

Navigating language and life: Supporting immigrant learners in their ESL journey

By Tetiana Yaremchuk, Canada

I came to Canada in June 2022 as an immigrant because of the conflict in Ukraine, so I know directly how difficult it is to start over in a new country. I currently teach English as an additional language (EAL) to adult immigrants at ISANS, mostly dealing with students at Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) levels 1 through 3. I have almost ten years of experience teaching high school students in Ukraine.

Teaching low-level students from a variety of backgrounds necessitates a thorough comprehension of their requirements and difficulties. In accordance with the CLB, ISANS uses the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) approach. This method guarantees that classes centre on useful, real-world tasks, enabling students to confidently navigate their new surroundings. In addition, I work to include the organization's guiding ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion into my teaching.

The educational backgrounds of the students in my class are diverse. Five to ten percent have earned bachelor's or master's degrees from universities. About 10% have only completed junior high school, whereas around 60% have either completed high school or college. Because of their diverse educational backgrounds, some students may be less familiar with formal education, while others may be more used to regimented classroom settings. It is essential for educators to consider these distinctions while creating lesson plans and selecting suitable teaching strategies.

Additionally, a lot of students deal with homesickness, personal trauma, or the strain of adjusting to a new society. Attendance and concentration are frequently impacted while juggling work, children, and other obligations with lessons. It can be quite difficult to navigate Canada's educational system and social conventions, particularly for students who are not accustomed to scheduled study.

I create lessons that emphasize relevance, usefulness, and accessibility to overcome these obstacles. The CLB framework and the PBLA system offer helpful direction. Using real-world tasks examples like completing documents, scheduling appointments, or comprehending transit schedules, I emphasize task-based learning. This method aids students in developing vital life skills and confidence.

I also use a range of interesting activities, both in-person and online, to help them even more and make learning fun and accessible. In addition to dialogues and interactive exercises to increase speaking confidence, these activities also include icebreakers to establish rapport and lower fear, role-playing games to simulate real-world interactions, visual materials, sensory techniques, and project-based work to accommodate various learning styles. Since many students are anxious about speaking or making mistakes, especially when they are new to the class, I also implement supporting tactics.

My objective is to establish a friendly and secure atmosphere where students feel at ease taking part. My teaching style has been influenced by a trend I've observed in my students over the years. People who have been educated in their home country, but are unemployed, frequently have exceptional receptive abilities, such as writing and reading. Conversely, students who work full-time or part-time but did not complete college typically possess better productive abilities, such speaking and listening. This discovery leads to a crucial conclusion: students' language development is greatly influenced by their persistence, autonomous efforts, and the assistance they receive from their surroundings.

For them to succeed in their language journey, combining these efforts—whether through structured instruction or practical experience—is essential. For my students, these tactics have produced motivating results. After volunteering at a food bank, one student was hired as a teaching assistant at a private daycare facility. After getting lost, another elderly student was able to find her way home without a cell phone, just having a conversation and asking for directions. Another student was also employed to work as a volunteer in a senior home. Notably, a senior learner from Ukraine who had previously relied on her daughter for help was able to discuss her health concerns with a nurse and make an appointment with a doctor for a follow-up.

These success stories demonstrate both the adaptability of students and the potency of a learner-centered, inclusive teaching methodology. My teaching style is influenced by my personal immigrant experience. My desire to develop lessons that are both realistic and caring stems from my understanding of the anxiety that comes with adjusting to a new language and culture.

It is a privilege and a challenge to teach ESL students at a low level. These students are incredibly resilient and determined, and they can make amazing progress in the classroom if given the proper tools. The CLB and the PBLA system offer a strong basis for creating learner-centered, successful sessions. Teachers may close gaps and assist students in creating a better future in their new nation by emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion and adjusting their classes to meet the needs of their students and to make the classes meaningful.



Author Bio



Tetiana has over 15 years of experience teaching English as a second language. Before moving to Canada from Ukraine, she taught high school students and ran private classes for adults. She holds a Master's degree in English Language and Literature (Greek Language), along with TESOL and TEFL certifications. She arrived in Canada in 2022 and was hired the same year as an EAL instructor at ISANS, where she supports newcomers in building essential language skills.