my lessons and immediately reperform those lessons in, what I hoped were, a more effective manner.

The decision to engage in more sustained forms of self-reflection was initially a capricious one. I had previously engaged in self-observation periodically. The most sustained form was in 2016 (Miller, 2016). Self-observation was useful at that time. However, I decided not to sustain the practice. I did occasionally return to the practice

but not in any systematic way. However, in 2024, I intensely felt the value of engaging in self-observation, and this quickly became a staple of my professional development.

Starting on June 5, 2024, I began to audio-record my lessons. During subsequent listening to the audio, I would make modifications to my materials or manually note things I would like to change about my instructional delivery, such as rate of speaking. I stayed with audio-recording until I switched to video-recording on November 22, 2024. I now exclusively record videos for purposes of self-observation on a near weekly basis. Starting on September 1, 2024, in part due to peer encouragement to share my experience of engaging in self-observation in forums such as Korea TESOL chapter events, I began taking detailed notes following self-observation. The notes were dedicated to documenting perceived issues and listing of potential strategies to mollify those concerns.

PROFESSIONAL AND AFFECTIVE BENEFITS

I have detailed elsewhere more thoroughly my experience of engaging in self-observation as it concerns in-class delivery of instruction (Miller, 2025). Due to space constraints, this article considers the benefits for teachers professionally and affectively. After that, it discusses the affordances self-observation provides for awareness of learner behaviors during class time.

Professional Benefits

Engaging in sustained self-observation is a form of reflective practice. The value of reflection for nearly all professional activity has been well-established (Bolton, 2018). Self-observation is essentially reflection via stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2016). Thus, it is arguably a superior form of reflection compared to reflective strategies that rely primarily on memory, such as reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Furthermore, self-observation is done in a manner that is removed from the actual performance of teaching. Thus, ideally more working memory is available to concentrate during self-observation compared to actual teaching performance. Hence, there is a legitimate argument to be made that self-observation has superior features compared to reflection-in-action.

One may object that there are affective downsides to this. It may be seen as tedious. It can be time-consuming. Personally, my self-observations of 50-minute lessons coupled with reflections and modification of materials occupied about two hours of a typical work week. That is a drawback. However, there is a positive aspect to this investment of time for self-observation as this quote from Donald Schön (1983) helps to illustrate:

> When practice is a repetitive administration of techniques to the same kinds of problems, the practitioner may look to leisure as a source of relief, or to early retirement; but when he functions as a researcher-in-practice, the practice itself is a

> source of renewal. The recognition of error, with its resulting uncertainty, can become a source of discovery rather than an occasion for self-defense. (p. 299)

Self-observation when done with the deliberate intention of modifying one's practice is a low-level (and easily accessible) form of research. It is a method to uncover many aspects of professional practice that will be difficult to gain awareness of through other means. As the aforementioned Schön quote alludes to, self-observation leads to discovery, which can engender a cycle of professional experimentation and, as Schön claims, "renewal." At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, self-observation may serve as an antidote to burnout.

Awareness of Learner Behaviors

I tend to try to limit, even minimize, direct instruction in my lessons. During one lesson in the second semester of 2024, rather than provide a gloss or directly explain topic-related vocabulary, I decided to have my learners infer the meaning of topic-related vocabulary via pictures and then get input from more advanced learners about the meaning of those vocabulary items. (Note: Roughly 10–20% of my students have had extensive experience living or studying in an English-prevalent environment.)

Listening in on audio-recorded student interaction made me more aware of the potential pitfalls of relying on peer scaffolding to assist with instruction. Prior to a listening text, I had students do a series of inductive activities focused on topic-related vocabulary. One lexical item was "second-class citizen." An advanced learner explained to the best of his ability what "second-class citizen" meant to a less proficient learner. The less proficient learner responded "like lower," to which the more proficient student responded "yes." Reflecting on that interaction, I was left wondering: Had the less proficient learner conflated the lexical items lower-class and second-class? Should I *always* supplement inductive activities with explicit vocabulary instruction to minimize misunderstandings? I started to recognize that I have a bias. I tend to want to nearly eliminate all forms of lecture in front of students, hence a preference, especially as it pertains to lexical instruction, for inductive activities, conducted primarily through peer-interaction. Nevertheless, without some form of concrete delivery of information (however condensed) or direct monitoring and intervention by myself in the role of a teacher, learner misunderstandings may flourish.

Reflections on a Single Lesson

To illustrate more concretely how self-observation can be implemented routinely, I will share details of how I performed and reflected following self-observation for a lesson audio-recorded on November 1, 2024.

I am encouraged by my supervisors to address "culture" (Western and American, I presume) in my lessons. Yet, I also have to balance the need to provide

interesting material. Deriving inspiration from Murphey (1992), as a team of teachers, we chose to have a unit on relatively famous songs that addressed larger social issues around the time the song was composed. The first lesson in the unit was the well-known Beatle's song *Revolution*. I used a simple "issues–solutions–comment" framework to make sense of my experience of the lesson both during and after engaging in the process of self-observation. Immediately after engaging in self-observation, I recorded through typewriting my reflections on the lesson. I focused on self-perceived issues, (potential) "solutions," and comments. In total, I noted 18 issues, some of which were relatively easy to address and to make visible by altering the instructional materials; other required behavioral shifts.

First, I will address a series of "teacher behavior" issues I noted. I *once* omitted an article while speaking to my students. I wondered if that was a form of subconscious "motherese" slipping in? Do I have implicit lowered expectations for my students? Regardless of my conscious or unconscious thought processes in the moment, I now feel it is unjustified to engage in that manner of simplified talk. Potentially learners could acquire inaccurate linguistic forms if exposed to such input frequently. The lesson included a short dictation activity. My impression of my recording was that I was using the citation form of the words in the dictation excessively. Upon reflection, I now feel I should have spoken more naturally, which would include reduced forms.

After engaging in self-observation and the reflection it often entails, I felt I was better able to enrich my materials and exploit already produced materials. During the November 1 lesson, my learners engaged in a series of very short readings to comprehend the background of the song. In the first reading, they needed to resequence the text into what would seem to be a logical order. In the first performance of this lesson (out of 10 total and which was the one that I audio recorded), after the task was done, I simply revealed the "correct" sequence to learners after they had attempted the task.

After engaging in self-observation, I felt I was rushing learners. In that first lesson, there were missed opportunities for learners to compare answers and justify their choices. In subsequent performances of that lesson, I used cold calling to ask learners to read (for instance) what sentence they had place as fifth in order. From there, I was able to ask learners to justify why they put that sentence in that position. This allows for a degree of higher-order thinking. Such follow-up questions help make learners' thought processes accessible to the teacher and hence allows for a degree of monitoring of learners' cognitive processing of the material.

In the final brief reading during this lesson, I alluded to the different viewpoints in left-wing politics in America in the late 1960s. The reading text seen by students had the well-known quote from the lyrics of *Revolution*: "If you going carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow." In my first performance of this lesson, I tried to convey verbally how shocking it was to "normal, average" Americans to see people in New York City walking around carrying a banner with Mao Zedong. I perceived many learners to have a puzzled look on their face while I verbally shared this short anecdote. While listening to the audio recording, it was obvious to me that the materials should have included an image of what I was trying

to convey. Subsequently I added an image to my PowerPoint presentation of people in New York City carrying a series of large pictures of “Chairman Mao.” When I showed that image in subsequent performances of this lesson, many learners let out a sigh or gasp of surprise. At that moment, I believed I had emotionally engaged (Theuma, 2017, p. 181) learners in a way that my exclusively verbal anecdote had failed to.

Though these details seem minor, especially in a conversational English class, it is important to remember that these shifts that I have attempted to explain are informed by principles and guidelines circulating in the educational literature. For example, in this “Chairman Mao” anecdote, my change in materials was informed by an awareness that we are a visual species. As Theuma (2017) stated, “70% of the sensory receptors in the body are found in the eye” (p. 181).

This process of modifying my materials illustrates what prior literature on reflection has alluded to. Meade et al. stated that “the process [of using video as a stimulant for reflection] helped make the teachers’ implicit theories about teaching explicit” (as cited in Tripp, 2010, p. 36). In the aforementioned anecdote, triggered by self-observation, I was able to consciously articulate my rationale for why I felt an image was suitable in that particular instructional sequence.

CAVEATS

I leaped back into self-observation in 2024 with a renewed enthusiasm. However, that enthusiasm may have caused me to overlook a few vital areas to attend to for more effective use of self-observation. For example, I did not explicitly articulate what my most prioritized teaching values were while engaging in self-observation in 2024. Now, I am more mindful of them when I engage in self-observation (see Miller, 2025 for a brief discussion on the need to articulate espoused values if one seeks to improve performance). Initially, I would seek areas for improvement or attempt to identify what I perceived as an issue in need of amelioration. I still attend to those concerns. However, I feel my perception is a little more refined. I am able to distinguish between what I call affective concerns (i.e., getting an emotional response from learners or making the lessons less “boring” for them), managerial concerns (i.e., making certain that task expectations – my instructions – are clear), and technical concerns. The final item is more closely attuned to issues focused on better practices related to ELT.

I will provide a brief illustration of what I mean by “technical concerns.” Recently (March 2025), in one of my classes, I consciously elected not to gloss a word, *ascent*, that was part of a story structure used to teach learners how to deliver a speech related to giving a person they admired a toast. My rationale was that learners would encounter the word multiple times. Thus, they would acquire it by the end of the unit regardless of any deliberate instruction on my part. I came to regret that decision. As revealed during the process of self-observation and reflection, several learners asked me what the word *ascent* meant, which primarily served as a distraction from my

lesson objectives. Additionally, several learners confused the word *ascent*, and mistakenly interpreted it as possessing the same meaning as *accent*. This even led to one learner getting laughed at by another learner because of their misunderstanding of the meaning of *ascent*. While the laughter was not malicious, it is fair to assume that getting laughed at was a source of a slight amount of embarrassment for the learner on the receiving end. All of the aforementioned deleterious consequences could have been avoided with a simple gloss. Self-observation and reflection heightened my awareness and sensitivity to these events.

Affective and managerial concerns are a fundamental part of quality instruction. Nevertheless, there is more. It is easy for a teacher to have their attention consumed by affective and managerial dimensions of practice. However, there are other equally rich areas to reflect upon and further explore. Teachers can either strive to strike a balance when they engage in self-observation between the three aforementioned areas of focus or make use of an evaluative checklist (Godínez Martínez, 2022, p. 91) to help ensure they stay focused more on what I refer to as technical concerns.

CONCLUSION

This article briefly addressed the benefits of engaging in sustained self-observation, and then attempted to illustrate how it can be implemented in a relatively easy-to-use and efficient fashion. Finally, I shared a few pieces of advice derived from personal experience to help interested readers optimize the benefits of self-observation coupled with reflection. Used well, self-observation may not only prevent burnout but also ignite professional growth.

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Vocabulary Acquisition Through Speculating and Paraphrasing Practices

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Increasing curiosity and connection to language when acquiring vocabulary requires the learner to resist the immediate gratification of instant translations or instructor supplied explanations. Applying this approach allows learners to experience delayed gratification in the form of greater learning outcomes. This paper outlines a classroom protocol for vocabulary acquisition that embraces the human side of learning, paraphrasing, and speculating, and was presented at KOTESOL 2025. Successful application of this approach creates a learning environment in which the discomfort of making "mistakes" in the short term are seen as an essential part of the learning process, ultimately leading to greater rewards in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

While advances in technology undoubtedly make tasks in our daily lives faster, easier, and more convenient, when it comes to language learning, it cannot be said that prioritizing speed and convenience always equates to better practice. As a species, comfort is undeniably important for our survival; however, the emphasis we place on ease and convenience in so many aspects of our lives also has detrimental effects on our development.

According to Michael Easter (2021), humans have become so accustomed to using technology to make life easier that. in any public place, when given the option of taking an escalator or climbing a flight of stairs, only two percent of the population will choose the more physically demanding option of the stairs. Knowledge of the inherent health benefits and importance of exercise has little influence on our decisions. Easter argued that choosing the easiest option has become second nature for us, and that only those with the "2% mindset" will opt for self-improvement through embracing challenge and adversity.

As famously demonstrated by the 1989 experiment, Delay of Gratification in Children (Mischel et al.), delayed gratification has its benefits. In this experiment, children who voluntarily resisted the temptation of upfront marshmallow treats in favor of delayed and greater rewards, even more marshmallows given at a later stage, developed into better academically and socially adjusted adolescents. Like our understanding of physical exercise, this knowledge has not prevented instant gratification from becoming the norm in everyday life.

Using technology and tools to assist learning is commonplace. While educators may benefit from the time saved and relieved of pressures from busy workloads, pandering to student preferences for fast-paced lessons and instant translations may do more harm than good. In a recent study analyzing the effects of using AI assistants in writing essays, researchers from MIT outlined the impact of varied degrees of reliance on technology on the learner (Kos'myna, 2025). These experiments demonstrated that overreliance on technology when performing study tasks leads to a disconnection between the learner and the work produced due to a lack of perceived ownership. This indicates that this lack of ownership will also lead to the learner experiencing difficulty focusing on personal learning goals.

While the technology certainly makes tasks faster and easier for the learners, the temptations of immediate gratification through essay formulation, grammar correction, and instant translations may prove too powerful for some, leaving little need for the learner to think for themselves. When educators pander to these trends by providing immediate answers or translations in class practices, there is less and less demand for learners to actually ponder meaning of anything unknown. As musician Tom Waits put it, "We have a deficit of wonder right now" (*A Quote by Tom Waits*, 2023).

AIMS

While tools and technology are certainly useful in many aspects of education, it is important to consider whether the comfort and convenience they provide benefit the learner in the long run. As language instructors this invokes the questions: How can we get learners to understand the greater reward in delayed gratification? How can we convince learners that to struggle and fail in the short term will help them learn and improve in the long term? In a world that prioritizes ease and convenience over almost all else, what can be done in the classroom to help learners view discomfort as a catalyst for change? In order to address these issues and including the increasingly observed phenomenon of learners opting out of thinking by passively waiting for a quick and easy answer, the following classroom practice was devised.

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of learning any language. As it features regularly in most language lessons, it was selected as the area of focus. This framework draws on elements of Kolb's experiential learning theory (1985/2015) in which learners engage in abstract conceptualization and serves as a useful protocol for learners to apply when learning vocabulary in any language class. An additional aim of this practice is to provide language learners with opportunities to struggle in a safe, supportive, and judgement-free environment. Doing so serves to strengthen their ability and willingness to embrace short-term discomfort for the sake of later outcomes, increasing curiosity and connection to the language. Like the children resisting the temptation and immediate gratification of upfront marshmallows, this practice fosters the notion that a little effort, discomfort, and struggle in the short term leads to greater rewards in the long term.

PROCEDURE

1. The instructor leads into the class topic by assigning pair and small-group discussion questions. These questions are designed to activate learners' knowledge and store of related vocabulary and concepts.

   Examples
   Who do you know who is a good storyteller?
   What are some of the ingredients of a blockbuster movie?

2. The instructor establishes that learning the vocabulary about to be introduced will aid learners in gaining a deeper understanding of an upcoming task and improve their performances in class practices. This demonstrates the correlation between learning the vocabulary and the bigger picture of the class or course aims, providing intrinsic motivation for the learners.

   Example
   "This vocabulary will help us understand a passage on the three-act structure of storytelling. Later, we will use this three-act structure to analyze literary works."

3. The instructor presents learners with a list of approximately ten lexical items sourced from the upcoming material. Two or three of these lexical items should be samples of previously studied vocabulary. Including these items helps provide learners with a sense of familiarity, reduces anxiety, and offers opportunities for review of past target language. It also acts as a connection between previous class concepts and materials, and ensures that all learners will have the opportunity for some degree of success in the subsequent practice.

   Example
   conflict, *crisis, *dilemma, flaws, inciting incident, obstacle, phenomenon, *protagonist, resolution, turning point
   (The asterisk (*) denotes previously studied items.)

4. Firstly, the instructor establishes the grammatical form of each word or phrase, and drills pronunciation of each item with the whole class. As learners are less likely to use vocabulary that they are not confident pronouncing, this ensures their success in later practice.

   Example
   (Instructor) "phenomenon."
   (Class repeats) "phenomenon."
   The instructor sets pairs and asks learners to discuss the following question:
   Which of these words or phrases do you know?

   By "which do you know," the question essentially means, which of the words or phrases can students explain in English. The instructor presents the practice as a

challenge for learners to explain the words or phrases to their partners by paraphrasing definitions, giving explanations or illustrating with examples.

5. While pairs are practicing, the instructor monitors and takes note of any interesting answers or common misconceptions, not providing any feedback at this stage. Withholding feedback encourages learners to develop their personal judgement on whether or not their paraphrased explanations or examples were accurate.

6. Before students reach exhaustion-point in terms of ideas and energy levels, the instructor pauses the practice and establishes that in the course of learning, there is always going to be new and unfamiliar vocabulary. Not knowing everything or being unsure of answers is perfectly natural and acceptable. The instructor then establishes that in such a situation, it is important to speculate possible meanings. Doing so allows communication to continue and keeps learners engaged and open to possibilities. In these speculating practices, it is important for the instructor to emphasize that there are no “wrong” answers and that all ideas are valid. In many cases, offering an answer can inspire further responses from classmates. The instructor provides useful phrases for speculating, suggesting, and hedging, and encourages learners to use them in their discussions.

   Examples
   I’m not sure, but maybe it means…
   It could be…
   I think it’s similar to…

   The instructor should model an example using a previously studied word and then ask learners to continue the practice, speculating anything unknown.

   Example
   I’m not sure, but maybe “protagonist” means the main character in a story.

7. The instructor monitors the practice, again withholding feedback or confirmation and takes note of any interesting answers and key ideas.

8. Pausing the practice before the learners reach exhaustion-point, the instructor praises the class on their efforts where appropriate and asks pairs and small groups to discuss the question “Which of these words or phrases do you want to check?” Phrasing the question to ask learners which phrases they want to “check” rather than “know” allows learners who are uncomfortable admitting not knowing something to save face and further emphasizes the notion that being unsure of answers is a natural part of learning. While groups are discussing, the instructor monitors and takes note of words and phrases that learners would like to confirm.

9. The instructor takes plenary feedback from the class and elicits further items to check.

> **Example**
> "I heard people discussing turning point, phenomenon, and flaws. Is there anything I missed that you'd like to check?"

This method of eliciting feedback from the class again reduces the pressure on learners to admit they don't know something, establishes normalcy of the unknown and reduces pressure on individuals. Over time, this increases the likelihood of individual learners volunteering and asking for further clarifications.

10. To clear up the meaning of nominated vocabulary, the instructor provides examples, definitions, and explanations, whenever possible, calling on learners to share key ideas monitored in the previous practice.

> **Example**
> I heard Student A give an excellent example of a "flaw" earlier. Student A, would you please share it with the class?

11. After providing definitions for all unfamiliar vocabulary, the instructor follows up by assigning a practice performed individually such as a vocabulary–definition matching exercise. This allows learners to consolidate their understanding of the lexical items just after having heard and discussed explanations and provides a written record for future reference. When most members are nearing completion, the instructor asks individuals to check with a partner to see if they had the same or different answers. If answers differ, the instructor asks learners to explain to their partners why they made those particular choices. When all members have checked, the instructor provides plenary feedback of correct answers for the class.

12. As a final practice, and to offer opportunities for learners to personalize the vocabulary, the instructor sets discussion questions that allow the learners to relate the meaning of the new target language to their own lives. Discussion questions should be written as open-ended questions wherever possible to allow for detailed answers, and development of discussions through follow-up questions should be encouraged. The instructor sets a time limit, monitors, and assists as necessary. When completed, the instructor cold-calls on randomly selected learners to provide feedback, encouraging the learners to use the target language in their answers.

> **Example**
> (Instructor) What has been a "turning point" in your life so far, Student B?
> (Student B) For me, a turning point was when…

CONCLUSION

As with any practice, learner performance improves significantly over time as familiarity with the exercise increases. The paraphrasing and speculating protocol becomes established as a class norm with students applying the strategies independently when faced with unfamiliar vocabulary. Additionally, learners report feeling less daunted when faced with new vocabulary or lexically dense texts. A further benefit of the practice of speculating and paraphrasing in vocabulary acquisition is that it creates an atmosphere of psychological safety in the classroom (Tu, 2021). This is an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable taking the initiative sharing ideas and making "mistakes" without fear of embarrassment or humiliation. All ideas are valid and acceptable in speculating practices, with the goal of continuing communication and thinking about the possible meaning of the vocabulary.

Free from the pressure of getting the "right" answer, an issue that often prevents learners from communicating at all, the discussions help students become more receptive to the correct definitions when they are established. In turn, a culture of error (Lemov, 2021) is established, where learners begin to view "mistakes" as positive occurrences that are a natural and necessary step towards finding the "correct" answer.

Discussing possibilities rather than opting out of thinking encourages learners to be curious about language and encourages creative thinking. As all member's opinions and ideas are viewed as valid, being unsure of answers and communicating possibilities becomes normalized and established as part of the process of vocabulary acquisition. With repeated experiences of success after periods of struggle, learners begin to view their initial discomfort as a normal aspect of learning and embrace challenges as opportunities for personal growth.

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Dialoguing with Students for Reflective Teaching Practice

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The authors describe an action research project on the use of a paper-based tool named the Student Profile Sheet. In the final minutes of each class, the students record what happened in class, their impressions, and reflect on their learning while completing the sheet. In addition, the sheet is an important channel of communication between the teacher and learner, allowing both parties to reflect on their classroom performance. Because many students are often reluctant to ask questions in front of their peers, they can more freely express themselves in writing. By reading student comments, the teacher gets to know the students, and by responding to the student's questions and comments, students come to know the teacher better. In this article, we will describe the features of the Student Profile Sheet and provide samples of student–teacher interaction. Finally, we will discuss comments and feedback from the students.

INTRODUCTION

Reflective teaching has long been recognized as a cornerstone of effective pedagogy, allowing both educators and learners to better understand classroom dynamics and improve learning outcomes. This article introduces an ongoing action research project that incorporates a paper-based tool called the Student Profile Sheet, which facilitates reflective practice and promotes meaningful student–teacher dialogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Japan, exchange diaries (*koukan nikki*) are a well-established form of communication. Initially, exchange diaries were physical notebooks that were exchanged between friends, typically adolescent girls. Over time, they have been adapted for educational purposes such as teacher–student exchange notebooks (*renrakuchou*) and reflection diaries in language classes. In a year-long study of business students at a private Japanese university, Yoshihara (2008) reported that dialogue journals had a positive influence on the students' attitudes towards English such as increased confidence in their writing skills. Also, students appreciated being able to interact directly with their teacher and have an improved relationship with their teacher.

Researchers have reported on the benefits of reflection/review journals and self-learning logs (Gebhard, 2009; Upton & Hirano, 2024; Yonezaki, 2015), such as increasing/maintaining motivation and increased language awareness. According to Casanave (1993), journal writing is potentially the most beneficial activity for developing students' confidence and communicative ability in English.

Huang (2021) describes how learners go through three stages in performing a learning task: preparation, engagement, and reflection. The final stage, in which students consider what obstacles were faced and how to tackle the problem in the future, is a critical part of reflection. Thus, reflection should be goal-oriented and of a deliberate nature. The present study builds on the idea "recording of experience" by systematically incorporating reflective writing into university classrooms.

METHOD

Participants

University students studying at two public universities in southern Japan participated in this study. The 129 participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of English language courses (Oral Communication, Reading, Academic Presentation, English Presentations) and a communication course (Cross-Cultural Communication). Table 1 shows the distribution of the students. At Institution A, 51 students were enrolled in three courses: 2 sections of Reading and 1 section of Cross-Cultural Communication. At Institution B, 78 students were enrolled in five classes: 2 sections of Oral Communication, Academic Presentation, Reading, and Presentation.

TABLE 1. Participants in the Study

Institution	Course	Participants	Code
A	Cross-Cultural Communication	20	A
	Reading Section 1	15	B
	Reading Section 2	16	C
B	Oral Communication Section 1	15	D
	Oral Communication Section 2	10	E
	Academic Presentation	4	F
	Reading	30	G
	Presentation	19	H

Data Collection

Data were collected in two forms. The primary source of data was the Student Profile Sheet. A sample sheet can be seen in Appendix A. It is A4-sized, double-sided, and includes a recent photograph, some personal information (hometown, hobbies) and blank areas to complete at the end of each class session. One area, "What I learned in class today…" encourages the student to reflect on their learning. The

second area, “Question or comment for your teacher…” gives the student opportunities to give comments or ask questions to the teacher. Additionally, the Student Profile Sheet is a way for both the student and teacher to verify attendance and class participation.

As shown in Table 1, all eight courses were coded (A–H), and data were collected from selected sheets at regular intervals (every fifth student) in classes A–G, ensuring a representative sample. The students from the Presentation course (H) participated in the study, but due to a procedural oversight, their profile sheets were not included in the analysis.

The second form of data collection was an end-of-course questionnaire. The participants completed an anonymous online questionnaire using Google Forms between January and February 2025. The questionnaire consisted of nine bilingual items, including seven Likert-scale statements. In addition, there were two open-ended questions. The statements ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

RESULTS

Quantitative

Table 2 shows the questionnaire statements and descriptive statistics. The students had positive impressions of the Student Profile Sheet with high levels of agreement to all of the statements. The average level of agreement with each statement was between 3.87 to 4.41. The students thought the profile sheet enabled two-way communication with their teacher (Statements a, e) with the weekly “Question or comment to your teacher…” section. Some students hesitated to make comments and ask questions during class in front of their peers, so being able to communicate in a written form was very useful for the students. Often students would ask clarification questions about vocabulary, grammar, and content covered in class.

The teachers encouraged off-topic comments and questions on general topics, such as food, travel, hobbies, and personal preferences, so the students thought that the Student Profile Sheet encouraged rapport with their teacher (Statements c, g).

In the “What I learned in class today …” section, students wrote about the class contents. Students often wrote about new vocabulary they encountered and information they had learned. Throughout the semester, they would look back to see what they had done in previous weeks. The students agreed that the Student Profile Sheet helped them reflect on their learning and helped them remember (Statements b, d).

TABLE 2. Attitudes Towards the Student Profile Sheet

Statement	Average	*SD*
a. It is useful to communicate with my teacher this way. (2)	4.41	.89
b. It helped me reflect on what I learned each class. (5)	4.32	.95
c. The Student Profile Sheet helped my teacher get to know me better. (1)	4.27	.94
d. It helped me remember what I have learned in this course. (6)	4.26	.98
e. It helped me ask questions directly to my teacher. (3)	4.21	1.01
f. Every course should have a profile sheet like this. (7)	4.03	.98
g. It helped me get to know my teacher better. (4)	3.87	1.09

Notes. *N* = 129. The questionnaire item number is in brackets.

Qualitative

The comments from the selected Student Profile Sheets were collected and analyzed. The comments were categorized into six primary themes: rapport, content-related (clarification/follow-up), general English, procedural, self-reflection, and strategies. The student comments are presented as they were written, including grammar and spelling mistakes.

Rapport

One of the primary goals of the Student Profile Sheet was to develop rapport with the students. Students often mentioned various aspects of rapport. For example, one student (A11) commented about the atmosphere of the classroom: “You often include jokes during classes and which makes the class fun, so I like it.” Another student (C17) commented how quickly the semester was passing by: “Next week is a last class !?!? so fast …”

Students wrote about their interactions with their classmates. One student (B7) wrote about an online session: “I was able to get along with an unknown person in a breakout room. Thank you.” Another student (A22) wrote, “Today, I could enjoy to communicate with my partner.”

However, most comments were questions to the teacher about their country or personal interests. A few examples of these comments are “I want to know about you! What is your hobby?” (A22), “Have you ever received any [school] punishment before?” (C11), “I want to know the best city have you ever visited” (D6), and “What is your favorite spot on the campus?” (F1).

Content-Related

Students asked follow-up questions regarding course content and reflected on classroom topics. In the cross-cultural communication course, one student commented on key concepts: “It made me confused the meaning difference between ‘identity’ and ‘associate.’ I could understand many factors effects our identity” (A1). Another asked, “Does your home country normally accept kissing in public?” (A11). Sometimes the comments were personal reactions to class topics and discussions: “I was surprised because I felt like the personality test was accurate!” (D1) and “Do you have any misunderstanding story except about [Nakijin]?” (D11).

General English

Many students used the Student Profile Sheet to ask questions to clarify English grammar and vocabulary. In most cases, the grammar and vocabulary had been used in class: “By the way, what’s the difference by in time and on time?” (A11), “I was surprised by Japanese-English words” (D1), “I want you to tell the difference ‘How are you?’ to ‘How’s it going?’ (D6), and “How do you say [mukashi ni ryūkō shita] in English?” (D11).

Procedural

Procedural comments are those related to class management, for example, confirming the schedule or assignment deadlines. Students wrote comments about tests. One wrote, “Lately we haven’t had the test so I’ll be preparing for it and aim high score” (A11). Another complained about a quiz based on their reading homework: “I was surprised that there was no passage on the test. There is only question. It’s reading class not remembering class!” (B12). One compared exams: “Final test is more word count than midterm test?” (G7).

Course scheduling was sometimes mentioned. For example, one student wrote, “Saturday is better for me [for scheduling a make-up class]” (B7). Another was feeling pressure about an upcoming presentation and commented, “It is a little hard for us to prepare for performance in a week TT…” (D6).

Finally, students wrote about assignments and deadlines. One wrote, “I am writing to inform you that I have been experiencing health issue since January 19th, which have unfortunately caused a delay in the submission of my assignment” (E1), and another lamented, “I didn’t reach my goal last week. I can’t rent books everyday” (G7).

Self-Reflection

The students identified their own strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes they commented on gaps in their knowledge. One wrote, “Today, I talked about origin of food. I could know that how much I don’t have knowledge about it” (A22). Another wrote, “I noticed that I have many stereotypes with other cultures. For example, I thought Canadians are very optimistic, but some people were strict with what they do. Stereotypes sometimes help but not always” (A1).

Some students reflected on their general skills. Although it was not a presentation course, one student commented, “I thought that I need to learn how to make good PowerPoint slide which everyone can see easily. I must practice a lot!” (A1). Another commented, “Personally this is one of the most essential skill I need to develop” (E1).

They reflected on their performance in class. One student commented, “Today I find a improve point for Book Spot. I’ll improve” (G11). Another student commented on their ability to effectively summarize the contents of the reading: “Today, you said copy and paste is not meaningful. So I will try to use own word next activity” (A6). Another student wrote about their test score and identified how they wanted to do

better next time: “The score was 18/24. I think well done. But I did mistake about spelling. It’s one of my issue” (G11).

As can be expected, many comments were written about their English skills. One student acknowledged their improvement throughout the semester: “I could read the story faster than before. However I need to study vocabulary” (B1). Another identified a goal: “I want to improve my reading skill for next TOEIC exam. I’ve already applied for it” (B7). At the end of the course, one student stated, “I could learn many things in this class and I could break the dislike about reading” (C11). Another commented, “I became good at English composition by this profile sheet!” (G1).

Strategies

Another primary aim of the sheet is to encourage students to develop learning strategies. A limited sampling of reflections described ways to improve reading, vocabulary, and other language skills.

Many students considered ways to improve their reading. One commented, “Skip & guess unknown words” I think that if we know words 70–80%, we can do this way” (C1), and a second one said, “I want to make use of audio books at home” (B16). Another identified the strategy of narrow reading (reading books by the same author or in the same genre), “Narrow Reading, Oscar Wilde,” and claimed, “I want to make time for reading and listening to English after this class finish” (G26).

One student discovered the importance of note-taking for vocabulary development: “When I had to remember vocabulary, I just saw vocabulary books many time. I learned it was important that we shold take notes” (B1). The student later devised a strategy to use the Academic Word List and General Service List: “AWL and GSL are very famous and common Academic word list. We learned how we should learn vocabulary. I think I try to make word list on my phone. It is important to keep a record which I meet new vocabulary” (B1).

Other comments included “I wonder how I can improve my short-term memory?” (C11). Another set a goal: “My goal is to improve pronunciation next presentation” (E1). Finally, one described her goal of thinking in English: “My aim in this class is to make my brain English brain (B7). These comments reveal both the pedagogical impact of the tool and the diverse ways students engage with language learning.

Feedback from Students

In addition to the Likert-scale statements on the end-of-course questionnaire, students were asked two open-ended questions: (a) What did you like about the Student Profile Sheet? and (b) How could the Student Profile Sheet be improved? Students could answer in English or Japanese, and some chose to respond in Japanese, so English translations have been added in brackets.

Students apparently appreciated increased interaction with the teacher, as in [the teacher replies to my questions] and [I get comments from the teacher]. One mentioned looking [forward to coming to class to see teacher’s comments]. Another said how he [can express my feelings to teacher] and finally, [it’s like an exchange diary. It’s fun.]

Other students liked having a physical record of learning and reflection. Their comments ranged from the practical, such as it is [easy to see attendance] and [by reflecting on today's class, I become aware of what I did], to a deeper cognitive level [by reflecting, I can think about what I need to do next].

Finally, many students described how the sheet improved their English skills. One said, "This Profile Sheet is need to use English. So I can practice and serch English to use this sheet. I think this action is increase English skills." Another described how it [increases opportunities to ask questions in English and add my impressions] and even [helped improve my writing skills].

For the open-ended question about improving the sheet, students offered constructive ideas. Some recommended simplifying feedback: "It might be helpful if we could evaluate using numbers or ratings." Another suggested adding "Self assessment on a scale of 1 to 5." Another pointed out that the reflection prompts were unclear: "I didn't know the difference between 2 parts."

A few students struggled with what to write and wanted the requirement to write something lifted ("Sometimes I didn't have a comment or question, so I felt it shouldn't be required to write them") or ("Please decide reflection thematic. I don't know what write"). Others felt that the sheet's layout was cramped ("If possible, I want the teacher's message space") and ("I think space for writing questions should be more large").

A few students recommended switching to a digital format ("Instead of paper, use Googleforms") or were critical of response time ("It takes too long to communicate with the teacher. It would be better to ask directly or by email").

Some students had difficulty in reading handwritten responses from the teacher ("It could improve to write a teacher's comment more easier to read"). Another felt more time was needed to complete the sheet ("I want more time to write the sheet"). One student wanted to scrap the photograph ("I think it doesn't need to put my picture on it").

Finally, one student proposed that they share their sheets with classmates ("It'd be useful for us to share our comments with classmates at some point. That way, I can see what they focus on, and I can think about what I need to do").

To summarize, students appreciated being able to ask questions and receive teacher responses, reflect on class content, and express their feelings. Many noted that the sheet helped them become more aware of their learning and provided an additional channel of communication with the teacher. Suggestions for improvement included more space for teacher replies, optional questions, and the introduction of digital formats like Google Forms.

DISCUSSION

The Student Profile Sheet proved to be a valuable tool for both students and teachers. It fostered a reflective learning environment, enhanced rapport, and allowed for personalized instruction. Importantly, it encouraged students to think

metacognitively about their language development, identify areas of growth, and formulate strategies for improvement.

Based on student suggestions, the Student Profile Sheet was expanded and revised for the 2025 academic year. First, the overall size was increased from double-sided A4 to A3, thereby increasing the number of entries from 15 to 30. This allows the profile sheet to be used in classes that meet twice a week during a semester. In addition, three columns were added to simplify the feedback from students, namely, students are able to illustrate their mood by circling one of the emojis, as well as indicate their level of effort and also degree of understanding on a scale. Finally, a dedicated space in which the teacher can reply was added (see Appendix B).

CONCLUSION

By encouraging reflective practice through a simple but effective medium, the Student Profile Sheet contributes to a deeper, more meaningful classroom experience. It supports student autonomy, builds community, and enhances language acquisition. Future directions may involve expanding the tool's use across specific tasks and strategies, and exploring its impact on different learning outcomes.

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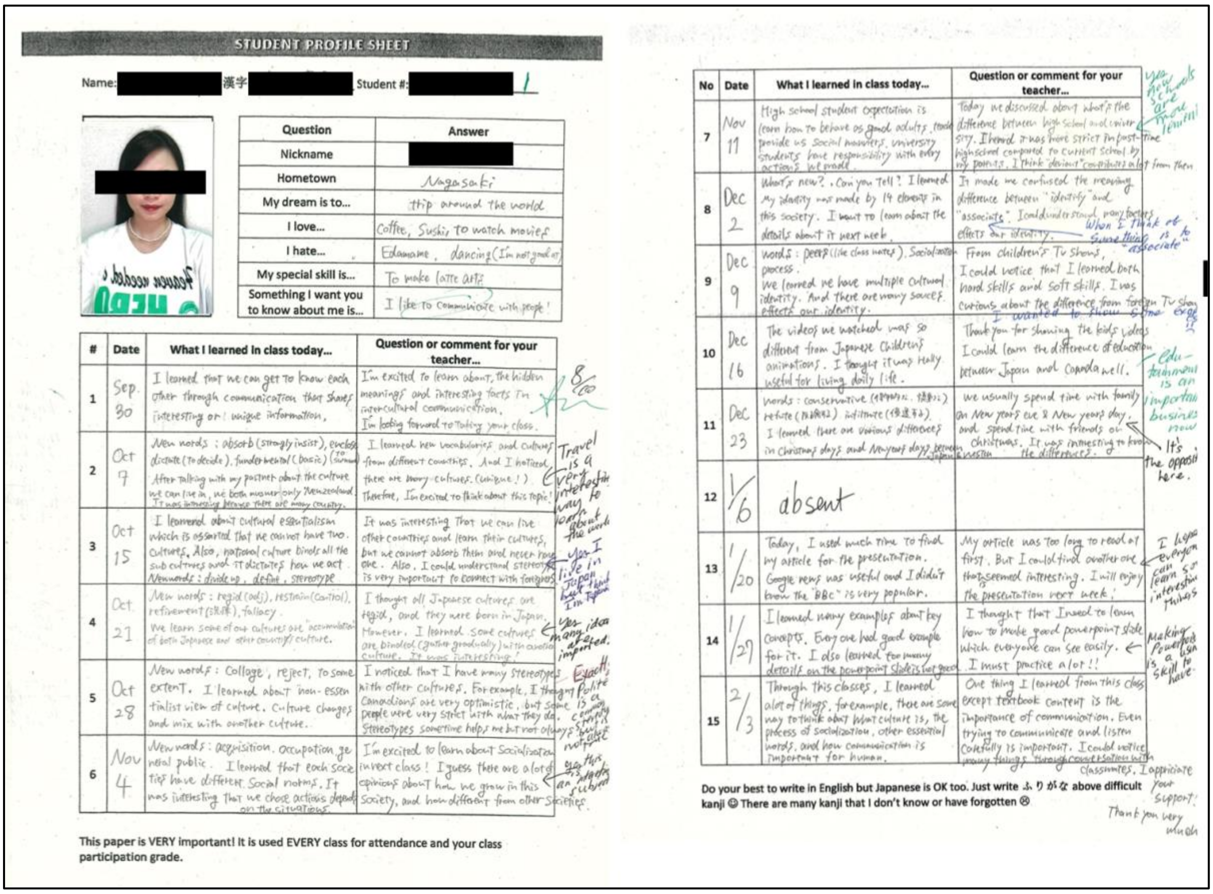
APPENDIX A

Sample Student Profile Sheet



STUDENT PROFILE SHEET

Name: [redacted] 漢字 [redacted] Student #: [redacted] 1

Question	Answer
Nickname	[redacted]
Hometown	Nagasaki
My dream is to...	trip around the world
I love...	Coffee, Sushi, to watch movies
I hate...	Edamame, dancing (I'm not good at)
My special skill is...	To make latte arts
Something I want you to know about me is...	I like to communicate with people!

#	Date	What I learned in class today...	Question or comment for your teacher...
1	Sep. 30	I learned that we can get to know each other through communication that shares interesting or unique information.	I'm excited to learn about the hidden meanings and interesting facts in intercultural communication. I'm looking forward to taking your class.
2	Oct 7	New words: absorb (strongly insist), enclose (to surround), dictate (to decide), fundamental (basic). After talking with my partner about the culture we can live in, we both answer only New Zealand. It was interesting because there are many country.	I learned new vocabularies and cultures from different countries. And I noticed there are many cultures (unique!). Therefore, I'm excited to think about this topic!
3	Oct 15	I learned about cultural essentialism which is asserted that we cannot have two cultures. Also, national culture binds all the sub cultures and it dictates how we act. New words: divide up, define, stereotype	It was interesting that we can live other countries and learn their cultures, but we cannot absorb them and never lose one. Also, I could understand stereotypes is very important to connect with foreigners.
4	Oct 21	New words: regid (adj), restrain (control), refinement ([illegible]), fallacy. We learn some of our cultures are "accumulation" of both Japanese and other country's culture.	I thought all Japanese cultures are regid, and they were born in Japan. However, I learned some cultures are blended (gather gradually) with another culture. It was interesting!
5	Oct 28	New words: Collage, reject, to some extent. I learned about non-essentialist view of culture. Culture changes and mix with another culture.	I noticed that I have many stereotypes with other cultures. For example, I thought Canadians are very optimistic, but some people were very strict with what they do. Stereotypes sometime helps me but not always.
6	Nov 4	New words: acquisition, occupation, general public. I learned that each societies have different social norms. It was interesting that we chose actions depend on the situations.	I'm excited to learn about Socialization in next class! I guess there are a lot of opinions about how we grow in this society, and how different from other societies.

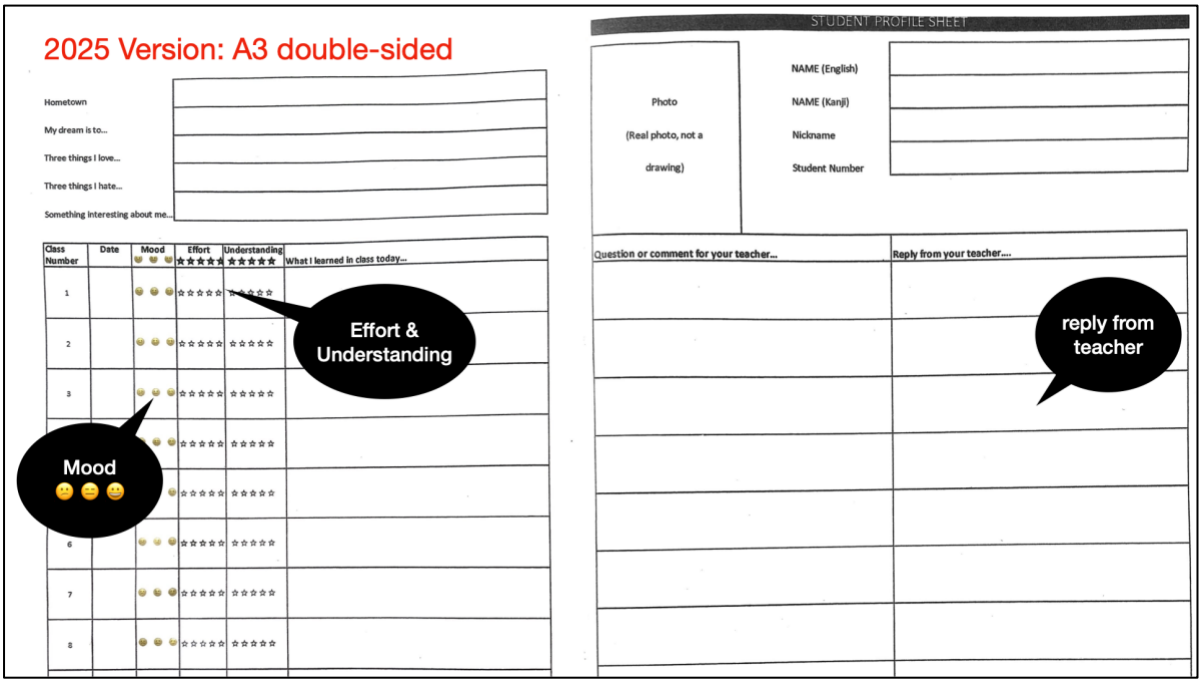
This paper is VERY important! It is used EVERY class for attendance and your class participation grade.

No	Date	What I learned in class today...	Question or comment for your teacher...
7	Nov 11	High school student expectation is learn how to behave as good adults, teachers provide us social manners. University students have responsibility with every actions we made.	Today we discussed about what's the difference between high school and university. I heard it was more strict in past-time high school compared to current school by my parents. I think "deviant" contributes a lot from them.
8	Dec 2	What's new?, Can you tell? I learned my identity was made by 14 elements in this society. I want to learn about the details about it next week.	It made me confused the meaning difference between "identify" and "associate". I could understand many factors effects our identity.
9	Dec 9	words: peers (like class mates), Socialization process. We learned we have multiple cultural identity. And there are many sources effects our identity.	From children's TV shows, I could notice that I learned both hard skills and soft skills. I was curious about the difference from foreign TV shows.
10	Dec 16	The videos we watched was so different from Japanese Children's animations. I thought it was really useful for living daily life.	Thank you for showing the kids videos. I could learn the difference of education between Japan and Canada well.
11	Dec 23	words: conservative ([illegible]), refute ([illegible]), infiltrate ([illegible]). I learned there are various differences in Christmas days and New year's days between Japan & western.	We usually spend time with family on New year's eve & New year's day, and spend time with friends on Christmas. It was interesting to know the differences.
12	1/6	absent	
13	1/20	Today, I used much time to find my article for the presentation. Google news was useful and I didn't know the "BBC" is very popular.	My article was too long to read at first. But I could find another one that is seemed interesting. I will enjoy the presentation next week!
14	1/27	I learned many examples about key concepts. Every one had good example for it. I also learned too many details on the powerpoint slide is not good.	I thought that I need to learn how to make good powerpoint slide which everyone can see easily. I must practice a lot!!
15	2/3	Through this classes, I learned a lot of things. for example, there are some way to think about what culture is, the process of socialization, other essential words, and how communication is important for human.	One thing I learned from this class except textbook content is the importance of communication. Even trying to communicate and listen carefully is important. I could notice many things through conversation with classmates. I appriciate your support! Thank you very much

Do your best to write in English but Japanese is OK too. Just write ふりがな above difficult kanji ☺ There are many kanji that I don't know or have forgotten ☹

APPENDIX B

Revised Student Profile Sheet Based on Student Feedback



Poster Presentation Reports

Analyzing App Data and Vocabulary Tests to Guide App Design

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This study analyzes data from WordQuizPool (WQP), a smartphone-based vocabulary game developed to strengthen students' receptive and productive vocabulary skills. Scores from WQP's Create and Solve functions were compared with results from in-class vocabulary tests covering translation, cloze, and sentence production tasks. Correlation analysis revealed moderate positive relationships between WQP activity and traditional test scores, with slightly stronger links for receptive tasks. While these results suggest WQP may support vocabulary development in line with established input–output frameworks, the study does not demonstrate causation. Findings will inform the design of future experiments using pre- and post-testing and control groups to more rigorously evaluate the app's impact on vocabulary learning.

INTRODUCTION

WordQuizPool (WQP) is a smartphone-based game developed by the author to help students practice both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Designed to supplement classroom instruction, WQP is a multiplayer, long-form, cross-platform game available on iPhone, Android, and web browsers. All students in a class can participate simultaneously throughout the semester.

WQP is a cooperative, non-zero-sum game: All students can achieve the highest score without requiring others to lose. Teachers can monitor student progress and quiz grading directly within the app, and a companion website allows for course and class setup and management.

To determine the efficacy of WQP, research must demonstrate measurable outcomes compared to traditional methods. The first step is to design an experiment that tests whether using the app leads to improved results. Once improvement is established, further research must confirm that any gains are due to the app itself and not simply correlated with other factors.

This study introduces a method for comparing WQP leaderboard scores with traditional in-class vocabulary test results, aiming to evaluate the game's validity and effectiveness in developing English vocabulary skills. While it does not include pre- and post-testing or experimental and control groups, the findings will help shape further research for developing the app. This study situates WQP within the broader

field of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which continues to expand as smartphones become increasingly integrated into students' daily study habits.

BACKGROUND

Vocabulary study is an essential part of learning any language. Both input and output are important aspects of this process, as highlighted by linguists like Krashen (1982) and Swain (1985). Learners should practice both receptive and productive knowledge to achieve vocabulary mastery (Nation, 1990). Methods range from rote memorization and wordbooks to communicative tasks and digital tools.

The concept of mastery sentences, introduced by Gallacher et al. (2015), refers to students demonstrating an understanding not only of a word's meaning but also of how it is used grammatically. Classroom techniques for scaffolding and improving these sentences include instruction on usage of collocations, synonyms, antonyms, and conjunctions.

Many teachers require students to use a wordbook to write sentences for assigned vocabulary; however, because only the teacher typically sees these sentences during grading, student engagement often remains low. Activities using students' sentences were trialed in the classroom by the author. These activities were inspired by games such as charades and the EFL "Password" game. For example, in one experimental activity, students submitted sentences to a Moodle LMS with the keyword blanked out, and other students were asked to read these sentences and guess the correct answer. A paper version of this activity was also designed for classroom use; however, these fell short because they were not designed to exhaustively utilize the student-generated content. Additionally, they became overwhelmingly complicated to manage and grade.

To address these concerns, the WQP app (see Figure 1) was designed, created, and first published by the author in 2022. The app's design attempts to integrate Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create.

The main concept of the WQP app is that students create and solve each other's quizzes. A quiz consists of a mastery sentence with the target word blanked out (a cloze), accompanied by nine multiple-choice answers. When the correct answer is selected, both the creator and the solver earn points. Each incorrect attempt reduces the points awarded. This system encourages creators to write sentences that clearly demonstrate the meaning of the target word. For example, a sentence like "The monkey is ____ a banana" would most likely be completed with *eating*. In contrast, a sentence like "I have a ____" could be completed with many different words.

After solving a quiz, the solver analyzes and evaluates the sentence for punctuation, spelling, and grammar. If the solver's rating matches the teacher's, they earn an extra point. While this feature is not mirrored in the vocabulary tests, it supports students' writing accuracy by aligning with Bloom's emphasis on evaluation.

The teacher's rating affects the points a student receives for creating a quiz. For example, in a class of 30 students, where each solver earns one point, one quiz could earn up to a possible 30 points. However, if the teacher rates the quiz at 33% (good spelling but poor punctuation and grammar), the creator only earns a third of the possible points: 10 points. They are able to edit quizzes and try to reclaim the lost points whenever they like. Students are also able to earn points for single-word translations from English to Japanese, Japanese to English, and for spelling the word correctly.

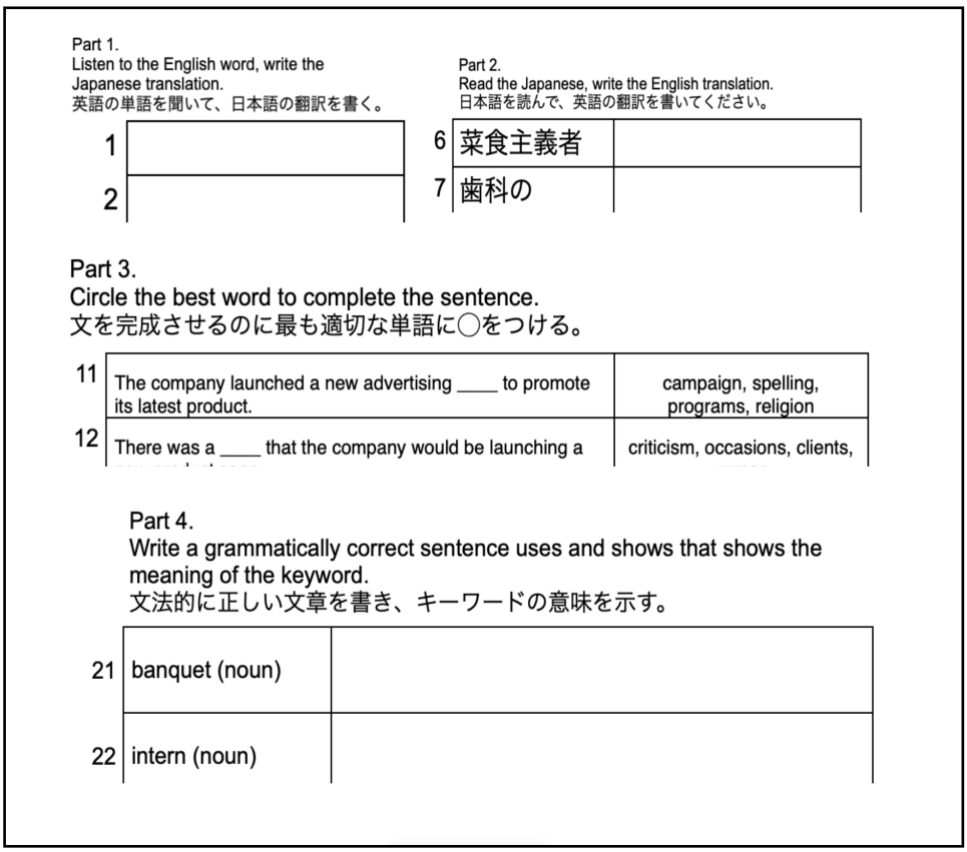
The app saves the quizzes and associated data in an SQL database and is accessed by the app using the author's proprietary API. There is a leaderboard available for the students to see the classes' progress and to review quizzes that they have solved. Students are encouraged to prepare example sentences in their notebooks by writing translations and composing sentences for each word. They may adapt examples from dictionaries or even use ChatGPT for support. However, the WQP app does not allow students to copy and paste sentences, so even if they use generative AI, they must manually type each sentence letter by letter.

Vocabulary tests (VT) are an essential instrument for assessment and grading, and there are various formats to measure different aspects of lexical knowledge. The VT (see Figure 2) used by the author includes a listening and comprehension component in which students hear a word and write its translation in their L1 (Japanese), a spelling section in which students read a word in their L1 and write it in English, and a grammatical or contextual comprehension task in which students select the best word to complete an incomplete English sentence, or cloze. The sentences for the VT cloze may be sourced from the class coursebook, a dictionary, or even

FIGURE 1. WordQuizPool (WQP)

created by the teacher or generative AI. This can be time consuming, especially if a unique VT is to be created for each class to avoid answers being shared outside of the class. The supporting website for WQP has a feature for generating multiple-choice clozes from quizzes submitted by each class. By using student-created content, engagement is expected to increase. The VT for this project has been modified to reflect the tasks in WQP, including a section for students to compose their own mastery sentences using words selected from the wordlist. Preparation for both WQP and the VT includes keeping a wordbook where students translate words, practice writing mastery sentences, and receive classroom instruction on using collocations, synonyms, antonyms, and conjunctions.

FIGURE 2. Vocabulary Test



Part 1.
Listen to the English word, write the Japanese translation.
英語の単語を聞いて、日本語の翻訳を書く。

1	
2	

Part 2.
Read the Japanese, write the English translation.
日本語を読んで、英語の翻訳を書いてください。

6	菜食主義者	
7	歯科の	

Part 3.
Circle the best word to complete the sentence.
文を完成させるのに最も適切な単語に◯をつける。

11	The company launched a new advertising ____ to promote its latest product.	campaign, spelling, programs, religion
12	There was a ____ that the company would be launching a	criticism, occasions, clients,

Part 4.
Write a grammatically correct sentence uses and shows that shows the meaning of the keyword.
文法的に正しい文章を書き、キーワードの意味を示す。

21	banquet (noun)	
22	intern (noun)	

METHOD

Two sets of data were available to the researcher: the high scores from the WQP app and the results from the midterm and final VT. High scores from WQP were split into productive (Create) and receptive (Solve) components.

The midterm VT included only words that had been assigned as homework in the wordbook and WQP up to that point, whereas the final VT included words from the entire semester.

Students took in-class, paper-based midterm and final VTs with receptive and productive components. Each test consisted of four parts, each mirroring activities in WQP. In Part 1, the teacher says five English words, and students write the Japanese translations. This is similar to WQP's Translate and Karuta but tests listening rather than visual word recognition. In Part 2, students read five Japanese words and write the English translations, aligning with WQP's Spelling Bee, though answers are handwritten rather than typed. In Part 3, multiple-choice questions use ten sentences taken directly from the WQP app. This reflects the Solve component in WQP, but the VT provides only four word choices for each cloze item. In Part 4, students write ten original sentences using target words from the word list. Like in WQP, these sentences are graded for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Students are instructed to write sentences that demonstrate the word's meaning and to avoid generic sentences such as "This is a ____."

These two datasets were prepared and analyzed for statistical correlation using Pearson's correlation coefficient, as both datasets were normally distributed and the relationship was linear. Pearson's coefficient measures the strength and direction of a linear relationship and is the most common method for interval or ratio data.

RESULTS

A total of 242 active students (N = 242) in seven classes used the WQP app to study the prescribed vocabulary over the second semester of 2024. They also took the midterm and final VT.

First, total scores from the WQP app and the final VT were converted to percentages, sorted by the WQP scores from low to high, and then overlaid in a line graph (see Figure 3). The high WQP scores visually show a slight tendency for students who scored well on WQP to also perform better on the VT. However, lower WQP scores correspond with more variable VT results.

Each class was then analyzed separately for correlations between WQP and final VT scores. The Fri_3 class showed the strongest correlation (r = 0.58, p = 0.0004), indicating a statistically significant moderate-to-strong positive relationship. Other classes showed lower correlation, which would suggest variations among students or differences in how the WQP or VT were administered.

The VT and WQP scores from the Fri_3 class were then divided into receptive and productive components for more detailed analysis. The WQP Create scores were compared with Part 4 of the VT, which assessed students' sentence production abilities. The analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.603 with a p value of 0.00054. A correlation coefficient of 0.60 suggests a moderate-to-strong positive linear relationship between the two variables, indicating that students who performed well in WQP creation tasks also tended to score higher in the VT's sentence production section. The low p value confirms that this correlation is statistically significant, meaning it is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 3. Midterm and Final VT Compared with WQP High Scores

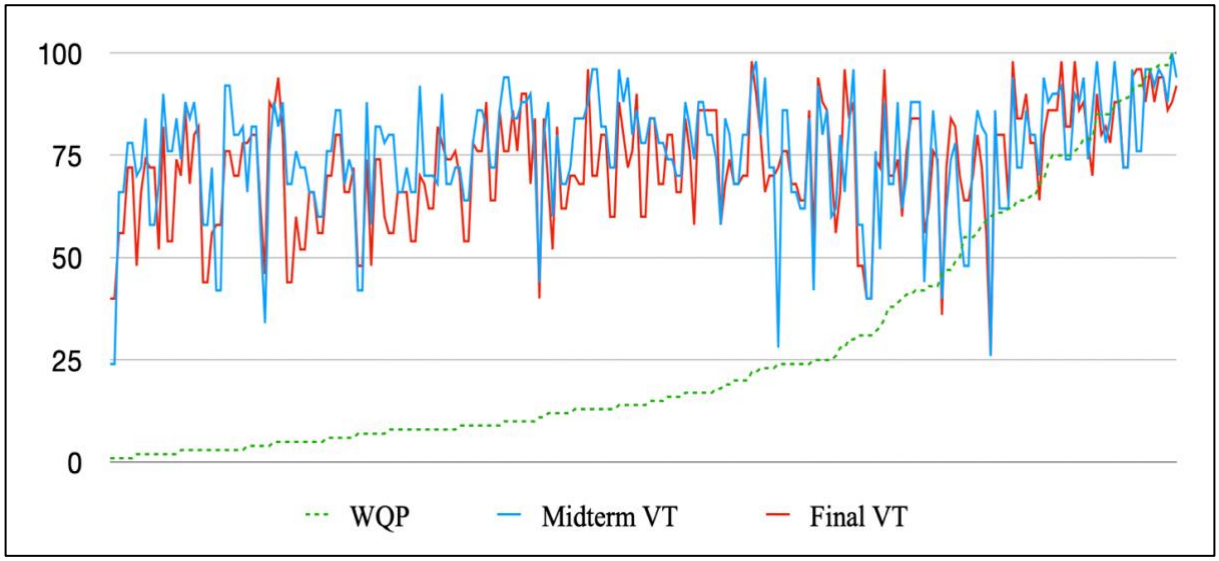
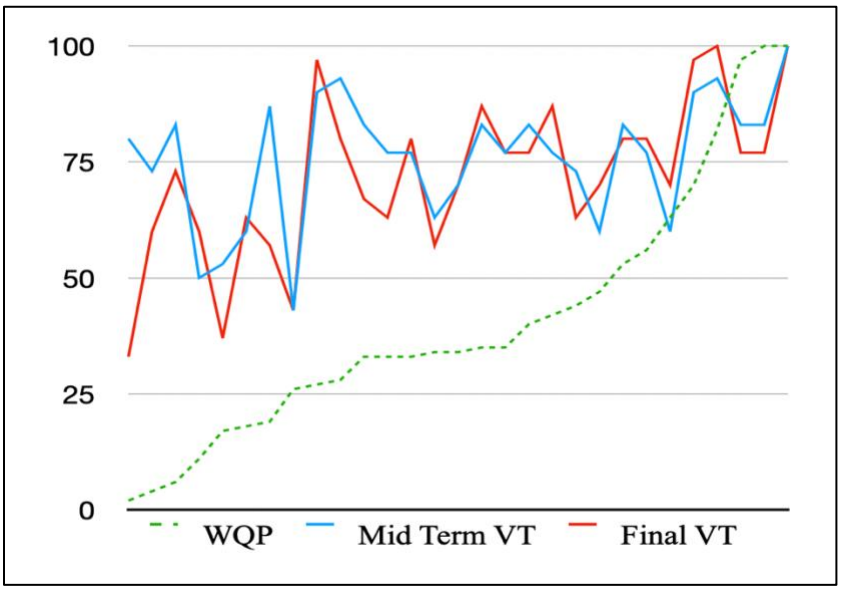
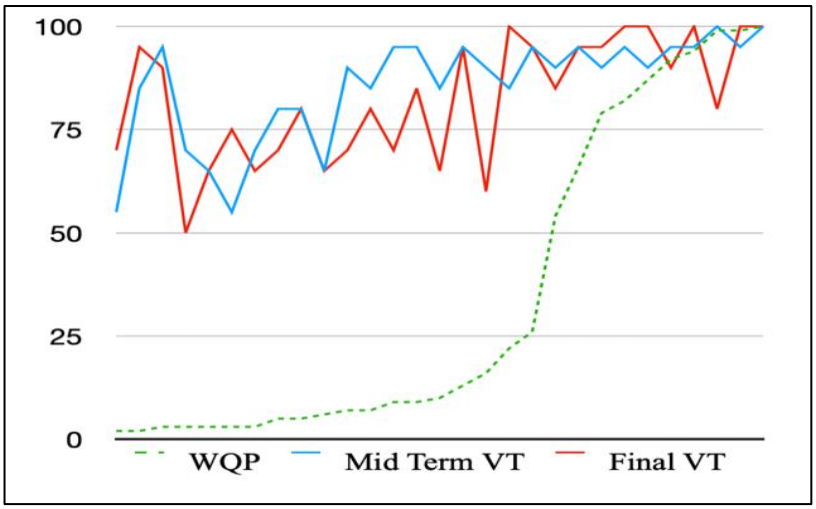


FIGURE 4. Productive Skills



The receptive elements of the WQP and the VT were compared by examining the Solve scores from the WQP and Parts 1 to 3 of the VT. This analysis produced a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.639 and a *p* value of 0.00019. This coefficient indicates a slightly stronger positive linear relationship than that found in the productive component analysis. As students' Solve scores increased, their performance on Parts 1 to 3 of the VT also improved. The very low *p* value confirms that this correlation is highly statistically significant, indicating the relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. Receptive Skills



DISCUSSION

The observed correlation of data from WQP and the VT suggests they measure overlapping aspects of vocabulary knowledge. The correlation observed between these data sets is modest and does not establish causation. Mitigating factors in the observed relationship could include differences between the VT and the WQP format, varying levels of student motivation over the semester, or the specific type of vocabulary knowledge being assessed, such as productive versus receptive use. Some students received exceptionally high scores due to frequent use of the app, either due to high engagement or more opportunity to use the app. Such outliers may influence the overall correlation.

While higher VT scores generally correlated with higher WQP scores, some students with higher aptitude scored well on the VT without using the WQP. This is reflected in the greater variability of VT scores among those with lower WQP scores. Receptive skills showed a higher correlation, possibly because many students solved more quizzes than they created in WQP.

LIMITATIONS

There are several differences between WQP and the VT. The VT includes a listening section, which WQP currently does not – though this feature is planned for future development. The VT uses cloze sentences with four answer choices, while WQP quizzes have nine. Additionally, WQP uses a touch-screen interface, whereas the VT was handwritten.

CONCLUSION

Analysis showed a slight overall correlation, with the Fri_3 class displaying the strongest. Receptive skills in both WQP and the VT showed slightly stronger correlation than productive skills. While the analysis indicated some correlation, this does not imply causation. It suggests that WQP is somewhat aligned with the VT, as both measure related aspects of language proficiency, but important differences remain between the two assessments.

The VT scores of light WQP users were more scattered – some high, some low – suggesting that some students were already proficient in English. In contrast, heavy users of WQP tended to score well on the VT. To determine whether WQP usage directly contributes to improved test scores, future research should employ pre- and post-tests with experimental and control groups to establish causation.

Some heavy users of WQP accumulated extremely high scores, which negatively affected the motivation of other students. To address this, a handicap system could limit additional score accumulation once a user's total exceeds twice the class average. While their points would be capped, they could still access the leaderboard and continue using the app's other features.

The results from this study will contribute to future improvements of WQP as both a study tool and a method for evaluating vocabulary acquisition. Future updates to WQP will also explore integrating listening tasks directly into the app, aligning the format more closely with classroom assessments and supporting a more balanced approach to vocabulary development.

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The Impact of a ChatGPT-Assisted Task on Exam Performance

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This study examined how ChatGPT use affects learners' writing performance and strategies in L2 English classes. Sixty-one science-major college students completed both a ChatGPT-assisted writing task and a midterm exam. Their writings were assessed for fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity using Lu's (2010) analyzer. Results showed that their performance improved in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity in the AI-supported task. However, in the midterm exam, their performance declined in all three areas. Learners reported using more cognitive, memory, metacognitive, and social strategies during ChatGPT-supported examination preparation. In contrast, during the exam without AI, they relied mainly on cognitive strategies and memory strategies, and their writing performance declined. The findings highlight the need to help learners internalize effective strategies without AI support. To integrate AI tools effectively into language education, fostering learners' independent writing skills and strategic awareness is essential. Developing the ability to coexist with AI while maintaining autonomy will be a key challenge for future pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, AI-assisted tools have significantly influenced how learners approach writing tasks, particularly in second language (L2) classrooms. These platforms offer real-time support, including grammar correction, vocabulary suggestions, and sentence restructuring. ChatGPT, in particular, can generate complete and contextually appropriate sentences, making it a powerful resource for language learners. Given these capabilities, it is important to examine how AI-assisted writing compares with traditional approaches to language instruction.

Previous studies on L2 writing have explored corrective feedback and their effects on writing performance from different perspectives (e.g., Cai, 2024; Goo, 2012; Pižorn & Jurišević, 2014). According to Valizadeh and Soltanpour (2021), there were no statistically significant differences in syntactic complexity between learners who received focused direct corrective feedback and those who engaged in additional writing practice without feedback. This finding suggests that corrective feedback methods alone may not strongly impact the structural development of L2 writing. More recent research has begun to examine the role of AI tools in providing feedback (e.g., Bowen & Watson, 2024). Other studies have explored their potential to foster metacognitive learning (e.g., Yamada, 2025). In light of these findings, the integration

of AI tools such as ChatGPT offers a promising direction for investigating how writing support influences linguistic development.

This study aims to investigate the role of ChatGPT in enhancing learners' writing performance, focusing specifically on fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity. Drawing inspiration from Valizadeh and Soltanpour (2021), who examined syntactic complexity using Lu's (2010) L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer, the present research extends this line of inquiry by comparing ChatGPT-assisted writing tasks with independent examination writing.

In addition, the study investigates the learning strategies employed by learners during ChatGPT-supported examination preparation and during the actual examination. To systematically analyze these behaviors, Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies is adopted, which categorizes strategies into direct strategies (cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies). This research addresses the following two questions:

RQ1. What are the quantitative differences in fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity between learners' writing in ChatGPT-assisted tasks and in independent examination writing?
RQ2. What learning strategies do learners employ during ChatGPT-supported examination preparation and during the actual examination?

To address these questions, a mixed-methods approach is employed, combining a paired sample *t* test to assess performance differences and a post-exam questionnaire to capture learners' strategic behaviors. This design provides a comprehensive understanding of both the linguistic outcomes and the strategic learning processes.

METHOD

Participants and Course Context

A total of 61 second-year university students majoring in science took part in this study. They were enrolled in a general English course within their liberal arts program. The participants were 19–20 years old and had English proficiency levels ranging from CEFR A2 to B1. The course included TOEIC preparation, reading, and writing activities.

This study focused on two writing events from a 14-week course: the fourth-week writing task and the seventh-week midterm exam. Both activities used the same essay topic. The fourth-week activity was an in-class writing task with ChatGPT support, and the exam was conducted in the seventh week, completed without external tools.

From the beginning of the course, learners were instructed to use ChatGPT for revising and improving their own writing, not for generating entire essays. Copying full AI-generated responses was strictly prohibited. Instead, learners were encouraged to analyze feedback, revise sentences, and share improved drafts in class. In addition to peer feedback, learners also received guidance and evaluations from the instructor.

Writing Task and Exam Design

In the fourth week, learners read a short text on the essay topic, watched a related video, and participated in group discussions. Then, learners wrote essays using ChatGPT, dictionaries, and a writing template divided into Introduction, Body 1, Body 2, and Conclusion. Learners had 60 minutes and were encouraged to revise their drafts using ChatGPT feedback. They also received corrective feedback from the instructor and peer reviews.

Three weeks later, the learners took the midterm exam, which consisted of two sections. The first section was a TOEIC-style vocabulary test, and the second was an essay-writing task. In the essay section, learners were told to write on the same topic they had previously practiced, this time without using any external resources and within a 15-minute time limit. The topic had been announced two weeks in advance.

ANALYSES

Quantitative Analysis

To assess differences in learners' writing between the ChatGPT-supported task and the independent exam, a paired-sample *t* test was conducted. Writing samples from both conditions were analyzed using Lu's (2010) web-based L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer. This tool allowed for the evaluation of writing in terms of fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity.

Table 1 shows the specific measures. These indicators were used to compare how learners performed with and without the support of ChatGPT.

TABLE 1. Measures for Task and Exam

Measure	Meaning of Measure	Term
Word Count	Total number of words per essay	fluency
Error Count[1]	Count of grammatical and lexical errors	accuracy
Mean Length of T-unit (MLT)[2]	Average number of words per T-unit	complexity
Clauses per Sentence (C/S)	Average number of clauses per sentence	complexity
Clauses per T-unit (C/T)	Average number of clauses per T-unit	complexity

Qualitative Analysis

In order to understand ChatGPT's influence on writing and learners' preparation strategies, a post-exam questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended items. The following two questions were used for qualitative analysis:

1. Were you able to write your essay during the exam?
2. What strategies did you use to write your essay during the preparation period and the exam?

The learners' responses were analyzed using Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies. While the full taxonomy includes six major categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, the analysis focused on the strategy types that emerged from the data.

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify patterns in how learners approached writing preparation and performance. Responses were coded to categorize them into distinct strategy types. This enables a deeper understanding of strategic language learning behavior.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis (Paired *t* Test)

Lu's (2010) L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer was used to assess fluency (word count), accuracy (error rate), and complexity (MLT, C/S, and C/T). *MLT* stands for "mean length of T-unit." It measures the average number of words per T-unit. A paired-sample *t* test compared 61 learners' writing in both the task and exam conditions. Table 2 shows the key results.

TABLE 2. Paired *t* Test of Task and Exam

Measure	Task Mean (SD)	Exam Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	*t* value	*p* value
Word Count	112.07 (27.52)	101.44 (22.05)	10.62	2.956	.004*
Error Count	4.62 (2.81)	5.85 (4.86)	-1.23	-2.069	.043*
MLT	16.83 (4.91)	14.83 (4.12)	2.00	2.689	.009*
C/S	1.89 (0.48)	1.74 (0.42)	0.15	1.861	.068
C/T	2.13 (0.65)	1.87 (0.62)	0.26	2.584	.012*

Note: $N = 61$, $p < .05$.

These results indicate that learners wrote longer essays with more complex sentence structures and fewer errors in the ChatGPT-supported task. The exam essays were shorter, less complex, and included more grammatical and lexical errors.

Learner Case Studies

To better understand how learners' writing features differed between the task and the exam, two individual cases of Ken's writing and Tomoko's writing, were analyzed in terms of fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity. Table 3 and 4 indicate the detailed data of Ken's writing and Tomoko's writing, respectively.

TABLE 3. Ken's Writing

Item	Word Count	Error[2] Count	Error Rate	Sentence Count	T-unit Count	Clause Count	MLT	C/S	C/T
Task	158	1	0.06%	9	10	17	15.8	1.89	1.70
Exam	104	4	0.38%	8	8	14	13	1.75	1.75

TABLE 4. Tomoko's Writing

Item	Word Count	Error Count	Error Rate	Sentence Count	T-unit Count	Clause Count	MLT	C/S	C/T
Task	140	2	0.14%	9	9	16	15.56	1.78	1.78
Exam	111	5	0.45%	7	7	16	15.86	2.29	2.29

As Table 3 shows, Ken's writing demonstrated a decline in almost all the items when moving from the task to the exam. In terms of fluency, his word count dropped from 158 words in the task to 104 words in the exam. Regarding accuracy, the number of errors increased from 1 to 4, which means the error rate rose from 0.06% to 0.38%. For syntactic complexity, the number of sentences, T-unit, and clauses decreased, from 9 to 8, from 10 to 8, and 17 to 14, respectively. These affected the number of MLT, C/T, and C/S, whose numbers decreased except for C/T. The rate of clause count out of T-unit count has some influence on the marginal increase of C/T of the exam compared to the task. These results show that Ken's writing in the exam, without AI support, tended to be less fluent (with fewer words and shorter T-units), less accurate (with more errors), and structurally simpler (with fewer clauses and sentences).

Tomoko, in contrast, displayed mixed patterns across the three dimensions. As Tables 4 shows, her fluency decreased from 140 words in the task to 111 words in the exam. Regarding accuracy, the number of errors increased from 2 to 5, which means the error rate rose from 0.14% to 0.45%. However, her syntactic complexity increased. While the number of clauses remained constant at 16 in both essays, the number of T-units decreased from 9 to 7, raising both her C/S and C/T ratios from 1.78 to 2.29. This suggests that, although her writing became slightly less fluent and accurate, she produced more clause-dense and structurally complex sentences in the exam condition.

These contrasting results illustrate that the impact of AI-supported writing on learners' performance varies by individual. Ken's writing became simpler without AI

support, while Tomoko managed to increase her syntactic complexity despite a modest decline in fluency and accuracy. These cases highlight the importance of examining individual patterns when evaluating the transferability of AI-mediated writing strategies to independent writing contexts.

Results of Post-Exam Questionnaire

Post-exam questionnaire results showed that 74% of learners felt they were able to complete the essay. The remaining learners also felt they had almost completed the essay but were not satisfied with the results due to a lack of preparation and time pressure.

Based on open coding aligned with Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies, the responses were grouped into different strategy categories. During ChatGPT-supported examination preparation, about 65% of the learners who completed all of the essays reported they practiced reading and writing and remembered phrases and sentences. Some of them reported that they analyzed expressions or translated when they felt it was difficult to remember the essay. Those learners' learning strategies stem from cognitive strategies. Around 20% said they practiced by reading their essays aloud to family members or friends, which reflects the use of social strategies. In addition, approximately 15% mentioned that they practiced writing under timed conditions to simulate the test situation and check their progress toward their goal, indicating the use of metacognitive strategies.

During the exam, it was found that many learners used cognitive strategies. This is because they reported they were able to write what they practiced and learned. They also used memory strategies because they used key words and phrases in the essays. However, some tended to omit content they could not recall. As a result, word counts in their exam essays declined. Few were able to express the content in different words or add new sentences.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the role of ChatGPT in enhancing learners' writing performance, focusing on fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity, and to explore the learning strategies used during ChatGPT-supported preparation and independent writing. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, the findings address the two research questions as follows.

RQ1. What are the quantitative differences in fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity between learners' writing in ChatGPT-assisted tasks and in independent examination writing?

The quantitative analysis revealed that learners' writing in the ChatGPT-assisted task was significantly more fluent, accurate, and syntactically complex than in the independent exam. Learners produced longer essays with fewer grammatical and lexical errors and demonstrated higher complexity as measured by MLT and C/T. These results suggest that AI assistance supports learners in producing more elaborate and linguistically accurate writing. In comparison, their writing in the independent exam condition was shorter, contained more errors, and exhibited lower syntactic complexity. This pattern indicates that learners may find it difficult to sustain their writing performance without external support.

RQ2. What learning strategies do learners employ during ChatGPT-supported examination preparation and during the actual examination?

To answer this question, the study examined learning strategies reported by the 61 participants during both the ChatGPT-supported preparation period and the independent exam. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy was used to classify the strategies into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social categories.

During the preparation phase, the most commonly reported strategies were memory strategies, such as memorizing phrases or sentences suggested by ChatGPT, and cognitive strategies, including rewriting or analyzing AI-generated output. These strategies helped learners store useful patterns and understand how to apply them. Additionally, many learners used metacognitive strategies, such as planning their study time and setting goals for practice, and social strategies, such as practicing writing aloud with peers or receiving feedback from peers or family members. These indirect strategies were used to organize learning and enhance motivation.

In contrast, during the actual exam, when external resources and social support were not available, learners relied less on indirect strategies. The use of memory strategies remained, especially for recalling previously memorized expressions. However, many learners did not show flexible application of compensation strategies, such as rephrasing or using simpler alternatives when they forgot a phrase. This suggests that their strategic behavior became more rigid under time pressure, and that some learners may have depended too much on ChatGPT during preparation, limiting their ability to adjust independently.

To illustrate these patterns, the writings of two learners, Ken and Tomoko, were examined in detail. Ken mainly used memory strategies, focusing on reading and recalling sentences. While this helped him during preparation, it was less effective in the exam when he could not remember phrases or sentences. As a result, his writing became shorter and simpler. Tomoko combined memory and cognitive strategies by reconstructing complex sentences learned earlier. Although this approach increased syntactic complexity in her exam writing, it also reduced fluency and accuracy. This suggests that her strategy use improved some aspects of writing but made others more difficult.

Overall, the findings suggest that while a variety of strategies were employed during ChatGPT-supported preparation, learners tended to narrow their strategies in

the exam context. This indicates the need to place greater emphasis on helping learners develop flexible and transferable strategies that can be applied in independent writing situations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of ChatGPT on learners' writing performance and the learning strategies they employed during preparation and independent writing. The analysis showed that learners produced more fluent, accurate, and syntactically complex writing in ChatGPT-assisted tasks than in the exam. This suggests that ChatGPT support can enhance writing quality.

In terms of learning strategies, a wide range of strategies were used during the preparation period, including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. However, during the exam, strategy use became more limited, and many learners showed difficulty adapting their approaches without ChatGPT. These findings highlight the importance of fostering flexible and transferable strategies to help learners perform effectively in independent writing situations.

Future research should explore how learners can be guided to use AI tools such as ChatGPT not only as a source of input but also as a means to strengthen their own strategic writing abilities. Instructional support may also be needed to help learners gradually shift from AI-supported practice to more autonomous writing performance.

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NOTES

[1] In the analysis of the examination data, minor errors involving the omission of articles such as *the* or *a*/*an* were not counted as errors. This decision was made because some learners had not yet reached a level of proficiency that enabled consistent and accurate use of English articles.

[2] According to Ortega (2003) and Lu (2011), MLT is regarded as a measure of complexity.

Panel Discussion Reports

Reflective Practice Panel: Teacher Maxims

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This paper discusses the perceived beneficial outcomes of the authors' participation in a series of reflective practice (RP) meetings from September-November of 2024. The central theme during the sessions was teacher maxims (Richards, 1996). First, we define and illustrate teacher maxims, then the characteristics of the RP group are discussed. This article concludes with suggestions for readers to cultivate a deeper awareness of their personal teacher maxims.

INTRODUCTION

The authors participated in a total of three reflective practice (RP) sessions from September to November 2024. Christopher was the primary facilitator. In two out of three sessions, the theme was teacher maxims. This article provides a brief overview of teacher maxims and their potential relevance to classroom practice. From there, the characteristics of the RP group meetings, which both authors participated in, are addressed. The authors then share their experience and discuss the value they felt they derived from participating in RP meetings. Finally, strategies to cultivate awareness of teacher maxims are suggested.

WHAT ARE TEACHER MAXIMS?

Richards (1996) defined *teacher maxims* as "personal working principles which reflect teachers' individual philosophies of teaching, developed from their experience of teaching and learning, their teaching education experiences, and from their own personal beliefs and value systems" (p. 283). Teacher maxims are not always succinctly articulated by teachers themselves, as the following example illustrates: "I have been in situations where I did not understand what was being taught or what was being said, and how frustrating it is, and so when I try to approach it, I say: How can I make it the easiest way for them to understand what they need to learn?" (Richards, 1996, p. 285). In this example, we clearly see how a teacher maxim is derived from

the teacher's past experience as a learner. Perhaps their maxim could be described succinctly as the maxim of user-friendliness: Do not make the learning experience more challenging than absolutely necessary. Such a maxim has much utility, but it is not without its limitations. For example, if material is "too easy" to comprehend, might learners fail to engage in adequate conceptual processing to achieve a deeper understanding?

Farrell (2015, pp. 55–56) provided a list of prevalent teacher maxims that is reproduced in Table 1. (Side Note: These options were what participants viewed during the RP meetings considered in this article.) Farrell goes on to elaborate about the utility of teacher maxims:

> The main point to remember as we (re)consider our axioms or maxims is that there are no right or wrong maxims; however, we now recognize that up to now we may have unquestioningly accepted some of them as truth. When we reflect on our teacher maxims we can uncover unconsciously held assumptions about teaching, and learning this new awareness can be used to help us interpret and evaluate our own teaching as well as the teaching of others. (p. 51)

TABLE 1. Prevalent Teacher Maxims

Maxim	Description
Involvement	Follow the learners' interests to maintain student involvement.
Planning	Maintain order and discipline throughout the lesson.
Encouragement	Seek ways to encourage student learning.
Accuracy	Work for accurate output.
Efficiency	Make the most efficient use of classroom time.
Empowerment	Give learners control.
Appropriate Level	Students can perform tasks and not feel frustrated.
Addressing Schemata	The bridge to the new material is built.
Flexibility	The teacher is able to satisfy needs of all types of learners.
Cooperation	Interaction patterns that may consist of teacher–student, student–student, student–teacher, and group work.
Positive Attitude	Class forms positive attitude towards target language and culture.
Learner-Centered Class	Teacher is in the class to elicit knowledge and help students to acquire skills.
Varied Types of Practice	Practice is directed to formation of a variety of skills, not one.
Validity	Teacher provides a task that does what it is supposed to be doing.
Cultural Input	Cultural information is presented to the class.
Curiosity	Tasks are designed to elicit and satisfy natural curiosity.
Perfection	Students want to become better.
Independent Learning	Instructions on independent learning are given.
Individual Approach	Individual merits are taken into consideration.
Motivation	Tools for forming positive motivation are used.
Control and Feedback	Students' homework is checked and correction is explained.
Fallibility	Teacher is also a human and can make mistakes.
Self-Esteem	Students' self-confidence increases as they progress in the language.
Using Technology	Technology in the classroom is a fun and effective tool to diversify language teaching.
Reward	Opportunities to receive rewards are promoted.

Teacher maxims inform teacher decision-making. Richards (1996) argued that teacher maxims serve as an encapsulation of a teacher's subjective philosophy of teaching (p. 284). Richards further noted that teaching is filled with many interactive decisions (p. 286). A stereotypical example is when students return after recess very energetic, the educator may elect to do a "cool down" activity before proceeding with their initial lesson sequence. Thus, infallible prescriptive guidance cannot be expected from teacher methodology courses, from textbooks, or curricular pacing guides. There are simply too many variables operating in the day-to-day life of an educator to rigidly adhere to top-down prescriptions.

Teacher maxims, whether consciously articulated or not, have a profound influence on the instructional choices a teacher makes. Tsui (1995, p. 357) contrasted two teachers working in the same educational institution. The first is a Hong Kong teacher who employed what Richards terms "The Maxim of Order: Maintain order and discipline throughout the lesson" (Richards, 1996, p. 289). The second is a New Zealand teacher who foregrounded "The Maxim of Encouragement: Seek ways to encourage student learning" (Richards, p. 290). The former teacher, who Tsui noted produced strong academic results (cited in Richards, p. 289), followed rigid protocols and cited challenges in eliciting student participation (Tsui, p. 357). In contrast, the teacher from New Zealand resisted traditional instructional routines. For instance, students were allowed to volunteer answers without raising their hands and students were not always seated in rows. Tsui reported that this class was more relaxed and noisier as learners often volunteered answers from their seats. Regardless, the teacher reported being pleased that the learners were making contributions (p. 357).

Maxims can conflict at times. Cortazzi (cited in Richards, 1996, p. 287) illustrated what Richards referred to as a "Maxim of Involvement: Follow learners' interests to maintain student involvement" (p. 287) and the "The Maxim of Planning: Plan your teaching and try to follow your plan" (p. 288). Teachers who hold the former maxim may decide to adjust their lessons based on the engagement displayed by their learners. Cortazzi quoted an informant illustrating the maxim of involvement: "And I just jumped on it. So whatever else I had planned for the day I just didn't do because something else had come up that was much more exciting" (p. 287). Woods contrasted this with a teacher who, in Richards' words, downplays an alternative interpretation volunteered by a student regarding a response related to a definition. The teacher justified her response stating, "They weren't exactly giving me what was necessary" (cited in Richards, p. 288). In these two brief vignettes, we see the role of teacher maxims in informing instructional decisions in moments of ambiguity or when a minor dilemma emerges.

RP Meetings Considered During the Panel

Though these meetings were somewhat informal in nature, we attempted to adhere to certain elements of Farrell's (2015, p. 102) guidelines for a teacher reflection

group. Christopher was the primary facilitator in all sessions and attempted to make group members feel safe and connected through sharing experiences. However, given competing priorities, we were unable to get members to achieve a feeling of passion among members for the group, nor a sense of honoring the group, which Farrell also recommended. There was a total of three sessions under consideration in this panel. The number of attendees varied. The first meeting, on September 24, 2024, included 12 members, as it was attached to a Seoul KOTESOL meeting that preceded the RP session, October 19 had five attendees and the November 12 session included 3 attendees. The latter session was conducted online via Zoom.

Perceived Benefits of Participating in the RP Sessions

Christopher felt participation in the group helped make him more aware of deficiencies in his practice. During the October 19 session, Christopher mentioned prioritizing a maxim of clarity in his teaching practice. A participant in the session indicated that communicating why is very important to her. This led Christopher to reflect on the effort he has spent on communicating the what and how, but not necessarily the why to learners about the purpose of classroom activities or the relevance of the larger curriculum to the lives of his learners.

Christopher believed that these RP sessions influenced him to make concrete changes to his teaching practice. In the November 12 session, Anika mentioned her use of recording practice rounds of learner speeches and assigning a variety of self-observation tasks. She believed the practice led to improved outcomes in the final performance of her learners' speeches. Christopher had considered the idea before, but due to a series of constraints in his current work context and perhaps a lack of initiative on his part, never implemented self-observation for the public speaking unit in his curriculum. When there were a series of significant curricular changes placed upon Christopher in late 2024, he felt he had the opportunity to have students engage in self-observation related to delivering a formal speech.

Christopher was made aware of additional resources and knowledge as a result of his participation in the RP sessions. One attendee enthusiastically discussed his use of the Cambridge English teaching framework (CambridgeEnglish.org, n.d.) as a self-diagnostic tool to determine suitable paths for professional development. Using this tool, Christopher felt he needed to cultivate a clearer long-term career focus. An admitted "fan" of ELT literature, after considering the scales in the subcategory of "planning development," Christopher ranked himself as somewhere between developing and proficient. He conceded that he could not concur with the statement contained in the aforementioned framework: "[I] actively seek the most appropriate professional development activities in line with [my] career goals."

Anika felt that examining the list of teacher maxims shared during the November 12 meeting was beneficial. She indicated that she liked the maxim of self-esteem (see Table 1). She articulated her surprise while initially working with university

students in South Korea. According to her, due to the exam pressures in high school, they enter her class practically thinking that it is impossible to speak in English. Anika described her teacher practices, which focus heavily on recycling discussion tasks and increasing learners' rate of speaking. Her curricular goals were not strictly performance-based. She wanted to increase learner confidence in their ability to communicate orally in English. She felt that seeing the maxim of self-esteem helped to validate her teaching practices.

CULTIVATING AWARENESS OF TEACHER MAXIMS

Richard's (1996) recommends a variety of strategies to build awareness of personal teacher maxims (p. 294). Journaling is one way to explicitly state one's teacher maxims. For educators struggling to identify their teacher maxims, engaging in self-observation is a way to infer what personal teacher maxims are actually displayed in practice. Self-observation can also be useful for teachers to determine how well their practice aligns with their personal teacher maxims.

CONCLUSION

Teacher maxims guide our teaching choices and priorities. Awareness of them is essential. Without this awareness, ossification may set in. As Richards (1996) noted, teachers' perspectives and maxims "have a lasting influence on teachers' thinking and practice and may also create resistance to alternative modes of thought and action" (p. 294).

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Reframing the Rhetorical Triangle for AI in ELT

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This article reimagines Aristotle's rhetorical triangle – ethos, pathos, and logos – as a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between teachers, students, and artificial intelligence (AI) in English language teaching (ELT). Each author offers insights on one of the dimensions, highlighting the interdependence and evolving roles within AI-integrated classrooms. Through examples and discussion, they emphasize the importance of preserving the human components of education while leveraging the potential of AI in English language learning.

INTRODUCTION

The article explores how Aristotle's rhetorical triangle – ethos, pathos, and logos – can serve as a productive analogy for understanding the evolving relationship between teachers, students, and artificial intelligence (AI) in English language teaching (ELT). Rather than analyzing rhetorical persuasion, the authors reframe the triangle to examine how credibility (teacher/ethos), emotional engagement (student/pathos), and logic or structure (AI/logos) interact in contemporary classrooms.

Each author contributes to the reframing of the triangle by addressing one of the focused perspectives: (a) the teacher as the ethical and instructional anchor (ethos), (b) the student as the emotional and motivational center (pathos), and (c) AI as a source of structure, support, and challenge (logos).

Rather than offering a prescriptive model, we, the authors, encourage reflection on balance, tension, and interdependence among these three forces. Through examples and discussion, the authors consider how to preserve humanity in teaching while leveraging the innovation AI offers.

TEACHER AS ETHOS IN THE AI-ERA CLASSROOM

In reimagining Aristotle's rhetorical triangle for the age of AI in education, we position the teacher as the embodiment of ethos – credibility, trust, and ethical guidance. While students bring emotional engagement (pathos) and AI represents logic and structure (logos), it is the teacher who orchestrates learning with intentionality, values, and human presence. In this brief reflection, I (Michael Free) outline three roles that teachers play in maintaining balance: trusted guide, ethical gatekeeper, and learning architect – illustrated through classroom examples from my university courses.

As trusted guides, teachers build credibility by modeling responsible AI use. In my "General English: Listening and Speaking" course, I explicitly demonstrate how to use tools like ChatGPT for brainstorming, outlining, or refining language but also clarify when reliance on AI becomes counterproductive. This involves in-class modeling; real-time correction of common AI missteps; and humorous, candid reflections on my own learning, intended to normalize uncertainty and emphasize growth. Similarly, in my "AI and Elementary Education" course for pre-service teachers, I encourage extensive AI exploration, but every student use of AI must be documented and critically discussed. This transparency supports the development of digital discernment.

As ethical gatekeepers, teachers must set clear boundaries around AI use and create a culture of trust and academic integrity. In the General English course, students are given explicit guidelines about what constitutes appropriate support versus academic dishonesty. They are allowed, but not required, to use AI with clear examples of when and how it can aid learning. In contrast, students in the AI and Elementary Education course are expected to use AI tools regularly as part of the course structure but must also engage in ongoing dialogue about its ethical implications. They ask, "What is cheating when collaboration involves both humans and machines?" These questions become essential to building AI literacy grounded in values rather than convenience.

Finally, as learning architects, teachers design intentional experiences, choosing when, how, and why to integrate AI. In my "Intercultural Communication" class, AI-generated support materials for textbook readings are provided, but students are also prompted to reflect on how these tools support or obscure deeper cultural understanding. Across all courses, I use AI for backend support – automating group rotations, drafting one-page lesson plans, generating quiz questions, and analyzing assessment data – but these efficiencies are always in service of human-centered learning. I don't allow AI to drive the curriculum; instead, I use it to open space for feedback, reflection, and more meaningful interaction.

Together, these roles reflect a teacher's evolving ethos in the age of AI. We are not simply facilitators or content experts but intentional designers of trust, learning, and ethical engagement. We shape the space where human and machine interaction occurs. While AI may offer structure and students bring passion, it is the teacher who ensures that what unfolds in the classroom remains both human and humane.

LEARNER VOICE AS PATHOS IN THE AI-ERA CLASSROOM

Pathos is a device used to persuade a reader or listener, and inviting English language learners to examine the rhetorical role of pathos in their writing can serve as a means to learn how to better express their experiences or views accurately. That process can be supported with AI as an instructional tool that helps students go beyond just examining if their writing is grammatical to whether they expressed their intent.

Figure 1 is an example of using AI in a writing task to engage students in consideration of pathos, using a manga-style cartoon image of a girlfriend and a boyfriend engaged in dialogue. The image shows the girlfriend's facial and body language along with the boyfriend's expression, one speech bubble, and one internal thought bubble. Students can also be given the opportunity to generate their own image, choose the topic, characteristics of the image, and the intended genre and style of the writing piece.

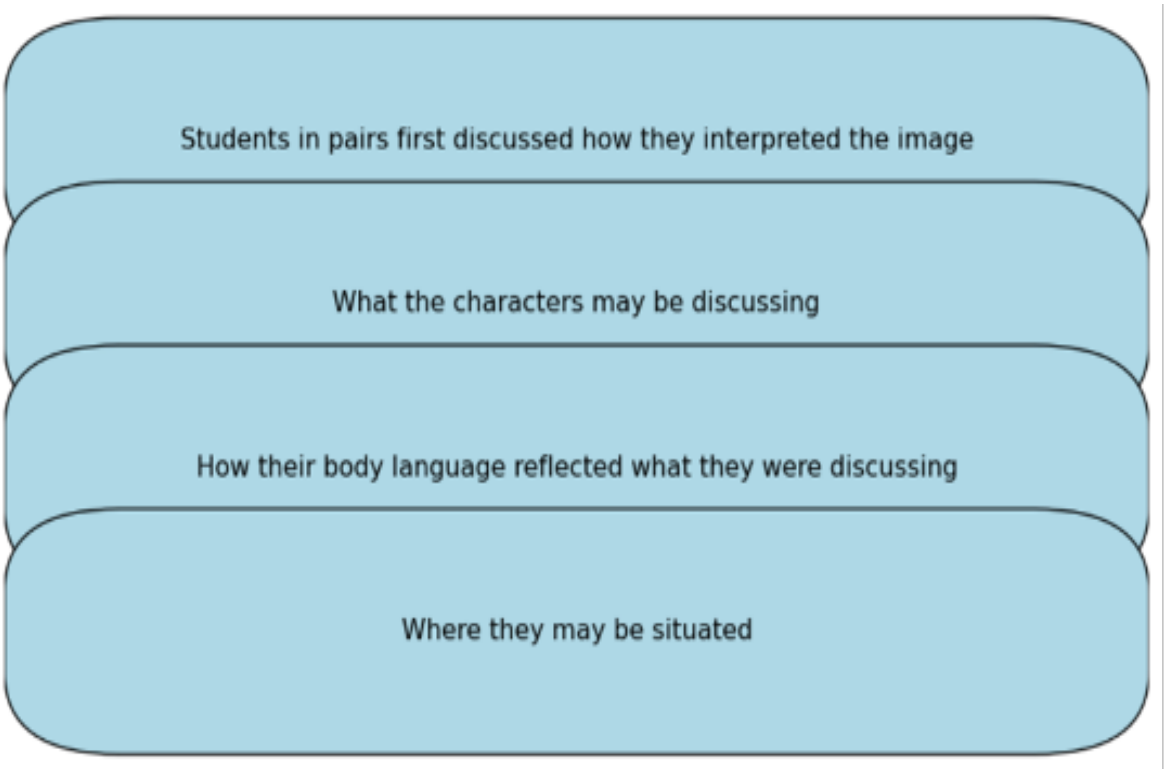
FIGURE 1. Writing Prompt Image: A Girlfriend and Boyfriend Conversation

(Google AI, 2025)

For this example, students are university level with an intermediate level English learners (A2 CEFR); however, this example image and activity could be adjusted for A1 CEFR-level students (i.e., middle/high school students).

To begin the writing process, students in pairs first discuss how they interpreted the image, what the characters may be discussing, how their body language reflects what they were discussing, and where they may be situated. After this discussion, the students, again in pairs, fill out a graphic organizer to organize their thoughts and outcomes of the discussion (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Themes of Discussion Outcome Graphic Organizer



With the topic of the discussion and emotions represented, students then individually storyboard the structure and progression of the story they will write. They are asked to describe (a) what happened earlier to the two characters in the image, (b) what is happening now between them in the image, and (c) what happens the moment after the present encounter is over.

After students produce the three segment descriptions associated with the image in written language, they are asked to use that language to write an AI prompt to generate a descriptive interpretation of what they wish to communicate.

When students have the descriptions for the three segments of their story, they engage in an examination of the language that AI produced, with a focus on structure (i.e., grammar), vocabulary use (i.e., lexis) and how emotion was reflected in the language produced, through lexical and/or structural choice. Through a comparative analysis of both descriptions, students reflect on how language and perspective shape meaning.

Students are then encouraged to intentionally select a stylistic mode of expression, such as a manga comic format, and determine whether to include complementary elements such as audio or music. Finally, they decide on a delivery platform, choosing between still or motion-based presentation formats. Throughout the process, students are prompted to consider how each creative and technical decision affects audience perception, emotional engagement, and interpretive outcomes, fostering deeper awareness of the rhetorical impact of multimodal design in digital environments.

AI's Logical Role, Logos, in the ELT Classroom

In the rhetorical triangle adapted for this panel, AI represents logos: the structured, logical, and data-driven element of modern ELT. This framing captures how AI contributes to learning through analytical tools, procedural thinking, and logical modeling. But the presentation and subsequent audience discussion also surfaced deeper tensions and possibilities, ones that reach beyond classroom logistics into questions of equity, ethics, and long-term impact.

At its best, AI supports the logic and structure in ELT by scaffolding instruction. It generates content such as quizzes, feedback, and summaries quickly and efficiently based on clearly defined language patterns and rules. These capabilities allow instructors to save time on repetitive tasks and enable them to better focus on students. For example, AI can be used to generate IELTS-style writing prompts and simulate dialogues at different CEFR proficiency levels in the same class.

AI is especially effective when paired with a process-oriented approach. In advanced writing classes, students are prompted to brainstorm, outline, and revise; at each step, they engage with both human feedback and AI scaffolding. As part of my instruction, I (Victor Reeser) ask students to log their prompts and responses allowing them to examine how logic and structure emerge in machine-generated responses. The meta-awareness that arises from this kind of work promotes not only language development but also digital literacy. It allows students to see AI as a structure tool that must be evaluated, adapted, and reflected on critically.

However, as AI tools become more advanced, so too do the risks. AI lacks empathy, intuition, and cultural sensitivity. It is prone to hallucinations, can propagate misinformation, and typically offers only surface-level understanding of topics. These are serious flaws. Students may lean too heavily on these tools, and submit work that bypasses critical engagement. In turn, this raises new challenges around academic integrity and authorship. In my own classes, I mitigate this by requiring students to document each step of the writing process. This allows me to identify inconsistencies and redirect instruction toward reflection and ownership.

At the heart of our panel discussion, however, was a concern larger than pedagogy. Audience members raised powerful questions about who current AI practices serve. Much of the global discourse around AI in education is framed around high-achieving students in well-resourced environments, that is, those who have already reached higher education. But what about students in the margins? One participant noted how this kind of discussion can feel like "talking from the tower," disconnected from real education disparity. This critique progressed into a thoughtful discussion on how generative AI could offer support to learners in underfunded communities.

In fact, large-scale initiatives addressing this subject are already taking place. In Thailand, UNESCO is planning its first international consortium on generative AI in 2026, focusing on AI's role in supporting national public education goals (Friberg-Storey, 2025). South Korea has similarly announced that AI-based learning tools will be introduced into public schools that same year (Seoul Government Complex, 2023).

These efforts demonstrate an understanding of the transformative potential of AI for all students.

Logos, then, is no longer just about logic and structure. It is also about judgement – making intentional decisions about what AI can and should do in education. As AI becomes more embedded in our tools and platforms, it is the teacher's role to shape how logos is applied: to frame its logic, check its accuracy, and guide its integration in ways that protect the human core of language learning.

CONCLUSION

Reframing the rhetorical triangle for ELT in the age of AI invites us to consider more than just tools; it asks us to reflect on relationships. By positioning the teacher as ethos, the student as pathos, and AI as logos, we illuminate the evolving dynamics of trust, engagement, and logic in the classroom. The teacher anchors the learning space with ethical clarity and purposeful design; the student brings emotional depth, creativity, and voice; and AI offers structure and support when thoughtfully guided. Yet this triangle is not fixed. It shifts with context, policy, access, and pedagogy. What remains constant is the need for balance and intentionality. As educators, we must ensure that AI enhances rather than erodes the human core of language learning. This panel does not offer a formula but a frame: one that prompts us to ask, in every course and context, how these three forces interact, and how we might keep learning both rigorous and humane in a time of accelerating change.

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Roundtable Report

Bridging the Gap: Preparing EFL Students for Global Readiness

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Global readiness, as both an educational imperative and a pedagogical challenge, demands that EFL instructors move beyond standardized curricula to foster students' communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and critical engagement. Drawing on dialogic and critical pedagogy, this roundtable discussion addressed the misalignment between how English is often taught (through rote memorization and test-oriented instruction) and how it is used in real-world, global contexts. Participants reflected on shared classroom experiences across varied educational systems, identifying barriers such as limited institutional support and passive learning cultures. In response, educators shared practical, student-centered strategies aimed at promoting global competencies and language fluency. Central to this dialogue was the evolving role of the EFL instructor as a cultural mediator and change agent within their institutions. This paper outlines the key themes and insights that emerged, offering a practice-informed foundation for instructors seeking to prepare students for the demands of an increasingly interconnected world.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of this roundtable discussion is based on observations we made while teaching our university-level English courses: Many of our students expressed the desire to work or study abroad, yet they did not realize the importance of cultural nuance and how it affects communication. Throughout the course of a semester, students often mentioned that they have become uncertain whether they would be able to adapt abroad due to their lack of intercultural communication skills and their lacking English abilities.

This is not a unique predicament; in modern society, the use of English for international communication continues to expand, yet many EFL students are still unprepared to use the language in real-world, intercultural contexts. This issue is particularly evident in South Korea, where English language education often prioritizes standardized tests over meaningful communication and intercultural interactions. As a result, students often struggle with fluency, intercultural understanding, and workplace readiness despite years of dedicated study.

In order to address this gap, we facilitated a roundtable session that brought together eight educators, mainly based in South Korea, with others based in Hong Kong and China, for a structured discussion on how higher education instructors can

better support students' global readiness. After a brief theoretical framing, participants worked in groups to discuss challenges such as test-driven learning, cultural isolation, and lack of opportunities for real-world communication practice.

This paper outlines the key themes, participant insights, and pedagogical strategies that emerged from the roundtable session. The roundtable emphasized the need for a shift toward culturally responsive, communicative, and student-centered EFL practices by drawing on models such as Byram's intercultural communicative competence (2020), Freire's critical pedagogy (2018), and Global Englishes perspectives (Rose et al., 2020). The attendees shared concerns that reflected broader systemic issues and reaffirmed the need to reimagine the EFL classroom as a space for global preparation and intercultural learning.

KEY THEMES AND REFLECTIONS

Limited Cultural Awareness

In terms of Byram's (2020, p. 91) model, there was a broad consensus that students are not provided with adequate opportunities to develop *savoir être* (openness to others) or *savior comprendre* (the ability to interpret and relate across cultures). Participants widely agreed that students in Korean university EFL programs exhibit limited awareness and knowledge of other cultures and often struggle to understand the global relevance of English. This lack of intercultural competence was attributed to both systemic and curricular issues. Attendees noted that students often perceive English solely as a language used in academic contexts, disconnected from real-world applications, due to the lack of exposure to English in non-educational contexts. For example, one attendee mentioned that their students enter the semester with a negative mindset about English, only realizing its full value halfway though, thus delaying their engagement and development.

The discussion revealed that many Korean textbooks rely on translation-based tasks or narrowly focus on Korean and Anglophone cultural examples (primarily the United States or the United Kingdom), which rarely encourage students to explore diverse global perspectives. Attendees observed that this reinforces a limited, hierarchical view of English-speaking cultures and fails to cultivate curiosity about non-Anglophone cultures.

It is important to note that this is not a universal experience, as one participant from Hong Kong noted that this issue was less prominent in their local context, where trilingualism fosters earlier and broader exposure to cultural diversity. Therefore, illustrating that more active cultural and linguistic exposure in real-world contexts could benefit students' English skills development and retention. Nonetheless, the consensus amongst instructors in Korea and China was that the current system does not support intercultural competence, either linguistically or culturally.

From Classroom English to Global English

Another dominant theme in the roundtable was the disconnect between how English is taught in Korean institutions in comparison to how it is used globally. Attendees stressed that the system privileges high-stakes testing as a metric for English proficiency, particularly the TOEIC exam, which promotes vocabulary memorization over fluency or communicative competence. This narrow focus leaves students ill-equipped to function in intercultural or professional settings where flexibility, clarity, and fluency matter more than precision (Rose et al., 2020, p. 4).

Although students typically spend years studying English, several participants expressed frustration that many students are unable to construct basic sentences, participate in conversations, or listen effectively. One instructor commented that even when progress is made in class to use English in practice, students often revert to test-preparation habits due to external pressure. As a result, students feel demotivated, as they have “done everything right” but are still unable to use English meaningfully and effectively.

In response, both presenters and attendees described how they integrate Global Englishes principles into their practice. These include using fluency-focused tasks, scenario-based roleplays, and intercultural simulations that highlight English use in diverse, non-Anglophone contexts. For example, one suggested assessment required students to roleplay a cultural miscommunication while traveling, requiring both linguistic performance and cultural research. The objective of these strategies is to help students develop flexible, real-world communication skills that go beyond the narrow native-speaking model.

Washback from High-Stakes Testing

Closely tied to the above discussion was a critique of the washback effect caused by Korea’s reliance on standardized tests like TOEIC and the national Suneung exam. Attendees argued that the national importance of these assessments shape how English is taught at various institutions across Korea (including after-school academies, public school, and at the university level). Additionally, English is also perceived as a measurable commodity instead of a tool to be used. One attendee commented that they often have to help students “unlearn” unproductive habits developed through years of test-focused instruction, like focusing on using correct grammar, instead of appropriate or effective language.

Another key issue raised was the inappropriate use of standardized tests for class placement. In some institutions, students are placed in classes, such as beginner, intermediate, or advanced level, based on TOEIC scores or online placement tests, which often do not align with students’ actual speaking or listening abilities. One presenter shared an example of a student who had someone else take the placement test on their behalf, resulting in misplacement into an advanced-level class, although their skills were on a beginner-level. This reflects broader cultural

emphasis on achieving high scores, regardless of whether the score reflects practical ability.

Overall, the group agreed that the dominance of high-stakes testing undermines the development of communicative competence and creates a mismatch between institutional goals and classroom realities.

Challenging Passive Learning

The discussion also touched on how systemic issues in EFL education contribute to what Freire (2018, p. 117) termed the “banking concept” of education, where students are viewed as passive recipients of information rather than active participants in knowledge construction. Attendees shared their concern that students expect to dissociate during English class, assuming they can memorize content later. However, with summative assessments increasingly focused on practical skills like conversation and comprehension, this approach is not beneficial to the students’ learning experience.

Most attendees expressed their desire to shift toward more dialogic, transformative educational approaches. Some instructors had already taken steps in this direction by designing critical thinking or study skills courses to help students navigate the educational system more reflectively. However, participants also noted that institutional or departmental constraints often limit the freedom to implement such pedagogical changes.

Although the session sparked a shared sense of professional affirmation and empowerment, attendees acknowledged that broader systemic reform requires collective effort and structural support. Nonetheless, the roundtable affirmed that individual educators could take small, yet intentional, steps to foster critical awareness, challenge passive learning norms, and prepare students for life beyond the classroom.

OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS

The roundtable served as a venue for exploring the systemic challenges students and instructors face in EFL education, allowing the attendees to reflect in a collaborative manner and share ideas for overcoming mutual challenges. Although attendance was modest, the depth of participation revealed that the concerns raised by the presenters, such as the overreliance of standardized testing, lack of intercultural competence, and prevalence of rote learning, were widely shared by the attendees in diverse teaching contexts.

Several results emerged from the session. First, participants expressed a renewed sense of clarity about the global disconnect between how English is taught and how it is used. Attendees noted that even in different countries, many students face similar obstacles: They are over-assessed, under-prepared for real-world communication, and unaware of English’s role as a global tool. The discussion helped

reaffirm the need for English as a foreign language instructors to act not only as language teachers but as cultural mediators and agents of educational change within their institutions.

Second, attendees were particularly receptive to the practical strategies shared during the session, such as using fluency-focused speaking tasks, scenario-based intercultural roleplays, and team discussions requiring global, rather than Korean-centric, examples. These techniques were seen as promising ways to overcome students' hesitation, promote global awareness, and encourage authentic use of English in the classroom.

Finally, the roundtable also revealed the potential for cross-disciplinary connections. One attendee, a content instructor who teaches Korean studies in English, shared that she faces similar challenges despite not teaching English as a subject. Her participation illustrated that the challenges of globalization, student disengagement, and classroom communication extend beyond the field of EFL. This insight suggests opportunities for future interdisciplinary collaboration, especially in English-medium instruction contexts.

Although the roundtable discussion affirmed a shared desire for change, it also stressed the limited institutional support as a common challenge. Many attendees acknowledged that, despite their willingness to implement new methods, systemic constraints often make innovation difficult. However, the session emphasized the value of small, intentional changes, initiatives that instructors can implement in their individual classrooms that can contribute to broader transformation over time.

CONCLUSION

The roundtable discussion reaffirmed the complex and interconnected challenges faced by EFL educators in preparing students for global success, particularly in contexts shaped by test-driven curricula, limited intercultural exposure, and passive learning cultures. Although the issues are systemic in nature, the discussion proved that meaningful change often begins at the classroom level, with educators taking proactive steps to foster global awareness, communicative competence, and critical engagement.

Consequently, it is clear that the need for dialogic and culturally responsive teaching practices exists, as it offers significant potential as a method to counteract rote learning and foster deeper student engagement in EFL classrooms. In addition, the role of the EFL instructor as a cultural mediator and global skills facilitator is becoming increasingly important in the preparation of students for intercultural interactions outside the confines of the classroom.

As the demands on our students evolve, so too must our approaches. Whether through classroom innovation, professional collaboration, or institutional advocacy, EFL educators are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between language learning and global readiness, starting one intentional step at a time.

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