Task-based language teaching and English for
Academic Purposes: Challenges and effectiveness
PLUS Bridging the language gap: Challenges
and opportunities for English education in
underdeveloped countries AND MORE...

TESL
Ontario

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Oh, M. (2021). Snow tree. Pixabay.com. https://pixabay.com/photos/tree-christmas-tree-snow-winter-7673572/

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Editor's Note

Hello and welcome to the November 2025 issue of *Contact* magazine.

Can you feel the wind down to the year? The TESL Ontario Coneference and the November issue always give me that feeling as we inch towards December and the New Year (yet racing to the finish line). Take some time to enjoy the upcoming calm after the storm.

I hope you were able to experience the 53rd Annual TESL Ontario Conference—plenty of motivational, insightful, and well-thought out topics and presentations. Really, something for everyone. And if you presented, *Contact* would love to incorporate your work as an article for the March 2026 issue! Sharing ideas, concepts, and methods, really keep us afloat with changing student needs.

In this issue, we shine the Spotlight on Nancy Van Dorp. Nancy started her TESL career teaching Business English, LINC Home Study, and English in the Workplace. She joined New Language Solutions in 2011 as a trainer and mentor for what is now Avenue.ca, and is currently the Manager of Distributed Learning. She is fascinated with the affordances of edtech solutions, and has presented at conferences across the country and in Australia. Thank you, Nancy!

We have a round of articles that will surely please. Md. Morshedul Alam researches the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) to develop English competency in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Zubeda Kasim Ali explores the language gap in underdeveloped countries. Sharifunnessa assesses the transferability of language skills through virtual reality. Isil Senturk exposes the challenges and opportunities for non-native English-speaking teachers in Ontario. Addison Jalbert and Ritaj Karaja give insight on the rhetorical analysis of TESOL conference abstracts. And Aide Chen looks at early-career teachers and building resilience. A big thank you again to all writers and contributors. Without you, the magazine is not possible.

Have the best holiday season!

Take care,

Nicola Carozza
editor@teslontario.org

CONTACT

Contact is published three times a year (March, August, and November) by TESL Ontario. March is our conference issue. It is published for the members of TESL Ontario and is available free online to anyone.

Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, and calls for papers.

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Spotlight — Nancy Van Dorp

Nancy Van Dorp (BA, B.Ed., M.Ed., CTDP) started her TESL career teaching Business English, LINC Home Study, and English in the Workplace. She joined New Language Solutions in 2011 as a trainer and mentor for what is now Avenue.ca, and is currently the Manager of Distributed Learning. She is fascinated with the affordances of edtech solutions, and has presented at conferences across the country and in Australia.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Nancy! For those that don't have the pleasure of knowing you, tell them a little about yourself.

Thanks, Nicola.

I've been involved in the LINC and ESL sectors since 2010, and started working as a consultant with New Language Solutions in 2011. New Language Solutions is a non-profit that is funded federally by IRCC and in Ontario by MLITSD. We develop, teach, and support the English language learning sector through Avenue.ca and the LearnIT2teach platforms. NLS also develops and hosts the open-access CanAvenue.ca platform.

I have just moved into the role of Manager of Distributed Learning for NLS. I have also worked for Sheridan College for more than 15 years—teaching a partial load in the Applied Computing and Business departments.

Lastly, I'm also a mom of two, so I can truly appreciate working moms everywhere.

You are known as a Microsoft Specialist [Re: Sheridan College], tell us more about how technology, and more so AI, have influenced your teaching, work, and students?

I love exploring technologies, and I especially love seeing how they fit in with education. Of course, some technologies make our jobs more productive, but some offer more set-up work than benefit.

With recent AI portals available to everyone, there are many new angles from which to look at this technology. While I am usually a quick adopter of technologies, I am somewhat of a slower adopter of AI. That's not to say I don't use it, because I do, but more that I am reluctant to make it do my work. I guess you can say I'm "old school" in that way.

Artificial intelligence has, though, really impacted my college students, and I have concerns about that part. I do feel that learning doesn't really happen when students can easily use AI to write assignments, and not use their authentic voice when, for example, they are preparing a reflective assignment.

Is there an area in development or teaching you want to explore more?

I have become interested in teaching to violence-impacted students. This interest has arisen in the past few years partly

due to violent trauma experienced by my immediate family in Canada in 2023.

There are webinars and courses out there, and I'm just waiting for the right time for me to be able to explore those topics more. I feel that I would be a good student to learn about those topics academically, and would hope I can share with others what I have learned down the road.

You are a well-seasoned presenter at many conferences – for those that have always wanted to present but don't know where to start, what's your advice?

As teachers, we are presenting every day, and it is not a huge leap to present to your peers. If we all view ourselves as students, which we must, it is not substantially different than teaching in a classroom.

When you have an idea/topic and you want to share it—just do it!

To begin, start presenting locally if you have the opportunity. TESL Ontario regional conferences are great for this, but it's ok to jump right into provincial conferences as well.

Pay attention when calls for proposals are issued, and heed the theme of the conference. Look and learn from other conference sessions descriptions. Like teaching in the classroom, think of your three learning outcomes.

Writing a presentation proposal is often like selling, so don't be shy to talk about what benefits participants will receive from attending your session.

And don't despair if your proposal isn't accepted. Try it at another conference, or try a different topic at the same conference. I can also share that not all my sessions proposed get accepted, but that's ok too.

What is something from the classroom that one day you'll look back on and think is your greatest achievement?

I developed and taught a college credit course based on the impact of culture in the workplace. In it's hey-day, there were 50 sections of the course being taught throughout the college per term, and I have never taught a course that received more consistently positive thoughts, reviews and thanks from students than that course.

If you could rub a magic lamp in your career, what would your three wishes be?

I would love a magic lamp!

My first wish would be for worldwide literacy. Literacy is such an important portal for knowledge and power. Access to resources is key to a growth and development for individuals and communities to thrive.

And once we have literacy, my second wish would be digital literacy for all. In my opinion, this is an essential skill to again thrive in our communities in 2025, and promote equality.

Lastly, I'd wish for more time to do the things we love. Whether it's hanging with family, participating in the community, or pursuing career options. More time would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you once again for your contribution, Nancy!

If you would like to know more or connect, please visit Nancy's LinkedIn.

Task-based language teaching and English for Academic Purposes: Challenges and effectiveness

By Md. Morshedul Alam, Bangladesh

This paper deals with the implementation of the Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) method to develop English competency in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds commonly enroll in EAP programs, which are intended to satisfy postsecondary English language proficiency requirements, as a means of pursuing higher education. TBLT has been growing in momentum in Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, India, and Vietnam since the 1980s as part of the communicative agenda and has drawn the attention of the educators, curriculum designers, policy makers, SLA researchers, and textbook writers. The method of TBLT is essentially a learner-centered and experiential pedagogical approach, which stands in contrast to more traditional approaches to language pedagogy like presentation, practice, and production (PPP). The student-focused methods advocated by TBLT suggest that the teacher should remain in charge of what happens in the classroom. In recognition of these advantages, TBLT has been incorporated into the national curricula of many Asian nations in the decade of 1980, particularly India, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Adams & Newton, 2009). This paper is an attempt to share my TBLT experiences in an EAP course at Carleton University, where all students learn English as second language (L2) from non-English departments.

The principal rationale of TBLT research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is to show how classroom tasks can foster a genuine need for communication, encourage an emphasis on form, give students the chance to receive feedback and correct their work, and get them ready for real-world tasks outside of the English classroom. TBLT is "effectively a teacher-free zone, in which tasks work their effect without any need for mediation" (East 2012, p. 82). All of these goals facilitate the interactionist domain. From an interactionist standpoint, in TBLT, "teacher input and direction have crucial roles to play in helping students to execute tasks successfully" (East, 2012, p. 82). The major significant strength of TBLT is that students can achieve more benefits from task-based learning because it is more student-centered, enables more meaningful communication, and frequently offers opportunities for the development of useful extra-linguistic skills. In the TBLT approach, students are more likely to be involved in their language learning because they are likely to be familiar with the tasks.

Because of the internationalization of higher education, EAP is gradually becoming an important component of English Language Teaching (ELT). Particularly, in the Canadian context, many immigrants and international students admit to the higher educational institutions in Canada, which necessitates the importance of teaching EAP courses so that students from diverse countries can adjust to Canadian education, life, and society. The paper seeks to outline the benefits and challenges of TBLT while demonstrating that EAP students benefit most from its use in an EAP context. Finally, this paper recommends ways to facilitate TBLT in ESL implications. In addition, language practitioners can get ideas from this paper about TBLT-based language pedagogy particularly, in the EAP context.

What is TBLT?

Generally, TBLT denotes using real language to accomplish meaningful tasks in the target language. These include going to the doctor, doing an interview, or contacting customer support for assistance. Many of the TBLT activities, according to Willis and Willis (2007), should be developed using everyday language. For instance, «making a conversation, reading newspapers, and finding our way around the world by asking people or looking at written sources on paper or electronically» (p. 139) are examples of such activities. Because of this, TBLT is particularly well-liked for boosting students' confidence and target language proficiency. Therefore, one could classify TBLT as a subset of CLT: "I would say that CLT addresses the question, *why?* TBLT answers the question, *how?*" (Nunan, 2004, p. 458). Long (2015) defines tasks under TBLT as "the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day" (p. 6). Furthermore, Nunan (1989) proposes that tasks "involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistic structure" (p. 10). TBLT addresses the significance of "what learners are able to do with the language" and attempts to provide guidance for the creation and implementation of tasks in the classroom (Norris, 2009, p. 578)**.** Norris continues by saying that classrooms serve as crucial "holistic activity structures" that let students connect language forms, meanings they convey, and contexts in which they are employed. Because of its efficacy, TBLT is globally accepted, as Chen and Wang (2019) highlight the clear global evolution of TBLT, characterized by its increasing recognition as an effective pedagogical method.

Principles of TBLT

The primary goal of TBLT is to communicate meaning in a way that is understood by learners with limited language proficiency. One of the most beneficial goals of TBLT, according to Willis and Willis (2007), is to provide students with "the confidence and willingness to have a go, even if their language resources are limited" (p. 2). The following are some of the main principles of TBLT:

- The curriculum's content is largely determined by the needs of the students. Topic selections should not be decided by teacher rather it should be fixed by students.
- The main components of teaching and learning a language should be based on communicative tasks. Instead of forms and structures, communicative skills should be given priority.
- Through practice more and more in the class, students will develop confidence, knowledge, and skills in language.
- Classes must be learner-centered focusing on students' engagement in the classroom activities instead of traditional teacher-led and lecture-based pedagogy.
- Grammatical accuracy is important but not the main goal of teaching. Focus should be given on real-life communication.
- Tasks are educational activities that imitate the kinds of things students do outside of the classroom. Tasks should be connected with everyday life, common, and familiar.
- Teachers must keep an eye on their students' progress and assess whether the tasks have been completed and whether students have met the task outcomes.

Theoretical framework of TBLT

It is clear that a carefully planned task sequence is crucial to any TBLT classroom. This begins with the teacher choosing a task according to students' needs. The next step is to create a set of target tasks that are more realistic and authentic. According to Willis and Wills (1996), a TBLT class can be divided into three main stages to provide a detailed introduction to each of these: pre-task, on-task, and post-task phase.

Pre-task, on-task, and post-task

Preparing students to complete the task and acquire the language is the aim of the pre-task phase. In this stage, the instructor presents the subject and assigns exercises that help students in learning words and phrases necessary for completing the task. This includes providing students' prior knowledge about the subject through reading or listening exercises, outlining important words and phrases, and getting them involved in strategic planning.

However, a three-stage task cycle is part of on-task (Willis, 1996). (1) Task: Students work in small groups or pairs to complete the task. The instructor resolves problems that need to be addressed and offers assistance and clarification as required. (2) Planning: Students get ready to show the class their work. It can be done orally or in writing. When necessary, the instructor offers assistance and linguistic guidance. (3) Report: After groups present their findings to the class, the instructor offers comments on the language and content.

With TBLT, the instructor takes into account a variety of potential solutions to the issue at hand rather than expecting the same result from every student.

According to Willis (1996), the post-task phase is known as the language focus phase, during which students can examine particular aspects of the task. The teacher can give form-focused instructions or practice exercises using new words, and students can write down new words and phrases they have learned. It makes it possible for the students to use language in a way that is clear. Students can self-correct with the teacher's assistance and feedback.

Observation detailed

At Carleton University, an EAP course is taught to develop students' L2 competency. The EAP course is for the students who have not come from countries where English is taught as L1. The instructor designs and teaches the course following the TBLT method. The course that I have observed is ESLA1500. There were eleven students from 8 different countries (2 Syrian, 2 Senegalese, 2 Afghans, 1 Indian, 1 Chinese, 1 Colombian, 1 Saudi Arabian, 1 Egyptian), which is a multilingual and multicultural phenomenon. The purpose of the course is to help students be familiar with a new culture, language, and environment in Canada. One striking issue is that students are very enthusiastic about learning English. It is a mandatory course for the students, without which they will not be eligible to get a graduate certificate. My observations are based on the two major components of the course materials, such as in-class writings and presentation. I have observed the in-class writing and presentation performances of the students from the perspectives of TBLT. I have found that students participated in both the activities with interests to learn something new from their peers and teacher.

Teaching practice of in-class writing and presentation

In this section, I will narrate the classroom practices in an EAP class regarding the implementation of TBLT. Here, I want to mention two topics practiced in the EAP class that I have observed. Students are assigned in-class writing weighing 15 marks. In the in-class writing, students are asked to write about their cultural heritages. The class is culturally diverse, and the students have presented their insights. For example, two Senegalese students have pointed out their African cultural traditions and customs focusing on African songs and dances. The Indian student has nicely presented the cultural heritages like the Sanskrit mythology, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Another student from Egypt has presented the Egyptian glories such as the Pyramids and the historical tombs of the pharaohs.

Presentation is the topic in which I have been instructed by the teacher to present a lecture and I have also observed students' presentations along with giving feedback to them. This is the topic in the EAP course, where

the students are asked to decide a topic in line with their respective degree subjects. Students have chosen suitable topics with consultation with their friends and teachers. They have prepared their presentation slides and presented them as a rehearsal of the final presentation. The students have received feedback from their friends and teachers. Finally, they have presented following the rubrics and the presentations have been graded. The students have aptly shown their talents in the presentation. For example, the Indian student who is doing an MA in Human Resource Management (HRM) has shown how the English language is used in advertisements to get the highest benefits by using English language in different products. The Colombian girl of the Economics department has presented the statistics of women's employment in financial sectors in Canada. One of the Afghan students has presented a comparative analysis of the use of AI technology in Canada and Afghanistan.

Discussion and reflection

I have observed each activity in the EAP classroom from a TBLT perspective, as one of the purposes of the course is to prepare students in such a way that they can effectively communicate both in writing and verbally in real-life contexts. If I consider the in-class writing from Wills (2006), I find that in the process of the accomplishment of the task, the criteria of pre-task, on-task, and post-task have not been followed. Therefore, in-class writing tasks have not been followed TBLT aspects both theoretically and practically (Figure 1). In-class writing task was mainly based on traditional presentation, practice, and production (PPP) method instead of TBLT. My opinion regarding in-class writing is that the post-task strategy of Willis (2006) can be followed to make the task under the TBLT method. Students' self-corrections and teachers' feedback can facilitate in-class writing in line with TBLT.

In my analysis, the TBLT method is appropriately followed in the presentation activity. Here, the three-stage task cycle of on-task (Willis, 1996) has been maintained (Figure 1). Firstly, the students have formed groups according to their subjects, chosen their presentation topics, and prepared presentation slides. Secondly, one class is scheduled to present the slides for peer and teacher feedback. Finally, after accommodating the feedback provided, the students have presented their topics, and the teacher has graded the presentation with final comments. In this presentation task, students have demonstrated their previous learning and also got suggestions for future pathways.

Implications for ESL teaching

Here, I will narrate the effectiveness and challenges in implementing TBLT in an EAP context. I will also suggest some ways to make TBLT effective in ESL teaching. In the ESL context, TBLT is a very effective way of teaching pedagogy. To develop L2 competency, the TBLT method has facilitated ESL learners to

improve their English efficiency particularly in the communicative purposes. The practicality, effectiveness, and learner-centeredness of TBLT are the major advantages. The most common advantage, practicality, is associated with how well TBLT activities fit the needs of EAP students and how they can get the students ready for similar tasks in their future degree courses. Effectiveness is another advantage of TBLT where students believe that TBLT activities are superior to other teaching strategies. Over time, students will be able to apply taught skills more successfully and learn and retain more information. The learner-centered classroom rounds out the top three advantages of TBLT. This becomes possible with TBLT because activities are more student-centered, and the teacher acts as a facilitator. Task-based activities encourage greater learning commitment and ownership on the part of the students. Here, I observe that students have got adequate opportunities to align the activities of the EAP course with their degree courses, and most of the class activities are based on real-life context, which made their learning effective and meaningful.

However, some drawbacks of TBLT have been addressed in my observation of the EAP program. The challenges that I have found are excessive instructor preparation, a lack of classroom time, and a mismatch with student expectations. Firstly, mismatch with student expectations is identified as the most significant disadvantage in relation to students' expectations for instruction and learning in an EAP class using TBLT methodologies. Some students may expect the teacher to do all of the teaching because they dislike learner-centered tasks. Students are thought to be accustomed to more conventional teaching techniques and are frequently unfamiliar with TBLT strategies. Some students are unwilling to receive knowledge from their peers. Secondly, TBLT is thought to be time-intensive, requiring more class time than some other methods. It has been noticed that within fixed class time, teacher cannot handle the TBLT activities in a proper way. Sometimes, in the middle of the activities, teacher has to end his class. Finally, with careful planning and skillful implementation, TBLT requires more instructor preparation. Because TBLT is difficult to organize, instructors have to be quite skilled in designing tasks.

From my observations of an EAP course at Carleton University, some suggestions are proposed to make TBLT more effective and meaningful in an EAP context.

- Pair and group interactions should be prioritized. Classroom processes seemed centered around teacher-student interactions. Students' participation in the classroom activities should be focused more, and overreliance on the teacher in the interactive scenario needs to be reduced.
- Balance between task time and class time should be given proper attention to implement TBLT. It is noted that the teacher often changes task time and intervenes in the pair and group activities. Teachers have limited class time and a tendency to accomplish all the predetermined topics. To facilitate TBLT, teachers should avoid introducing many topics in one class.

- Teaching objectives and assessment methods should have a good alignment. The intention of the teacher is noted to navigate a task-based teaching, but the assessment process is found mostly traditional grammar and knowledge focused. Students are found concerned about English linguistic knowledge about forms and structures. Therefore, a good alignment between TBLT practice and assessment process is required.

- Teachers should design tasks in a way that they promote student engagement. In addition, students like tasks and learn from the tasks. To engage students more in the classroom activities, students should be given enough time to share their thoughts.

- Tasks should be based on specific real-life activities so that students find motivations and interests to engage in activities and consider tasks as fun. Unknown topics or difficult topics should be avoided as students are found reluctant to join in the discussion when topics are unfamiliar to them.

- Teachers should create a low-anxiety learning environment where students feel free to share their ideas and practice English language to develop confidence and competence in communication. The core objective of TBLT class should be learning for pleasure.

Conclusion

This paper mainly addresses the implementation of TBLT in an EAP context. The paper tries to focus on a theoretical framework of TBLT perceptions and classroom practice in an EAP classroom. Generally speaking, TBLT motivates EAP students to improve their L2 linguistic knowledge and skills. Some benefits and drawbacks have been addressed from observation of an EAP class. Some suggestions are also provided to facilitate TBLT in an EAP context mainly in the implication of ESL learning. Above all, TBLT is a learner-centered approach that focuses more on learning theories than language theories. One notable distinction between TBLT and earlier form-focused approaches is that TBLT classes start with an emphasis on meaning before shifting to language and finally form. It engages students in an activity that is meaning-focused. TBLT appeared to offer the prospects to combine "the best insights from communicative language teaching with an organized focus on language form" (Willis, 1996, p. 1).

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Author Bio

Md. Morshedul Alam has been teaching in the Department of English Language and Literature at International Islamic University Chittagong since 2012. He completed an MA in the Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. His areas of interest include Applied Linguistics, ELT, Indigenous Languages in Bangladesh, Curriculum Design, Language Policy and Planning, and TESOL. He is a life member of Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA).

Bridging the language gap: Challenges and opportunities for English education in underdeveloped countries

By Zubeda Kasim Ali, Pakistan

Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world, English language proficiency is crucial for accessing international opportunities in business, education, and diplomacy. For underdeveloped countries, enhancing English education represents both a challenge and a potential catalyst for socioeconomic advancement. This paper examines the challenges hindering effective English language instruction in these regions, proposes principles for context-sensitive curriculum development, and analyzes successful case studies. Special focus is given to an initiative in northern Pakistan to illustrate localized strategies. Recommendations are provided to promote sustainable and inclusive English language education frameworks.

Introduction

English serves as the lingua franca in international communication, science, and commerce. For underdeveloped countries, acquiring English proficiency can offer access to global markets, academic resources, and employment. However, systemic educational barriers such as outdated curricula, inadequate teacher training, and limited infrastructure hinder effective language acquisition (Karim & Mohamed, 2019). Many underdeveloped regions lack the educational infrastructure to support English language learning. Textbooks, audio-visual aids, and technological tools are often unavailable, particularly in rural areas. Schools frequently operate without language labs or consistent electricity, severely limiting the implementation of modern language instruction methods (Shaheen et al., 2013).

A significant portion of English language instructors in these regions are non-native speakers with limited fluency. Teacher training programs are often outdated or insufficient, resulting in educators who lack confidence, methodological training, and the ability to facilitate student-centered learning environments (Rae & Kirkwood, 2010). Imported English curricula from developed countries often ignore local cultures and experiences. As a result, students struggle to relate to the content, leading to disengagement. An overemphasis on grammar and rote memorization instead of practical communication further limits learning outcomes (Power et al., 2012). Limited access to English outside the classroom stifles language development. Unlike in urban centers, rural students rarely encounter English in daily life, whether through media, signage, or conversation. This lack of immersion hinders fluency and long-term retention (Walsh et al., 2013).

Curricula must reflect the learners' cultural, social, and economic realities. Incorporating familiar scenarios, local idioms, and regionally relevant topics can make English more accessible and engaging. Language instruction should emphasize real-world communication over rote grammar. Techniques such as group discussions, role-playing, and problem-solving activities enhance speaking, listening, reading, and writing proficiency (Karim et al., 2021). Investing in continuous teaching is essential. Local training institutions should offer modern pedagogical courses, mentorship opportunities, and access to updated teaching resources. Even in resource-constrained settings, technology can expand learning opportunities. Mobile-based learning platforms, audiobooks, and offline educational apps can be leveraged to provide flexible, low-cost support to students and teachers (Shaheen & Walsh, 2012). Assessment should be formative, ongoing, and aligned with curriculum goals. It must prioritize language usage and comprehension over memorization, guiding both teachers and students in identifying learning gaps and strengths (Shaheen & Lace, 2013).

Case studies regarding English language development in underdeveloped countries

An additional example can be found within the Ismaili Muslim community through the Time and Knowledge Nazara (TKN) initiative. This voluntary program mobilizes skilled Ismaili professionals globally to support educational and development projects, including English language education in underdeveloped regions. TKN volunteers conduct English workshops and training programs, particularly in parts of South and Central Asia and East Africa, where access to quality English instruction is limited. These workshops not only improve learners' proficiency but also equip parents with communication skills that enable better job prospects, enhanced family literacy, and increased participation in community initiatives (The Ismaili, n.d.).

In northern Pakistan, various initiatives have demonstrated the importance of contextual and culturally relevant approaches to English language education. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the Aga Khan Education Service (AKES) implemented a community-centered English language program that integrated bilingual instruction and tailored teacher training. By leveraging local cultural references and building on the community's linguistic strengths, the program improved student participation and performance. In Chitral, non-governmental organizations partnered with local educators to introduce low-cost English learning modules and mobile-based resources in remote schools. Teachers were trained using regionally adapted curricula, and students were encouraged to participate in English drama and conversation clubs, creating a more immersive and engaging learning environment. These examples highlight that language education initiatives grounded in the local context, supported by community engagement, and adapted to resource limitations can lead to meaningful and sustained improvements in English proficiency.

Similar successes have been observed globally. In Bangladesh, the English in Action (EIA) project used mobile phones and digital audio content to deliver professional development for teachers and multimedia lessons for students. The program reached thousands of teachers and millions of learners, significantly improving spoken English performance in both urban and rural settings (Power et al., 2012). In Rwanda, a government-led transition to English as the medium of instruction included a comprehensive teacher training component and language support materials. While the initiative faced challenges, it underscored the importance of political will and systemic alignment for language education reform.

In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education collaborated with international agencies to implement the English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) in universities. This program enhanced the proficiency of tertiary-level English instructors through workshops, peer collaboration, and updated teaching resources (Shaheen et al., 2013). In Vietnam, the National Foreign Language 2020 Project aimed to elevate English language proficiency by reforming curricula, strengthening teacher training, and introducing national assessments (Hung, 2013). Though results varied, the project highlighted the importance of coordinated national policy and investment in achieving long-term language education goals.

These case studies reflect a diverse range of strategies that have been successfully adapted to local conditions. They emphasize that effective English language development in underdeveloped countries requires an integrated approach—one that combines community involvement, contextual relevance, teacher capacity-building, and support from national education systems.

Policy recommendations

Governments and NGOs should support the formation of teams comprising local educators, linguists, and cultural experts to develop context-sensitive English curricula. Collaboration with international donors

and educational bodies can provide essential funding, training materials, and technical assistance while ensuring that local need drive implementation. Creating English-speaking clubs, producing local media content in English, and designating English-use zones in schools can reinforce learning beyond formal instruction (Karim & Mohamed, 2019). Programs should be evaluated regularly using both qualitative and quantitative data. Flexibility and responsiveness to feedback are essential for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

English language education offers significant promise for underdeveloped countries seeking to integrate into the global economy and knowledge systems. Yet, without thoughtful curriculum design, robust teacher training, and contextual adaptation, this promise may go unfulfilled. Case studies such as those from underdeveloped countries demonstrate that locally grounded, resource-aware, and community-supported initiatives can overcome systemic barriers. Through sustained investment and innovation, underdeveloped nations can empower their populations with the linguistic tools needed for global engagement and development.

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From virtual to reality: Assessing the transferability of language skills acquired through VR

By Sharifunnessa, Canada

Virtual reality (VR) has emerged as a powerful tool in language education, offering immersive environments that simulate real-life communication scenarios. Unlike traditional classroom methods, VR allows learners to interact with target language speakers, navigate culturally rich settings, and respond to authentic language cues—all within a controlled, engaging space. While the technology shows promise for enhancing vocabulary, pronunciation, and conversational fluency, a key question remains: Do the skills developed in virtual settings translate effectively to real-world communication?

In this article, I explore the impact of VR-based language learning beyond the digital experience. It examines how learners apply VR-acquired language skills in everyday situations, considering factors such as confidence, accuracy, and cultural competence. By analyzing recent studies and learner experiences, this research aims to assess the practicality and long-term value of VR as a language learning tool, particularly in bridging the gap between virtual fluency and real-world proficiency.

Understanding virtual reality in language education

Virtual reality (VR) can be defined as a fully immersive, 360-degree learning experience that goes beyond traditional educational settings, involving learners in a digitally-enriched, multisensory environment, providing a unique and effective learning approach (Parmaxi, 2020). According to Lloyd et al. (2017), VR is "an immersive computer-enabled technology that replicates an environment and allows a simulation of the user to be present and interact in that environment" (p. 222). Wang and Braman (2009) also supported the same notion in their study claiming that the highly immersive virtual environment provides students with a sense of reality, enabling them to actively explore and comprehend content, rather than passively sitting through a traditional lecture in a classroom setting.

Pinho et.al. (2009) stated that VR has three key characteristics: immersion, interaction, and involvement. Sherman and Craig (2003) describe four key elements of the VR experience, such as a virtual world, immersion, sensory feedback (responding to user input), and interactivity. According to them "a virtual world is the content of a given medium. It may exist solely in the mind of its originator or be broadcast in such a way that it can be shared with others" (p. 6). They also identified two types of immersion in virtual reality: physical immersion and mental immersion. Physical immersion involves the user's ability to interpret sensory cues such as visual, auditory, and haptic feedback to navigate and control objects in a virtual environment. On the other hand, mental immersion refers to the state of being deeply engaged within a VR environment. In terms of sensory feedback VR empowers users to choose their perspective by physically positioning themselves and to influence occurrences within the virtual environment.

After considering all these features of VR, Hua and Wang (2023) explain that VR has immense potential to be integrated in language teaching and learning to promote contextualized and interactive learning experiences. VR technology can be an effective tool for language education, particularly in foreign language learning because it enables students to practice their language skills in realistic situations, making language learning more engaging and enjoyable. Besides this, VR could promote "intrinsic motivation, more intercultural awareness, and a reduction of the affective filter" (Schwinhorst, 2002, p. 230).

Transferability of language skills acquired through VR

In order to assess the transferability of the language skills acquired through VR, it is essential to know what different researchers say about VR use in their findings. One of the most important language skills learned through VR is vocabulary. Alfadil (2020) conducted research to explore the influence of the VR game *House of Languages* on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary acquisition of intermediate school students. In this study, he reported that students who used VR games had shown greater performance in vocabulary acquisition than those who learned vocabulary through traditional learning. A similar study in Taiwan with 49 grade seven students also found that learning vocabulary through virtual reality (VR) was significantly more effective than traditional video watching. The VR group had higher vocabulary learning and retention due to contextualized learning through virtual environments with multimodal support, real-time interactivity, and feedback (Tai et al., 2022).

VR supports not just vocabulary development but also plays an important role in improving writing skills, which are often the most challenging in language learning. Several studies highlight VR as an effective way to enhance writing abilities. Chen et al. (2022) examined the use of spherical video-based virtual reality (SVVR) to support Chinese composition writing and provide authentic contexts for students. The experiment involved 59 grade four students divided into experimental and control groups. Results demonstrated that

the SVVR-supported learning approach improved students' behavioral engagement and deep writing skills, leading to better linguistic expressiveness and creative thinking performance than the non-SVVR approach. In line with these findings, Feng (2023) discussed that learners using immersive virtual reality (IVR) performed significantly better on target language word usage, lexical density, distribution richness, and completion of tasks than those in the conventional classroom in an EFL context. Ebadijalal and Yousofi (2022) also noticed similar improvements in their participants' writing regarding task achievement, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and overall writing performance while experimenting with Google Expedition (GE) in the Iranian EFL context.

Most of the research related to VR in ESL/EFL focuses on measuring the effectiveness of VR in improving oral proficiency or speaking skills. Chien (2020) observed that learners' English speaking, learning motivation, and critical thinking skills improved after implementing a peer-assessment-based SVVR approach for a high school English course in China. Besides SVVR, the Google Expeditions VR platform has also been found to be an authentic VR platform to improve the oral proficiency of EFL learners (Ebadi & Ebadijalal, 2022). VR tools also helped the learners improve their vocabulary, content, and presentation skills in the target language (Damio & Ibrahim, 2019; Xie et al., 2021). Finally, it can be said that in terms of speaking a second language, virtual reality has been reported as one of the most promising platforms, with no significant negative outcomes reported.

Although listening and speaking are mostly intertwined, only some studies are found based on the immersive VR experiment on EFL/ESL learners' listening comprehension. Tai (2022) found that Taiwanese seventh graders using VR felt more engaged and motivated in listening tasks with realistic, interactive scenarios. Similarly, Tai et al. (2020) showed that grade seven students using mobile VR headsets for the Mondly app had higher listening comprehension and memory than those watching videos, feeling more immersed, focused, and less anxious.

Alemi and Khatoony (2020) found that 18 young Iranian EFL learners significantly improved their English pronunciation after undergoing ten sessions of VR-assisted training that lasted 90 minutes each. The training was designed as a VR game facilitated by a humanoid robot and targeted aspects of English pronunciation like contrasting vowels (such as /ɪ/ and /i/).

Reading through virtual reality is found more appealing and exciting among learners. Pianzola et.al. (2019) reported that the use of VR in reading can increase the desire to read by immersing the reader in the story world and creating an emotional connection and affective empathy. Their findings suggest that VR can be a valuable tool for encouraging reading. Their study mainly focused on whether reading a chapter of a fictional story in virtual reality (VR) can make the reading experience more appealing and increase the

intention to read the story further or not. However, for efficient reading, it is necessary to understand how a text should be displayed in VR. Rau et al. (2018) claimed that VR requires more time for the students to speed up reading and make choices compared to desktop display.

Although not directly connected to skills transferability, besides cognitive benefits VR has also shown significant affective benefits such as promoted task engagement, enhanced motivation, elicited positive attitudes and emotions, promoted willingness to communicate, promoted confidence, reduced foreign language anxiety, and reduced psychological distance between students and teachers (Hua & Wang, 2023).

The challenges and limitations facing virtual reality in real-world applications

Additionally, unfamiliarity with VR technology may pose technical challenges for teachers and learners during learning. Lesson planners or designers may produce inauthentic materials if they are not familiar with the pedagogical implications of VR (Lee & Park, 2020). Moreover, higher costs of software, lower IT skills of the teachers, development of predominantly lower cognitive skills, and development of addiction to the use of VR technologies are also marked as limitations in Klimova's (2021) study. VR tasks can be time-consuming and distracting for learners (Chen et al., 2020). Other limitations are reported as lowered learners' attention and level of thinking (Hsu, 2022); slowed down speed in answering questions while not improving accuracy (Rau et al. 2018); reduced confidence (Chen et al. 2019); and elicited mixed feelings (Chen et al., 2020). VR also lacks facial expression tracking and other nonverbal paralinguistic clues crucial for foreign language learning (Kaplan & Gruber, 2021).

On a different note, VR may have accessibility issues because VR developers have not primarily prioritized accessibility concerns. The environments they create often heavily depend on visual elements and interfaces that assume the user has normal vision, good eye-hand control, and physical dexterity. As a result, individuals with disabilities may face difficulty in accessing these virtual worlds (Folmer et al., 2009; Forman et al., 2012). There are various ways to utilize VR in education, but to achieve a more realistic immersive environment, users need to use VR headsets, which can be expensive for learners in different contexts (Sadler & Thrasher, 2021).

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that VR has emerged as a promising tool in language learning, with its potential to create immersive environments that simulate real-life situations. Several research has shown that the linguistic skills acquired through VR are effectively transferable to the real world. However, there are still some limitations that need to be addressed to fully apprehend the potential of VR in language learning. Educators need to be trained to use VR effectively in language teaching, including how to integrate it into

existing curricula, how to design effective VR learning experiences, and how to manage the technology in the classroom. Developing VR content that effectively supports language learning demands a substantial investment of time, resources, and expertise. It is essential for curriculum designers to have a thorough understanding of language learning principles, VR technology, and instructional design to create relevant and engaging VR materials.

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Empowering non-native English-speaking teachers in Ontario: Challenges and opportunities

By Isil Senturk, Canada

Abstract

This study examines the experiences of Ontario Certified English Language Teachers (OCELTs) who are non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to frame their professional strengths and challenges. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and reflective journaling, the research highlights NNESTs' unique assets, such as cultural sensitivity, empathy, multilingual skills, and shared learning experiences, which enrich their teaching in multicultural classrooms. Yet, it also reveals persistent obstacles, including discriminatory hiring practices, linguistic disconnects, and inadequate institutional support. The findings suggest that reflective practices, rooted in Kolb's model, can empower NNESTs by fostering professional growth and resilience. The study calls for a shift in Canadian TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) policy to value NNESTs' pedagogical strengths, address systemic inequities, and enhance equity and efficacy in English language education.

Keywords: non-native English-speaking teachers, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, native speakerism, reflective practices, equity, inclusion, experiential learning

Introduction

"To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life." – Ludwig Wittgenstein

That quote speaks to something many of us know instinctively as language teachers: Our words are tied to who we are. For non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), this connection is deeply personal. Many of us have walked the path our learners are on learning English, adjusting to new cultures, and navigating life through a second (or third) language.

And yet, even with strong credentials and rich lived experience, NNESTs often face invisible hurdles, like bias in hiring or assumptions about our ability to teach because of how we speak. These challenges do not take away from our strengths, but they do shape our day-to-day teaching lives.

In this article, I share findings from a small study with Ontario-Certified English Teachers (OCELTs) who are NNESTs. Drawing on interviews, surveys, and personal reflection, I explore what helps and what hinders our work, and how reflective practice—using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle—can empower teachers like us to thrive in Ontario's classrooms.

Literature review

Across the field of English language teaching, there has been a long-standing preference for teachers who speak English as their first language. This mindset, known as "native speakerism", assumes that native speakers make better teachers simply because of their background (Holliday, 2005). However, this bias can unfairly sideline qualified non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), who often bring a wealth of knowledge and empathy to the classroom (Braine, 1999; Ma, 2012).

Many NNESTs share concerns about their accents or feel less confident using idiomatic language (Liu, 1999). Some say students, even unintentionally expect their teachers to sound "native", which can affect the classroom dynamic. Others have experienced barriers in hiring, where job ads or credentialing systems favour native speakers, even when experienced NNESTs have years of training (Braine, 1999; Mahboob, 2010).

At the same time, researchers highlight the powerful advantages NNESTs bring. Because they have learned English themselves, NNESTs often anticipate the struggles students face and can explain grammar or pronunciation in ways that really click (Medgyes, 1994; Tian, 2018). Their multilingual and multicultural experiences also help them build more inclusive classrooms (Ma, 2012; Tian, 2018).

Furthermore, for NNESTs, navigating the complexities of language teaching can be both rewarding and challenging, especially without adequate institutional support. When NNESTs have access to mentorship and professional development, they are better equipped to overcome doubts and grow in their roles (Tian, 2018; Zareva, 2017). Unfortunately, not all schools or institutions offer this kind of support, and the result is a missed opportunity not just for teachers, but for learners, too.

One helpful tool for NNESTs is reflective practice. Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—teachers can reflect on challenges and turn them into learning opportunities (Kolb, 1984; Lee, 2009; Yuan & Lee,

2016). This kind of intentional reflection empowers NNESTs to improve their teaching, strengthen their confidence, and ultimately support their students in more meaningful ways.

Methodology

To explore the real-life experiences of NNESTs, I used a mix of methods. First, I surveyed 30 OCELTs who identified as non-native English speakers. Their responses gave a snapshot of common challenges and strengths. Then, I interviewed five of them in more depth, using open-ended questions that let them share their personal stories. I also reflected on my own journey as a NNEST, journaling about classroom experiences and professional hurdles. I used Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) to analyze this personal reflection—looking at what happened, what I noticed, what it meant, and what I could try next.

Although the sample size was small, the focus was on depth rather than generalization. This kind of reflective, narrative-based approach is valuable for understanding how NNESTs grow and adapt, especially in diverse and dynamic ESL classrooms (Creswell, 2013; Kolb, 1984).
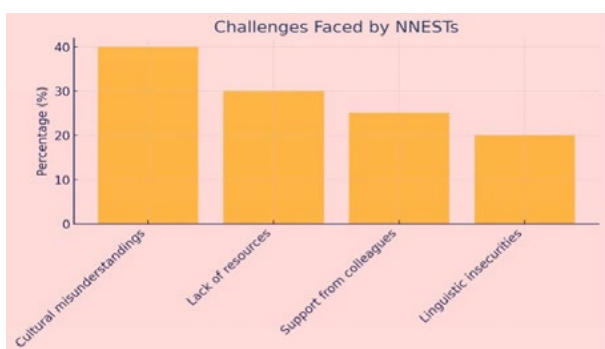
Results

Figure 1: Challenges Faced by NNESTs

Challenges NNESTs Face

These challenges were expanded upon through thematic analysis of interview data. Cultural misunderstandings were consistently mentioned by interviewees, with 60% identifying these as a significant issue. One teacher shared: "Sometimes people believe that if you are not Caucasian and English is not your first language, you are not equipped to teach the language. When I was teaching ELT, I felt that I was questioned and challenged more." Another participant expressed frustration with student preferences for native English teachers: "Students sometimes want a native English teacher," which indicates a bias that impacts NNESTs' teaching environments.

In discussing classroom challenges, many teachers reported feeling that their linguistic insecurities were a barrier to student engagement. One teacher explained: "Some students initially assumed I would be less competent because of my accent, which made me feel like I had to prove my expertise." Another teacher mentioned, "certain cultural practices, like my emphasis on collaborative learning, were unfamiliar to students who expected more lecture-based instruction." These comments suggest that NNESTs face additional pressures to prove their competence, especially in classroom settings where students may hold preconceived notions about their abilities based on accent or teaching style.

Moreover, interviewees reported that institutional policies often favoured native speakers, leaving NNESTs to navigate these challenges without sufficient institutional support. One teacher shared: "Sometimes it feels like the system isn't designed for us. Resources are limited, and there's little acknowledgment of the unique challenges we face." However, some teachers also shared positive experiences of support from colleagues. One teacher explained, "My mentor was instrumental in helping me navigate cultural differences in the classroom."
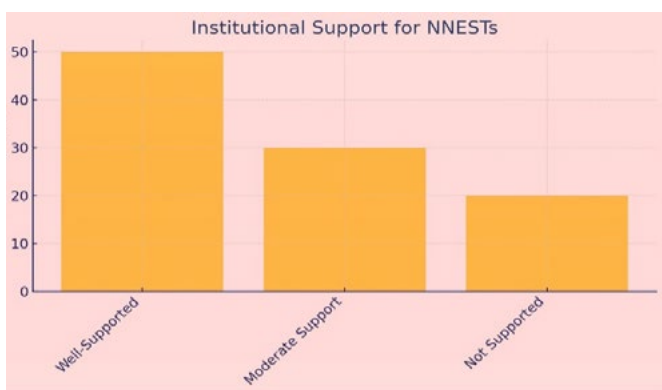

Figure 2: Institutional Support for NNESTs

Strengths NNESTs Bring

Despite the challenges, NNESTs reported several strengths that enhanced their teaching effectiveness. Survey data revealed that 85% of participants viewed their cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets in the classroom, and 50% of respondents highlighted their multilingualism as a key strength in connecting with students and explaining complex concepts.
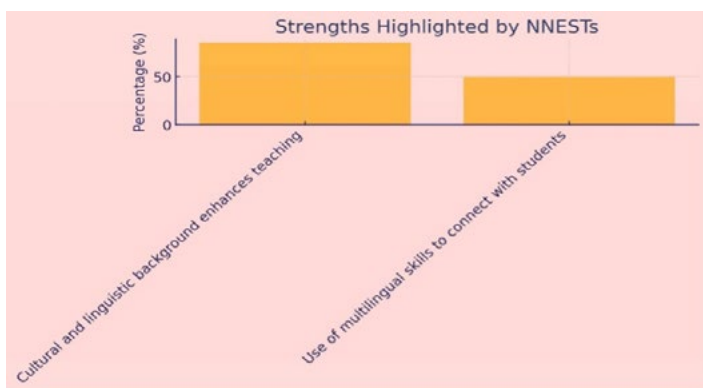
Figure 3: Strengths Highlighted by NNESTs

Furthermore, confidence levels among NNESTs were notably high, with 70% of respondents rating their confidence as *very high* (5/5) and 30% rating it as *high* (4/5).
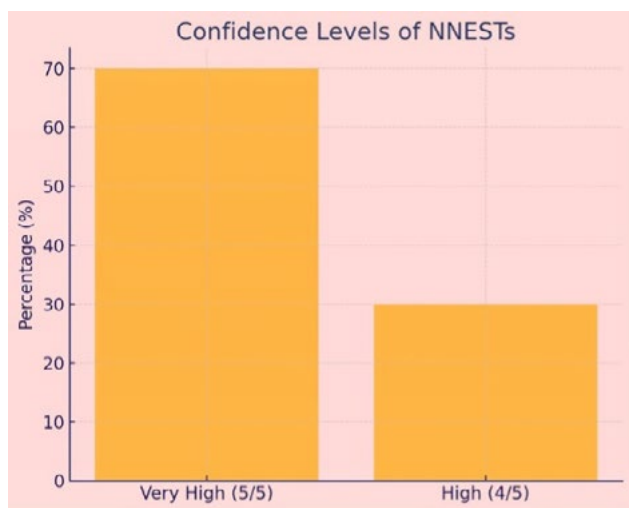

Figure 4: Confidence Levels of NNESTs

Interview data reinforced these findings, with several participants emphasizing how their experiences as language learners allowed them to empathize with their students. One teacher remarked, "I've walked the same path as my students. I know how frustrating it can be to learn a new language, so I use my experience to guide them." Another teacher explained, "I can anticipate the kinds of mistakes my students will make because I've been there myself."

Additionally, multilingual competence was seen as an advantage in anticipating student mistakes and providing more nuanced explanations. One teacher commented, "When a student is struggling with pronunciation, I can often give them examples in their first language or explain a concept in a way that makes more sense to them."

Confidence among NNESTs was notably high, with institutional support playing a role in boosting this confidence. Teachers who had access to mentorship or professional development opportunities were more likely to express higher levels of self-assurance. One interviewee shared, "When my institution recognized my strengths and provided opportunities to grow, it boosted my confidence significantly."

Reflections as a NNEST

Reflective journal data provided rich insight into the lived experiences of non-native English-speaking teachers. As a NNEST myself, I used Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to analyze my own teaching journey in Canada, focusing on moments of challenge and growth.

One recurring theme in my reflections was linguistic insecurity, particularly related to my accent and how it might influence students' perceptions of my authority. Despite holding a master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT), over a decade of university-level teaching experience, and multiple Canadian teaching credentials—including a TESL trainer certificate—I was rejected from a teaching position due to a lack of Canadian experience. This occurred even after completing professional development courses in Canada and the UK. In one instance, my eligibility was questioned based on my nationality, despite my qualifications. These experiences mirror the systemic barriers many NNESTs face, where institutional policies and implicit biases often outweigh demonstrated competence.

Yet, my reflections also highlighted sources of strength. My multicultural background often became a bridge between myself and my learners. In one journal entry, I wrote: *"Students often tell me how much they admire my ability to adapt to Canadian culture and succeed. They see me as someone who has overcome obstacles, which makes them believe they too can thrive in an unfamiliar environment."*

My shared experience as a newcomer fostered deeper empathy in the classroom. I noted: *"I often feel that my background allows me to connect with students on a more personal level. They appreciate that I understand the challenges of resettlement and often seek advice related to both academic and personal concerns."*

This empathetic connection created a sense of trust and belonging, especially for learners navigating similar transitions.

Finally, I observed that students responded positively to culturally informed instruction. As I reflected: *"I can see students becoming more engaged when I bring elements of my own cultural journey into the lesson. They seem to value the varied instructional strategies I use, which are shaped by a multicultural lens."*

Through reflection, I came to see these experiences not only as challenges, but as opportunities to grow—and to model resilience and inclusion for my students.

Connecting the dots

These findings echo what researchers have been saying for years. Bias against non-native English-speaking teachers is real, and it shows up in hiring, classroom dynamics, and institutional structures (Holliday, 2005; Medgyes, 1994). But so are the strengths: multilingualism, empathy, adaptability, and insight into the language-learning process (Ma, 2012; Medgyes, 1994).

What's especially important is how reflection—structured and intentional—can help NNESTs grow. By stepping back, analyzing what happened, and trying new approaches, we become more confident and effective in the classroom (Lee, 2009; Yuan & Lee, 2016).

What this means for the classroom

A key implication of these findings is the need for institutions, schools, and teacher education programs to take a more proactive role in addressing systemic inequities. Biases won't disappear on their own. We need mentorship programs, equitable hiring practices, and more inclusive professional development opportunities. When NNESTs are supported, everyone benefits—teachers, students, and the broader school community.

Reflective practice as a path to growth

One of the most important takeaways from this study is the power of reflection as a tool for professional development. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is not just a theoretical concept—it's something teachers can apply in real-time to improve their practice. For NNESTs, this cycle offers a structured way to analyze lessons that went well, make sense of challenges, and test new strategies in the classroom. For instance, a teacher struggling with student engagement might reflect on participation patterns, identify possible barriers, and adapt their approach in future lessons.

Moreover, this model does not just benefit individual teachers—it has the potential to reshape how schools and organizations approach professional growth. Incorporating structured reflection into staff meetings or coaching sessions can foster collaboration between native and non-native teachers, build empathy, and generate inclusive strategies. Reflection tools can also be part of onboarding programs, especially for internationally trained educators who may be adjusting to new educational cultures.

Final thoughts

Non-native English-speaking teachers are a vital part of Ontario's ESL landscape. We bring rich, multilingual perspectives and a lived understanding of what it means to learn and teach in a second language. Yet, many of us still face persistent barriers—from hiring discrimination to daily microaggressions and misunderstandings.

By naming those challenges and highlighting our strengths, we move closer to a more equitable and inclusive profession. Supportive leadership, inclusive policies, and mentorship opportunities tailored to NNESTs' needs all play a role in achieving this goal.

We must shift the narrative: Teaching excellence is not about sounding like a native speaker. It is about making meaningful connections, fostering student growth, and guiding learners with care and empathy. And who better to do that than someone who has walked that path themselves?

Ultimately, embracing diverse linguistic identities and promoting reflective practice can lead to classrooms that are not only more effective, but also more compassionate—for both teachers and the students they serve.

Future directions

This study raises timely questions about the structural dynamics shaping our profession. What would it look like if hiring practices genuinely valued linguistic diversity? How might mentorship and professional development change if they were designed with NNESTs' lived experiences in mind?

Further research could explore how NNESTs' instructional approaches influence student achievement or how learners perceive and respond to linguistic diversity in their classrooms. It would also be valuable to investigate how school leaders—such as principals, program coordinators, and TESL trainers—can actively challenge native speakerism and support all educators equitably.

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Exploratory rhetorical analysis of TESOL conference abstracts

By Addison Jalbert and Ritaj Karaja, Canada

Abstract

Discourse analysis research has previously investigated the rhetorical structure of abstracts found within empirical texts. This has been used to inform academic writing practices and instruction of English for Academic Purposes courses. More recently, this research has analysed abstracts submitted to conferences in the area of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Research on the rhetorical structure of abstracts has utilized Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis to figure out if they follow the models *Create a Research Space* (CARS; Swales, 1990) or *Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion* (IMRD; Lores, 2004), finding mixed results (Kessler et al., 2014; Yoon & Casal, 2020). The current study investigated abstracts successfully accepted into a TESOL conference proceeding (KOTESOL, 2023) to continue this research using similar methods, finding that they tended to follow the IMRD format. Previous research analysing the rhetorical structure of abstracts from international TESOL conferences has found similar results (Trang, 2024). This prompts the question of if TESOL conference abstracts by non-native English speakers tend to follow IMRD overall and why.

Introduction

Research in the empirical field of discourse analysis has historically examined the rhetorical structure of various written academic texts as genres. A rhetorical genre consists of a single group of spoken or written texts with a shared set of communicative purposes that is socially recognized by members of the community where the genre occurs (Cameron & Panovic, 2014; Swales, 1990). Examples of written texts include almost

anything that has writing on it, and when they recur, they are recognized as concrete genres. Some examples of written genres include books, posters, or maps. Rhetorical structure refers to how parts within a text are organized to communicate meaning and create coherence.

More recently, research has investigated the rhetorical structures of empirical abstracts through methods used to systematically analyse written discourse. Specifically, research has analysed the rhetorical structure of abstracts from conference proceedings using Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis (Swales, 1990). This has informed English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction and academic practice involving abstract writing. Abstracts found in academic conference proceedings are a concrete rhetorical genre important to scholars. To write a conference abstract accepted by reviewers, knowing how to address the rhetorical needs of the particular genre and reviewers' expectations is important.

Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis is an approach to systematically analysing text used to identify the rhetorical structures of genres (Swales, 1990). A move is a meaningful, functional segment of a text that has a coherent communicative function for a text. Moves both have a local role within a text and contribute to the overall recurring purpose of the genre they act in. They can be found in texts as paragraphs, sentences, or phrases. Steps are functional parts of text which act as sub-units that build moves (Swales, 2004, pp. 228–229).

Research has systematically analysed abstracts of conference proceedings in the field of applied linguistics using move-step analysis to see if they followed the rhetorical structures of *Create a Research Space* (CARS; Swales, 1990) or *Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion* (IMRD; Lores, 2004), finding mixed results. For example, Kessler et al. (2014) found that abstracts in the field of applied linguistics which were successfully accepted into conference proceedings followed the IMRD format. These results suggest that the IMRD model should be used to write successful conference abstracts. Kessler and colleagues (2014) encourage future researchers to replicate their results by analyzing other conference abstracts in the field of applied linguistics to expand the generalizability of the findings and improve EAP instruction. Other research on the rhetorical structure of applied linguistics conference abstracts contrasts as it found that they tended to follow CARS models (Yoon & Casal, 2020).

It is unclear which rhetorical structure applied linguistics conference abstracts follow, including TESOL conference abstracts, since research has found varied results on the topic. Additionally, previous research in the area has primarily focused on moves playing a key role in the genre, so there is a lack of previous research examining the rhetorical features of conference abstracts at step levels. The current study will help clear up the research debate of which rhetorical structures applied linguistics conference abstracts follow

and add more findings about steps contained in the abstracts. It specifically looks at TESOL conference abstracts, as past research on this topic has focused on these (Stein, 1997; Trang, 2024).

Methods

The purpose of this research project was to further investigate the rhetorical structure of abstracts from TESOL conference proceedings by analysing them in relation to the models *Introduction-Methods-Result-Discussion* (IMRD; Lores, 2004) and *Create A Research Space* (CARS; Swales, 1990). These models have been used in relevant past research in the area of applied linguistics (Kessler et al., 2024; Trang, 2024; Yoon & Casal, 2020). The research question examined by the current study was *Does the rhetorical structure of TESOL conference abstracts correspond to IMRD or CARS models?* To address this question, Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis (Swales, 1990) was used to systematically analyse and compare the rhetorical structure of abstracts to the models by using moves and steps.

To find materials for the current study, one empirical conference proceeding in the field of applied linguistics was sourced from the internet of which abstracts would be collected from and analysed. A proceeding which was created within the past five years was used to ensure better relevance and application of study results. Abstracts were chosen from the proceeding of the KOTESOL conference that took place in 2023 (KOTESOL, 2023). Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (KOTESOL) is a professional not-for-profit organization for teachers of English at any level in any organization. It is affiliated with the TESOL International Association (KOTESOL, n.d.). KOTESOL holds annual international conferences in South Korea focusing on research and literature in the area of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Abstracts from this proceeding were chosen because TESOL conference abstracts are empirically relevant to the current research literature. Past research on abstracts from applied linguistics conference proceedings have examined the rhetorical structure of TESOL abstracts from conference proceedings (Payant & Hardy, 2016; Stein, 1997; Trang, 2024).

At first, eight abstracts were chosen and analysed, then two more since a clear pattern was quickly found in the first eight. Ten abstracts were analysed in total. Each text was analysed twice—once to see if they contained the IMRD model, and a second time separately from the IMRD analysis using the CARS model. Using each model, moves were first identified, then steps within the moves were identified. Moves and steps were marked by specific colours of ink and highlighting. Colours used for moves and steps were classified by a legend. The two additional texts analysed after the first eight were analysed only for moves to see if the pattern in the first eight continued, since the pattern was quickly found.

To analyse the data for moves and steps found in IMRD rhetorical structures, a coding scheme was created. Although the IMRD model found within the article Lores (2004, p. 283) contained only moves, the present research aimed to analyse the texts for both moves and steps. To ensure this analysis was possible, a final coding scheme was created from segments in the articles by Lores (2004, p. 283) and Cotos et al. (2015, p. 56). The 'moves' shown in the article were used as the steps, and the 'steps' of the 'moves' shown in the article were used as descriptive criteria to analyse for the steps.

The current research used both moves and steps to analyse the models. As addressed in the introduction of this paper, there has been a need introduced for research to look at applied linguistics conference abstracts at step levels, since it is lacking. Cotos et al. (2015, p. 56) provide criteria on moves and steps for articles that follow IMRD, as opposed to abstracts, but it was applied to analyse abstracts since IMRD steps were needed and steps for IMRD abstracts could not be found. Additionally, in move-step analysis, steps may be analysed for in terms of being obligatory or optional in a text or genre (Swales, 1990). In both IMRD and CARS analyses of the current study, all steps were analysed for in terms of frequency, rather than if they were obligatory or optional.

The moves used to analyse for the IMRD model were the categories *Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion*. The move called *Introduction* referred to text where the authors gave empirical background to the research, introduced significance, or introduced a research gap. The move called *Methodology* referred to information provided about methodology, materials, and participants used in the study discussed in each abstract. The move *Results* defined the results the authors found within their study. The move called *Discussion* referred to the process of authors discussing their results in relation to relevant empirical literature, practical applications for their results, and/or future directions for their research study.

To analyse each text for the CARS model, the CARS move-step model from the article by Swales (1990, p. 141) was used to define moves and steps. The moves for CARS were *Establishing a Territory, Establishing a Niche*, and *Occupying a Niche*. The move *Establishing a Territory* referred to text where generalizations about their study topic were made, research relevant to their current study was introduced, or statements about the significance of their research were made. The move *Establishing a Niche* refers to when the author introduced a gap in research or knowledge relevant to the study, unrelated to possible future research directions. The move *Occupying a Niche* was where authors presented methodology, participants, materials, results of their study. It could have also been a presentation of practical applications for the research, and/or a discussion of how their results related to the current research.

Findings and discussion

In the current study, abstracts from conference proceedings in the area of TESOL were analysed using Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis (Swales, 1990) to see if their rhetorical structure followed either CARS or IMRD models. The study analysed for both moves and steps of each model to respond to the research question, *Does the rhetorical structure of TESOL conference abstracts correspond to IMRD or CARS models?*

When the data was analysed for the CARS model using moves and steps, not all the moves of the CARS model were found. Although the abstracts did not follow the CARS model, the most common move of CARS in the abstracts tended to be move three, *Occupying a Niche*. On the other hand, all the moves in the IMRD model were found, since each abstract had the obligatory moves *Introduction, Methods, Results,* and *Discussion*. Therefore, the findings of the study are that moves contained in the abstracts followed the IMRD model. When the data was analysed for steps, steps from both of the IMRD and CARS models were found. However, no steps analysed for using either model were more frequent than others, suggesting that there are no specific steps required.

Although the submission guidelines of the KOTESOL conference abstracts (KOTESOL, 2023) did not indicate that a particular format of abstract was required, findings suggest that the abstracts must follow an IMRD structure to be successfully accepted. This result also provides further support for an overall pattern where TESOL conference abstracts tend to follow an IMRD model. This is consistent with Wayne Stein's (1997) research where he found that successful TESOL abstracts followed an IMRD model.

Furthermore, the result of the current study is consistent with findings that non-native speakers of English used the IMRD format to write TESOL abstracts (Trang, 2024). Since the writers of the abstracts submitted to the international KOTESOL conference were likely to be non-native English speakers, it suggests that non-native speakers of English are more likely to use the IMRD format, possibly due to higher simplicity of use. Approximately 25% of KOTESOL members are Korean (KOTESOL, n.d.). The study raises a question for future research about how non-native speakers of English and native English speakers differ in how they write TESOL abstracts.

Conclusion

The current study used Swalesian rhetorical move-step analysis to begin to explore whether TESOL conference abstracts followed the models CARS or IMRD, finding that they followed the IMRD model. Findings also showed that there were no obligatory steps in the abstracts, suggesting that there are only optional steps within IMRD models.

Limitations faced by the project included project size, scope, and ethics. The number of conference abstracts analysed was small, which can affect the generalizability and results of the findings. A different pattern of results could be shown in a larger sample of abstracts. As for the scope, the study only focused on a single conference proceeding in the area of TESOL. This may mean that the findings may not apply to different areas within the field of applied linguistics, or other academic disciplines. The final limitation was that since the study did not get an ethics clearance, there was a lack of access to data such as rejected abstracts. Analyzing abstracts that were rejected could provide information about the acceptability of conference abstracts by reviewers, including abstract content and the rhetorical structure they were written in.

In terms of practical applications of the findings, the research provided more evidence that abstracts submitted to empirical international TESOL conferences which follow the IMRD format tend to be accepted. It also suggests that non-native English speakers tend to write abstracts that follow this format. Future research could compare abstracts written by native and non-native speakers of English to determine if they are more likely to use a certain rhetorical structure, especially since research has started going in this direction (Trang, 2024). Moreover, research could analyse abstracts in conference proceedings from different empirical TESOL or applied linguistics conference proceedings or from across multiple time periods to better generalize results. It could also examine the frequency of steps from the CARS and IMRD models to define if there are more common ones than others.

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Author Bios

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Practical tips for early-career language teachers to build resilience

By Aide Chen, Canada

While resilience has become a buzzword across many helping professions, research on language teacher resilience is still in its early stages, with much yet to be explored about how teachers, particularly those new to the profession, navigate challenges and sustain themselves in their teaching careers. To help bridge this gap, I draw on insights from my PhD dissertation, which examined the experiences of early-career English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers in Ontario, Canada, focusing on how they built early-career resilience (Chen, 2023). Synthesizing these findings, this article introduces the what, why, and how of early-career teacher resilience: What does teacher resilience mean? Why is it important to pay attention to it now more than ever? And how might new teachers begin to build and sustain it?

What is teacher resilience?

The word resilience comes from the Latin resilire, meaning "to leap back". Long before the term entered the field of education, it was used in disciplines such as physics and psychology. In physics, resilience describes a material's ability to absorb energy under stress and return to its original shape without breaking (Gordon, 1979). In psychology, it refers to how people cope with and recover from extreme hardship, such as surviving the Holocaust (Frankl, 1959) or growing up in poverty and abuse (Werner, 1977). Despite disciplinary differences, these early uses of resilience share a common theme, namely enduring pressure and recovering effectively. In education, resilience echoes this theme and is often defined as the ability to "bounce back" from adversity while continuing to grow, whether personally, academically, or professionally (e.g., Ungar, 2004). This definition aligns with the core principles of positive psychology, which emphasizes the development of "positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions" to help people flourish in the social environment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

As positive psychology gained traction in applied linguistics and education (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), the concept of teacher resilience began to receive increasing attention. One widely cited definition describes it as "the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach" (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 26). While this definition highlights teachers' inner strength,

researchers now recognize that resilience is not only a personal trait but is also shaped by teachers' social and professional ecosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) involving students, colleagues, supervisors, labor markets, policies, ideologies, and even time factors (Chen, 2023). In this sense, teacher resilience is deeply personal, but also social and political.

Understanding resilience through this ecological lens challenges the assumption that struggling teachers, especially those early in their careers or from marginalized and international backgrounds teaching in Ontario, are simply "lacking" resilience. Instead, it directs our attention to the supports, resources, and structural conditions that allow teachers to survive and thrive. This perspective is especially relevant today, as many educators face mounting uncertainty, job insecurity, and emotional strain in their professional lives. Against this backdrop, the next section discusses some of the real-world conditions necessitating teacher resilience.

Why does teacher resilience matter?

Teaching EAL can be incredibly rewarding as there is nothing quite like the satisfaction of connecting with students and seeing them thrive (Corcoran et al., 2023). But alongside such rewards also come real challenges. In Canada, EAL teaching is notably precarious—a major structural problem that has persisted for decades (Auerbach, 1991; Breshears, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2023). EAL teachers often rely on short-term or part-time contracts in settlement agencies, adult education centers, or postsecondary institutions where the pay is typically low and unpaid work is common (Breshears, 2019; Valeo, 2013). An illustrative example is the federally funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, where instructors frequently juggle multiple jobs and temporary contracts (IRCC, 2010). This pattern is not unique to LINC. Rather, it reflects wider labor trends across the profession that prioritize flexibility over stability (Kalleberg, 2009), leaving teachers with limited bargaining power and a persistent sense of career uncertainty.

The difficulties do not end there. Broader social and global changes continue to (re)shape teachers' work in complex ways. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, triggered a sudden move to remote and hybrid teaching, pushing language teachers to quickly adapt to new digital tools without much training or support (MacIntyre et al., 2020). For early-career teachers, this pressure was intense, as many were expected to demonstrate technological competence just to remain competitive in the job market (TESL Ontario, 2021). At the same time, geopolitical tensions, such as shifting ties between Canada and major student-sending countries like India and China, along with the rise of anti-Asian racism, have further disrupted enrollment rates in English language programs (Zhang et al., 2023). More recently, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has also unsettled the North American job market. As companies accelerate their adoption

of AI technologies, the demand for upskilling has risen sharply (Dobbs et al., 2025), while the number of entry-level jobs has declined due to slower hiring practices (Lichtinger & Hosseini Maasoum, 2025).

On top of these external pressures, EAL teachers must navigate the emotional demands of classroom teaching. Like teachers in other fields, they deal with limited resources and heavy workloads; however, their role carries added complexities when tailoring lessons for students with vastly different proficiency levels, bridging cultural differences, and supporting learners as they adjust to new linguistic and cultural environments (Mercer, 2020). These responsibilities require a high level of emotional investment. Teachers often put aside or even suppress their own emotions in order to meet their students' needs (Gkonou & Miller, 2017; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018).

For early-career teachers who themselves speak English as an additional language, an added layer of challenge comes in the form of self-doubt. Influenced by ideologies like native-speakerism and pressures around professional accountability, many of these teachers grapple with imposter syndrome, linguistic insecurity, and reduced self-efficacy (Horwitz, 1996). These internal battles make it harder for them to take pedagogical risks and can undermine their sense of belonging in the profession (Auerbach, 1991; Tum, 2014).

Taken together, these realities help explain why language teaching has been described as "a profession in crisis" (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 406) marked by high turnover rates (Mason, 2017) and persistent job insecurity (Corcoran et al., 2023). This is where language teacher resilience becomes essential. Building resilience, both individually and collectively, can help teachers sustain their well-being and their careers over time. That said, resilience is not about eliminating stress or pretending challenges do not exist. Nor should the burden of handling systemic issues fall solely on individual teachers. True resilience must be supported through collaborative efforts, where teachers, administrators, and policymakers work together to create communities of practice that promote professional growth, connection, and care. While this article will not focus on large-scale structural reforms, I will share three practical strategies that can help build early-career resilience among EAL teachers in Ontario, Canada (and potentially in other contexts as well).

How to build early-career teacher resilience?

In the following subsections, I focus on three key strategies that can help early-career language teachers strengthen their professional resilience, including finding career opportunities, maintaining reflective journals, and leveraging support from broader ecological systems. While these strategies are practical and actionable on an individual level, they are also deeply interconnected and influenced by larger structural contexts. That said, this list is by no means exhaustive because systemic changes, such as improvements

to teacher preparation programs, a more stable and inclusive job market, and immigration policies that support rather than hinder teachers' long-term well-being and career development, are equally if not more important in building a sustainable teaching profession.

1. Finding career opportunities

Getting a foot in the door, whether through practicum placements or job hunting from scratch, is often one of the biggest challenges for early-career language teachers in Ontario, Canada. One way to make the process feel less overwhelming is to approach it playfully (like gaming): there are tasks to complete, goals to unlock, and strategies to try, but you can also stay lighthearted and flexible along the way.

Start by reflecting on your current skill set, including both what you have learned through formal education and transferable skills from past work, volunteering, or life experiences. Consider how these strengths align with different career paths in the field. Beyond classroom teaching, opportunities may include curriculum support roles, tutoring services, private language schools, TESOL consulting, newcomer settlement agencies, or college/university-affiliated English programs.

Even if your long-term career goals are not fully defined yet, this stage can still be productive. Use a spreadsheet or job-tracking tool to keep everything organized. Track details such as job titles, required qualifications, salary ranges, application deadlines, start dates, and web links. Make a habit of updating your CV and cover letters regularly and tailoring them to the specific roles you are applying for. It also helps to regularly check centralized job boards (see below) as well as the career pages of institutions that interest you.

- TESOL International: https://careers.tesol.org/
- TESL Ontario: https://careers.teslontario.org/
- Jobs in Education: https://jobsineducation.com/
- Education Canada: https://www.educationcanada.com/search.html
- UniJobs Canada: https://www.unijobs.ca/
- School Boards: https://www.tvdsb.ca/en/our-board/employment-opportunities.aspx
- Job Bank: https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/home

Most importantly, building resilience in this phase also means managing the emotional ups and downs of the job search. It is not uncommon for applicants to send out dozens or even hundreds of applications before receiving an interview. This can feel discouraging. But instead of interpreting rejection as a personal failure, try to see it as part of the process. Give yourself permission to feel disappointed, but also take time to reflect, regroup, and adjust your strategy if needed. This kind of emotional flexibility is key to staying motivated and growing professionally, especially in a field where career paths are often nonlinear and unpredictable.

2. Keeping reflective journals

If you have already landed a teaching job—congratulations! That is a big milestone. But as you will soon discover, the real work begins in the classroom, where new and often unexpected challenges arise. One simple but powerful tool to help you navigate these ups and downs is reflective journaling.

Let us start with the how before diving into the why.

Think of journaling as a way to capture moments that feel meaningful, whether they are uplifting, frustrating, confusing, or inspiring. You do not need fancy tools. A notebook, a notes app, or even voice memos on your phone can work just fine. Try to set aside just 5-10 minutes each week, ideally after an emotionally charged or memorable experience. Write freely and without judgment; this is not about grammar or perfect phrasing, but about being honest with yourself and building self-awareness. If you are not sure where to begin, these prompts can help get you started:

- What made me feel proud or happy in my teaching today?
- What felt frustrating or disappointing?
- How did an interaction with a student or colleague make me feel?
- What is one workplace rule, challenge, or moment that has been on my mind?
- How is my personal life (e.g., family, time, values, beliefs) shaping the way I teach?

Once journaling becomes a habit, its deeper value begins to emerge. Reflective journaling offers benefits across three dimensions: emotional, analytical, and critical.

Emotionally, it gives you a safe, private space to process your feelings, especially those that might otherwise go unspoken or ignored. In my research (Chen, 2023), for example, an in-service teacher named Noel used her journal to vent anxieties about juggling multiple short-term contracts and feeling professionally unstable. Another teacher, Maria, shared how overwhelmed she felt trying to manage both in-person and remote learners during the pandemic without sufficient institutional support. Whether you are dealing with frustration, joy, anger, or pride, journaling helps you better understand your emotions and respond to them in manageable ways, which is an essential part of long-term resilience.

Analytically, journaling allows you to identify patterns in your teaching and track your professional growth over time. One pre-service teacher, Alyssa, began journaling about her anxiety around academic reading and class presentations. Through regular reflection, she was able to manage her stress more effectively and gradually build her confidence. Other in-service teachers used their journals to troubleshoot lesson plans, reflect on student dynamics, or evaluate how well a new tech tool worked. In this way, journaling becomes a practical tool for problem-solving, decision-making, and continuous professional development.

Critically, journaling can also be a way to question and push back against systemic issues in the profession such as unpaid labor, unstable contracts, burnout, or unrealistic expectations. Even when solutions are not immediately available, writing things down can help you name and validate your experiences. When shared in safe and trusted spaces, whether with peers, mentors, or researchers, these reflections can foster collective awareness and spark subtle acts of resistance. In this sense, journaling is not just a personal practice but also a political one. It allows you to reclaim your voice, connect with others, and begin to foster change.

3. Leveraging resources from ecological systems

Another key piece of building resilience is knowing where to find support and how to make the most of it.

A good place to start is by revisiting materials from your teacher education or professional development programs. These "old" resources (e.g., course readings, workshop slides, practical tools) can take on new meaning when applied in real classrooms. They are not just static content but can evolve alongside your teaching practice and offer fresh insights when revisited with experience in mind. Depending on the institution where you work or study, you may also have access to credible, research-informed materials such as peer-reviewed journal articles, Cambridge Elements, or Routledge books, which are often available for free through academic libraries or membership portals. But even without institutional access, there are still plenty of useful options. Open-access platforms like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, and even AI-powered tools can help you discover relevant and practical content at no financial cost. Staying informed in this way is not just about "keeping up", but about empowering yourself to learn, adapt, and make research-informed decisions in your teaching.

Equally important are the people around you. Building a supportive network of colleagues, mentors, and peers can be game-changing, especially during the often isolating early years of teaching. These communities of practice, whether formally or informally, can provide emotional support, share practical strategies, and create a much-needed sense of connection and belonging.

Peer support can take many forms, such as:
- Sharing job leads, teaching tips, or career advice
- Attending training sessions or well-being events together
- Collaborating on lesson planning or classroom observations
- Exchanging ideas on content, pedagogy, or technology

In my research, for example, one in-service teacher, Maria, co-developed lesson plans with a colleague when institutional support was lacking during the pandemic. That collaboration helped them navigate a

particularly stressful time. Another teacher, Noel, joined a local Toastmasters club. While not directly related to teaching, it helped improve her public speaking skills and boosted her confidence in the classroom. These examples show that sometimes, the most meaningful support does not come from formal systems; it comes from the relationships we build (inter)personally.

That said, it is important to recognize that not everyone benefits equally from these networks. Building and maintaining informal support communities often requires emotional labor that goes unpaid and unacknowledged. Teachers who are introverted, navigating a new cultural context, or dealing with financial constraints may (or may not) find it harder to access and sustain these connections. This is why we should be cautious about framing networking, or any career development strategy, as a one-size-fits-all solution. While networking can be incredibly valuable, it only truly works when it is accessible, fair, and responsive to different needs. Acknowledging that what works well for one person may not work for another is key to creating more inclusive, supportive professional spaces. That diversity of experience should be respected.

Conclusion

Resilience is not about being unaffected by stress, but about learning to navigate it, recover from it, and keep growing. Practical strategies like intentional job searching, reflective journaling, and tapping into supportive networks can help early-career teachers stay grounded amid uncertainty. But to be clear: Resilience is not about asking individual teachers to adapt to problematic systems. Real, lasting resilience in the TESOL field requires systemic change. That means reimagining teacher education, transforming hiring practice, and creating workplaces where emotional well-being and professional growth are not afterthoughts, but priorities. When we commit to these changes individually and collectively, we move beyond mere survival in the profession and begin to create the conditions where language teachers can truly thrive.

Notes:

- All personal names mentioned in this post are pseudonyms used to protect participant confidentiality.
- Special thanks to TESL Ontario for their invaluable support in sharing my call for research participants, and to the participants themselves, whose generosity and insights greatly contributed to the depth and richness of this study.

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