

Research Notes 85

Findings of the Action Research in
ELICOS Program 2022

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Action research for sustained and powerful professional learning

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Introduction

Educational policymakers in different sectors around the world see professional development (PD) of teachers as a necessary component of achieving the standards and outcomes they anticipate. Depending on the context, teachers are typically required to attend events offered by government ministries of education, university and training centres, and external providers such as embassies, publishers and major foreign government organisations (Freeman, Reynolds, Toledo and Abu-Tineh 2016). From their typology of PD events offered in one particular context, these authors note that:

The professional development offerings – the topics, formats, and most critically who provides what – all contribute to valuing and supporting some forms of teaching over others. This constellation can suggest views of what constitutes “good” or “up-to-date” teaching (2016:15).

These constellations provide subtle (or maybe not so subtle) messages about what is expected of teachers in a particular educational sector. In the context of Freeman et al’s research they encompassed: methodological expectations and skills; policy priorities around how the learning environments, assessments, and standards should be managed; and the methodological knowledge and skills that were seen as creating an effective teaching identity. Essentially, however, such messages tend to constitute top-down demands on teachers which often result in disappointment when the expected educational outcomes and perceived quality of instruction do not eventuate (e.g., Weddell 2011). The lack of impact of the training is frequently

ascribed to teachers' shortcomings (e.g., Coleman (Ed) 2017) – their failure or refusal to apply the PD they receive in their classrooms – and may lead to further external requirements for their 'remediation'.

In this short discussion, my argument is that these disappointments typically arise from the failure to understand teachers' needs, interests and perspectives on the kind of professional learning they value and find beneficial. My focus is on what opportunities are afforded when teachers can conduct contextually grounded and reflective professional learning (cf. Timperley (2015) on teachers developing adaptive expertise), such as the kind of action research (AR) reported in this issue of *Research Notes*. I also look at what has been discerned in the literature about the value of teachers being able to identify relevant issues and questions in their own practice and pursue classroom inquiries in such a way as to respond to questions of interest to them.

Action research and professional learning

In the current dynamic spheres of educational and societal change – which are creating different roles and functions for instruction (e.g., Burns, Matteson, Phease and West 2023, Sadeghi and Thomas (Eds) 2023) – teachers constantly require new forms of knowledge, skills and expertise. In these contexts, language teachers and educational leaders must become continual learners (Freeman 2017) mindful of their own professional learning. Unfortunately, much professional learning has typically offered 'outsider' or top-down forms of development, such as presentations, workshops, or courses delivered by external experts. Although these can be valuable in terms of imparting what are seen as concepts of current effective practice, they are often generic in content and therefore not tailored for teachers' specific pedagogical contexts and daily needs. Consequently, they are not smoothly and easily transferred into practice by the teachers who attend such events (Diaz Maggioli 2012, Wyatt and Ončevska Ager 2017). There is increasing evidence that professional learning is most effective when it is school and classroom-based and tailored to teachers' classroom experiences. As Mann (2005:108) points out: 'Where a teacher is able to stay in their teaching context, enriched by reading, reflective teaching and AR, the experience usually leads to sustained development.'

These contentions are well supported by research undertaken in an OECD study (Peña-López 2009), one of the few major international studies to examine the views of teachers' themselves. It sought responses from researchers and teachers across the world in relation to their perspectives on effective professional learning. In this extensive study, opportunities for individual and collaborative teacher research were reported to have the highest impact on professional growth. One reason for this response could be to do with the fact that teacher inquiry, such as AR, is flexible and practitioner-friendly with options for individuals, groups and institutions to pose questions about their particular contexts and initiate exploratory approaches that fit their specific structures. Such processes are embedded in the idea that 'teachers have the ability to formulate valid questions about their own practices and pursue objective answers to these questions' (Fraser 2005:10).

There is now growing evidence of the links between AR and these forms of professional learning. Here I focus on three areas: the impact on teaching skills and knowledge; the impact on teacher-student relationships; and the impact on colleagues and institutions. In each case I provide an illustrative example from AR in the Australian ELICOS sector published in previous issues of *Research Notes*.

Impact on teaching knowledge and skills

Undertaking AR appears to deepen teachers' knowledge about their own teaching and encourages them to identify gaps in their knowledge and work towards filling them. For example, Burns (2014) and Wyatt (2011) both note that exploring a specific issue in their context resulted in teachers gaining knowledge about that issue and was a fundamental benefit for self-learning. In Burns' study, Australian teachers reported that their thinking became 'more sophisticated, analytical and focused' (2014:11). They developed greater knowledge about theories of teaching and analysed how (or even whether) to apply these concepts in practice. Other studies have reported that teachers expand their understanding of the links between teaching and research on their topics (e.g., Gilliland 2018). They are more likely to seek ideas relevant to their inquiry from the literature, or to develop and articulate their own theories about teaching based on evidence from their research. In Kondo's (2020) study, for example, Japanese teachers used a model from the literature and through several cycles of AR and extensive discussion developed their own collective theory of communicative competence.

Through their focus on their own teaching while doing AR, teachers can also gain a sense of greater teaching effectiveness. Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2016), working with teachers in Türkiye, reported gains in self-efficacy beliefs in the chosen research areas (e.g., grammar teaching). Other studies point to increased reflectivity, autonomy and confidence in their practices. In the Banegas (2011) study for example, teachers reduced their reliability on textbooks and began to develop their own materials based on a greater focus on student needs. Perhaps, this is one of the most important outcomes of developing knowledge and skills through AR – teachers expanding their knowledge and understanding of their learners and thus becoming better equipped to meet learning needs. Studies in this area show that teachers tend to give more attention to the views and perspectives of students, develop more connection with them, and feel greater empathy and sensitivity towards them.

Herhily and Pottage offer an illustration of some of the findings above in a 2013 issue of *Research Notes* on AR. Their research was conducted in the language centre of a higher education institute. Their students, from numerous nationality backgrounds, were studying in a 10-week Direct Entry course, one that on successful completion to a level comparable to C1 of the CEFR, provides a direct pathway into students' chosen university courses, without the necessity to achieve an IELTS or TOEFL entry level. The two teachers focused on effective ways to provide feedback on speaking, deciding as part of their research to select VoiceThread, an online discussion board where teachers and students can post audio and video feedback comments. First using questionnaires to collect student background information and

perspectives on their speaking skills and use of technology, the teachers then asked the students to audio-post to VoiceThread on various topics for homework every two weeks.

In the first cycle, the teachers found that they themselves lacked the ability to give detailed corrective feedback on speaking, particularly in relation to pronunciation. Moreover, both teachers and students lacked the metalanguage of pronunciation. To remedy these problems, they consulted the literature, drawing particularly on practical teacher development resources and using their own developing knowledge to instruct their students on pronunciation and its metalanguage. These strategies enhanced their capacity to expand the amount and quality of feedback they gave, so that there were notable improvements in student performance. In interviews they then conducted, they were sensitised to students' desire for more collaborative tasks as well as opportunities for written as well as video feedback. Heeding their students' voices enabled the teachers to heighten their appreciation of student perspectives and learn more about their needs, both for feedback and the use of technology for feedback.

The two teachers gained knowledge and skills from the AR in different ways. Herhily noted he was 'focusing on learning more about pronunciation teaching' and was working to become a 'more methodical and proactive teacher' when giving feedback. He had also realised the importance of communication with his students to 'inform his teaching and improve outcomes' (2013:13). Pottage believed he had increased his knowledge of the uses of technology, not only for feedback but also student motivation. As a research team they felt working together had pushed them to extend their knowledge and skills further than researching individually.

Herhily and Pottage's research provides a good example of professional learning through AR in increasing teachers' knowledge about their own teaching, being open to students' perspectives and experiences and thus striving to address their needs, and identifying gaps in their own learning that they needed to fill.

Impact on teacher-student relationships

As already suggested, AR appears to enable teachers to learn about their students more deeply and to perceive the learning and teaching situation more clearly from their perspectives. Teachers who conduct AR can develop more personal relationships with their students, understand their learning needs better and give students a voice in the classroom (Rogers et al 2007). By collecting evidence from and about their students or by having students collect evidence that contributes to their research, teachers gain heightened awareness and begin to interact with students in qualitatively different ways. As a result, they can become more pedagogically mindful, focusing on their students' existing abilities and further needs, rather than on the teaching of syllabus content. Burns (2014) found that the teachers she surveyed reassessed their teacher-student relationships in various ways: reconceptualising the notion of learner-centredness; being increasingly open to student participation and perspectives; valuing student knowledge, skills and views on learning; and giving their students greater autonomy and decision-making

about their learning. In a study by Mashhadi, Biria and Lofti (2020), a recurring theme from teachers was greater recognition of student voice and the importance of classroom discourse where both teachers and students could express their concerns, expectations and perspectives. Other emerging evidence shows increased connections to students, and development of greater sensitivity and empathy.

Campbell and Thorpe reported on AR which reflected the themes discussed above in a 2017 issue of *Research Notes*. They were preparing students from diverse backgrounds for entry into second year courses at university, and felt discouraged by what they perceived as their students' lack of interest, motivation and engagement in the course content, as well as their dependence on the teacher. However, they noticed that students were very wedded to their smartphones and wondered whether and how this interest could be harnessed. They experimented by asking their students to create videos of a narrative genre on a topic relating to the experiences of international students, which the students prepared by writing a script in collaborative groups and then acting out the story. They wanted to find out if this activity would help the students develop greater autonomy, and also increase their ability to work collaboratively.

The teachers scaffolded this task by breaking down the steps in the process; for example, providing input on the structure of story-telling genres, sourcing illustrative and instructional videos, and asking students to assign roles (cameraperson, scriptwriter). They also provided opportunities for students to meet to give each other feedback on their progress and discuss their next steps. However, apart from these kinds of supports, students were left free to create their own outcomes with the teachers acting as facilitators when required. To collect evidence on responses to this process the teachers used five student questionnaires at various intervals, interviewed four of their students, collected input from the shared Google Docs used as a class communication platform, and kept research journals to record their observations.

Campbell and Thorpe discovered that their students were much more capable of engagement and collaboration and were also more motivated than they had assumed. The students responded overwhelmingly positively to the activity and performed exceptionally well in the final speaking assessment for the course, compared with students in other similar classes. While they could not directly attribute the results to the video productions, the teachers were surprised at the way the students seemed to have developed and transferred their new skills and also noticed their unexpected creativity in other course tasks.

Overall, the two teachers realised that 'our assumptions about what this cohort of students was capable of doing were brought into question and it was extremely rewarding to see how much they could accomplish independently' (2017:16). They learned more about their students' previous instructional experiences and began to understand that the apparent lack of interest in collaboration could be overcome through motivating activities. What they learned as professionals points to the power of AR to enable teachers to drill down into some of their own biases or assumptions and thereby to find new ways to unlock students' apparent lack of motivation and engagement.

Impact on colleagues and the institution

There is growing evidence that AR by teachers can have a 'ripple effect' outwards to the professional learning of other colleagues and, potentially, to that of the institution as a whole. Wyatt (2011), for example, notes in his study that other teachers gained practical ideas from their colleagues' research. Other trends found in the literature relate to teachers' increased interest in research generally, and greater confidence to try new things and do research. Also, as Banegas and his colleagues experienced, the collaborative and democratic approaches inherent in AR can create a fruitful basis for renewed lesson planning and materials development, which contribute to improvement of institutional programs (Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez and Vélez 2013). Others have noted the creation of better teacher collaboration from colleagues researching together, which works against the isolation often experienced in classroom teaching and serves to encourage an institutional professional learning culture. Some teachers who conduct research become role models, mentors or 'go-to' resources for other teachers, thus also contributing to improved potential for institutional development (e.g., Edwards and Burns 2016).

AR by MacAulay and Bencic reported in a 2019 issue of *Research Notes* provides an example in this respect. Teaching a University English Entry Course (UEEC) focused on general academic purposes at a university language centre, they were concerned about how well the course prepared their students for direct entry into their diverse disciplines. From previous experience of teaching UEEC, they had observed that the generic nature of the academic content did not necessarily equip students for their future discipline-specific discourse communities; neither were the students knowledgeable about 'the content, issues, language and expectations of their intended majors' (2019:90). They decided to explore what connections could be made with the students' disciplinary areas and what effects that would have on their students.

To pursue their plans, they introduced their students to the concept of ethnographic research and positioned them as researchers of the information they needed or wanted about their future disciplinary studies. Across the first four weeks of the course, students were assigned five investigations of topics they wished to pursue (e.g., perusal of faculty and course requirement on websites, interviews with previous UEEC students now studying in that discipline). The teachers scaffolded the procedures for the tasks before students undertook them outside class. At the end of this period, the students gave poster presentations to their peers and to other UEEC students and staff. In the final 10 weeks of the course, students selected from five topics which had become salient in the initial four-week phase and broadened their investigations according to their needs and interests. In this part of the course, students were assessed on the required content, but the teachers also wanted to evaluate the effects of their AR strategies on student outcomes. Through the quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (student reflective journals, focus groups, content of student posters) data the teachers collected over the whole course, they identified four themes: students' increased knowledge; motivation and confidence; skills development; and connections with peers.

MacAulay and Bencic reflected that they had greatly deepened their knowledge of their students' challenges, as had other colleagues teaching the UEEC course, through feedback on their experiences as ethnographers and their poster presentations. Their institution too recognised the impact of their AR and requested them to redevelop some of the components of the UEEC course based on their findings. The renewed content was taken up and continues to be taught by their colleagues. It was clear that what they had learned rippled outwards for the professional learning of their students, other teachers, and their institution.

Conclusion

As in the examples highlighted above, the teachers' reports featured in this current issue of *Research Notes* also reflect the many gains in professional learning that can be made through AR. In focusing on a variety of issues that currently occupy teachers in the ELICOS sector and their institutions, they range across a variety of topics and areas of keen interest to the authors. In the pages that follow, readers will find rich illustrations of how AR can be harnessed to explore diverse areas: instructional scaffolding, student interactions with disciplinary literature, ipsative feedback, student engagement in their university community, in online and multimodal instruction, and in speaking classes. All these accounts elicit thoughtful reflections on how teachers can deepen their own content and pedagogical knowledge, their engagement with their students, and the impact their research can have on their colleagues and institutions.



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Building connection: An EAP course that facilitates engagement with the university community

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Introduction

ELICOS teaching positions tend to be quite transitory in nature and so I consider myself particularly fortunate to have been able to work at the English Language Centre at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) for over 12 years. One of the great benefits associated with this is the opportunity to bump into former students around the campus. Sometimes it has been three or four years since their ELICOS course completion and, after the initial awkwardness of scrambling around my memory for long since filed-away names, it is always interesting to chat with the students about how they are doing and how their degree courses are going. Often, they have pleasingly positive stories to tell. They are passing units, improving their English language proficiency, and becoming increasingly settled into the university culture and their lives in Melbourne.

Unfortunately, however, not every student has a happy tale to tell. One Colombian student, who had completed her English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course exceptionally well, had just received a Fail for her first essay in her Bachelor's degree. When I dug further it turned out she had misinterpreted the topic. Where the essay had required her to analyse the impacts on Australia of its historically isolationist policies, she had written about how Australia's geographical isolation had led to the evolution of such unique animals as the koala and kangaroo. In other words, her confusion over the word *isolationist* had lured her into completely the wrong direction. On another occasion, I found myself having a long discussion with a student from Bangladesh who had recently lost a significant sum of money when

she paid a first month deposit for an apartment advertised on a real estate website. It was only when she arrived at the apartment on 'moving in day' that she had discovered she had been duped. The person advertising the apartment had not been the owner and the police had informed the student there was very little chance they would be able to retrieve her deposit. Possibly the most shocking story I have heard from a student was a South Korean who had been struck by a car and knocked unconscious whilst trying to cross a busy Melbourne road. Although she had fully recovered from her injuries, she had since been notified that the driver was intending to sue her for damages to the vehicle.

Such conversations have impressed on me that no matter how well students do in their university bridging courses, such as EAP, their path to becoming successfully integrated into the local and academic cultures is far from complete and can be fraught. This realisation has prompted me to reflect on whether EAP programs can and should do more to prepare students for their university journey beyond the language proficiency and academic skill-building that are at its core.

Context

That many students at ACU find transitioning to university a daunting task is borne out by the ACU Course Withdrawal 2021 statistics. Sixty-six percent of total student withdrawals occurred in the first three months of the academic year and a second minor bump of 15% withdrawals occurred at the commencement of Semester 2. Thus, 81% of all student withdrawals occurred early in their units and courses. For international students specifically, 48% gave reasons for their withdrawal related to difficulties in studying and issues related to living in Melbourne. Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012:3) point out that students transitioning to university frequently found it challenging to envision university life and thus that a mismatch in expectations could develop. This can especially be the case for international students moving away from their families and support networks, as there is a risk of homesickness and the difficulty of keeping up with study quickly becoming acute (Fisher, Cavanagh and Bowles 2011:226). An additional complication is that many international university students fall within the approximate age bracket of emerging adults (18–25) and that this period is associated with marked changes in attitudes and beliefs (Lefkowitz 2005:41). This is indeed reflected in the Course Withdrawal rates at ACU as students 25 years and under are 75% more likely to drop out of their courses.

Traditionally, at ACU, the focus on assisting students in their transition to university has been concentrated on a range of events during Orientation Week, including information sessions and social events. Certainly, there is merit in these, particularly when it is considered that friendly, supportive staff is one of the key factors associated with successful university transition (Fisher et al 2011:227). However, one-off events of this nature may fail to achieve their desired outcomes and could even lead to increased feelings of isolation and disconnection (Lessky, Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann 2021:38). Effective transition programs therefore would optimally be conducted over extended time periods and utilise a variety of platforms, both synchronous and asynchronous.


Gateway to ACU: A transition to university program

The English Language Centre at ACU was involved in a joint project to develop a digital, game-based transition to university program. The program was funded by the Victorian State Government as a part of their initiatives to help the international education sector recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. My specific role in the project was Content Writer. I had worked in a similar role in developing ACU's Virtual Study Tour, which won the LearnX Awards 2022 Gold Medal for Best VR and Online Integrated Training.

Gateway to ACU, as the program is called, aims to connect new students with the university community through challenges, simulations, and pop-up videos involving ACU staff and current students. Although this content is asynchronous in nature, all students accessing the program are assigned student mentors who will contact them. *Gateway to ACU* consists of five modules, each taking approximately 25 minutes to complete. Typically, transition to university material is offered to students before arriving at the university and for independent access. However, embedding the program into a bridging course such as EAP could potentially facilitate a deeper interaction with the content by adding an additional synchronous element to the learning experience. That it was decided the program should be game-based was in part due to the students already receiving static transition to university materials upon first accepting their ACU offers and during the orientation period. As Perini, Luglietti, Margoudi, Oliveira and Taisch (2018:41) observe, a gamified approach can be 'more appropriate than the non-gamified one when there is the need to address the more operational aspects of students' learning'. Thus, giving students an opportunity to interact in a fun, dynamic way with topics they have already encountered, would appear pedagogically sound.



Figure 1: An international student providing voiceovers for Lizzy, an animated character in *Gateway to ACU*



Meet Lizzy. She is going to be travelling to Australia as an international student and will be completing this module with you, **Getting ready for Australia**.

Lizzy might need your help along the way. Answering her questions correctly will help Lizzy gather important items before her flight.

Passport **Laptop** **Emergency contact details** **Backpack**

Are you up for the challenge?

Introduce yourself to Lizzy by **typing** your name in the textbox below, then **select** Go to head over to Lizzy's house.

[Go]

Figure 2: Lizzy, as she appears in *Gateway to ACU*. Students will move through the modules with various animated characters and make choices to assist them with their university transition.



Figure 3: A lab demonstration being filmed for *Gateway to ACU*. Although many EAP students would not be required to use the labs as a part of their degree programs, it was felt that taking a broader look at university life would help them feel more included in the ACU community.

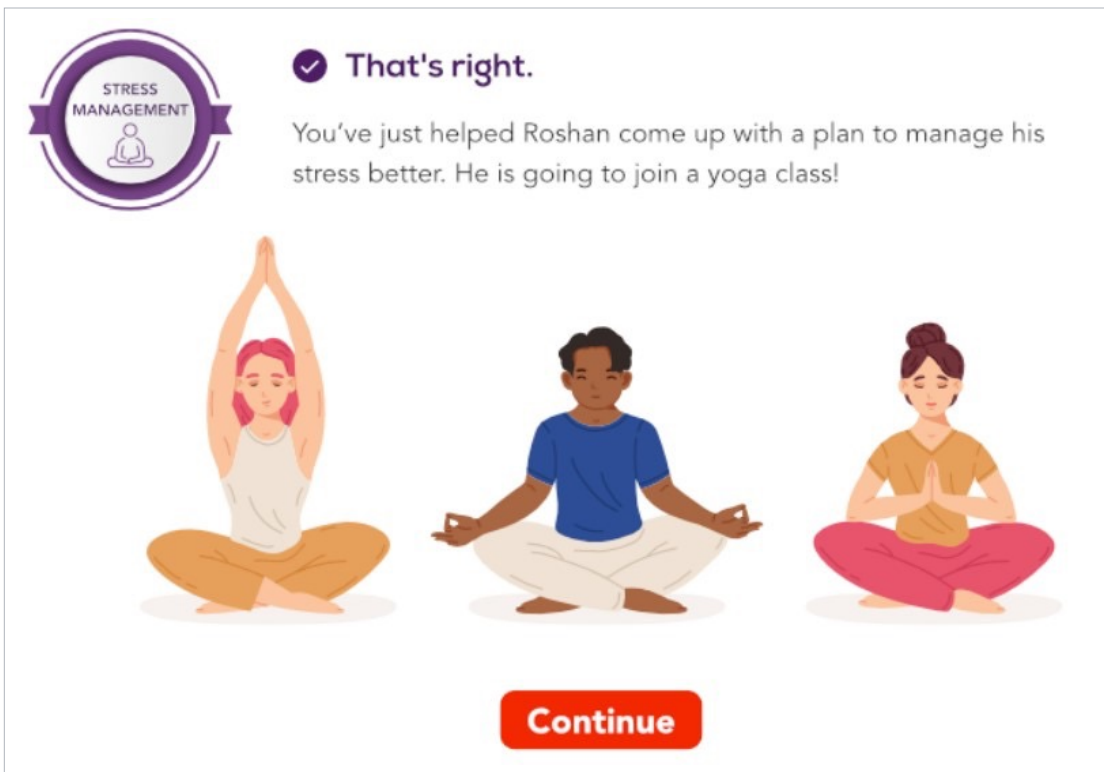


Figure 4: An image from a Gateway to ACU activity that takes a game-based approach to promoting student health and wellbeing

The project and research questions

The purpose of my action research (AR) project was to explore the potential of transition to university content being meaningfully and effectively integrated into EAP courses. More specifically, I was keen to look into the merits of digital, game-based transition as an engaging way to incorporate transition to university content into the EAP classroom. To this end, my AR project pursued the following research questions (RQs):

1. What are EAP students most concerned about in their transition to study at ACU?
2. Is there a place for transition to university content in EAP courses? If so, would a digital, game-based approach be engaging?

Data collection and limitations

1. Initial survey and focus group discussions

Two initial focus group sessions of 60-minute duration were conducted with EAP students in conjunction with a needs analysis survey. The students in the research group ranged in age levels, nationalities, and language levels, and the degrees they were intending to take at ACU were primarily in the areas of Education, Health Sciences and Business. Nearly all the students were recent arrivals in Australia and were embarking on their first university experience in this country. Around half of the students had not undertaken university study in their home countries as well.

The survey and focus group discussion questions were arranged to explore three main areas related to university transition: 1) awareness of the university and its services; 2) ability to settle into student life; 3) ease of living within the broader Melbourne community. The focus groups discussed the same questions as those in the survey and afforded the opportunity to drill down into issues as they came up. The overall results were very valuable in the development of the *Gateway to ACU* modules in that there was an attempt to provide content relevant to all the issues that were raised.

2. Student interaction with the *Gateway to ACU* modules

Once Module 1 was ready for testing, I set aside a one-hour session in my EAP class for students to run through it individually or in pairs (see Figure 4). The students were then asked to share their feedback through a follow-up survey and focus group discussion. Unfortunately, with the full *Gateway to ACU* program still under development throughout the AR study period, it was not possible to extend the project's reach to a more comprehensive five-module program analysis conducted over the length of an EAP course (which is something I would be keen to explore further). However, since the game-based approach and use of animated characteristics was consistent across the modules, it would be possible to draw reasonable assumptions from one module to the full program. This would particularly be the case for the gamified approach and students' interest in the program being incorporated into their EAP unit, which were the key areas of interest in my AR project.

3. Wider stakeholder feedback on the value of the *Gateway to ACU* program

Another area of research, once the early iteration of the *Gateway to ACU* program was ready for testing, was to reach out to external stakeholders for their feedback. These included the International Student Advisor, the Coordinator for International Student Transition and Retention, and a member of AskACU (the team responsible for answering general student enquiries at the university). One of my former EAP students also kindly offered to provide feedback. She was still studying at ACU in the final year of a Master of Public Health degree and was also employed by ACU in a Student Mentor role.

The questions these stakeholders were specifically asked to focus upon in reviewing the program included: 1. What did you find valuable about the *Gateway to ACU* program?; 2. How do you think the program will help new international students as they arrive in Australia, and start their studies at ACU?; 3. Which topic areas in the program do you believe would be of most benefit for international students? Feedback was provided orally and, along with the student survey results, was very beneficial in informing the overall development of the *Gateway to ACU* modules (which was occurring in parallel to the AR project).



Figure 5: EAP students exploring the Gateway to ACU Module I in the AR testing phase

Findings

1. Student concerns in their transition to university

The EAP students in the research group identified a range of shortcomings they felt could impair their successful university transition. Interestingly, one of these was simply not being familiar with the history and background of the university. Seventy percent of students indicated they knew little or nothing about this aspect of the university whereas 96% of students suggested that such knowledge was important (see Appendix 1). Another noteworthy gap was in understanding Australian culture with 81% of students expressing a lack of confidence in this area (see Appendix 1). Other notable concerns included how to make friends, deal with homesickness, and navigate Australian slang. Students also expressed feelings of anxiety about transitioning to study at ACU. Some concerns were related to more immediate issues, such as how to access the ACU online learning platform, and others were more long term, such as what post-study employment options might be available. This anxiety is perhaps best summed up by one student who noted, 'I'm a bit worried about my uni life' (see Appendix 1).

2. Embedding transition to university content into the EAP curriculum

There was a strong expression of support for the inclusion of university transition content into the EAP course. Indeed, 100% of students indicated that the *Gateway to ACU* content was *Useful/Somewhat useful* (see Appendix 2). Students were particularly positive in the category of Studying in Australia, with 85% of students of a view that the module was *Useful* in this regard (see Appendix 2). One student commented that 'this kind of module helps students to fit in to ACU community'. And another student observed 'I feel it fun, I really like it and it is a chance for us to know more about the culture and everything about the Australia' (see

Appendix 2). Nevertheless, there were two students who expressed concern that the program might take time away from their language proficiency development. This apprehension was understandable given the high-stakes nature of the EAP course and is especially pertinent for game-based activities that can be considered trivial and inconsequential by some learners. This thought was articulated by one student who suggested the module 'is more suitable in General English not EAP' (see Appendix 2). It highlights the need to make clear reference to the program's relevance with the unit learning outcomes and to be selective of the most appropriate tasks. It also highlights the benefits of checking in with students regularly through an EAP course as it allows teachers to respond to student concerns before they fester.

3. A digital, game-based approach to university transition

A game-based approach to the transition to university content was very well-received among the research group with 100% of students finding it engaging. An important element was the student being able to assist the animated character through the various challenges contained within the module. Ninety-two percent of students were positive about this element. The same percentage of students voiced a desire to have the *Gateway to ACU* program incorporated into their EAP course. One student noted that, 'I have to see more module like this it is fun' (see Appendix 2).

4. External stakeholder feedback to the game-based approach

The external stakeholders saw significant value in the inclusion of the program's transition to university content. The International Student Advisor was pleased that the program offered an introduction into her role and the assistance she could provide. She was also glad that many of the concerns international students came to see her about, including around accommodation and part-time employment, were touched upon in the modules. Similarly, the AskACU representative noted that many of the questions that international students bring to their help desk were addressed in the program. The Coordinator for International Student Transition and Retention added her support for the program and commented particularly on the material related to identifying and responding to homesickness. In her role, she saw this as being one of the most significant challenges for many international students in successfully completing their degrees and that encouraging students to act early was a key step in limiting severity. The Regional Manager for International Recruitment noted the value of including Academic Integrity content in the program as it would complement and reinforce the other modes of delivering this information to EAP students set to embark on their degrees. Perhaps, most compelling for me was that my former student, Mia, expressed a wish that the *Gateway to ACU* program had been available for her when she had been studying EAP. She noted that at the time she had had a lot of questions related to university life but had not thought it appropriate to ask them as the focus of the EAP curriculum had primarily been on developing language proficiency and academic skills.



Figure 6: The Academic Integrity Officer introducing the concept of appropriate academic research for *Gateway to ACU*. This material was well-received in the external feedback as a way of reinforcing the importance of this topic, particularly for EAP students set to embark on their degrees.



Figure 7: Mentors providing university-transition advice from a student's perspective. EAP students noted in their feedback that including mentors helped them feel more a part of the student community.

Conclusion and reflections

The AR project was a worthwhile opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the broad range of hurdles international students are presented with when undertaking study at university. The initial focus group discussions I had at the onset of the project impressed on me that many students in my EAP class were undergoing one of the biggest readjustments in their lives and that tapping into this realisation could make their learning experience so much more meaningful and richer than if language proficiency and academic skills are targeted exclusively. This insight aligned with my impression prior to embarking on the AR project that not all students who perform well in EAP courses are able to fulfil this promise in their degree courses.

The fact that over 90% of students in the research group were keen for *Gateway to ACU* to be incorporated into their EAP unit was an encouraging indication that transition to university content can help address the kind of concerns and uncertainties identified in the needs data collection stage. Of equal value, however, were the concerns garnered in the follow-up survey about whether the program would be suitable for language proficiency and academic skills development. As the program features a simulated lab experiment and other videos involving staff and students, combined with quizzes and comprehension questions, I feel the program could be of value in those areas. The focus of the program on academic integrity could also be of significant benefit. To have student mentors talk through these issues in a more informal way could complement well the more formal, top-down workshops and modules that ACU students are required to complete.

Overall, this AR project has highlighted the importance of taking a holistic approach with EAP curricula, particularly in terms of fostering in students a greater understanding of the university and the wider community and in familiarising them with the approaches and tools available for successful transition. Embedding into the EAP curriculum game-based, university-transition content that includes dialogues, quizzes and creative activities can help enrich and broaden the learning experience and help set students up for success in their future degree programs.

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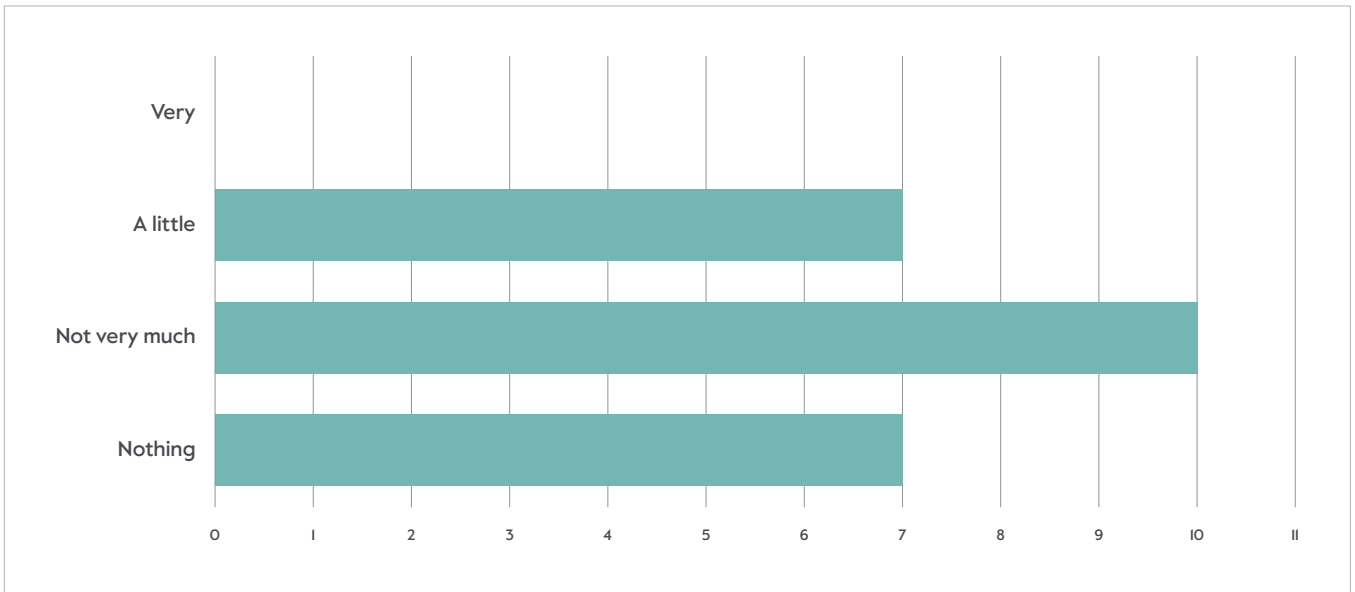
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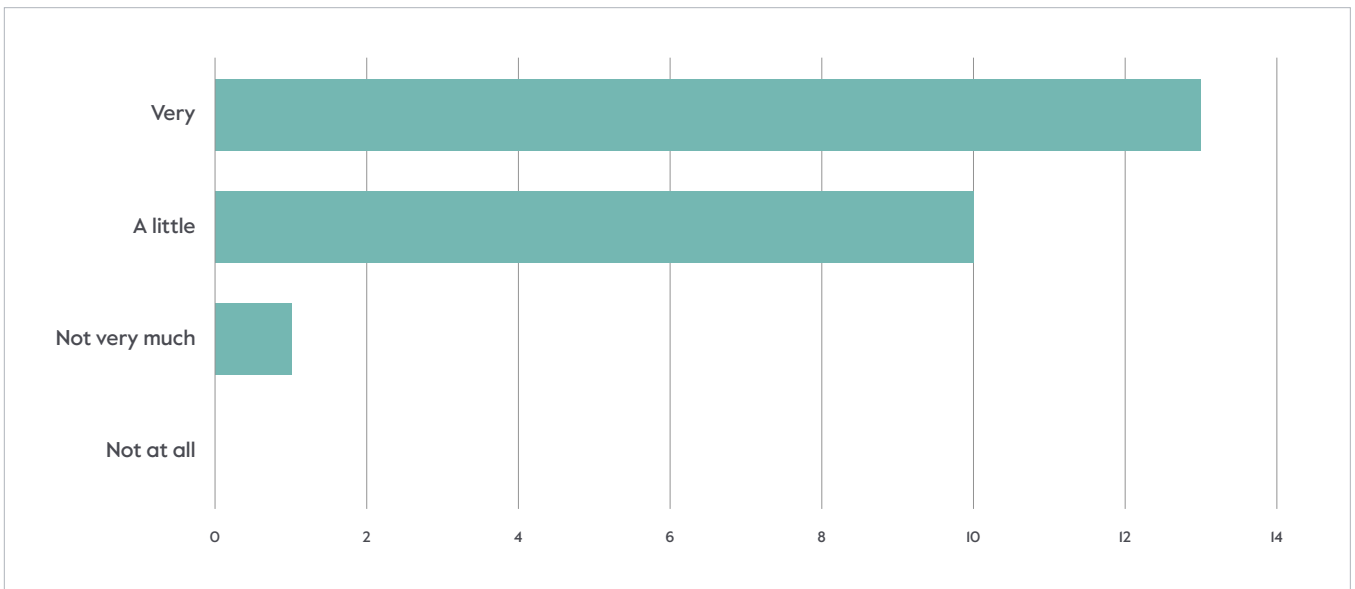
Please click the following link to view the authors’ presentation at the 2022 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/professional-development/webinars>

Appendix I: Needs analysis survey

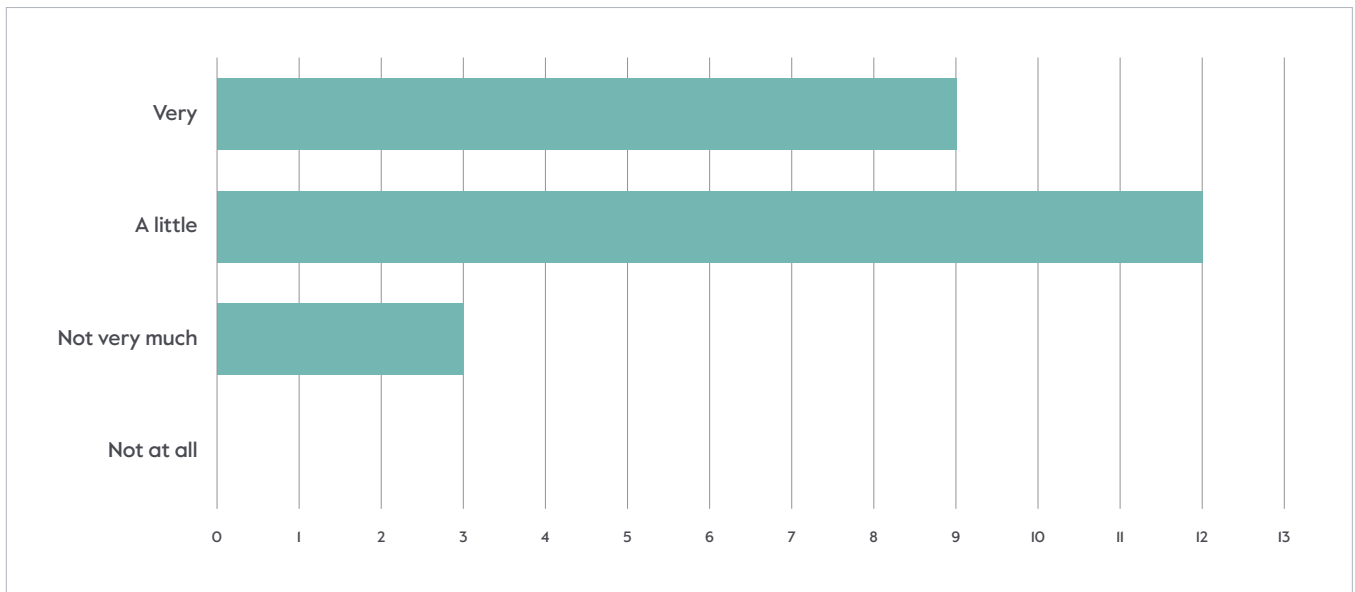
Q1.1 – Do you know much about ACU including its history and mission?



Q1.2 – How important is it for students to know about the university they are studying at?



Q1.3 – While preparing to come to Australia and commence your studies at ACU, was it clear what steps you needed to take?



Q1.3b – What things were you unsure about?

Method of study

Nothing much

Where to stay

I'm a bit worried about my uni life

Uncertain about my career path

Timetable

Choosing the courses

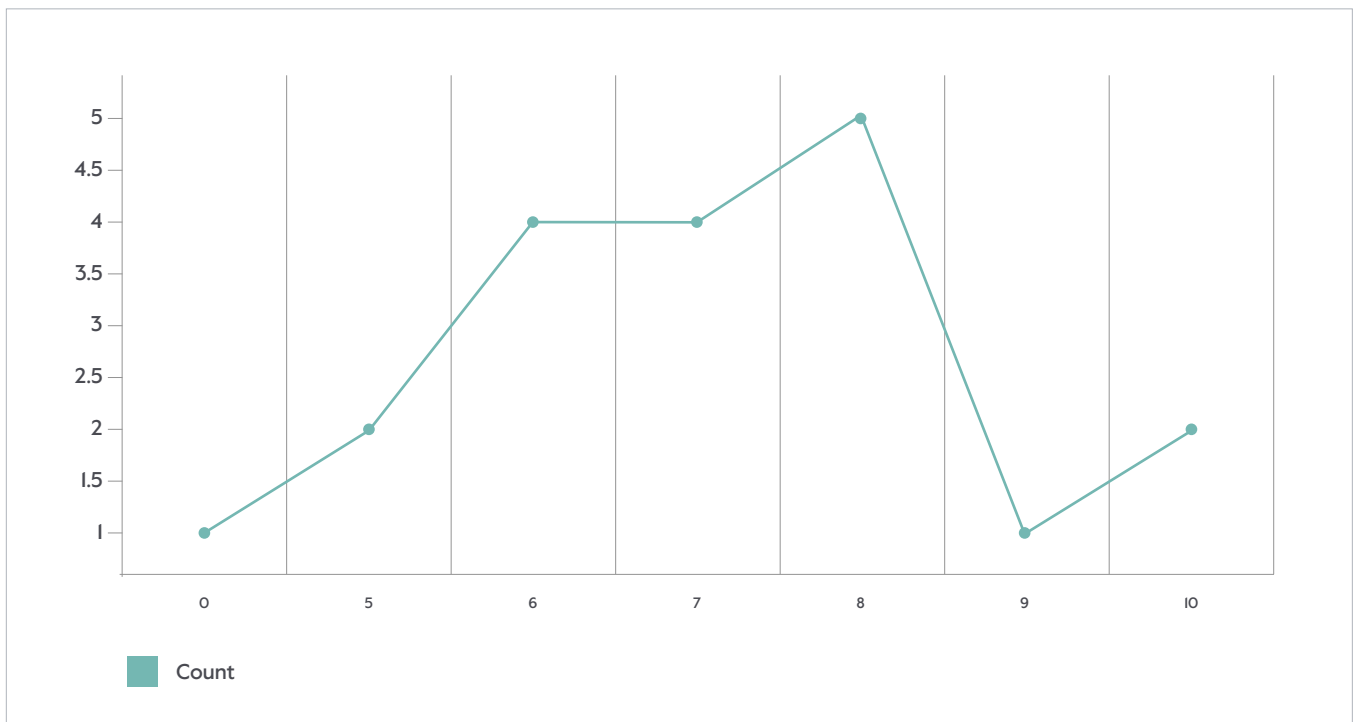
Accommodation, job, cost of living

Class delivery, information on future course

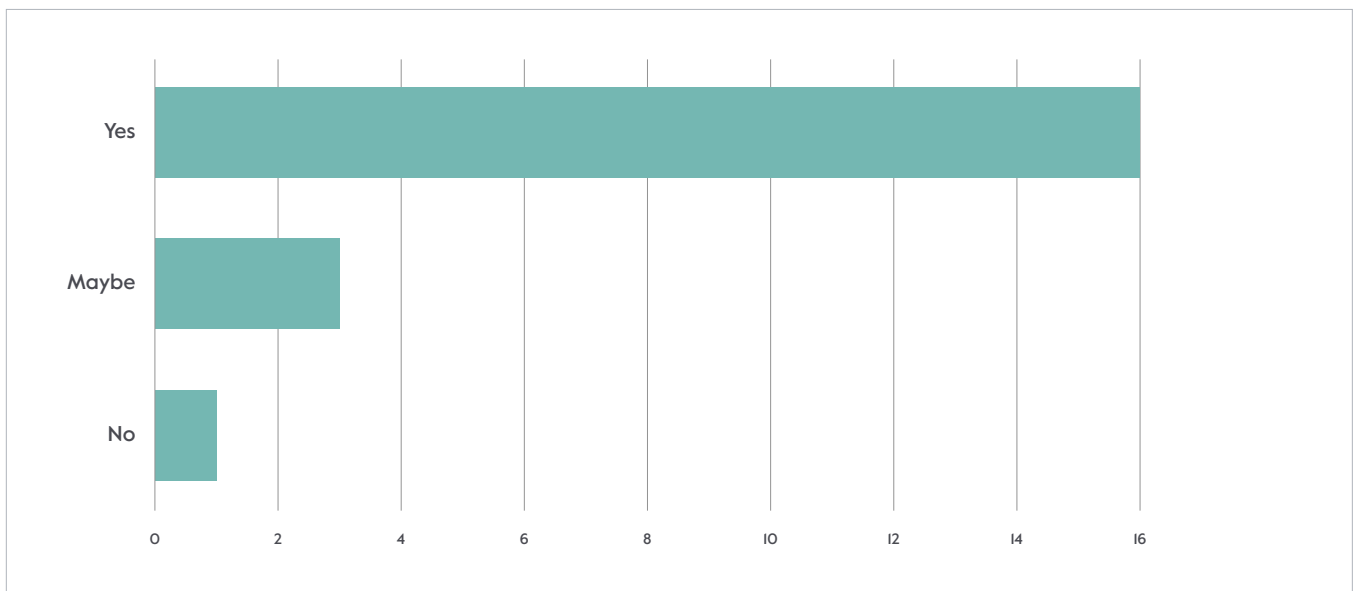
Enrolment took a while to figure out. More steps should be involved, perhaps implements a tutorial.

ACU did not provide much support for new students, for example ACU did not really show new students how to get access into LEO, nor how to use student emails properly.

Q1.4 – On a scale of 0–10, how easy was your decision to come to ACU?



Q2.1 – Do you feel motivated in your studies at ACU?

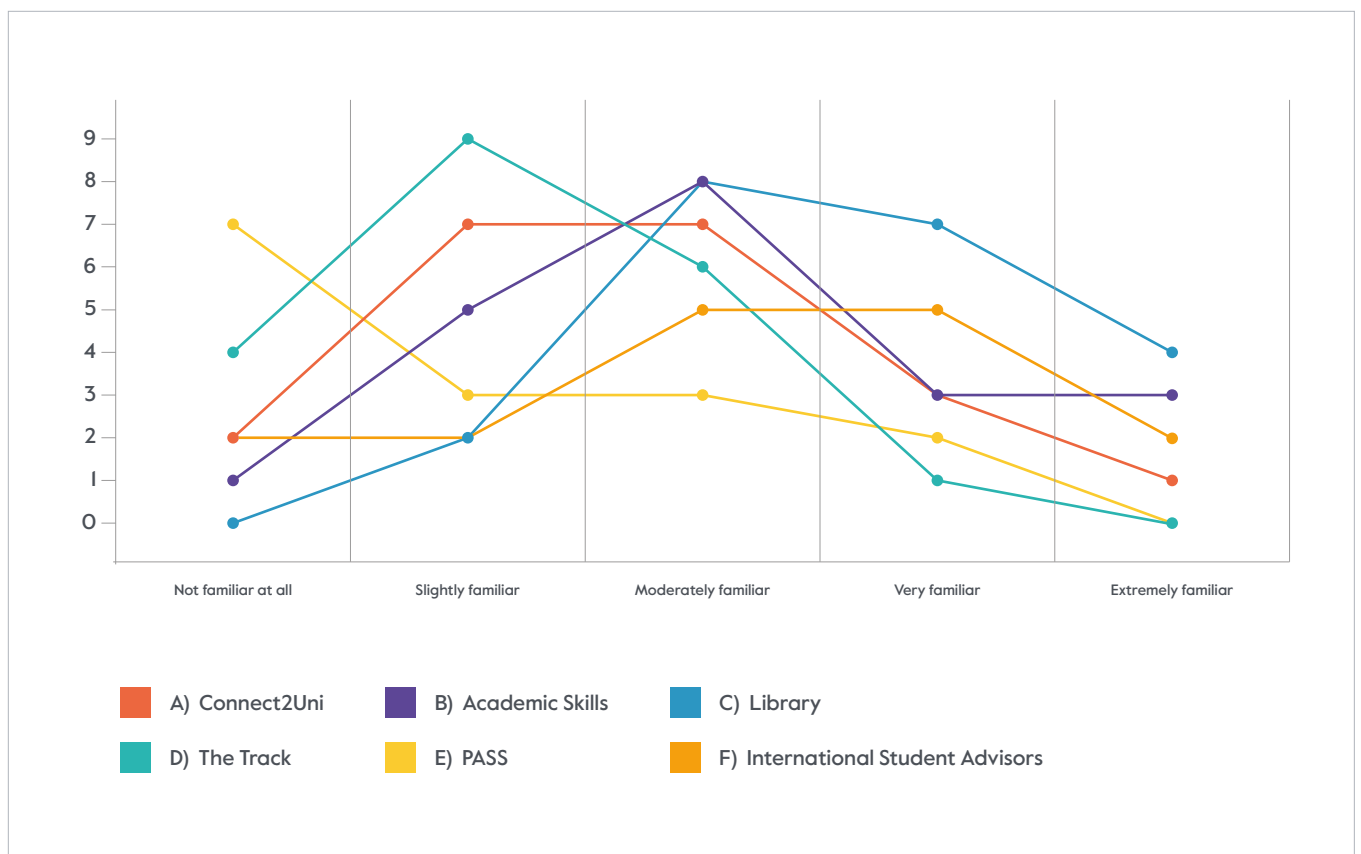


Q2.1b – What helps you maintain your motivation?

Independence in studies
 My fellow students
 Family and career
 The future
 Future goals
 Library and teachers
 Keep my eye on the prize – motivated by my goals and the life I want to live
 I want to stay in Australia
 Supportive friends and encouraging teachers
 My dreams, friendly tutors

Job offers, engagement with the university and Australia
 Encouragement and support from lecturers, family and peers
 In my country universities are not that big. Studying in a big university, seeing international students, and a big library motivates me.
 I prefer to have an in-person class for learning English Face-to-face learning (lectures and tutorials), getting closer to graduating
 Good course structure, friendly/helpful staff

Q2.2 – How familiar are you with the following ACU services?



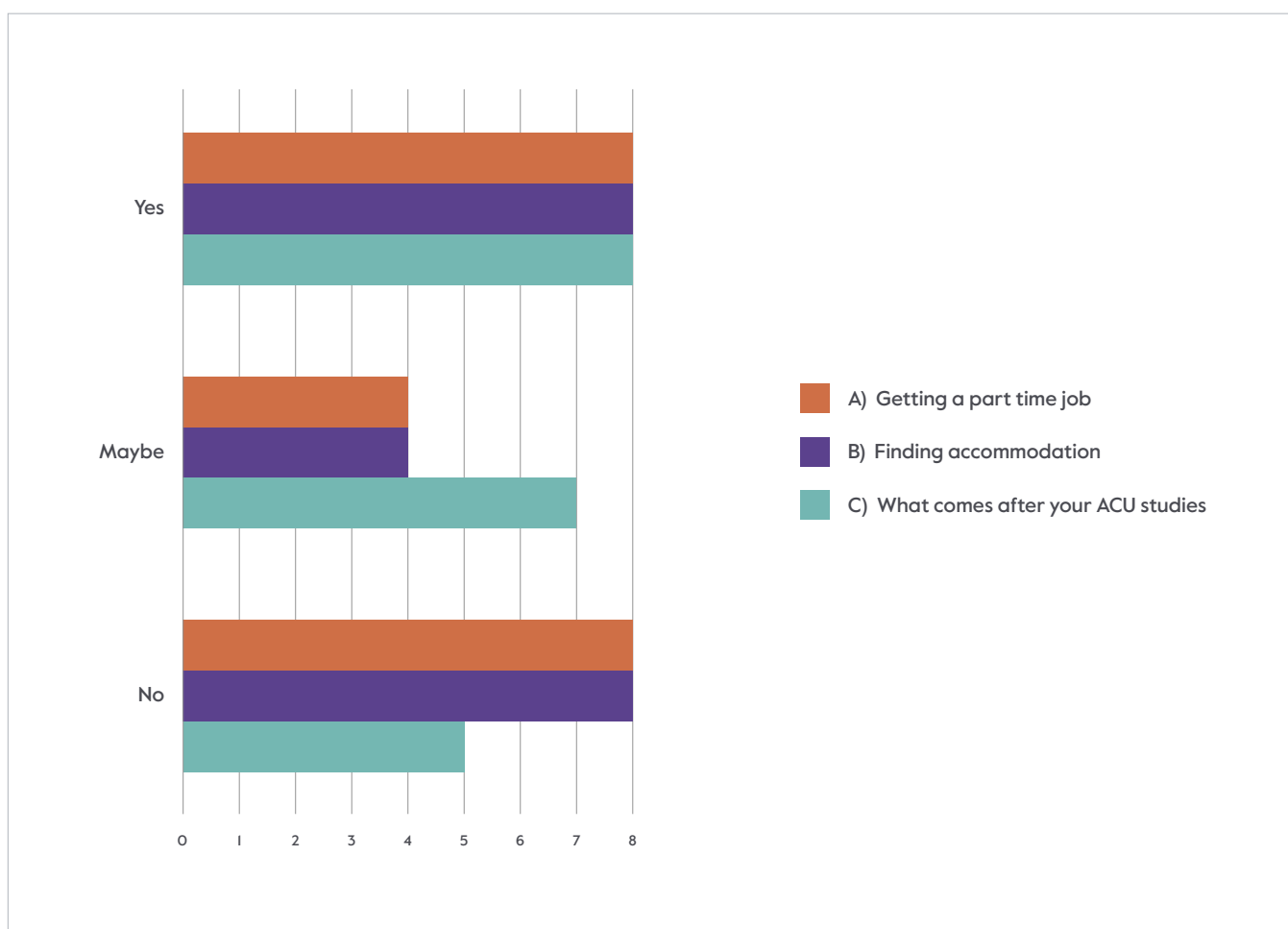
#	Question	Not familiar at all		Slightly familiar		Moderately familiar		Very familiar		Extremely familiar		Total
		%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
6	F) International Student Advisors	12.50%	2	12.50%	2	31.25%	5	31.25%	5	12.50%	2	16
5	E) PASS	46.67%	7	20.00%	3	20.00%	3	13.33%	2	0.00%	0	15
4	D) The Track	20.00%	4	45.00%	9	30.00%	6	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	20
3	C) Library	0.00%	0	9.52%	2	38.10%	8	33.33%	7	19.05%	4	21
2	B) Academic Skills	5.00%	1	25.00%	5	40.00%	8	15.00%	3	15.00%	3	20
1	A) Connect2Uni	10.00%	2	35.00%	7	35.00%	7	15.00%	3	5.00%	1	20

Q2.2b – Which ACU service have you found most useful?

The International Student Advisor
AskACU
Library

Student Life
Academic Skills Unit

Q2.3 – Do you know where to get help and advice about the following:

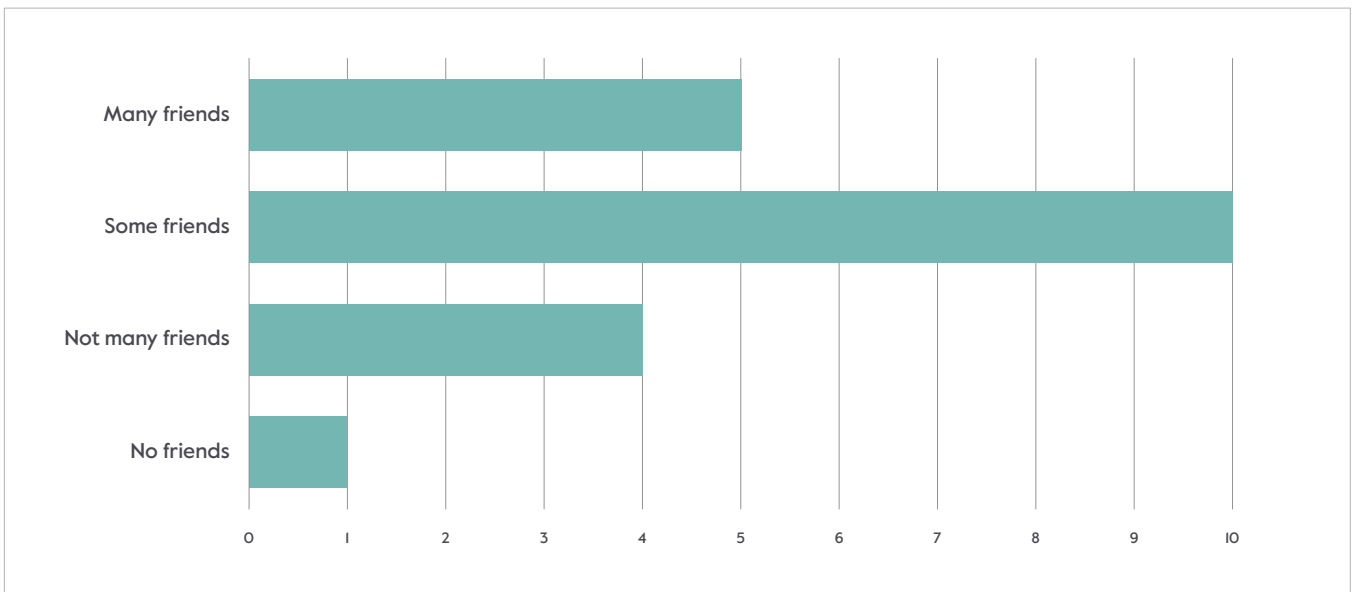


#	Question	Yes		Maybe		No		Total
1	A) Getting a part time job	40.00%	8	20.00%	4	40.00%	8	20
2	B) Finding accommodation	40.00%	8	20.00%	4	40.00%	8	20
3	C) What comes after your ACU studies	40.00%	8	35.00%	7	25.00%	5	20

Q2.3b – Which of these would you like more assistance with?

What comes after your studies	A and C
Finding accommodation	Study support
Part time job	Academic track
Getting a part time job	Getting medical assistance
Don't know	None

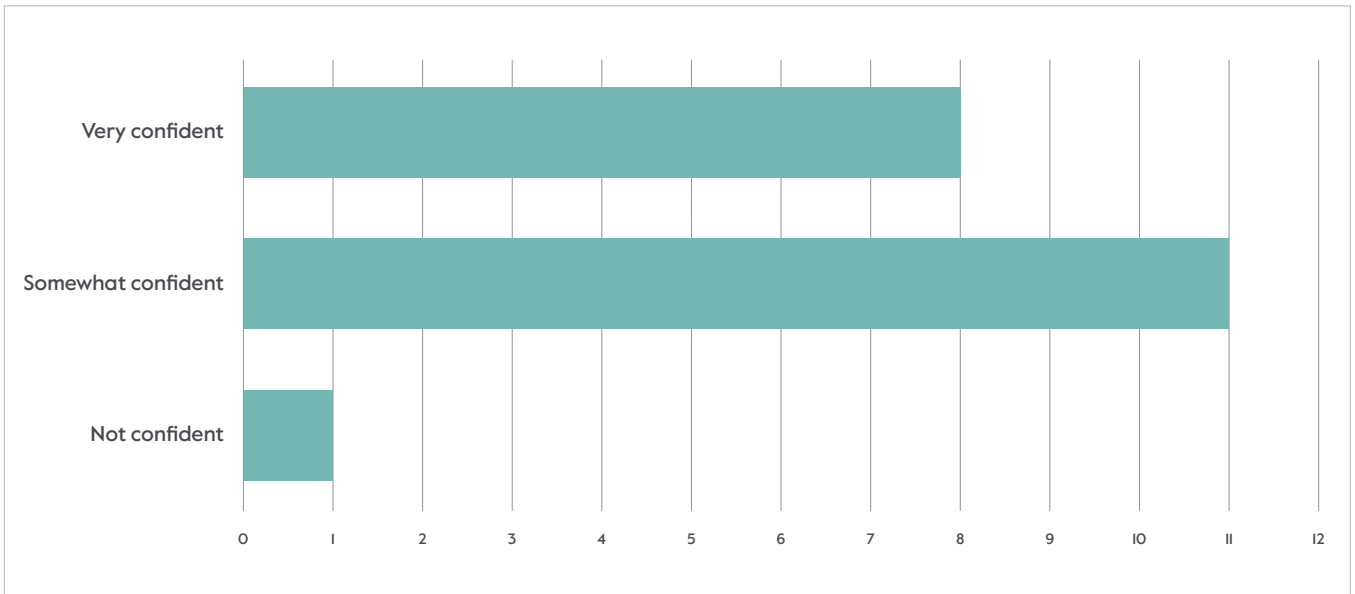
Q2.4 – Have you been able to make friends at ACU (select)?



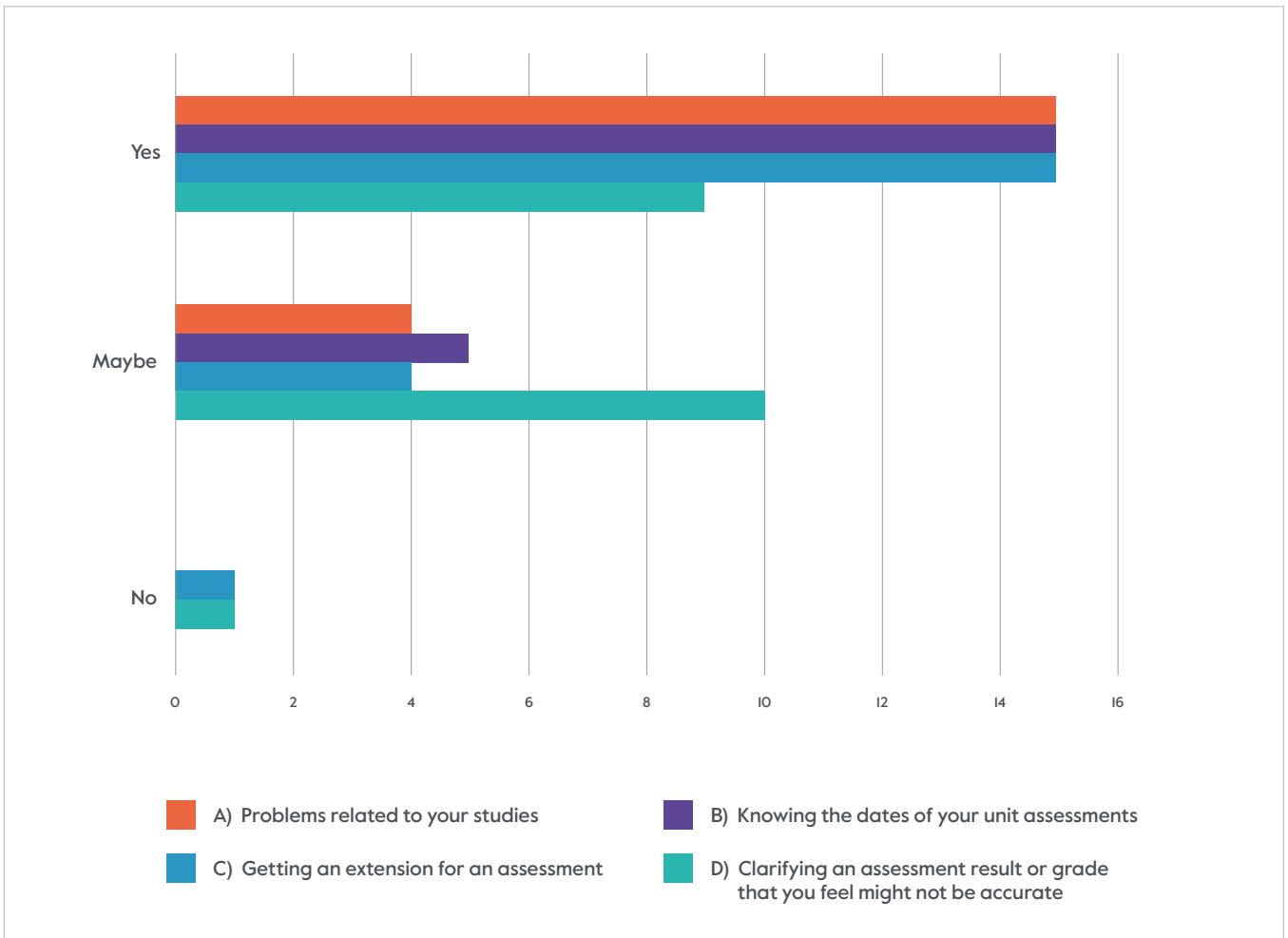
Q2.4b – What is the best way to make friends at ACU?

I have no idea	I cannot interact with many people
Communication	Be yourself and never compromise on who you are to your core
Parties	Sport, extra activities, groups of study
Join events	Finding common interests
Classroom	Be friendly and respectful
Be friendly and warm	Naturally make friends. Don't force anything.
Just talk with them	To see people naturally
	Just have communication without hesitation
	What is the best way to make friends at ACU

Q2.5 – How confident are you using a computer and IT for study purposes?

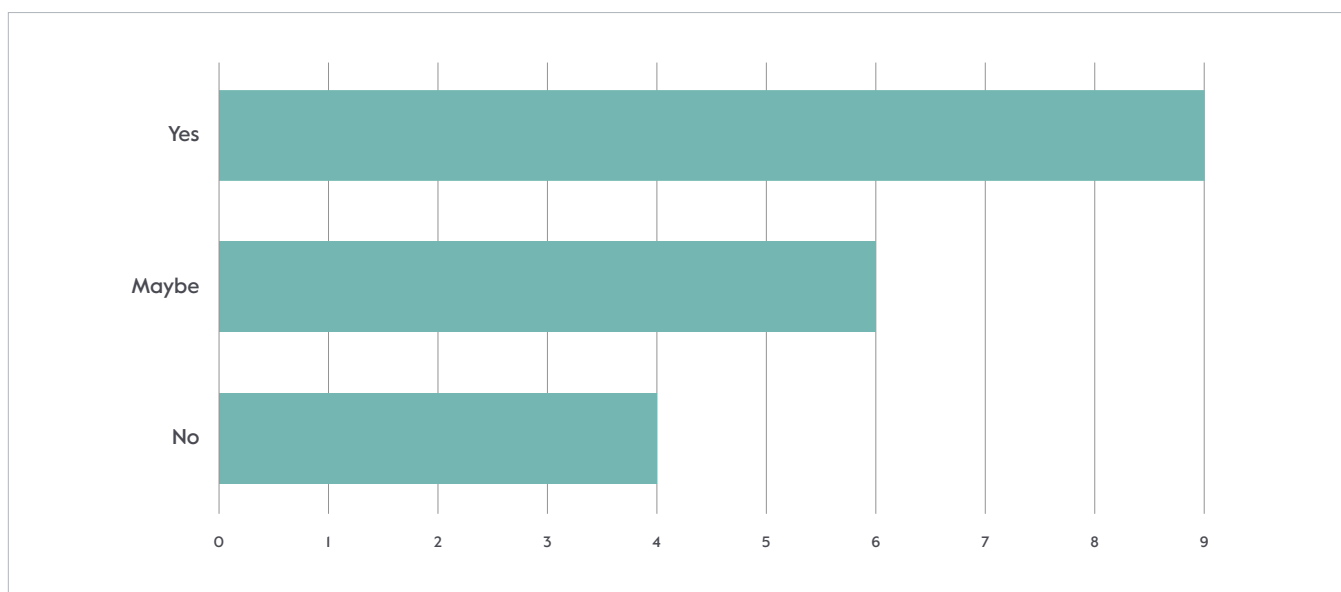


Q2.6 – Do you know where you can receive help/advice with:



#	Question	Yes		Maybe		No		Total
		%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
1	A) Problems related to your studies	78.95%	15	21.05%	4	0.00%	0	19
2	B) Knowing the dates of your unit assessments	75.00%	15	25.00%	5	0.00%	0	20
3	C) Getting an extension for an assessment	75.00%	15	20.00%	4	5.00%	1	20
4	D) Clarifying an assessment result or grade that you feel might not be accurate	45.00%	9	50.00%	10	5.00%	1	20

Q3.I – Have you experienced culture shock or homesickness while studying in Australia?

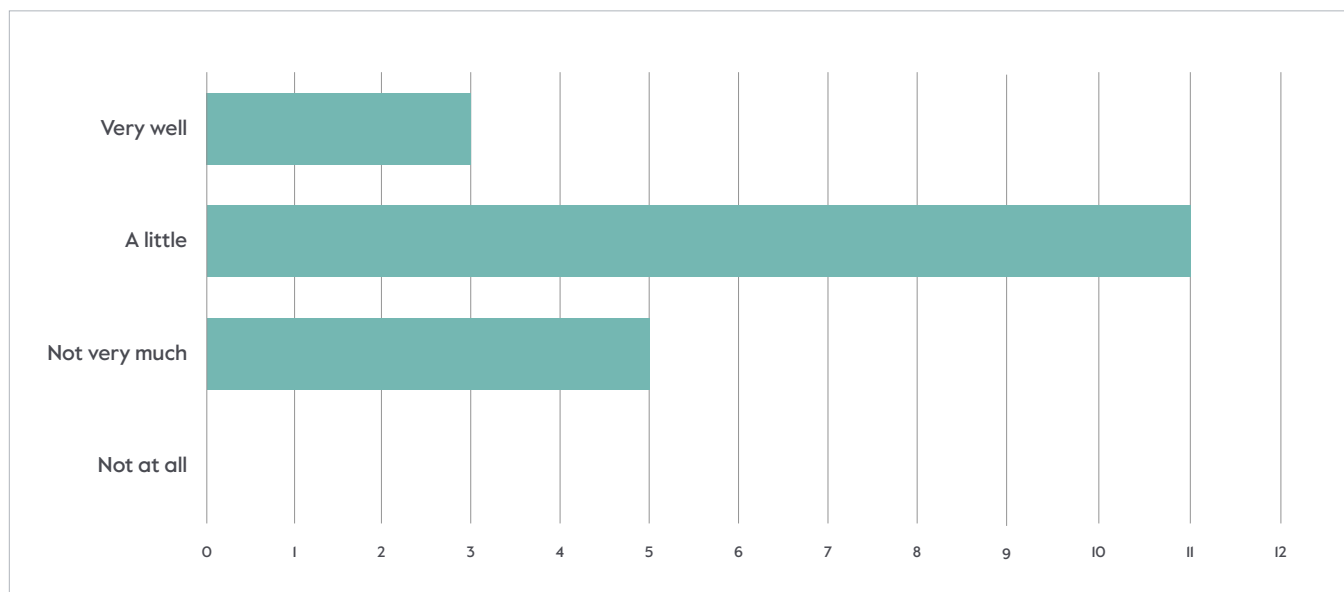


Q3.Ib – If so, how did you deal with culture shock and homesickness?

I just tried to adapt
 Communicate with my friends and my family
 Think and do something positive
 Talking a lot
 Chat with my friends and have food
 Take a break and spend time with someone you are comfortable with
 With homesickness I, try to video call my parents frequently but end up crying anyway

Lean on my friends, stay virtually connected to family and friends. Cry if I need to :)
 Make more friends
 Learn about Australian culture
 I'm still in little bit culture shock
 Keeping myself busy with uni and part time job
 Making new friend, keep in touch with my family who are overseas, learn some of Australian and other foreigners, culture, lifestyle

Q3.2 – How well do you feel you understand Australian culture?



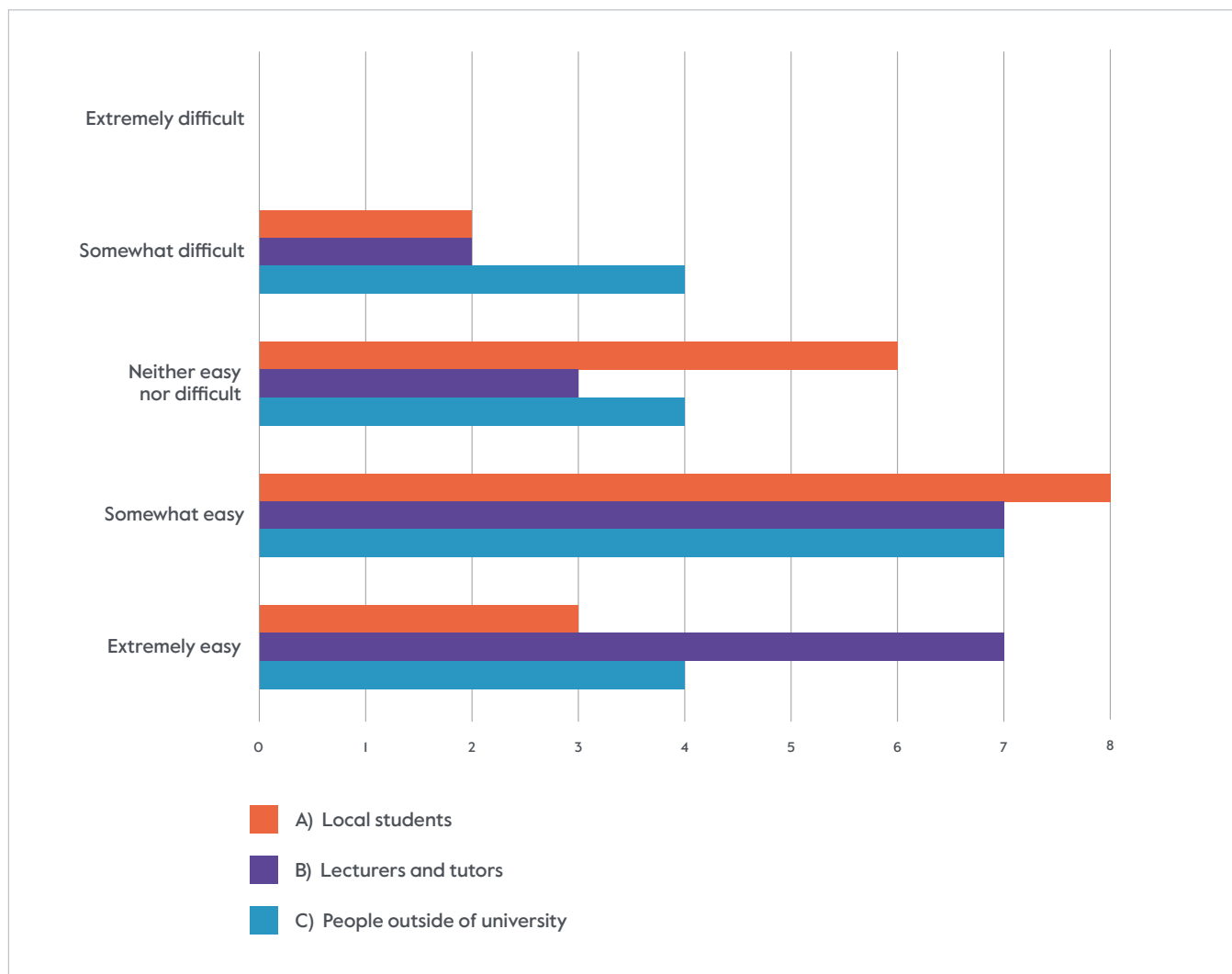
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Very well	15.79%	3
2	A little	57.89%	11
3	Not very much	26.32%	5
4	Not at all	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	19

Q3.2b – What is the biggest difference between Australian culture and your home country’s culture?

Government, laws, culture, and way of life.
 Multicultural, meeting new people from different countries
 Mentality
 Freedom
 There are not many differences but more free and an independent environment
 Multiculture
 Teaching styles – very passive. Work culture – extremely intense.

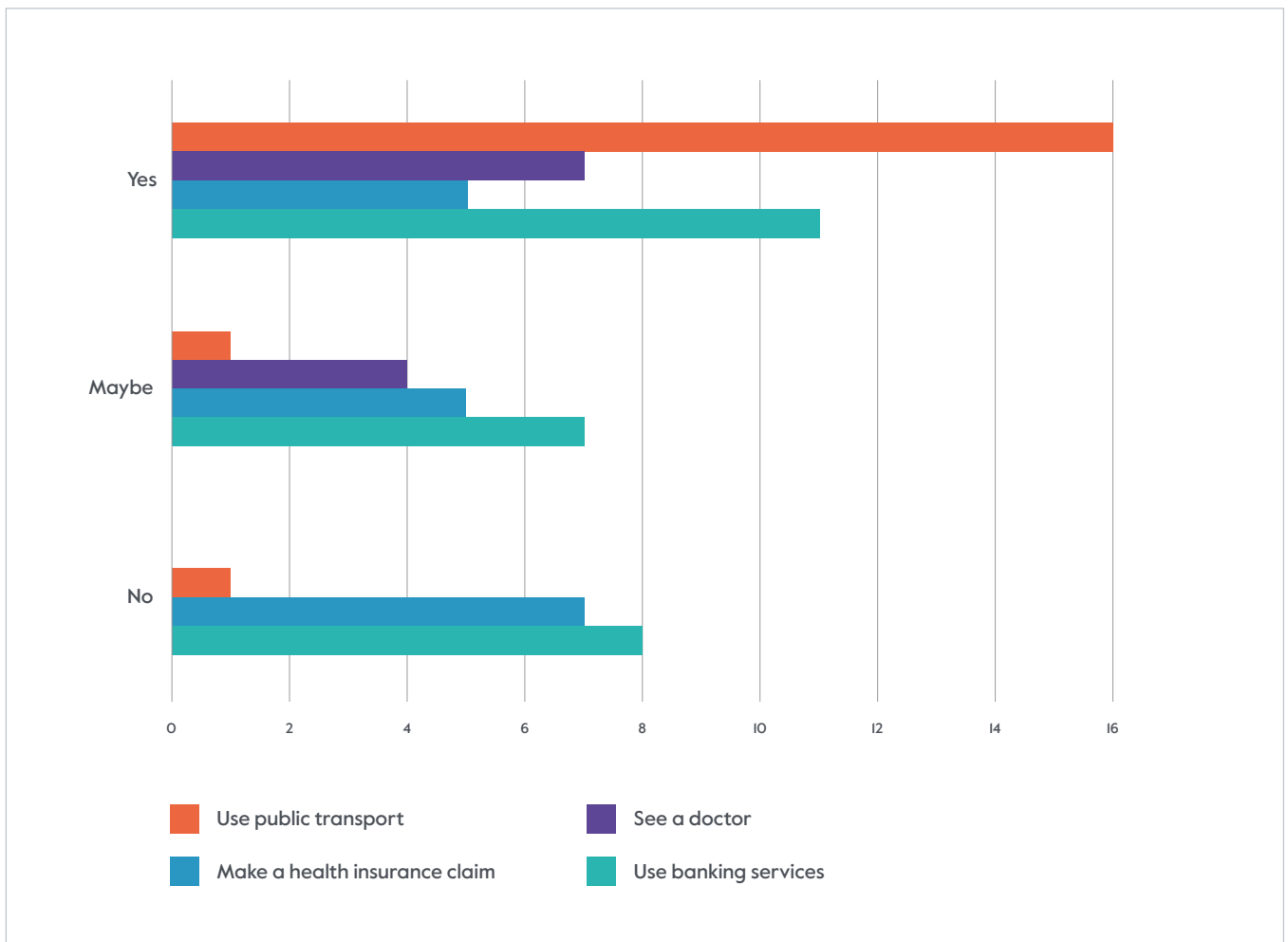
Most of the restaurants close earlier
 Methods of study
 How people greet each other – calling people names by their first name regardless of an individual’s age
 Traffic, public transportation, shop names.
 Informal/formal behaviour
 Language

Q3.3 – How difficult do you find communicating with:



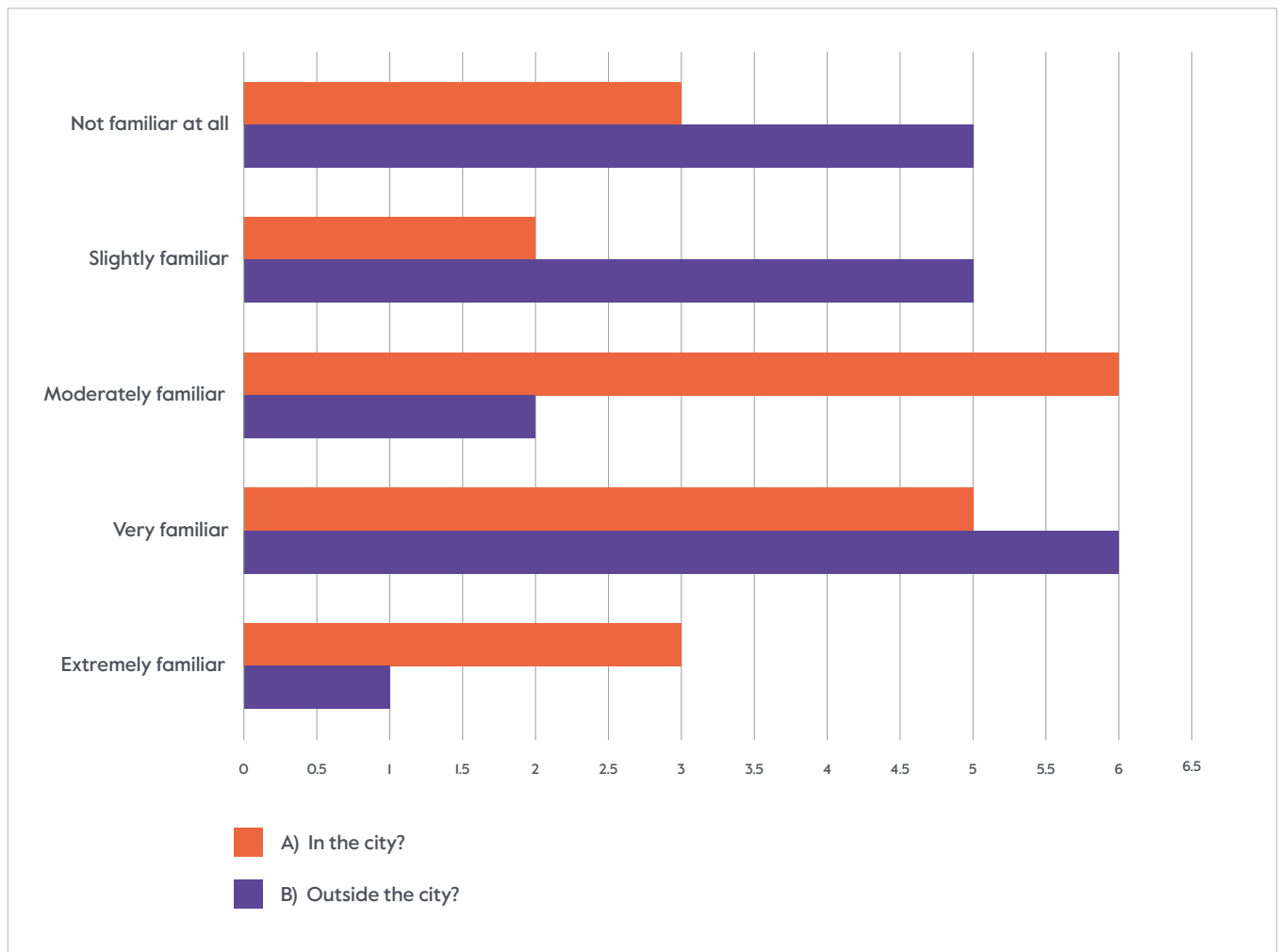
#	Question	Extremely difficult		Somewhat difficult		Neither easy nor difficult		Somewhat easy		Extremely easy		Total
1	A) Local students	0.00%	0	10.53%	2	31.58%	6	42.11%	8	15.79%	3	19
2	B) Lecturers and tutors	0.00%	0	10.53%	2	15.79%	3	36.84%	7	36.84%	7	19
3	C) People outside of university	0.00%	0	21.05%	4	21.05%	4	36.84%	7	21.05%	4	19

Q3.4 – Are you confident you know how to:



#	Question	Yes		Maybe		No		Total
1	Use public transport	88.89%	16	5.56%	1	5.56%	1	18
2	See a doctor	38.89%	7	22.22%	4	38.89%	7	18
3	Make a health insurance claim	27.78%	5	27.78%	5	44.44%	8	18
4	Use banking services	61.11%	11	38.89%	7	0.00%	0	18

Q3.5 – Are you aware of the different sightseeing spots you can visit:



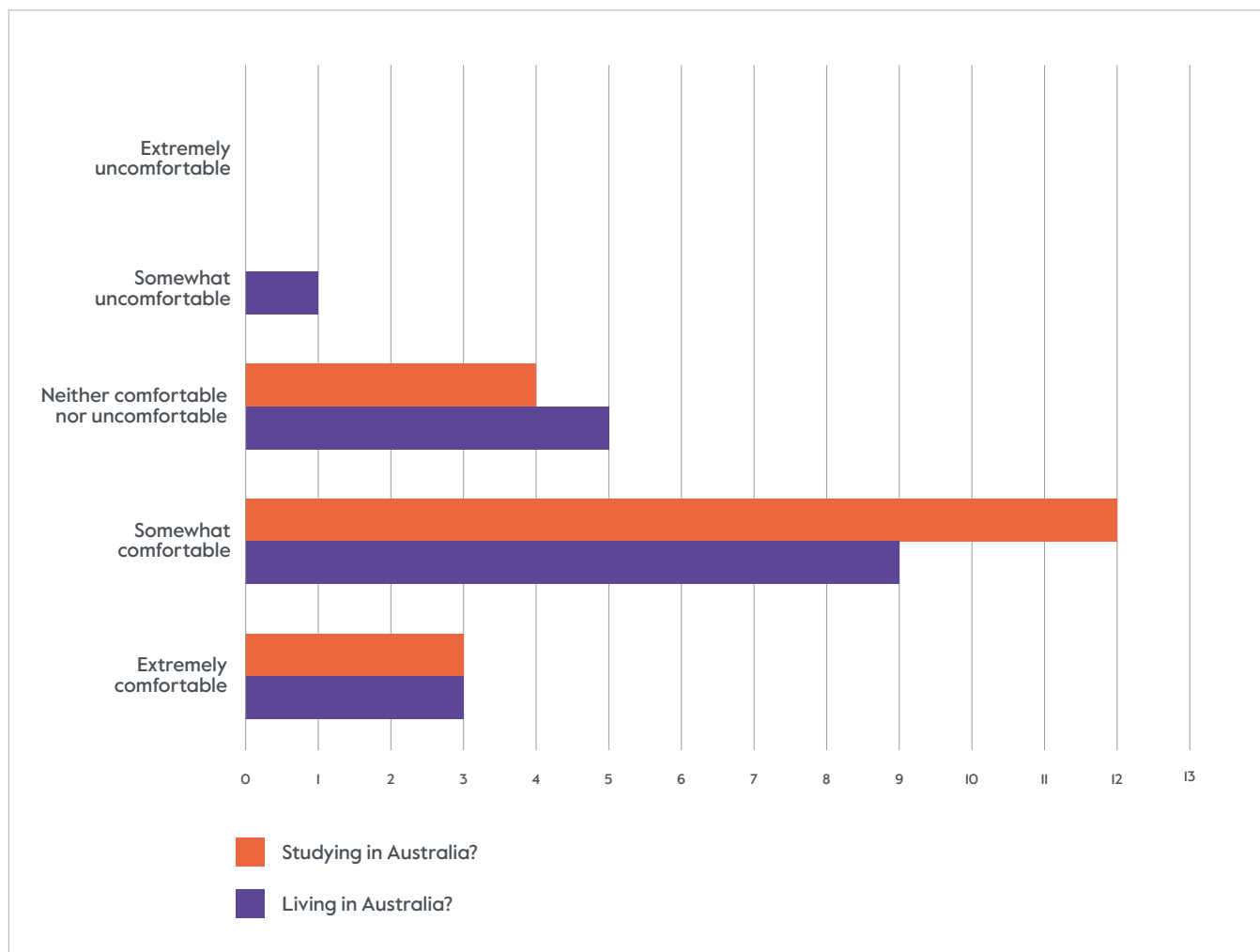
#	Question	Not familiar at all		Slightly familiar		Moderately familiar		Very familiar		Extremely familiar		Total
1	A) In the city?	15.79%	3	10.53%	2	31.58%	6	26.32%	5	15.79%	3	19
2	B) Outside the city?	26.32%	5	26.32%	5	10.53%	2	31.58%	6	5.26%	1	19

Q3.5b – How do you spend most of your free time?

At home
 Gym and library
 Watching drama
 Depends on my mood
 No free time
 I go to work on weekdays and weekends so not much free time on hand
 Out with friends, explore Melbourne, self-care

Sleep
 Hang out with friends
 Reading and drawing
 At the beach
 Social media
 Watching YouTube, exercising
 Take a rest

Q3.6 – How comfortable are you with...



#	Question	Extremely uncomfortable		Somewhat uncomfortable		Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable		Somewhat comfortable		Extremely comfortable		Total
1	Studying in Australia?	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	21.05%	4	63.16%	12	15.79%	3	19
2	Living in Australia?	0.00%	0	5.56%	1	27.78%	5	50.00%	9	16.67%	3	18

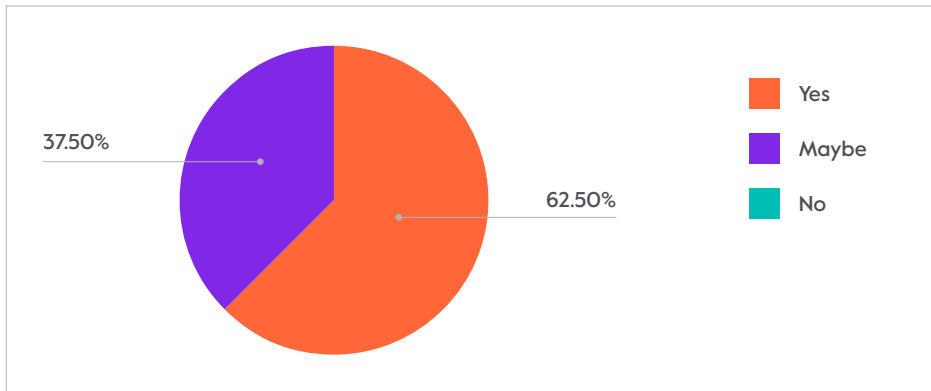
Q3.5b – How do you spend most of your free time?

Communication
 Finding a partner
 Everything is good
 I just feel like I need to make some time for myself
 Nothing you haven't already done

No idea
 Periodic meetings
 I assume ACU doing everything perfect they can do
 Information on financial support with international student accommodation

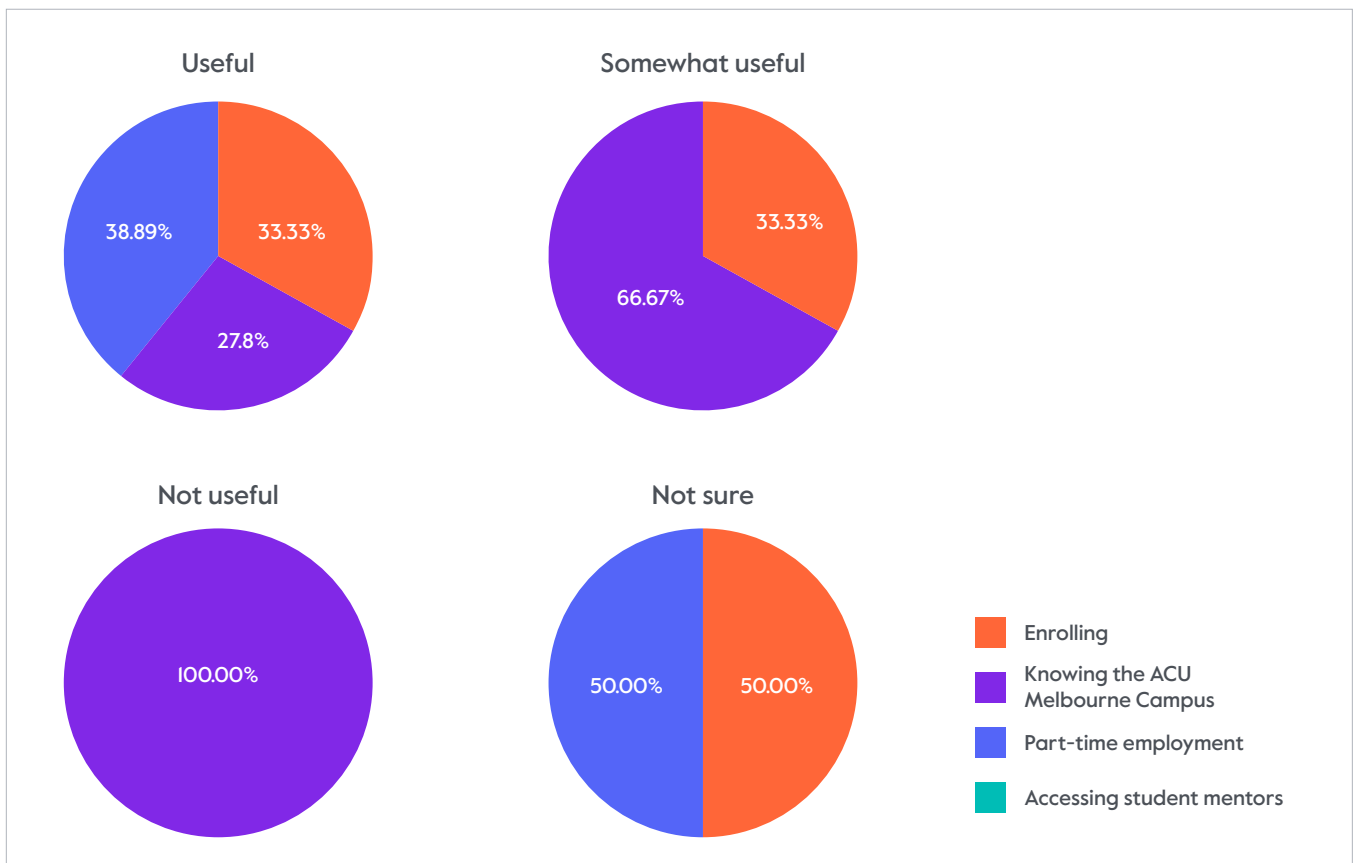
Appendix 2: Module 1 feedback survey

Q1 – Did you find the module engaging?



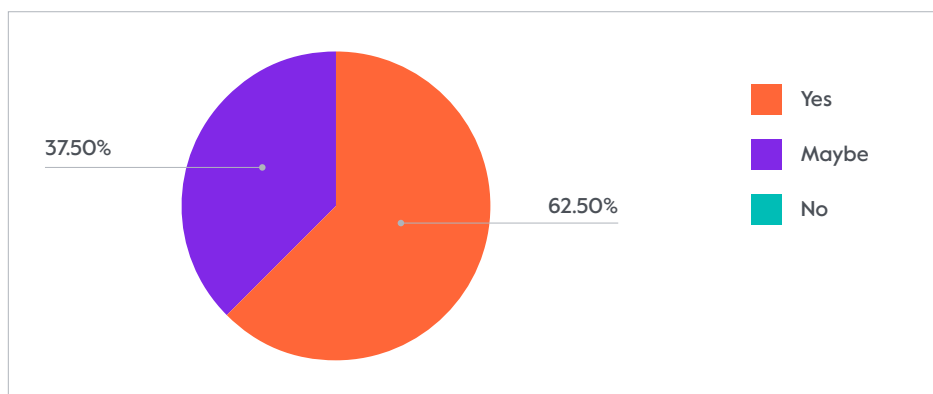
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	62.50%	5
2	Maybe	37.50%	3
3	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

Q2 – How useful did you find the module's information related to:



#	Question	Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Not sure		Total
		%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
1	Enrolling	75.00%	6	12.50%	1	0.00%	0	12.50%	1	8
2	Knowing the ACU Melbourne Campus	62.50%	5	25.00%	2	12.50%	1	0.00%	0	8
3	Part-time employment	87.50%	7	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	12.50%	1	8
4	Accessing student mentors	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0

Q3 – Did you find the module engaging?



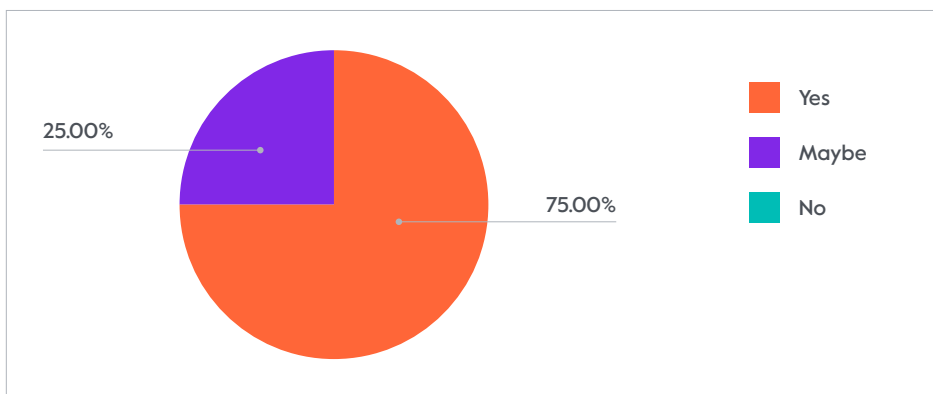
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	62.50%	5
2	Maybe	37.50%	3
3	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

Q4 – Was the text in the module clear and easy to understand?



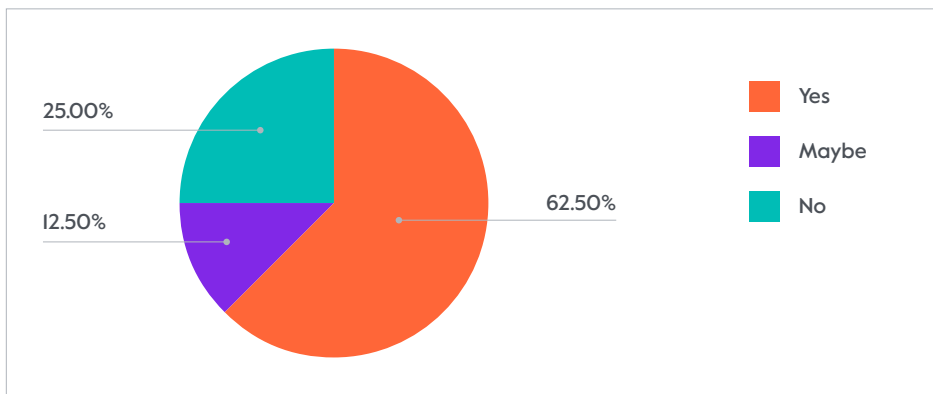
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	8
2	Maybe	0.00%	0
3	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100.00%	8

Q5 – Was the module easy to use?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	75.00%	6
2	Maybe	25.00%	2
3	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100.00%	8

Q6 – Would you recommend this module for new ACU students?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	62.50%	5
2	Maybe	12.50%	1
3	No	25.00%	2
	Total	100.00%	8

Please explain:

This module is useful because the majority of the students are new in Australia

This kind of modules helps students to fit in to ACU community

Useful and helpful

It provides necessary information for international students

I feel it is fun, I really like it and it is a chance for us to know more about the culture and everything about Australia.

It is more suitable in general English not EAP. I don't know to have this in EAP class. I want to focus more on the writing speaking reading listening EAP languages skills.

Q7 – Do you have any additional thoughts or suggestions about the module?

No

All good. Thank you very much.

Yes, I have to see more module like this it is fun.

Investigating students' perceptions of effective engagement methods for online and multi-modal ELICOS classes

Thalia Koster and Geraint Morgan, International Language School of Canada (ILSC), Brisbane

Introduction

Many educational institutions globally experienced a rapid shift to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced teachers and students alike into a largely unfamiliar world of delivering and receiving lessons online. This presented some obvious challenges for ELICOS teachers, who tried to facilitate the busy and collaborative classes of the past behind a much smaller and less interactive screen. As schools opened and closed depending on their states' current policy, another landscape started to emerge, that of multi-modal classrooms through simulcast, which saw face-to-face (FTF) classes with students participating physically in the classroom streamed live to online students tuning in from around Australia, and the world. These classes placed a demand on teachers to seamlessly transition simulcast classes to and from online learning during various stages of the pandemic and its lockdowns, and catered for students who were in quarantine or isolation. Further challenges faced by ELICOS teachers were simulating the classroom experience and maintaining the focus of the online cohort. Together, ELICOS teachers for online and simulcast classes encountered the same issue: a lack of student engagement, particularly on the part of students joining classes online.

Similar experiences were shared globally by teachers of all disciplines. Serhan (2020) noted comparable instances of a lack of engagement in online lessons when students

were surveyed on their perception of their classroom engagement in Zoom classes at university. Farrell and Brunton (2020) and Pakpour, Souto and Schaffer (2021) supported this finding, remarking that many college educators were concerned at how easily their students were becoming bored and unmotivated in online learning environments. As expected, ELICOS classrooms also experienced this lack of engagement initially. However, as teachers adapted and developed resources and methods, ELICOS institutes began to see higher levels of satisfaction from online cohorts.

The goal of this research was to investigate the methods that we had implemented in our own classrooms over the course of the pandemic by surveying our online students. It was hoped that the effective methods could then be used in both simulcast and online classrooms to facilitate the interactive ELICOS classes that many teachers were missing. By understanding which activities students found helped them the most, further professional development and training materials could be developed and be available for teachers wishing to improve on their online students' engagement. However, it is worth noting that multiple areas of interest emerged throughout our investigations, which will be discussed in our reflections.

Context and participants

The International Language School of Canada's Brisbane campus (ILSC Brisbane) offers courses in General English (GE), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Cambridge exam preparation courses (i.e., IELTS and B2 First/C1 Advanced), and a wide range of English elective courses from academic skills to applicable everyday language skills. ILSC Brisbane provides online courses in GE and EAP to students globally, and to students who elect to study online from anywhere in Australia. Participants in this research project were online students in an EAP course, and online students in an IELTS test preparation course which was taught via simulcast (participants' English levels were equivalent to Cambridge B1 level). Courses are four-week sessions per module (two modules for EAP, three modules for IELTS), five days a week (Monday–Friday), four hours in length, and teachers primarily use Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) to facilitate the classes. As students were attending from all over the world, finishing time for classes ranged from 2pm to as late as 2am for South American students. Over the course of the research, classes fluctuated in size with an average of 13 students. The IELTS classes were run as a simulcast class with students attending both FTF and online. For both classes, many participants were from South America and Asia, and the typical age was between mid-20s and mid to late 30s. For a large majority of students, this was their first time engaging in an online classroom setting, while a much smaller number of students had previous experience with online learning typically from a university course in their respective countries.

Research focus

To investigate the participants' perceived effectiveness of the methods that we had implemented in class to improve engagement, the term 'engagement' itself had

to be defined. This was attained through discussions with colleagues about their personal experiences teaching online. Colleagues described student engagement, ideally and simply, as being *actively present* in the classroom. This meant that a student responded to the teacher and their classmates and completed activities in a timely manner. Upon examination of this preliminary data from our colleagues, and also student feedback, the term was further defined from Kahu's (2013) holistic framework of student engagement, which presented a connection between good study habits and engagement, and Farrell and Brunton's (2020) acknowledgment of an educator's struggle to find the ideal methods to combat antecedents and consequences within an online classroom.

With this in mind, we collected both quantitative and qualitative feedback from students through surveys and group/individual interviews about the following two methods that we had implemented to promote positive online learning experiences:

1. A learning online etiquette and good study habits presentation shown at the beginning of each four-week cycle.
2. Mandatory webcam for participation (a school-wide initiative).

These were applied after reflecting on identified factors which affected students' participation and performance in Kahu's (2013) holistic framework of student engagement. These methods were designed to inform students how to promote good study habits before they began their courses (e.g., time management skills and balancing work/family with study), and to endorse student-student (S-S) and student-teacher (S-T) connections through positive communicative experiences to create a sense of belonging, community, and motivation.

We collected further feedback about the following method used in both the online only and simulcast classes that was designed to further promote positive online learning experiences.

3. Well-planned discussions using 'breakout' rooms (Appendix 3).

A further concern expressed by colleagues, and even experienced by us, was the pressure of performing an online ELICOS class that was entertaining enough to hold the attention of its online cohort, and informative enough to achieve their learning goals. The methods we focused on in our research were chosen considering what opportunities we were presenting for the students to engage in their classroom settings. The method above allowed for both S-S and S-T interactions for shorter and longer periods of time during class.

Research design and data collection

Data collection ran for three cycles (three four-week sessions). At the beginning of the four-week sessions, students were given an entry survey which was tied into a common start-of-session classroom activity, My English Learning Goals. This survey collected general demographic data (age, nationality, etc.) but it also gauged their familiarity with learning English in an online setting. Students who were enrolled

in an online ELICOS class for the first time answered questions regarding their expectations for the course, while students who had participated in previous courses (either at ILSC or another school) were asked to reflect on their previous online learning experiences (Appendix 1). In Cycles 2 and 3, students were also shown a Learning Online Etiquette presentation that was later adapted into ILSC Brisbane's First-day PowerPoint which was used by all teachers. Students in our EAP online class and IELTS simulcast class were told that they were part of a research project, for the purposes of consent, but not what the project was about. At the end of each session, students were given an exit survey (Appendix 2) that asked for feedback concerning the methods implemented by the teachers to promote their engagement. Results were then compared to see how students' attitudes towards their online learning experience had changed and if there were any particular methods that had helped them focus and engage in their online learning. Finally, we kept a teacher's journal to write reflections on participants and classroom activities.

It should be noted that data collection was not a smooth-sailing experience as new students joined and graduated mid-session, leaving missing entry and exit surveys. There was also a sudden switch back to FTF classes as the pandemic and its lockdowns came to an end.

Findings – EAP classes

There were nine respondents who had previous experience learning online (Figure 1). These students tended to disagree more with questions related to their engagement. A larger majority of these students believed that taking English classes online had not been easy. However, respondents were satisfied with their own perception of their English learning progress with 77.7% answering 'strongly agree' and 'agree' to whether they thought their English had improved. Students also believed they were not able to stay focused during online classes. Responses to questions like *I get to know my teacher* and *I get to know the other students in my class* showed that most respondents had likely experienced less S-S and S-T engagement in preceding classes. Students also preferred to complete activities by themselves, and an overwhelming majority of students did not feel comfortable in their online classes (77.8%).

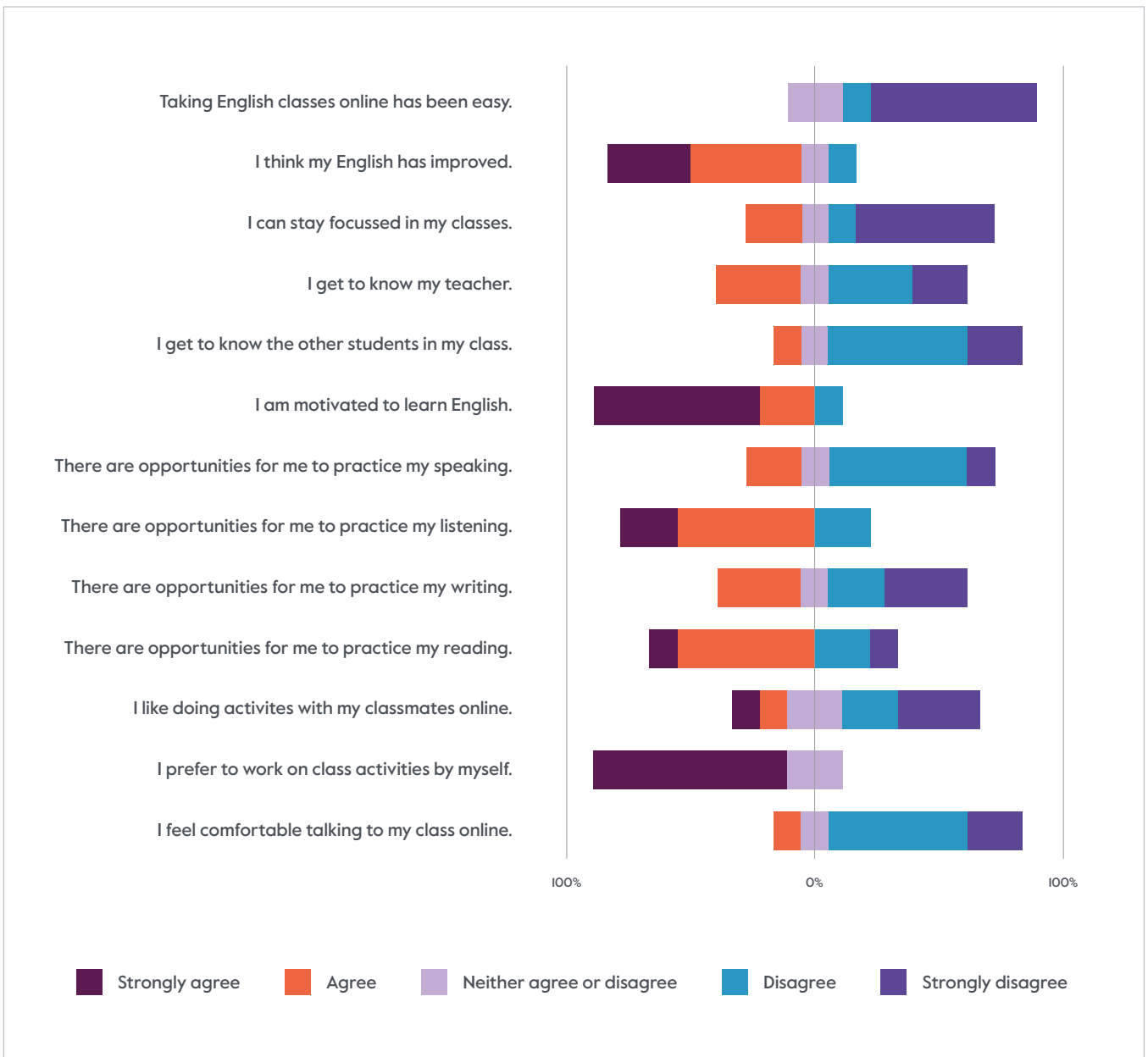


Figure 1: Appendix I entry survey – experienced online learners (Question 6)

On the other hand, the 13 respondents who had not learned English online before (Figure 2) were mostly neutral or optimistic in their expectations. However, students did not expect that the online course would be easy.

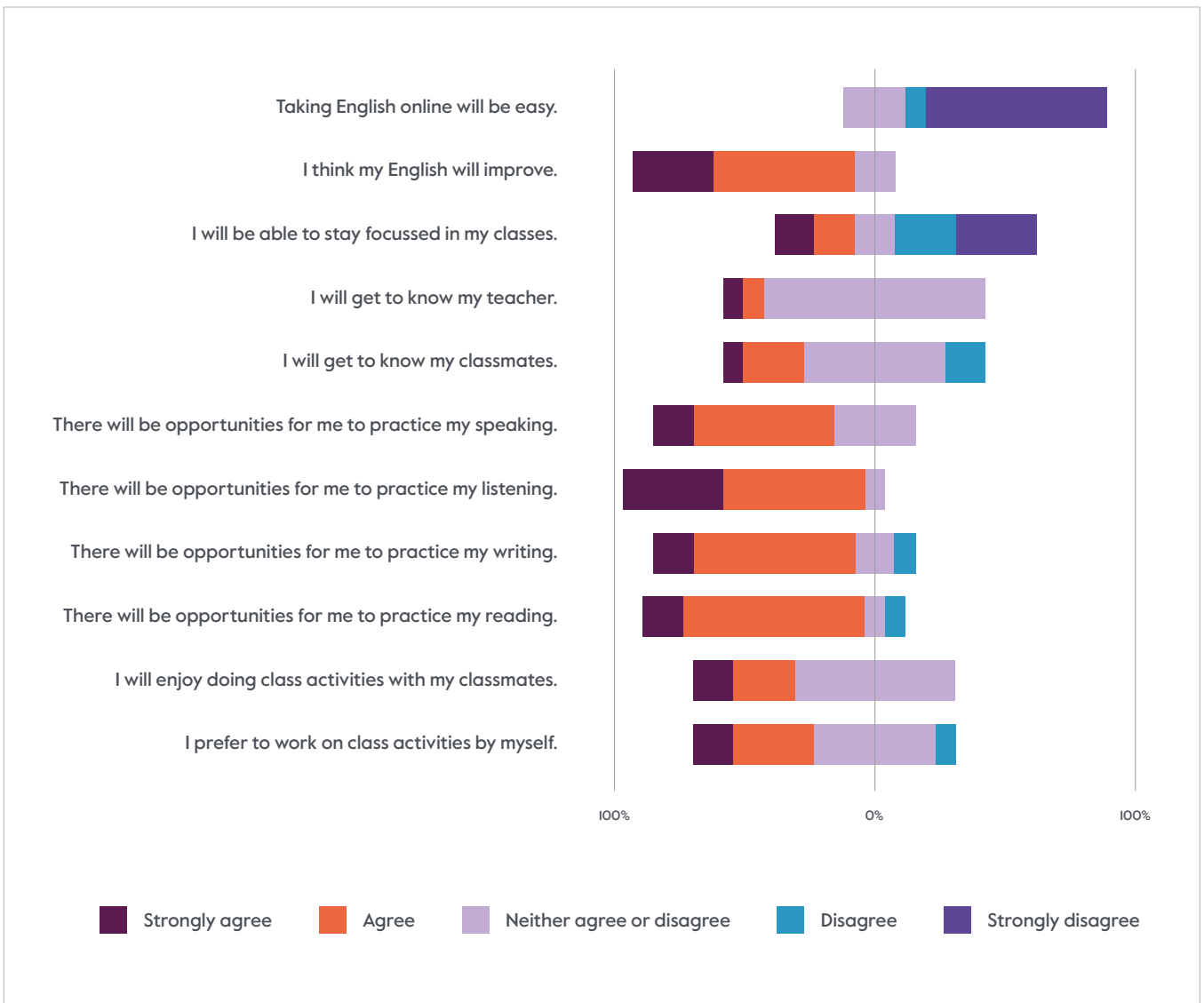


Figure 2: Appendix I entry survey – first-time online English learners (Question 10)

The exit survey asked similar questions but related to their four-week session where teachers had actively applied the five methods to promote student engagement (Figure 3). It should be noted that only 13 out of the 22 participants who completed the initial surveys completed the exit survey as well (due to early graduation, class changes, and lateness/absence towards the end of the cycle).

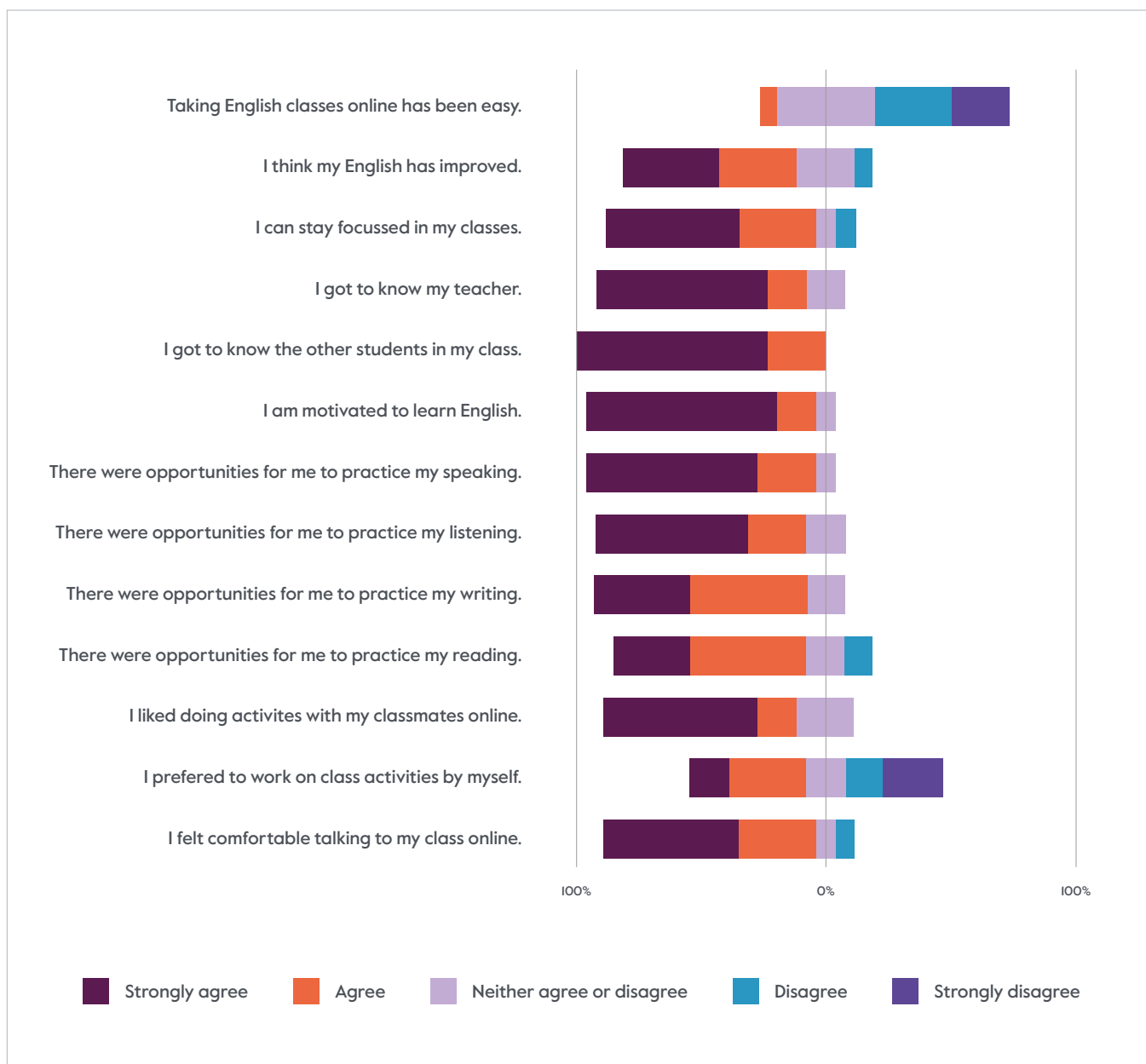


Figure 3: Appendix 2 – Student end-of-session survey (Question 2)

Comparing Figures 1 and 2 with Figure 3 shows that students found they were able to stay focused more during classes and engage in both S-S and S-T interactions. Students also believed that they were more accepting of working with other classmates to complete activities.

Students were also surveyed about their opinion of the school's *no webcam no attendance* policy. Responses were almost equally split regarding whether they thought the policy was good or bad (Figure 4). In response to whether they preferred to talk to other students with cameras on or off, there was an overwhelming preference to talk using the cameras (Figure 5).

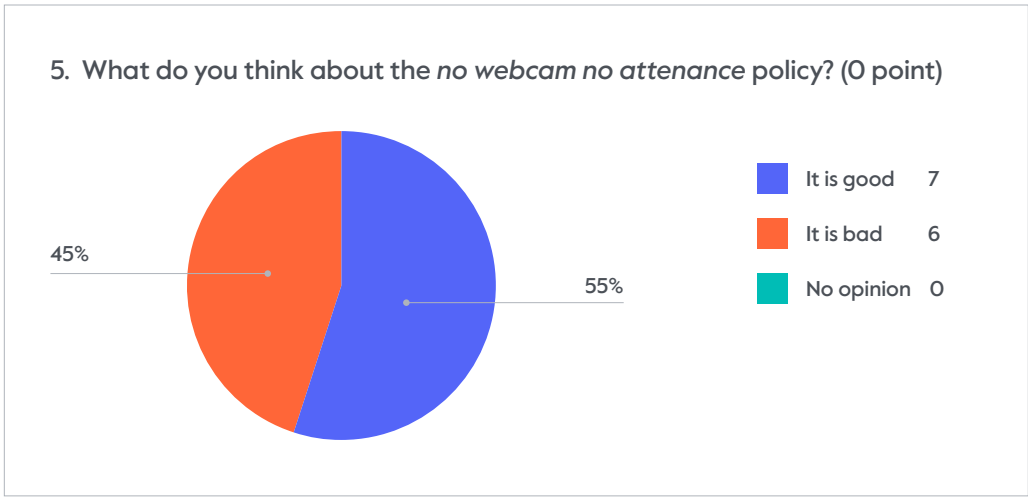


Figure 4: Appendix 2 – Student end-of-session survey (Question 5)

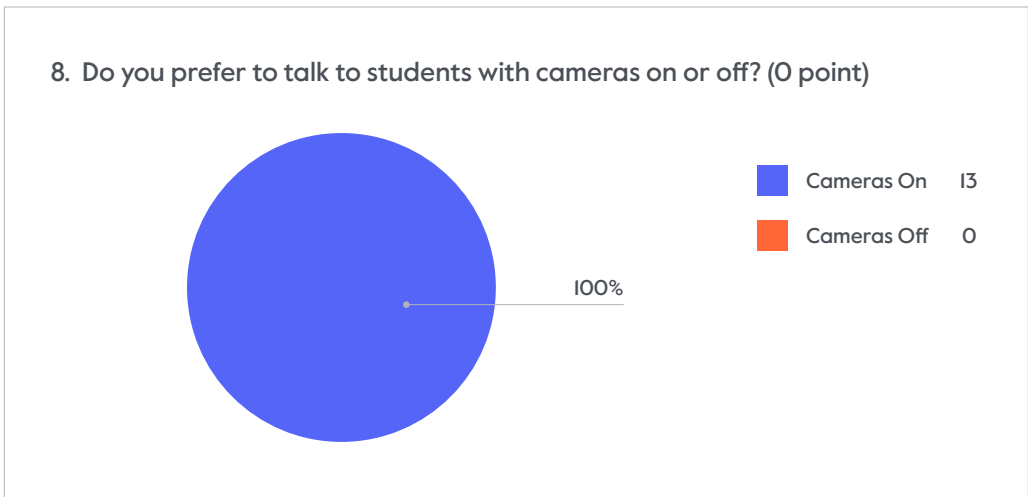


Figure 5: Appendix 2 – Student end-of-session survey (Question 8)

It was particularly encouraging to see students participate and get to know their peers through pair/group breakout rooms and in-class discussions. Students were able to monitor their own engagement and that of their peers. These communicative activities were consolidated with students presenting spoken or written summaries of their discussions in the main classroom. This encouraged students to work together and complete activities in a timely manner. As pictured below, students more than often had their cameras on for discussion. Although these discussion activities were a daily task, this was also a weekly formative assessment, which may have further encouraged students to participate and work on their conversation management skills.

Feedback received from these activities was positive overall. In the exit surveys, nine out of 13 students mentioned this method was one of their favourite class activities.

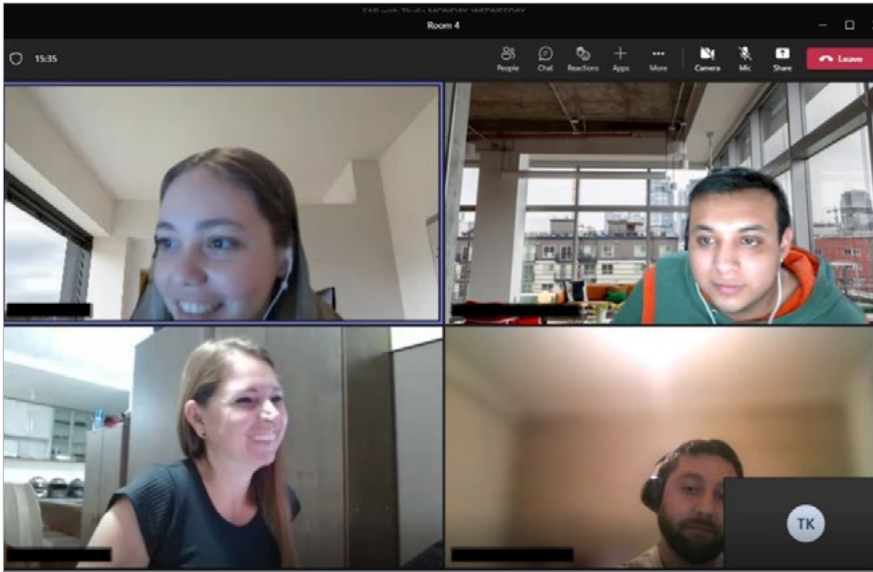


Figure 6: Students discussing environmental problems and solutions



Figure 7: Students discussing causes and effects of environmental issues

Table 1: Appendix 2 (Question 3) 'What kinds of activities did you enjoy the most?'

1	anonymous	I like the weekly discussion circles. i know it was a test but I like chatting with another students.
2	anonymous	I enjoy speaking with everyone in class, so I love my classmates. Even in writing and reading activities we talk and discuss, I am learned a lot because of this.
6	anonymous	Discussion assessment was fun and not worrying. I was able to talk with people from many countries in this class and this i'm grateful for.

A chain reaction to this was the positive engagement observed during classes and in their written feedback at the end of the session. When compared to the entry surveys, there is an arguable increase in both S-S and S-T interactions.

Table 2: Appendix 2 (Question 7) ‘How did you feel about talking to other students in your class?’

3	anonymous	Other students are nice. it is easy to talk together
4	anonymous	I have some great friends now! I like what we have the same goals.
5	anonymous	It was a lot fun. Everyone is trying to speak English and learning English and I can ask everyone about any topics.

Overall, students showed positive engagement throughout the cycles, and when presented with the opportunity, were enthusiastic when engaging with the course material and discussions with their peers.

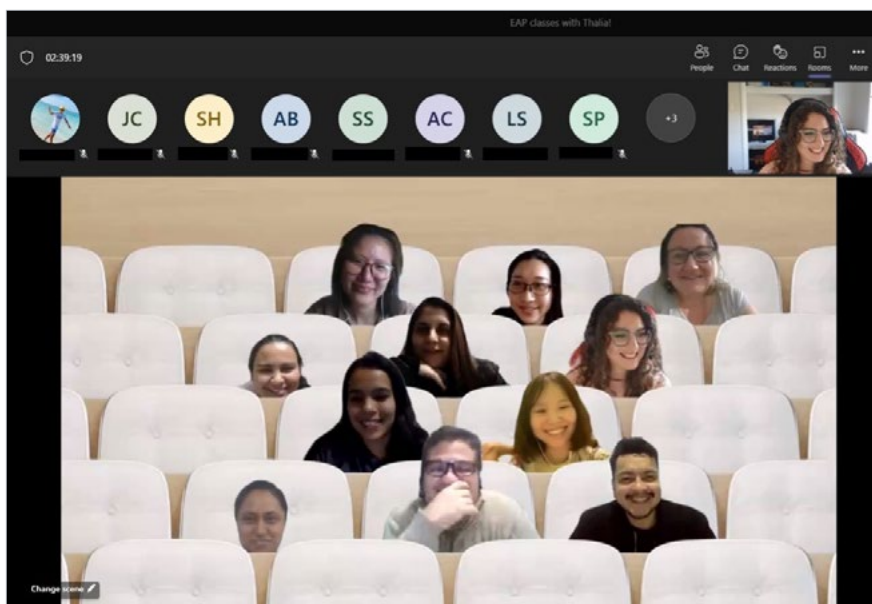


Figure 8: End-of-session class photo (Cycle 2)

Findings – IELTS classes

From the IELTS class, students responded positively to the three methods. Simulcast students were happy to put their answers to certain activities in the chat, which meant that they were there for the whole class to see as classroom students would use MS Teams on their phones. One finding of note was that students who did not speak much seemed more willing to do so – helping them to feel that they were more actively engaged in the class, rather than merely listening in remotely.

Students in the class were asked to log into the Teams meeting on their phones, and then paired with online students for speaking activities in breakout rooms (following Appendix 3). Thankfully, this worked well. It was positive for students to have a variety of partners and they always seemed happy to carry on chatting after completing the activity, which was great to see.



Figure 9: Left – A classroom student communicating with an online student in pair work. Right – Two classroom students communicating with an online student in a group of three.

The novelty factor of using their phones in class also appeared to encourage students to engage more, and willingly.

Though it was often hard to get comments on their activities directly from the students in class, especially without drawing too much attention to what was being trialled, there were subtle changes in behaviour and attitude, particularly from students who might have been less engaged before trialling these activities, which were indicators of increased levels of engagement. Some of these changes included students who previously said little to nothing whilst they were logged in online beginning to offer more responses to open class questions, as well as seeming more confident, when called by name, to respond.

Despite a mandatory webcam policy, it was still challenging to have all students turn on their cameras in simulcast classes. It was observed that when the camera was facing the classroom students, and not the teacher, more students would turn their cameras on to engage.

It was noticeable that students in breakout rooms would put their cameras on and then turn them off again in the main session. For this reason, more breakout rooms for online students were included to help students engage with each other and the class content.



Figure 10: Class camera is directed at students participating in-class

Conclusions and reflections

Overall, this action research project allowed us to reflect on the methods that we had applied to our teaching through a very tumultuous period, and we were able to investigate whether students had found these methods effective or not in engaging them in their English classes. Based on our findings, students did seem to respond positively to the methods implemented and found them helpful in providing opportunities to participate, communicate effectively, and hold their focus.

As mentioned previously, collecting data was not an easy task and it is an area for both of us to explore and understand better. This project began just as the ELICOS sector was finally experiencing an improvement after a very daunting experience for schools and teachers. Because students preferred to enrol in FTF classes, there were fewer online students. This presented a massive challenge as we both taught different classes, and in a different classroom environment (simulcast and online).

On reflection, there were other areas of interest that emerged from our lessons. With students engaging in meaningful communicative experiences, a classroom culture formed where they were eager to attend classes to enjoy the company and conversation of their peers. As students had similar goals (further studies for EAP students and sitting an IELTS exam for IELTS students), they easily found common ground to bond and encourage each other. Our research begged the question whether we, as teachers, are truly aware of creating opportunities for students where they can engage in something more than just content.

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Please click the following link to view the authors' presentation at the 2022 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/professional-development/webinars>

Appendix I: Entry survey – An online summary is available here.

Question 1: What is your name?

Question 2: What is your English level?

Question 3: Where are you from?

Question 4: How old are you?

Question 5: How long have you taken online English classes?

Question 6: Select a response for each statement. (Students with previous experience learning online)

(Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree)

Taking English classes online has been easy.

I think my English has improved.

I can stay focused in my classes.

I get to know my teacher.

I get to know the other students in my class.

I am motivated to learn English.

There are opportunities for me to practise my speaking.

There are opportunities for me to practise my listening.

There are opportunities for me to practise my writing.

There are opportunities for me to practise my reading.

I like doing activities with my classmates online.

I prefer to work on class activities by myself.

I feel comfortable talking to my class online.

Question 7: How do you feel about talking to the class and answering questions online?

Question 8: Which skill would you like to improve this session?

Question 9: Why do you want to improve this skill?

Question 10: Select a response for each statement. (Students with no experience learning online)

Taking English online will be easy.

I think my English will improve.

I will be able to stay focused in my classes.

I will get to know my teacher.

I will get to know my classmates.

There will be opportunities for me to practise my speaking.

There will be opportunities for me to practise my listening.

There will be opportunities for me to practise my writing.

There will be opportunities for me to practise my reading.

I will enjoy doing class activities with my classmates.

I prefer to work on class activities by myself.

Appendix 2: Exit surveys – An online summary is available [here](#).

Question 1: What is your name?

Question 2: Select a response for each statement. (Students with no experience learning online and students with previous experience learning online.)

(Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree)

Taking English classes online has been easy.

I think my English has improved.

I can stay focused in my classes.

I got to know my teacher.

I got to know the other students in my class.

I am motivated to learn English.

There were opportunities for me to practise my speaking.

There were opportunities for me to practise my listening.

There were opportunities for me to practise my writing.

There were opportunities for me to practise my reading.

I liked doing activities with my classmates online.

I preferred to work on class activities by myself.

I felt comfortable talking to my class online.

Question 3: What kinds of activities did you enjoy the most?

1	anonymous	I like the weekly discussion circles. i know it was a test but I like chatting with another students.
2	anonymous	I enjoy speaking with everyone in class, so I love my classmates. Even in writing and reading activities we talk and discuss, I am learned a lot because of this.
3	anonymous	reading and discussion
4	anonymous	reading, listening, speaking, writing activities are enjoyable. I liked talking together in groups, all students were very interested and committed studying English.
5	anonymous	I liked all the activities.
6	anonymous	Discussion assessment was fun and not worrying. I was able to talk with people from many countries in this class and this i'm grateful for.
7	anonymous	I like the gramar activities online and matching vocabulary to definisions.
8	anonymous	Typing, grammar, vocabulary, discussion scircles,
9	anonymous	I enjoyed speaking and listening activities. I think my fluent has improved because I can speak with people from all around the world.
10	anonymous	speaking and reading activities
11	anonymous	writing, reading and discussion
12	anonymous	Some grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening

Question 4: What kinds of activities did you learn from the most?

Question 5: What do you think about the no webcam no attendance policy?

Question 6: When the teacher asked you questions during class how did you feel?

1	anonymous	I feel okay and I am not nervous.
2	anonymous	Thalia's always nice to everyone in class, I think everyone feel comfortable with her as the teacher.
3	anonymous	I feel fine.
4	anonymous	I feel nervous when teacher say my name! xD
5	anonymous	I feel fine.
6	anonymous	Sometimes my english is bad but Thalia can make the class comfortable.
7	anonymous	comfortable now I think
8	anonymous	Good. I feel close to teacher and I think she likes every student in the class.
9	anonymous	Its really easy to understand teacher. I feel like I know everything she was saying.
10	anonymous	not bad
11	anonymous	I feel I can answer better now.
12	anonymous	Fine. I can understand my teacher easy

Question 7: How did you feel about talking to other students in your class?

1	anonymous	Other students in my class are all so friendly. I am happy to know so many students that will be in Canada with me soon!
2	anonymous	I LOVE everyone in this class!!! I hope I can learn with <i>Student Name</i> and <i>Student Name</i> in next class.
3	anonymous	nother students are nice. it is easy to talk together
4	anonymous	I have some great friends now! I like what we have the same goals.
5	anonymous	It was a lot fun. Eveyone is trying to speak English and learning English and I can ask everyone about any topics.
6	anonymous	I was able to talk with people from many countries in this class and this i'm grateful for.
7	anonymous	They are nice. I have made alot of friends.
8	anonymous	I LOVE my classmates. <3
9	anonymous	I feel more confident now because some students are hard to understand but I can hear them clearly now.
10	anonymous	I feel ok
11	anonymous	It was always fun to talk with <i>Student Name</i> and <i>Student Name</i> . I wish we are in the same class next time to!
12	anonymous	It was good,I think some students dont talk much about the activity teacher gives

Question 8: Do you prefer to talk to students with cameras on or off?

Question 9: What do you think about using 'breakout rooms' for online classes?

Appendix 3: Well-planned breakout rooms (discussion circles) approx. 30-minute tasks

1. The teacher (T) presents discussion topic (e.g. *trends*) and elicits knowledge/information from students (Ss). T assists Ss as needed to get a class discussion going about the topic (technological trends/online trends etc.)
2. T focuses on one of the suggestions made by Ss and demonstrates the task by asking and answering discussion questions, e.g. What is TikTok? When was it founded? Who is the founder? Have you used it?
3. Ss are then placed in breakout rooms (groups of three to four students) and are asked to discuss different trends. T monitors discussions and assist students that are confused.
4. Ss are asked to write a summary of their discussion.
5. Ss are split and placed into different rooms (one student to share about each trend) and read out the summaries of their group's discussion. Ss ask questions about the trends and share any relevant experiences or information.
6. Ss come back to the main classroom and T asks follow-up questions to the activity.

Encouraging EAP students to engage with the literature of their disciplines

Jennifer Ball, The Australian Catholic University English Language Centre

Introduction

The reading workload in an Australian degree can be extremely demanding. Students must tackle long reading lists of highly specialised texts, often delivered in digital format. The task is difficult for all students but for English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students, it is even more challenging. Unfortunately, once they enter their degrees, students may receive very limited help to develop the reading skills to manage this workload. While university academic support services tend to offer comprehensive writing support, there is generally far less, if any, help available for reading. It is therefore crucial that EALD students leave their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs with the skills to effectively read the literature of their disciplines. As an EAP teacher, I was concerned that in our program, students were mainly exposed to the simplified text types found in EAP textbooks and had little opportunity to engage with authentic literature from the discipline they would enter. Furthermore, even though it was an online class, our program did not specifically cover the use of digital tools to support reading. To address these concerns, this action research (AR) trialled the use of referencing software to support EAP students to read peer-reviewed articles from their disciplines.

Reading lessons that make use of authentic materials can be both effective and motivating. Nunan loosely defines authentic materials as 'any material which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching' (1989:54). Reading authentic texts helps bridge the gap between learning an abstract skill

and applying it in the real world. Engaging with authentic materials can also boost motivation because students can clearly see the relevance of the skills they are practising (Gilmore 2007). When choosing these texts teachers must consider authenticity of context to select materials that the students will actually need, or want, to engage with. For example, authentic texts for EAP students include peer-reviewed articles and textbooks from their future disciplines.

It could also be argued that authenticity of mode should be encouraged so students practise reading material in the mode they will encounter in their study. As tertiary study environments increasingly move online, it seems obvious that a percentage of EAP materials must also be digital. This is important as there is growing evidence that even apparently tech savvy 'digital natives' may have difficulty transferring their skills to academia (Janschitz and Penker 2022). Furthermore, EALD students are more likely to be on the wrong side of the digital divide than other students, meaning they have had less experience with technology (The Settlement Council of Australia and Good Things Foundation 2020). These concerns led me to the following research question (RQ):

Can referencing software help EAP students develop the reading skills needed in a 21st century tertiary environment?

To help answer this question, I asked the following sub-questions (SQs).

1. What are teacher and student attitudes towards reading peer-reviewed articles in an EAP class?
2. What activities support the use of peer-reviewed articles in an EAP class?

Educational context

The research was undertaken over 10 consecutive weeks of an EAP program in a university in Brisbane. Due to Covid-19, the program had been remodelled for online delivery. A total of 19 students from 11 countries attended the class for anywhere between two and ten weeks during this period, and 18 of these students consented to have their work collected for the study. The actual study routine did not vary between participating and non-participating students. During this period, enrolment did not guarantee attendance as many students' lives were still disrupted by Covid-19. Individual students joined and left at irregular points throughout and only four students were enrolled for the entire 10 weeks. On entry, students' English levels were IELTS 5.5 or above. On successful completion of the program, students articulated directly into a variety of undergraduate or postgraduate degrees.

Method

The research procedure followed the cyclic method of AR proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, as cited in Burns 2010) which involves repeated sequences of planning, action, observation and reflection. To a certain extent, this was already happening on a weekly basis, reflecting my usual lesson planning. However, I enacted

deliberate changes to my teaching practices over two action cycles in order to address the RQs. The action cycle is illustrated in Figure 1.

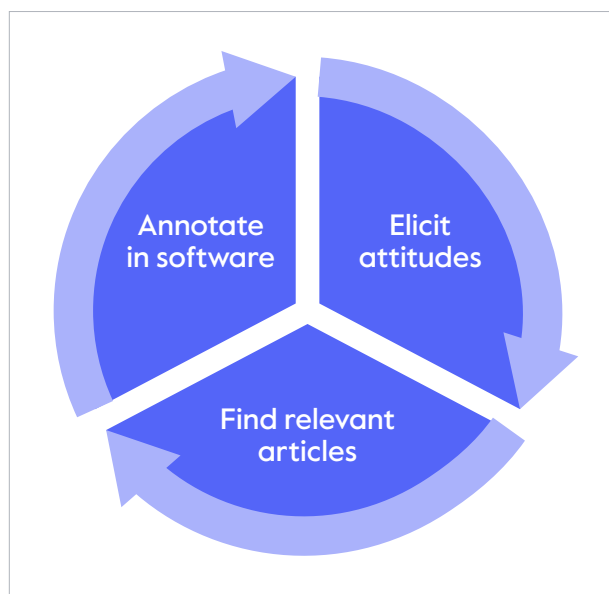


Figure 1: Action cycle enacted twice over the 10-week period

The steps in the cycle were repeated as needed. The referencing software I chose to use was Mendeley (Mendeley Ltd 2020) due to its ease of use, functionality and because it is free. Specific data was collected in each cycle to investigate each SQ. The data and the main findings are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of data collected

Data	Purpose	Main findings
Sub-question 1		
Anonymous student zoom poll (Seven respondents)	Identify potential psychological barriers to reading academic articles.	Students had a positive attitude to reading academic articles although they found it challenging. Time pressure concerned them.
Exit reflection comparing textbook readings and peer-reviewed articles (Seven respondents)	Determine student judgements of the reading activities at program completion.	Students considered both types of reading beneficial.
Think-aloud reading activity observed by volunteer support teacher (Two students)	Understand student concerns or confidence levels during reading tasks.	Students felt concerned that their reading was slow. One student was prevented from even starting the task due to issues with technology.
Teacher surveys (Seven respondents)	Understand teacher attitudes to using peer-reviewed articles and referencing software. Offer a medium for input to the study from other teachers.	Unanimous support from teachers for the use of peer-reviewed articles in EAP courses. Qualified support for the use of referencing software.

Data	Purpose	Main findings
Sub-question 2		
Mendeley Class Group	Check student ability to productively annotate a text.	All students in the class in Week 10 were able to use Mendeley to support reading to some degree, though they were at varying stages at learning the software.
Completed paraphrase (Four students completed)	Check student reading comprehension and use of Mendeley.	Some students could use Mendeley to insert references into a text document.
Teacher observations	Assess changes in student confidence and skill in reading peer-reviewed articles.	Students were enthusiastic about using Mendeley. Most problems were related to initially accessing the necessary software, including Microsoft Word, rather than learning to use it.

Discussion

Sub-question 1

To investigate student attitudes towards reading peer-reviewed articles, I ran a Zoom poll at the beginning of Cycle 1. Students had just finished some activities involving an article which was not drawn from any of their disciplines. The questions covered understanding the main ideas, vocabulary and key statistics, identifying the author's opinion, finding evidence to support an argument and judging the quality of an academic article. The poll asked them to rate the difficulty of various aspects of reading academic articles in general, on a Likert scale of 1 to 4 where 1 = easy and 4 = impossible. Of 32 responses, 27 were 1 or 2 (15 for 1, 12 for 2), only five were 3 and there were no 4s. While this seemed to suggest that the students were quite confident about their ability to read academic articles, the responses to an open-ended question which referred specifically to the article they had just read all seemed to contradict their previous answers. For example, one student wrote: 'Academic reading is one of the difficult part for the students to understand properly. There is using of huge vocabulary that's make hard get it.'

The contradiction may suggest the students were not thinking of peer-reviewed articles when answering the Likert scale questions, but rather were referring to regular EAP tasks due to their lack of exposure to more authentic material. Alternatively, the contradiction may throw into question the validity of an in-class Zoom poll for eliciting attitudes in ELICOS. It is possible the students may have viewed the poll as a quiz and were trying to select the right answer. However, despite these potential limitations, the results did suggest the students' overall attitude to reading academic articles was positive.

At the beginning of Cycle 2, I asked some volunteer tutors to observe individual students in breakout rooms. The students did a reading task and were asked to narrate what they were doing. These observations led to two points of confirming evidence. Firstly, students expressed concern that their reading was too slow;

a comment also made in the Zoom open-ended question. Secondly, weak technology skills negatively impacted some student's task success, which I had noted in my own class observations.

At the conclusion of Cycle 2, I asked students to complete a reading reflection comparing textbook reading tasks with reading authentic literature. Only four students submitted responses, but these all said both types of reading were useful, and two indicated their confidence in reading peer-reviewed articles had increased.

To investigate teacher attitudes, I sent an online survey to 15 past and present teachers of the program. Seven responded. They unanimously supported the use of peer-reviewed articles in EAP courses and only one teacher had not already done so. However, most noted that the language in academic articles is challenging for EAP students, so scaffolding is essential. For example, one teacher said students could be supported 'by firstly showing the structure and how journal articles are divided into major sections such as abstract, introduction etc'. Another point common to some teachers was the feeling that there was not always adequate time for reading peer-reviewed articles within EAP programs. There was also support for the idea of learning referencing software, although this was sometimes qualified with comments such as 'if students take the time to double check the entries with the APA Guide'. All seven teachers had used referencing software themselves, most commonly Endnote which indicates that using it in their classes is within the skill set of EAP teachers.

Sub-question 2

To investigate activities that support the use of peer-reviewed articles, in Cycle 1, I first wanted the students to understand the relevance of the articles to their future study. As a class activity, each student selected an article from the representative reading list of a compulsory unit in their future degree. They then downloaded it from the university library. As not all students were present, and new students joined the class, this step had to continually be revisited.

My plan was to have students use the built-in tools in referencing software to support reading their article. To begin using the Mendeley software, students needed to sign up, and join our Mendeley class. Although this software can be used online, I wanted them to download the Mendeley desktop app because many students had very poor internet connections and may not have been able to work in the online platform while on Zoom. Completing these preliminary steps proved far more difficult and time-consuming than I had anticipated. An unforeseen challenge was the low level of technological skill of some of the students. In all of our lessons, class time was quite severely impacted by the need to individually help students navigate the online environment by having them share their screen. At this point, Mendeley felt more like an unnecessary burden than an asset.

At the end of Week 5, I paused for the reflection stage of Cycle 1. At this point, little article reading had taken place and all of the students were at different stages of learning to use Mendeley. The answer to my RQ seemed to be a clear no. I looked to the AR literature for advice and noted that collaboration is often advantageous

(Burns 2010). While I didn't have a co-researcher, I was part of a very supportive teaching team and received suggestions from them based on their experience and knowledge of these particular students. The challenges I was facing with my research were reflective of challenges with the program overall, students at different points in the program, with different skill levels, and very different levels of engagement. I decided to follow a suggestion to limit my teaching presentations to around 15 minutes and then work with students individually. Furthermore, I was encouraged by the positive attitude students had shown to reading their articles and using Mendeley thus far; despite the challenges, I decided to find more time for these activities.

In Cycle 2, I had a class of 12, half of whom were continuing students who would complete in five weeks and the other half were new students who would complete in 10 weeks. I reduced the textbook readings from two to one a week and devoted that session to reading articles. Due to the difficulty in getting all students started with Mendeley, I decided to provide another reading support structure that could be applied with or without the software. I developed a reading scaffold sheet (Appendix 1) based on SQ4R method: survey, question, read, respond, record and review. There are a few variations to this method, which has its origins in the SQ3R method originally developed by Robinson (cited in Oxford and Crookall 2016) but all of them step students through a structured approach to reading, which emphasises the need for multiple, purposeful passes over the text. We worked through the scaffold as a class with each student applying it to their article, or the second textbook reading if they did not yet have one. The scaffold was detailed enough to support students to read independently even if they missed this introduction. In the next reading session, students continued with their SQ4R reading of either the same or a new article, doing the annotation in Mendeley if they could. I had also created a Mendeley task sheet which checked off the use of some of the most important tools of the software. While the students worked independently, I took small groups or individuals into breakout rooms to help them with Mendeley and reading their article. In Mendeley, most problems arose only in the sign up and download, but after that the progress was smoother. Working one on one with students, I generally found it relatively easy to help them engage with their articles, even though I had not read them, because of the very standard generic structure of research articles. I was able to refer to concepts covered in the textbook such as the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. I could usually get the gist of the article from a quick skim and then just read the specific part the student was having trouble with. However, this did not work as well for articles which were not research-based.

By the conclusion of Cycle 2 all students had signed up to Mendeley online and downloaded the desktop software. They could highlight and add sticky notes. Eight had joined our Mendeley class group and uploaded their annotated articles. Some students had begun to use tools for managing quantities of references such as searching across articles and tag. I did not introduce students to the referencing feature until they had learned the other functions because I wanted to make the point that this software was for managing reading before writing. However, once students had used all the important tools, I had them write a paraphrase of part of their article in Word, inserting the in-text references and reference list

using Mendeley. Four of the students handed in these summaries. For my own final reflection of Cycle 2, I updated the Mendeley scaffold to better lead students to this point (see Appendix 2).

Conclusion

In answer to research SQ1, regarding teacher and student attitudes towards reading peer-reviewed articles, the findings show strong support from both teachers and students. In answer to research SQ2, regarding activities that support the use of peer-reviewed articles in EAP classrooms, I found that EAP students can work individually and productively on literature from their intended discipline if provided with a scaffolded approach such as the SQ4R method. Furthermore, students were able to use referencing software to further support this method. Although the software used for this research was Mendeley, the findings suggest that Endnote might be a better choice, at least in this context, as it is already familiar to many teachers. Overall, this research demonstrated that referencing software can help EAP students develop the reading skills needed in a 21st century tertiary environment.

A recommendation suggested by the findings is to incorporate time management into reading lessons to alleviate students' anxiety around the pace of their reading. Two findings suggest the need for further enquiry. Firstly, some students, including those who are entering postgraduate study, demonstrated quite low digital skills and would have benefitted from further support to strengthen these before leaving the EAP course. More information is needed about what gaps EAP students might have in their academic digital literacy. Secondly, more work is needed to support teachers to scaffold reading of non-research-based peer-reviewed articles.

Participating in the AR program was extremely empowering. As ELICOS teachers we are most often not the creators of the programs we teach, and while we are likely to have the opportunity to innovate through our teaching methods, we would rarely add a learning objective, as I did in this research. Because my idea was supported by the AR program, I felt justified in enacting it. This was most important at the point between cycles, when my research appeared not to be working, and to be wasting students' valuable study time. I would certainly have abandoned the attempt had I not enacted the reflection step of the research cycle which helped me find a way forward. I have been very grateful for this opportunity.

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Appendix I: The SQ4R technique

1. Survey 5–10 minutes

- Apply a quick CRAP test (check the reading for Currency, Reliability, Authority and Purpose) to make sure you want to bother reading it, e.g. Where was it published? Was it a reputable publisher? Does it have a reference list?
- Check you have the reference for this text – If not STOP reading. You cannot use this text in your essay.
- Read the abstract if there is one or the introduction if there is not.
- Skim the whole text:
 - How is the text organised?
 - Note headings and subheadings
 - Read the captions for charts/graphs/diagrams and try to figure out what each is about

2. Question 5–10 minutes

- Create some questions that you will try to answer as you read:
 - Do you already have some questions about this topic that you hope this text will answer?
 - Do you have any questions after skimming the text?
 - Turn headings into questions.
 - Ask yourself what you already know about the topic.

3. Read 20 minutes to several hours

- As you read look for answers to your questions.
- Look first for main ideas then details.
- Read in sections:
 - You have created at least one question for each section, so read only to the end of that section then pause to try to answer the question.
- Use the topic sentences to support your understanding. If you don't understand something, reread the topic sentence before it and think how that point could be supporting the topic sentence. Does it explain the main idea of the topic sentence? Does it provide evidence or an example?
- Look for transition words such as next, for example, in contrast, in addition, to help you understand how the sentences relate to each other.

4. Record while reading

- Use your survey of how the text is organised to guide the level of attention you will pay to each section. You may not want to devote equal time to each section.
- Actively highlight and annotate as you read.
 - Highlight only the most important points. Too much highlighting can make it difficult to separate the main point from support details.

- Write brief paraphrased notes in the margin. Make sure these are your own words to avoid accidentally plagiarising when you use your notes in your essay.

5. Recite 5–10 minutes

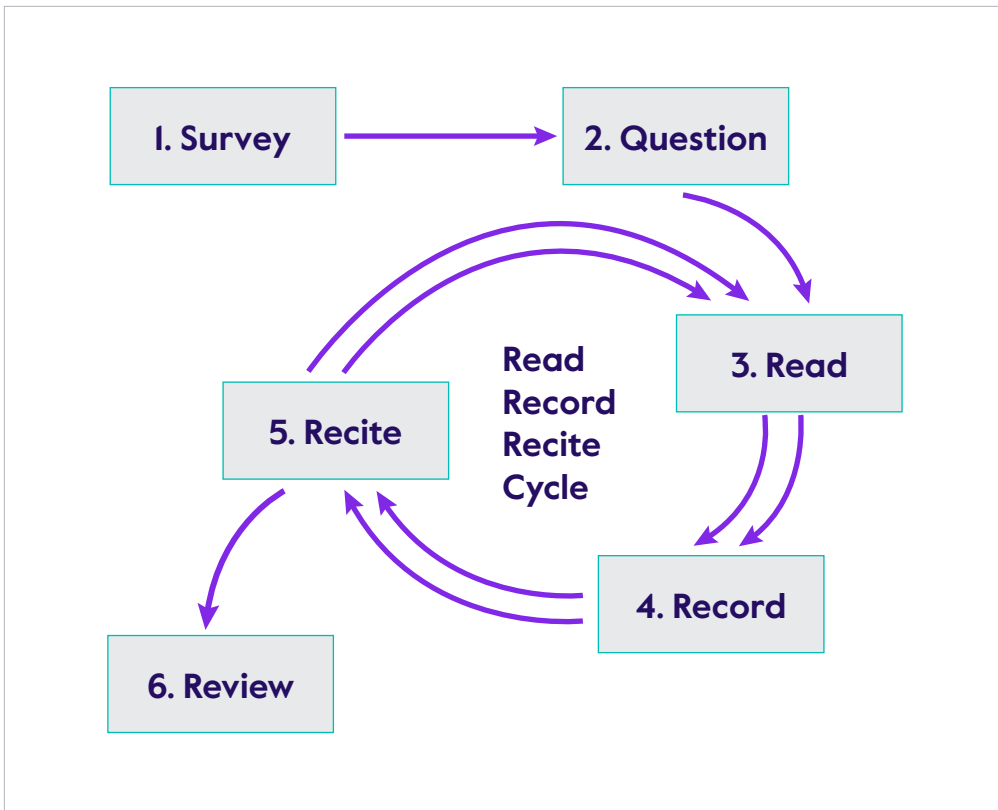
- After reading, look at the questions you created.
- Can you answer them? If you cannot, go back, reread the appropriate sections, and take notes.
- Take the time and recite or recall whatever you can remember as soon as you finish reading.

6. Review

Review immediately to make sure you still understand your own paraphrase. Review again after a day or two.

Summary:

Using SQ4R reading method	
Survey: Overview	CRAP test Title Abstract Headings Figures Conclusion
Question: What do you want to know from this reading?	What do you already know? What do you want to know? Change title and headings to questions
Read: Sections	Look for main ideas then details
Record	Actively annotate
Recite: Practice	Check your understanding
Review: Self-knowledge evaluation	Do you understand your notes? What will you need to know?



This study guide was compiled from the following websites:

<https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/c.php?g=697430&p=5011752#:~:text=What%20is%20SQ4R%3F,for%20you%20and%20your%20courses>

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.usu.edu/academic-support/files/SQ4R_Reading_System.pdf

<https://spark.library.yorku.ca/effective-reading-strategies-sq4r-reading-strategies>

Appendix 2: Academic reading challenge



Photo: Анна Рыжкова from Pexels

1. Find an article that you are likely to need to read in one of your future units and that you are interested in. You can search: <https://www.acu.edu.au/handbook/handbook-2022>
<https://library.acu.edu.au/find/library-guides>
2. Get an online Mendeley account: go to <https://www.mendeley.com> and choose 'create account' at the top right. To make things easier, sign on with your ACU e-mail. (If you did not use your ACU e-mail to sign on, don't join again, just tell me your e-mail.)
3. Get the desktop app: <https://www.mendeley.com/autoupdates/installers/1.19.8>
4. Join our Mendeley group: Answer the e-mail invitation.
5. Learn how to add pdf files and annotate them: <https://www.mendeley.com/guides>
6. Add your annotated pdf to our to our Mendeley class folder.
7. Add some tags e.g., the unit it is a reading for, the topic area, your name.
8. Read and annotate it according to the SQ4R method (use sticky notes and highlights).
9. Add a sticky note at the end with one or two sentences giving your opinion about this article.
10. In a Word document, write a brief summary (remember to use your own words) of an interesting paragraph or a description of a graph/chart or diagram in the article. Add the in-text reference using Mendeley.
11. Search for one of the references in the reference list of the article and add it to your Mendeley but not in our class folder.
12. Below your paraphrase write: 'I also found' and add the in-text citation for the second reference (using Mendeley).
13. Insert a bibliography using Mendeley.
14. Check your bibliography and adjust any information in Mendeley if necessary. Refresh in Word if necessary.
15. Upload your paraphrase to Padlet.

Am I talking enough? Evaluating the effectiveness of quantitative speaking feedback

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Research focus

Many ELICOS direct entry programs assess group speaking in order to prepare students for tutorial-style discussions at university. This type of speaking assessment aims to collect adequate samples from speakers in order to assess ability to participate in academic contexts. Unfortunately, many students do not demonstrate their ability for *discussion*. Some deliver a series of pre-prepared mini-speeches, others remain fairly silent, while some dominate the discussion.

Active and balanced participation in discussions includes a number of factors, but this report focuses on the quantitative: the *amount* of speaking and the *number* of turns. Achieving a balance between these two factors is often a significant challenge faced by speaking students in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and General English classrooms. I have witnessed students attempting discussion-style speaking exams in multiple contexts, but I noted that for university entrance exams students had a propensity for presenting pre-prepared mini speeches. These monologues were often delivered in a pre-assigned order with an arbitrary linking phrase, such as 'I totally agree with you', used before launching into an unrelated point. This student preparation technique was at odds with the very nature of a tutorial discussion where the assessment rubric required them to interact responsively and appropriately, such as not dominating the discussion, and connecting responses to previous turns.

This gap between what was required and what students were providing was due to a number of factors including skill level, confidence, personality, demographic factors,

and culture and interruption patterns from their L1. In response, I sought a way to help students solve the problem, regardless of the reason. I developed an online talk timer, amitalkingenough.com, as a way to provide students with quantitative feedback on the amount they participated in a conversation, that is, their speaking percentage (%), and their number of turns taken (TT). Although it is not necessary to speak exactly evenly in a discussion, it is a good benchmark of contribution, and this timer offers judgement-free, immediate and measurable feedback to speakers.

Review of literature

Turn-taking and amount of contribution are influenced by a multitude of personal and cultural factors, and for English learners, these combine with linguistic elements, creating enormous potential for miscommunication. Different language speakers perceive features such as overlaps, simultaneity and interruptions quite differently (Cantrell 2014, Goldberg 1990, Liddicoat 2004, Makri-Tsilipakou 2015). Ideas around pragmatic transfer, however, have offered me the most insight into this issue. The idea that even when fluent bilinguals speak in English they still apply silence patterns from their L1 because the spaces between utterances operate 'at a lower conscious level than speech' (Saville-Troike as cited in Lemak 2012:17) is valuable. If this is the case for near-proficient speakers, those at lower speaking levels would draw even more heavily on their speech and silence patterns from L1. According to Jenkins, this pragmatic transfer 'can only be replaced by immersion in the host culture and language' (as cited in Lemak 2012:18), but I would argue that bringing silences to a conscious level, that is, raising speaker awareness of their own contribution, may assist students in adopting new speech (and silence) patterns.

Development of an online timer: amitalkingenough.com

Regardless of the reason for interrupting, or not interrupting, the aim in an academic tutorial discussion between students should be fair contributions. Although 'fair' is a somewhat spurious aim, near-even amounts of talking time is a good place to start. I created a free online talk timer, amitalkingenough.com, to objectively demonstrate each speaker's contribution in terms of speaking percentage and number of turns taken. To do this, a listener (who does not speak) taps different buttons on the timer for each utterance made during the discussion. Speakers can aim for even amounts of speaking and turn-taking or can alter this aim to suit their context. In terms of technical details, the app considers an 'equal' contribution to be plus or minus 5% of the equal percentage. For example, if there were four people involved in a discussion, an exactly equal percentage would be 25%, so the timer considers an 'equal' amount of speaking to be anywhere between 20% and 30%.

Educational context and research questions

In order to test the efficacy of amitalkingenough.com, The Centre for English Teaching (CET) at University of Sydney (USYD) generously allowed me to follow the progress

of students in a five-week Direct Entry Course for Speaking and Listening (DEC5). There were three online classes of 12 to 15 students each, and one small face-to-face class of six students. The students were almost exclusively from China. Approximately 80% were hoping to enter postgraduate study while 20% were entering university for the first time. The course comprises highly motivated students, who have conditional entry to their university course at USYD and require a recommendation from CET to begin their tertiary studies.

My research project aimed to investigate the following research questions (RQs):

1. Can amitalkingenough.com equalize speaker contributions in group discussions?
2. Can amitalkingenough.com increase low speaker interactions in group discussions?

Method

This CET Direct Entry Course, like many others, uses a tutorial-style discussion to assess student preparedness for university entry. At CET, this assessment is a 15-minute discussion called 'Interactive Speaking', which involves three to four speakers.

All students, regardless of whether they were participating in the study or not, were asked to consider their initial attitudes to group speaking tasks (Appendix 1), then introduced to the Interactive Speaking task by familiarising themselves with the task instructions, rubric, timing and format, and watching and analysing a teacher sample. Students recorded their weekly Interactive Speaking practices on Zoom regardless of the mode of delivery, because assessments were conducted via this platform. Students were provided with training on how to use the timer, and then asked to watch a group's video from within their class in order to track speaking percentages and number of turns (Appendix 2). After receiving feedback on their own production, students answered reflection questions on their performance and using the timer (Appendix 3). This process was repeated each week with rearranged speaking groups each time, and students were encouraged to apply feedback to their next practice.

Because I had a small face-to-face class of six people, I invited all students from across the course to participate and around 30 opted in from amongst the other three classes. Data were collected on participating students' speaker contributions and interaction rates. This included peer-reported numerical data on speaking percentage and turns taken, weekly written reflection questions and my own observations of my students.

Data collected

Figure 1 below indicates examples of the comments made by students after they had begun their use of the app. These initial student reflections express surprise, which was a typical response. Overall, students were very positive about the timer, and they felt it would be helpful for them to understand their performance. This may indicate a difficulty in perceiving their own speaking contribution.

“I am a little surprised. I thought I had spoken a ot but my speaking only reached the lower standard of equal.”

“My percentage was too high. Actually, I was note aware of talking too much, because I was trying to express completely. After reflection, I think it may bother others’ speaking, so I am not happy with that and should listen more.”

“Frankly speaking, I am a bit happy because I have never thought I could take so many turns.”

Figure 1: Reflections after the first use of amitalkingenough.com

Figure 2 shows the rate of turn-taking per minute based on Week 1 results. Students were divided into two groups based on their first turn-taking result: Low (below 0.5) and High (above 0.5) Initial Turn Rate. Turn-taking was then tracked over the following three weeks. Week 1 revealed a significant split between high turn-takers and low turn-takers, but by Week 2 this gap seems to have narrowed. There seems to have been some overcorrecting in Week 3, but then the final practice week shows an evened turn-taking rate.

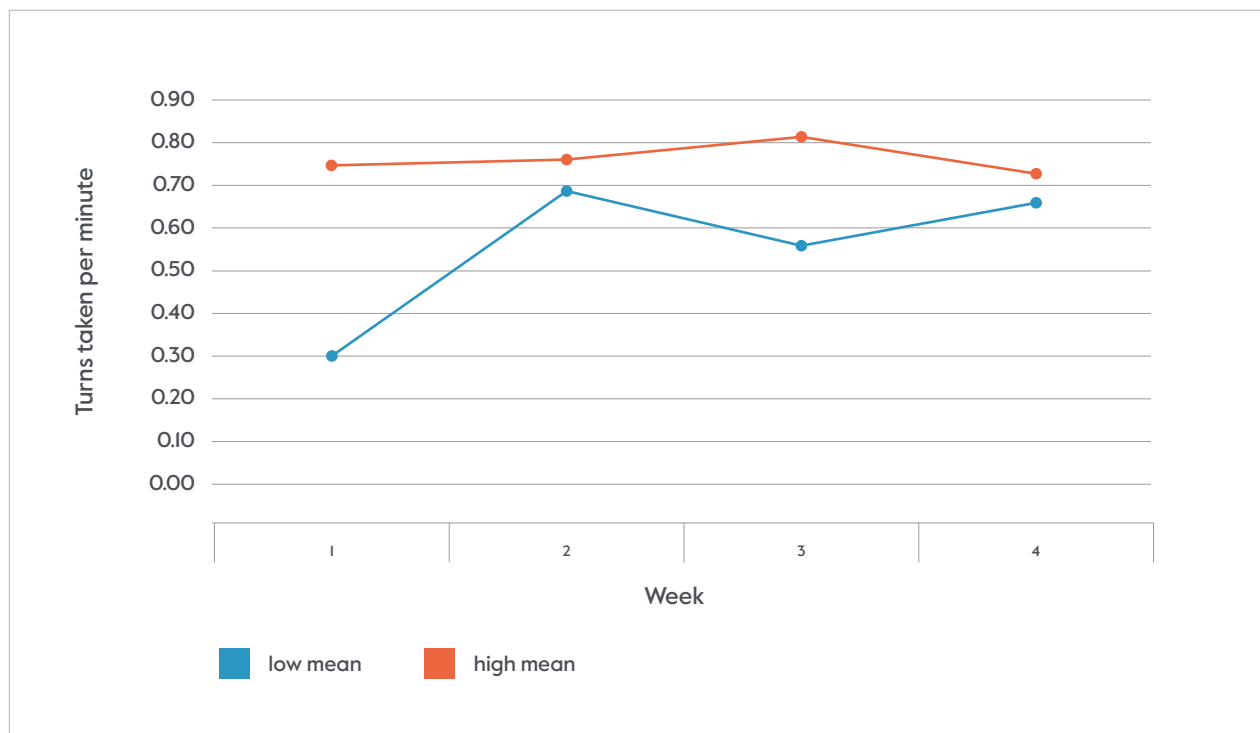


Figure 2: Mean turns/minute based on low or high initial turns

Students were also asked to reflect further on their use of the timer from Week 4, as exemplified in Figure 3. When students were asked to reflect generally on percentage and turn-taking, many responded with ideas about achieving balance, whether that be increasing their listening or speaking. Students seemed to recognize the importance of co-contributing to discussions.

I observed that team spirit definitely increased motivation to include all members of the group and promoted understanding that the group needs to win in order for an individual to win. The timer provided a gamification element, that is, by receiving quantitative feedback after a task, students were able to modify their contributions. When this element was paired with meaningful instruction and modelling of interruption phrases, intonation and socio-cultural expectations, student skills in this area really escalated.

“Students should be aware of time when they are having a discussion with others. Giving others opportunities to express their ideas is not a bad thing.”
“When someone speaks too little, we can ask them some questions to help them.”
“Timer is very useful, I find that I’m not used to interrupting people when I’m speaking, so I don’t speak as often, which is not good for conversation.”
“I can reflect on my performance and explore where I can do better through amitalkingenough.com . And now I’ll pay attention to my speaking percentages when I’m discussing.”
“This timer can absolutely help others by [showing] how much they speak and have a clear goal at future discussions.”
“When we are confident and encouraged to participate in discussions equally, everyone’s speaking will improve.”

Figure 3: Reflections after the fourth week of using the timer

Analysis of data

This research set out to observe the effectiveness of amitalkingenough.com on equalising speaking percentages and increasing low turn-taking during group discussions. Both students and teachers were resoundingly positive about the effectiveness of the timer for this purpose, and specifically its helpfulness for future speaking attempts.

Although increased turn-taking may not be the aim for all contexts, these students needed to increase interjections and frequency of turns to avoid the ‘mini-monologue’ style of speaking. These improved overall for the cohort, but most specifically for those who began with a low rate of turn-taking. These participants brought their turn-taking up to the level of the high turn-takers, indicating improvement in this area, without disadvantage for the high turn-takers.

Despite a genuine increase in student awareness of their speaking contributions, initial speaking percentages were remarkably equal even from Week 1, and so the data did not show any improvement in this area.

The fact that the majority of interactions took place over Zoom meant that speaking patterns differed from face-to-face communication. In addition, students encountered issues with internet glitches, videos not working, sound delays, background noise and more.

Conclusions

This app seeks to short-circuit any subconscious, socio-cultural and individual perceptions of contributions to a discussion. It transforms the fuzzy notion of individual contribution into a non-biased, numerical figure that overrides subjective perceptions. Prior to this current study, I have seen incredible improvements in both reticent students speaking more and in talkative students including others more. These changes have been swift, with near-equal speaking percentages in each group in the class within two to three uses of the timer.

In my class's final practice, upon revelation of even speaking percentages and highest turn-taking across the board, the class erupted into applause – a rare display of passion from an otherwise level-headed class. This showed me that measurable and quantifiable results, and explicit instruction on how to achieve them, allowed students to see a clear goal and meet their aim.

One of the most interesting parts of the process was the genuine student interest in improving their speaking performance. They sought techniques and strategies to assist them to understand and perform interruptions and perfect the art of clarification for the purpose of furthering the discussion. As such, the absolute necessity for the teacher to demonstrate, scaffold, correct and encourage effective discourse strategies cannot be overstated as this timer measures quantity but does not assist with quality of utterances.

Based on previous success and the results from this data, I believe amitalkingenough.com genuinely helps students improve their speaking by increasing awareness of discourse strategies, which is particularly effective when paired with strategic teaching interventions on effective strategies.

Reflections

I would like to offer my congratulations to this group of hard-working students. They were all recommended to advance into their studies at USYD. Although this is not rare, I still take it as a personal victory. I am also grateful to CET, who have now incorporated the use of amitalkingenough.com into DEC5 so that future cohorts can benefit from the tool.

Weekly peer evaluation tasks in DEC5 which encourage detailed and global listening skills now include the use of amitalkingenough.com. These tasks also include peer comments on qualitative elements, such as use of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and discourse management, thus providing more holistic feedback on weekly speaking practices. Weekly reflection on these peer feedback tasks provides students with a written record of their own progress as well as a chance to consider their strengths and weaknesses, and strategies for improvement to be used the following week. This reflection allows students to complete the feedback loop before feeding-forward their learning into subsequent speaking practice tasks.

My development and use of this app also caused me to reflect on how it could be improved. Several students commented on their concern about lulls and pauses in

the conversation, or when it was not clear who had the floor. From these comments and my own reading on cultural differences in relation to silence, I am now working on a 'pause/continue' toggle to measure silences. Far from being a failure to communicate, silence is an important part of discussion, and I believe this should be reflected in the talk timer tool.

This timer can be used in a wide variety of language learning contexts, from general English classes through to high-stakes exam preparation, and can be used for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to, pair and group discussion, genre speaking analysis and replication of discussion patterns. In addition, the timer could be used to set challenges for students such as guessing one's own percentage before the scores are revealed, and playing games in which students compete to speak the most, interrupt the most or take the longest turn. Such tasks encourage experimenting with ones' speaking performance and offer an increase in agency and ownership of language. Moreover, students can use the timer in class *and* in their own time to further practice their speaking skills. Although I developed a number of activities for using this feature, I look forward to hearing from other users about their own experiences, and their ideas for developing it further.

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Appendix I: Initial questionnaire

CET DEC5 Speaking – Questionnaire

Thank you for completing this form. This questionnaire is to understand student perceptions of their speaking during class discussion groups. Your responses will be completely anonymous. Please write your name, class and teacher's name for administrative purposes only.

1. My name is:

2a. My class is:

2b. My teacher is:

3. In general, do you speak more or less than other speakers during a discussion group?

Highlight the best option:

- a) I think I speak **much less** than others.
- b) I think I speak a **little less** than others.
- c) I think I speak approximately **evenly**.
- d) I think I speak a **little more** than others.
- e) I think I speak **much more** than others.

4. Do you usually feel confident when speaking in English in discussion groups? Why/Why not?

5. Do you enjoy speaking in English in discussion groups? Why?

6. Do you think it is important to speak approximately evenly to other students during discussions?

Thank you so much!

Appendix 2: Peer evaluation form on Week 1 Interactive Speaking Practice

DEC 5 – Week 1 – Interactive Speaking Practice - Peer-evaluation form

Each group will listen to another group's Week 1 Interactive Speaking Practice video and provide feedback. When watching the videos, each group member will listen for a different aspect of the discussion.

Listener #1 Name:	Please use amitalkingenough.com to measure the speaking percentage and number of turns for each group member.	
	<u>What was their Speaking Percentage? Was it equal?</u>	<u>Number of Turns</u>
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #2 Name:	Please make notes on the content and relevance of each member of the group.	
	<u>Content</u>	<u>Relevance</u>
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #3 Name:	Please offer pronunciation feedback, both positive and negative.	
	<u>Positive Pronunciation</u>	<u>Pronunciation that needs work</u>
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #4 Name:	Please note down any signal words that the speakers use, and any polite interruptions.	
	<u>Signal words</u>	<u>Interruptions</u>
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #5 Name:	Listen for use of grammar and vocabulary	
	<u>Grammar</u>	<u>Vocabulary</u>
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		

Appendix 3: Individual Reflection on Week 1

DEC 5 – Week 1 – Interactive Speaking Practice - Peer-evaluation form

Each group will listen to another group's Week 1 Interactive Speaking Practice video and provide feedback. When watching the videos, each group member will listen for a different aspect of the discussion.

Listener #1 Name:	Please use amitalkingenough.com to measure the speaking percentage and number of turns for each group member.	
	What was their Speaking Percentage? Was it equal?	Number of Turns
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #2 Name:	Please make notes on the content and relevance of each member of the group.	
	Content	Relevance
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #3 Name:	Please offer pronunciation feedback, both positive and negative.	
	Positive Pronunciation	Pronunciation that needs work
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #4 Name:	Please note down any signal words that the speakers use, and any polite interruptions.	
	Signal words	Interruptions
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		
Listener #5 Name:	Listen for use of grammar and vocabulary	
	Grammar	Vocabulary
Speaker #1 Name:		
Speaker #2 Name:		
Speaker #3 Name:		

Training L2 learners to be autonomous through Instructional Scaffolding

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Educational context

The Academic English and Study Skills (AESS) Bridging course is a flagship preparatory program of the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT), University of Western Australia (UWA), which equips adult L2 learners to transition into multidisciplinary graduate and postgraduate studies in UWA. It is a 20-week program divided into two 10-week modules (Module 1 and Module 2). A core feature of Module 2 is the Research and Study Skills (RSS) component where learners gain insights into the processes involved in conducting research and embark on independent research in their own disciplines. The aim of RSS is two-fold:

1. to provide training in study and higher-order thinking skills, and
2. to cultivate autonomous L2 learners, capable of taking responsibility for their own learning and participating successfully within the larger academic community in an Australian university setting.

Factors that prompted my action research

A key issue that spearheaded this action research (AR) was the lack of prior knowledge and skills, and the inexperience of past cohorts at conducting research which affected educational outcomes. Because it was unfamiliar territory, many faltered at different stages of their research journey but especially at Stage 1,

which requires the construction of a research question (RQ) and focus questions (FQs) and a description or explanation of the research problem as part of the introduction to the research paper. This stage undoubtedly impacts the quality of the final 2,000-word paper that each student will submit towards the end of the RSS course. Without a clear grasp of what it is they are investigating, the reason(s) for it and the value of discovering the answer, their overall task performance will be undermined. It is not surprising, therefore, that past cohorts repeatedly expressed concerns such as, 'how do I select an area to research/investigate?', 'where can I find peer-reviewed articles?' and 'after this step what should I do?'

In addition, many L2 learners are used to more traditional instructional and learning styles reflective of their sociocultural context. There is a strong disinclination for active participation in their learning and for these students, switching from a teacher-centred to learner-centred mode can be daunting. For instance, a pre-course survey of the previous year's (2021) cohort, indicated that lectures, consultations with me as their teacher, and independent research were my students' preferred learning methods. The following were some of their verbatim responses.

Lectures are the most important because they bring us the newest information and familiarise us more quickly with how to apply appropriate methods to academic research.

I need the consultation time to communicate with my teacher to solve questions.

Independent research can give me enough time think by myself.

In contrast, they did not see the value of peer group discussions at all, as evident in the verbatim comments below.

Everyone in the class have different research directions. It is not a good idea to put their thoughts together.

Due to different majors, it is difficult for me to have positive communication with classmates around me.

The third driver was comments from colleagues on how their students had failed to appreciate the cumulative nature of the research steps and thus, were unable to comprehensibly articulate their research problem, RQ and the value of their investigation. This feedback resonated with my own observations.

The overarching objective of the AESS Bridging course to cultivate autonomous learners, a critical characteristic for success within the Australian higher education context, constituted the final impetus for my AR. My dilemma was how learner autonomy (LA) could be developed in the RSS classroom.

Theoretical framework

This research was mainly informed by Vygotsky's concepts of the Zone of Proximal Learning (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), Bruner's ideas on Instructional Scaffolding (IS) and Fisher and Frey's Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework. Vygotsky, who held that social interaction within a learning community and cognitive development are intrinsically related, argued that interacting with MKOs (teachers, peers, technology) within the ZPD would enhance learning and propel learners to mastery of newly learnt knowledge, skills and strategies. This is because the ZPD bridged the gap between what learners could already do and what they have the potential to successfully achieve through structured guidance (Newman and Latifi 2021). Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) introduced the concept of scaffolding to describe the interaction between instructor and learner to achieve a learning outcome, while Bruner (1978) emphasised the importance of appropriately structured IS in creating autonomous learners. Figure 1 below portrays this dynamic.

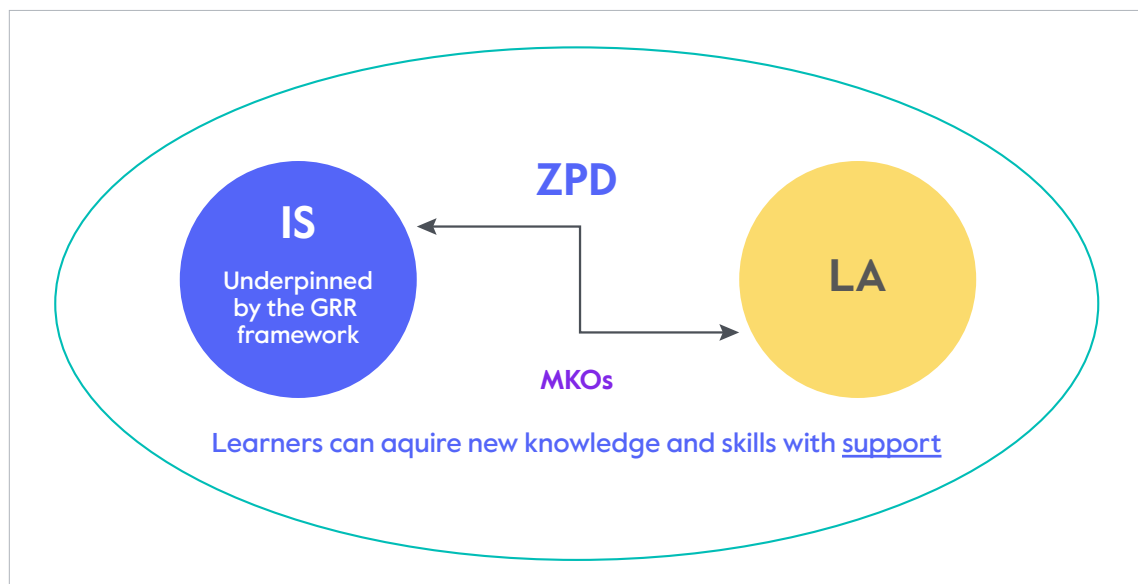


Figure 1: The synergy between ZPD, IS and LA

The multifaceted concept of LA has been described as: the ability of learners to think critically, make decisions and act independently (Little 1991); learners accepting full responsibility for their learning (Dickinson 1995); and the 'capacity to control important aspects of one's language learning', which must be appreciated as 'complex, multidimensional and variably manifested' (Benson 2013:839–840). LA, therefore, does appear to be a 'higher' goal compared to learner independence (LI) as the latter encompasses mastery of subskills that will eventually facilitate the successful completion of a task. Fisher and Frey (2021:3–4) call this process or journey towards autonomy GRR, where four interdependent phases are incorporated: 'Focused Instruction (I do it)', 'Guided Instruction (We do it together)', 'Collaborative Learning (You do it together)' and 'Independent Learning (You do it alone)'. IS implemented in this research reflected the above order.

Research questions

The aim of this research was to determine the significance of IS in developing LA in my online RSS classroom. Not unlike a physical classroom, the online platform, owing to technological advances, can promote and generate social interaction and collaboration among learners. I wanted to investigate the efficacy of IS as a learner-centred intervention strategy to bridge the gap between dependency on the teacher and LA in the learning of new and challenging skills. Hence, the question:

What is the role of Instructional Scaffolding in developing learner autonomy in the online Research and Study Skills (RSS) classroom?

Two subsidiary questions that arose were:

1. To what extent can peer group discussions be instrumental in cultivating autonomous learners?
2. How is the role of the teacher and learner within the collaborative learning environment redefined?

My research

My online class consisted of 12 students. They were from China (8), Nigeria (1), Peru (1), Saudi Arabia (1) and Taiwan (1), pursuing postgraduate studies in Accounting, Finance, Geoscience, Biomedicine, Logistics, Architecture, Engineering and Strategic Communication. The age range was from 21 to 42 years. The RSS component encompasses three major stages but based on feedback from past cohorts, colleagues and my own observations, I decided to focus on the critical and particularly challenging Stage 1, which markedly influences learning outcomes for the next two stages. Stage 2 involves identifying three peer-reviewed journal articles to support the research, summarising one article and doing a preliminary research presentation, while Stage 3 consists of writing the research paper, finalising the research portfolio, which is a record of the research process, and preparing for the research interview with the class teacher. The course duration is nine weeks.

Stage 1 requires the completion of three tasks over three weeks, labelled as entries:

Entry 1 – Identifying the research topic and formulating the RQ

Entry 2 – Constructing FQs which identify the sub-issues

Entry 3 – Describing/Explaining the research problem

Data collection methods and findings

The methods were selected based on their suitability and effectiveness in facilitating rich data collection. Consultations and submission of the three entries, integral to the course requirements, allowed for additional insights into the intervention.

1. A preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix 1) on students' perceptions of research and preferred learning styles was conducted at the beginning of the course (Week 1) to gauge the impact of IS in augmenting the learning experience. The key findings were that all but one student (91.6 %) had never done research before; most were anxious about coping and preferred to learn through lectures and consultations with the teacher. The one student (8.3%) who had some experience had submitted a paper that required secondary research in their undergraduate course. The paper had been written in their L1.
2. The students were also given a step-by-step guide and simple model outlining the Stage 1 research process early in Week 1 (Appendix 2). These scaffolds exemplified the thought processes of a researcher embarking on an investigation in their field and were delivered as a think aloud. The students were then assigned to breakout rooms (three per room) and given a set of five questions to discuss (Figure 2). I joined each room during the discussion. After the activity, students posted their comments on the Class Discussion Board on Blackboard (BB). Everyone found the guide and model to be useful ('clear'; 'helpful'). In terms of insights into research, the responses were varied and interesting ('many things to learn'; 'research question should be chosen carefully'; 'we discussed how to search information'; 'first important thing is to identify subdiscipline'; 'originality is important'). On confidence levels and support needed, most acknowledged that the tasks were challenging yet they 'had a little bit of confidence' and speculated they would 'need some support later'. Two sample student posts on BB are provided below (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

Group Discussion 1
Are you clear on the steps involved in Stage 1? How clear are you?
Was the model helpful? Why or why not?
What new things about the research process did you learn from your discussion?
How confident are you about starting your own research at this point of the course?
Do you think you need additional support? What kind of support?

Figure 2: Questions for discussion in breakout rooms

Posted date: 20 April 2022 4:12 PM

Status: Published

Post:

RSS Week 1 Group Discussion 1 – The Research process Stage 1

Author:

XX

Starting research would be difficult if someone had no experience. Nonetheless, it will be excited to learn how to research and read peer-review papers.

The model was useful and simple, which gives steps on how to start the work. The first important thing is to identify the subdiscipline rather than looking at the problem or issue in this area, which requires reading more to identify the issue.

Writing questions is very necessary to start the journey in the research.

Most students are apprehensive about the time and the manner to assemble the information therefore, the first step will be difficult, but it will be easy with time.

(Post is read)

Figure 3: Sample Student Post

Posted date: 20 April 2022 3:49 PM

Status: Published

Post:

RSS Week 1 Group Discussion 1 – The Research process Stage 1

Author:

XXX

Yes, I understand. Draw a mind map and ask two questions.

I think models are helpful, to know what the mind map should contain, what questions should it ask.

We discussed which parts were included in the whole paper.

Just a little bit of confidence.

After I've created the problem, see if it's a good question.

(Post is read)

Figure 4: Sample Student Post 2

3. Next, individual consultations (20 minutes) were scheduled prior to the submission of Entry 1. All except two participants (88.3%) managed to produce clear concept maps (Appendix 3). The two who struggled were unsure of the sub-issues and related aspects of the research topic that could be investigated. They indicated the need for 'more background reading' before they could produce a map that clearly depicted the progression from their discipline area to their RQs.
4. Another consultation (20 minutes) was organised before the submission of Entry 2 (Appendix 4). Whilst most were successful, four participants (33.3%) grappled with pinpointing sub-issues and FQs. Open-ended questions revealed that they had not grasped the concept of FQs and needed tailored support to eliminate confusion, bring clarity and expand understanding.

5. In Week 3, an authentic role play activity was conducted. The purpose was to help students to write the introduction to the research paper where the research problem would be explained (Entry 3). Participants took turns playing the role of the Director or Director of Studies to whom they were to report on the progress of their research. A role play card and a detailed guide which deconstructed the task into manageable steps were given and explained (Appendix 5). The interview was modelled with important task elements (Research problem, RQ, FQs and Hypothesis) highlighted. Participants used a five-star rating scale (Excellent [5], Very clear [4], Satisfactory [3], Average [2] and Unclear [1]) to assess their partner's performance (Appendix 6) and uploaded their reflection of the activity on the Discussion Board on BB (Figure 5). Overall, there was consensus that it had been 'very useful'; 'helps me make a clear structure for my Entry 3'; 'very helpful'; and 'easier for me to prepare my Entry 3'. None of the participants received a rating below three stars. Two participants each received four and five stars. The reasons given included 'makes me have a basic understanding of her major'; 'able to describe problem and question clearly'; 'strong connection and logical'; and 'methodically stated'.

Posted date: 8 May 2022 6:33 PM

Status: Published

Post:
RE: Week 3 Role Play activity feedback

Author:
XXXX

This practice helped me to be able to organize my ideas for my Entry 3. After presenting my problem, it was easier for me to prepare my Entry 3. Listening to my classmate's presentation helped me improve some aspects of my presentation. My partner's presentation was very clear and interesting.

(Post is read)

Figure 5: One student's reflection on the role play activity

6. At the end of Week 3, students submitted their Entry 3. The responses of eight students (66.6%) were characterised by strong and coherent content and clear structure (Appendix 7). Despite inaccuracies with language and vocabulary, task requirements were fulfilled satisfactorily. In contrast, the remaining responses (33.3%) mentioned the main elements of Entry 3, but these were not sufficiently elaborated. There was also a lack of connection between the elements.
7. Throughout Stage 1, teacher observations during lessons and reflections after activities were recorded in a journal.

Discussion

My research demonstrated that IS played a considerable role in developing learner independence and to some extent, autonomy, during Stage 1 of the research process. By independence, I mean that students were able to move from focused and

guided instruction where I, as the teacher, exerted more control over their learning environment and experience, to collaborative and independent learning where my students were able to assume more responsibility and therefore control over different aspects of their learning. This measured release of control was empowering for students as it: reduced anxiety and helped to clarify new concepts; provided students with opportunities to learn and do; built self-belief and confidence; developed reasoning, inquiry and problem-solving skills; and exposed them to different perspectives or approaches to a problem.

The teacher-learner dynamic was also reconceptualised. By playing the role of facilitator rather than information provider, I was able to encourage LI and subsequently, LA through offering prompts and cues to activate recall and asking open-ended questions to initiate more complex thought. The learner became the focus rather than the teacher. As the level of support decreased from high to moderate to low, the level of learner control increased accumulatively. Increased responsibility for their own learning led to LA where self-directed learning became evident. At this level, the students made informed decisions on their research directions, showed clear awareness of how they could get there and conceived an actionable plan to reach their objectives. I became a sounding board for them to resolve conflicting ideas and overcome possible hurdles that they foresaw along the journey.

Interestingly, the peer group discussions, despite being unpopular initially, proved instrumental in developing LA. The cooperative and collaborative nature of the support provided in the ZPD by more advanced peers (MKOs) facilitated deep learning which is a prerequisite for LA. Interaction in this zone encouraged students to think aloud and share their thought processes. Among these were fears about the relevance of their FQs and challenges they had faced in trying to limit the parameters of their research. There was also opportunity to question, seek clarification and debate on feasible approaches and alternative routes to addressing their RQs. These interactions led to learners making judgments about how they were going to proceed with their research and what resources they were going to use to achieve learning outcomes.

The role of technology in the ZPD as a scaffold to cultivate LA cannot be dismissed. Digital literacy skills enabled students to control crucial aspects of their learning. For example, they were able to fill gaps in information about their research topics and possible issues that were worth investigating through entering appropriate search terms on OneSearch or Google Scholar. Creating a dedicated RSS chat group on their mobiles, where ideas were shared and queries answered, was another instance of collaborative learning leading to expansion of understanding and mastery of new content and skills. It is worth mentioning that students who independently accessed the resources (guides, recorded lectures, exemplars etc. in the online Self-Access centre on the Learning Management system) displayed comparatively more independence and autonomy. They were the ones who were able to proffer solutions to roadblocks and select the most feasible course of action to proceed with their research. During whole-class discussions and consultations, they not only outlined the options but were able to justify their choices when

questioned. There were others, however, who needed further guidance and expert opinion i.e., more intentional scaffolding to consolidate their grasp of new content and skills, validating Fisher and Frey's (2021:5) statement that the 'GRR instructional framework is recursive'. Figure 6 illustrates this trait vis-à-vis IS and LA.

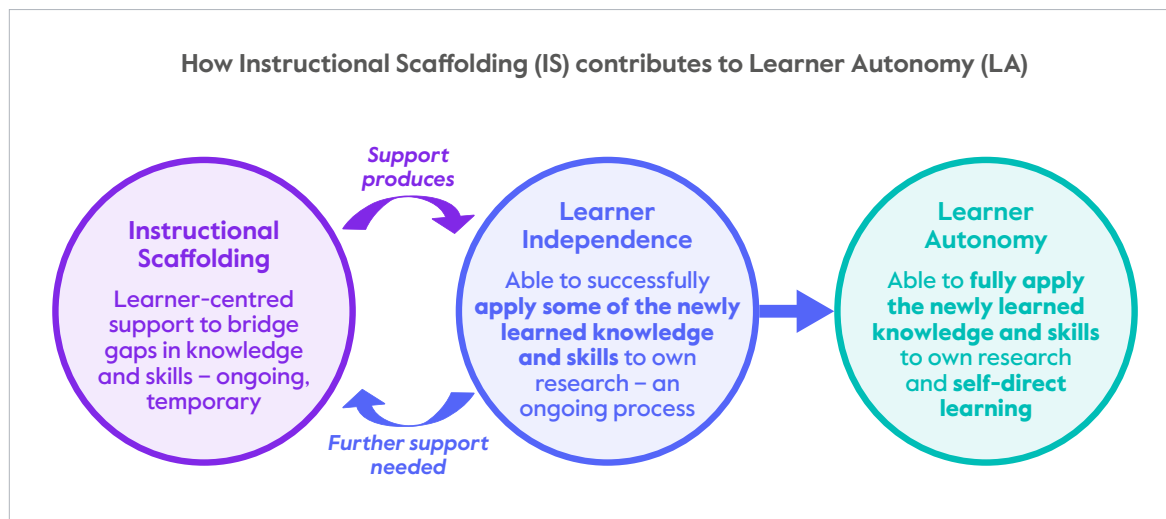


Figure 6: The role of IS in cultivating LA

As can be seen, the progression from IS to LA is non-linear. While IS does cultivate LA, it must be appreciated that the journey is fraught with interruptions. For example, while competencies in some skills may improve, their application in the performance of tasks may fall short of the standard required. My AR reiterated the fact that there is a symbiotic relationship between GRR and LA. The more responsibility that is assumed by the learner for their learning, the more autonomous they become.

Reflections

Overall, the students cleared Stage 1 more smoothly and quickly than previous cohorts. What do I mean by this? Their concept maps and RQs (Entry 1) were clearer and the FQs (Entry 2) logical because of a deeper cognition of the research process and task requirements. Consequently, the explanation of the research problem (Entry 3) was more considered and coherent, revealing not only a deeper measure of comprehension of new content but also the ability to analyse, think critically and substantiate a particular position. Without a doubt, the whole-class discussions, peer group discussions and individual consultations functioned as scaffolds to induce higher-order thinking skills which translated into deep learning. In that regard, the teacher and more informed peers became scaffolds to build on new competencies developed through guides and models.

While a cooperative and collaborative learning environment can energise learners and motivate deeper level thinking, to maximize learning, it is necessary for peer groups to comprise members with different skills sets and learning competencies who participate actively. This way you can ensure that there will be MKOs whom the less skilled learners can rely on to acquire new knowledge and strategies for success.

For the MKOs themselves, the benefit of this type of sharing of information and opinions is that they can reflect on their own efforts, self-direct, and strategise further to achieve their individual learning goals.

Consultations with my students revealed the subtle yet perceptible distinction between independent and autonomous learners. The former demonstrated independence at task level where they were able to perform tasks by themselves because they understood exactly what each task entailed and how they could produce what was required through following specific steps. Independent learners also grasped the interconnectedness of the three tasks in Stage 1 and understood how the final entry (Entry 3) was the culmination of their learning and practice in Stage 1. Autonomous learners, on the other hand, displayed all the above competencies and some more. They were able to see their research beyond Stage 1 into Stage 2 and 3 and chart a learning course that would get them to a clearly conceived destination. Moreover, they were able to outline how they were going to achieve their objectives and overcome anticipated obstacles. This ability to self-direct their learning was a clear distinguishing feature of autonomous learners – a transferable competency, for successful engagement in a more demanding academic environment.

To make IS work and to facilitate effective learning of new content and skills, it is necessary to gauge students' ZPD so that scaffolds can be adapted to individual learning needs and capabilities. At the same time, determining the right amount of support is also crucial to ensure learners are engaged actively. I found that in wanting to 'help' students grasp new concepts and skills, there could be a tendency to provide too much support, creating passive learners, which is certainly not the goal. Teachers, therefore, need to refrain from providing answers but encourage students to think, reason, inquire and learn. Teacher and MKO 'think-alouds' as well as open-ended questions were especially beneficial in this regard. Finally, the success of IS as an intervention strategy to promote autonomy is dependent on regular checks to ascertain if students can complete tasks on their own. For instance, the one-on-one consultations prior to the submission of each entry were instrumental in gauging each student's level of confidence and readiness to fulfill tasks and if further scaffolding was required to bridge any gaps. Conversely, the scaffolds, which are meant to be temporary, could be removed when learners' cognition of the newly acquired competencies is demonstrated through working at the given tasks on their own, independent of MKOs.

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Please click the following link to view the authors' presentation at the 2022 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/professional-development/webinars>

Appendix I: Preliminary survey form

Dear BCA students,

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions regarding the **Research and Study Skills (RSS)** component of your Bridging course in CELT, UWA.

Name:

Age:

Nationality:

Program of Study in UWA:

Instructions: Please answer all the questions. Where applicable, write your answers in the space provided.

1. I like to learn using the following methods:

(Underline ALL your preferences.)

- a. Listening to lectures
- b. Conducting independent research
- c. Having one-on-one consultations with my instructor
- d. Whole-class Q & A sessions
- e. Group discussions with my peers (classmates)

2. The three methods of learning I prefer the most are...

(Name the three methods according to your order of preference)

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

Why do you say this?

3. Among the methods of learning listed above, I don't like...

Why do you say this?

4. Based on the *Introductory Lecture to RSS (RSS Overview)*, how well do you think you will be able to perform the tasks listed in the table below?

Rate your answers on a scale of 1–5 and then state why you gave that rating.

5 – I can perform the task excellently

4 – I can perform the task well

3 – I can perform the task satisfactorily

2 – I can perform the task partially

1 – I don't think I can perform the task

Task	Rating (1–5)	Reason (Why did you give this rating?)
Entry 1 – Select my research topic and formulate my research question		
Entry 2 – Write three focus questions that will help me to answer my research question		
Entry 3 – Write the Introduction to the research paper <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Research problem– Research question– Hypothesis		



Thank you for your participation.

Gowri Duke

BC Teacher

Email: gowri.duke@uwa.edu.au

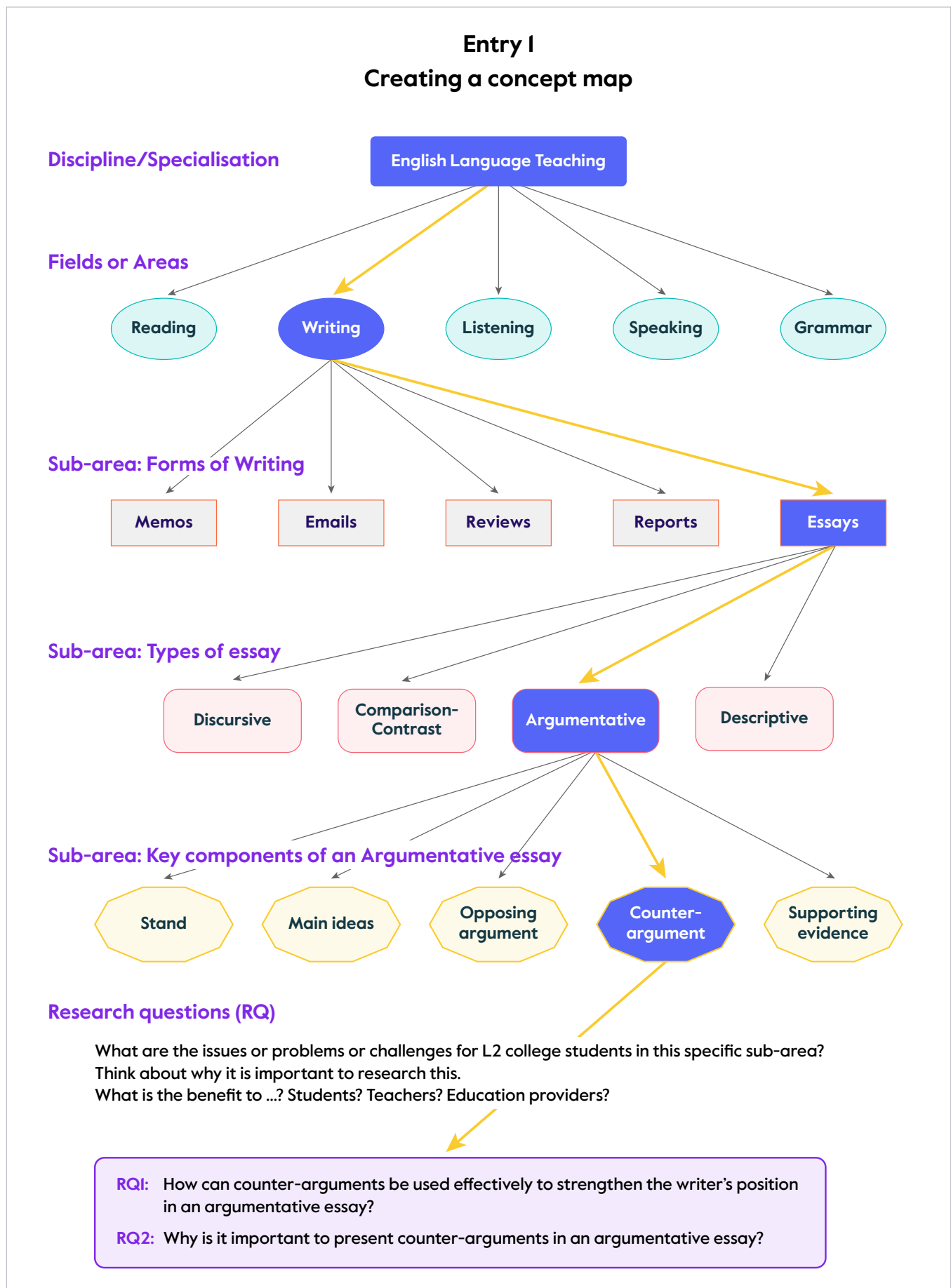
Tuesday 19 April 2022

Appendix 2 : A step-by-step guide on the Stage I research process

This guide takes you through the thought processes involved in progressing from your discipline area to the focus questions that will help you to answer your research question.

1. What are some of the key fields or areas under my discipline?
2. What is the sub-area within each field/area of my discipline that I am most interested in?
3. What are some of the issues or problems that are worth investigating in this sub-area?
Some background reading on current issues may be required at this point. You could, at the same time, skim read recent, peer-reviewed journal articles at this point to get an understanding of the issues.
4. What is the issue or problem that I am interested to investigate?
5. Why is it important to investigate this issue or problem? (Think about how useful the information that is discovered will be to those involved or the industry etc.)
6. Formulate my research question.
7. Formulate my tentative hypothesis.
8. Formulate my focus questions.

A simple model



Entry 2: Writing Focus Questions (FQs)

How can I best answer the research question (RQ)? = **Focus questions (FQs)**

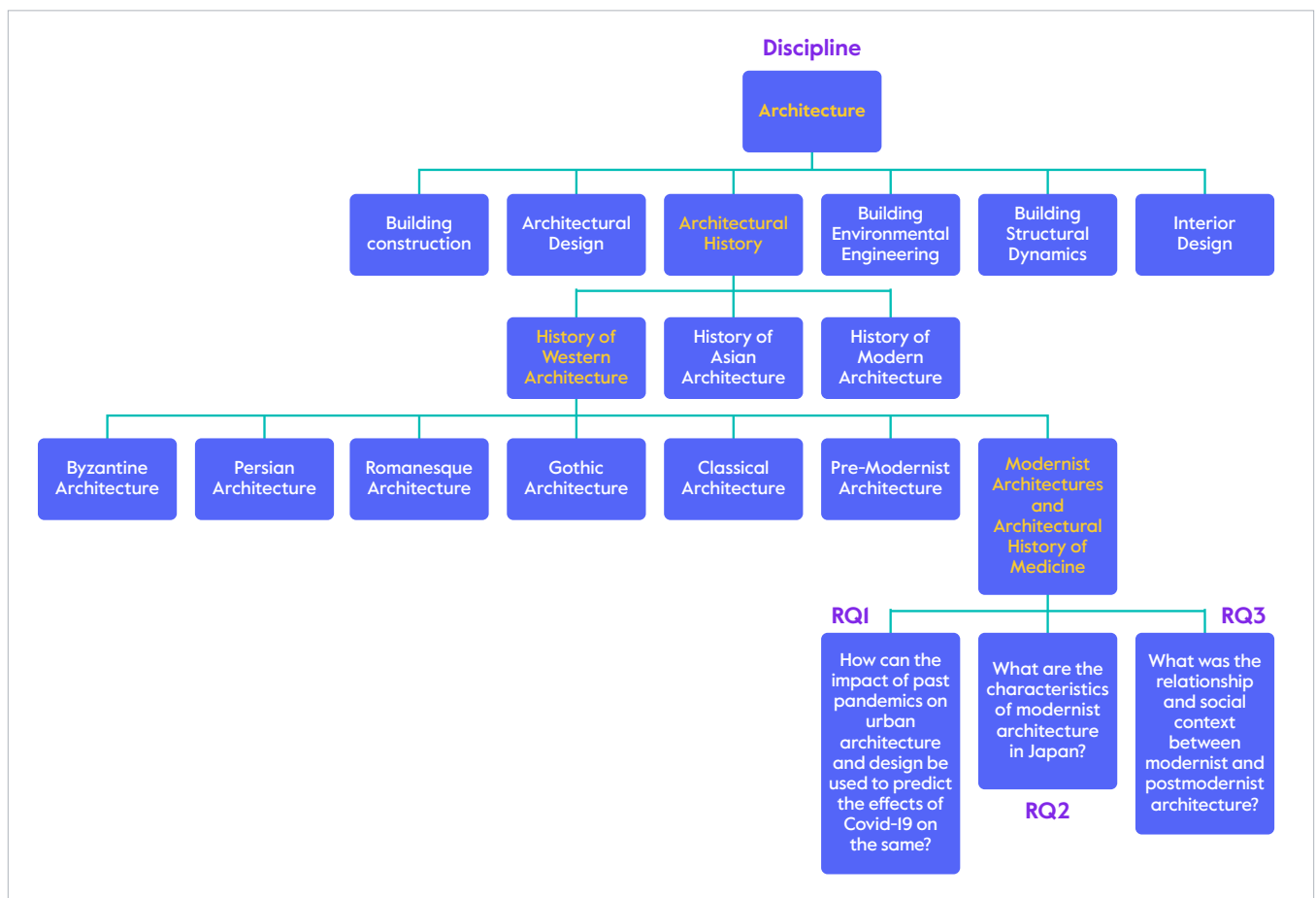
Think about the information you will need to present to address the RQ. Ask yourself what information the reader will need to know.

Hypothesis

The Hypothesis should directly answer the RQ.

E.g., *Counter-arguments need to be relevant and specific to be able to substantiate the writer's position in an argumentative essay.*

Appendix 3: Sample Entry 1 (Concept map)



Appendix 4: Sample I (focus questions)



Appendix 5: Role play card and guide for explanation of problem

Role play card

(In the handout to students, the names of the Director and Director of Studies were given.)

Student A: Director or Director of Studies, Centre of English language Teaching (CELT), UWA

Student B: Yourself

The Director and the Director of Studies are keen to know how you are progressing in your Research and Study Skills (RSS) component.

Report on the following to them:

1. Your discipline.
2. The sub-area you're interested in.
3. The issue or problem or challenge in this sub-area that you want to investigate.
4. Your RQ.
5. Why it is important to do this research OR What the benefit of doing this research is.
6. *Your tentative hypothesis (optional).*
7. Your three FQs which will help you to answer your RQ and prove or disprove your hypothesis.

Example:

Director: Hi Gloria, how are you going?

Gloria: Hi ... So far so good. I think I'm managing rather well.

Director: Oh, that's good to hear. Now tell me ... how are you faring with your research? What are you investigating?

Gloria: Well ... as you know, my discipline is ...

(After the brief report ...)

Director: It sure looks like you have got off to a great start, Gloria. All the best as you progress to the next stage.

Gloria: Thanks!

Director: Cheers

Reverse roles at the end of the first interview

This guide will help you with the role play activity.

1. What is my discipline? **English Language Teaching**
2. What is the sub-area I'm interested in? **Writing argumentative essays**
3. What is an issue or problem or challenge in this sub-area that I want to investigate? Describe briefly.

The problem: In argumentative essay writing, key elements include the writer's stance, main ideas that support it, opposing arguments and counter-arguments and supporting evidence. Out of these, countering the other side's arguments to present a more convincing or persuasive case has consistently posed challenges to second language learners. Even if they are able to come up with a clear stand on a given topic with relevant main ideas and evidence to support their position, addressing the opposing arguments and offering a reasonable rebuttal can be a difficult task. There is a genuine need to equip them with practical strategies to overcome this hurdle.

4. What is my RQ?

How can post-secondary language learners produce effective counter-arguments?

In view of this, the aim of this research is to investigate how post-secondary language learners can produce effective counter-arguments.

(RQ turned into a statement)

5. Why is it important to do this research? **Or** What is the benefit of doing this research?

Identifying effective strategies or methods will help learners produce more cogent and persuasive argumentative essays which is one of the requisites of this genre of writing.

6. What is my tentative hypothesis?

To produce effective counter-arguments, second language learners need to appreciate the value of rebuttal and the different forms it can take.

7. What are the three FQs which will help me to answer my RQ and prove or disprove my hypothesis?

- i. **Why is it important to address opposing arguments?**
- ii. **How effective is the concessional style as a form of rebuttal?**
- iii. **How effective is the oppositional style as a form of rebuttal?**

Appendix 6: Feedback on role play task

Name:

Classmate's name:

1. How would you rate **your classmate's** presentation of their research? (Please shade)



2. Why did you give this rating?

1. How would you rate **your own** presentation of their research? (Please shade)



2. Why did you give this rating?

Key:

5 ☆ Excellent 4 ☆ Very clear 3 ☆ Satisfactory 2 ☆ Average 1 ☆ Unclear

Appendix 7: Sample Entry 3 (Explanation of research problem)

Architectural design is created by integrating a wide range of knowledge and ideas—for example, cultural background, materials, and structure. Although each design has its background, there are always major design streams in each era. Sometimes architecture is a monument of power, and at other times, it is considered a part of nature. However, ideas on architectural design have undergone transformation and it is necessary to examine the reasons for it and whether there will be changes in a post-Covid 19 world. Clues to these questions will be found in the connections between past pandemics and architecture. Therefore, the research question is: How can the impact of past pandemics on urban architecture and design be used to predict the effects of covid 19 on the same?

Human beings had experienced many pandemics before the covid-19. The plague, known as the Black Death, had continuously assailed European society from the 6th to 18th centuries. The horror of those days are well-documented in many historical books and works of art, for example, in the famous novels *La peste* (Camus, 1947). Also, in the 20th century, many infectious diseases, for instance, tuberculosis, typhus, and the Spanish flu threatened people's lives. Considering the impact of past pandemics on societies and the architectural design ideas of those eras, it would be reasonable to assume that the global Covid 19 pandemic would also transform present design ideas. Therefore, the hypothesis is: Urban and Architectural design had shifted to include the hygienic philosophy created by past pandemics, hence new health ideas based on Covid-19 will also impact current design concepts.

Using ipsative feedback for personal bests in grammatical accuracy in L2 writing

Malcolm Kirkwood, UQ College, Brisbane

Introduction

From my experience as a TESOL academic writing teacher, teacher feedback on grammatical accuracy does not always translate into better student writing. Indeed, despite initial improvements, student writing often appears to worsen towards the completion of a standard academic writing course – a trajectory that raises the question of optimal feedback. Worryingly, this observation of worsening (or stagnant) performance appears to support Truscott's (1996) assertion that grammar correction is a futile task, a pedagogical process devoid of empirical support. Moreover, as deduced from meta-analysis (Truscott 2007) grammar correction can apparently even harm writing development. Nonetheless, while grammar correction may not be predictive of enhanced grammatical accuracy, this may reflect current feedback practices and thus prioritises a re-examination of formative assessment in L2 academic writing.

Against this background, this article describes findings from my action research (AR) project on the utility of ipsative (self-referential) feedback in enhancing second language learners' grammatical accuracy. Specifically, the study was conducted with the aim of better understanding the idiosyncratic role of feedback in correcting morphosyntactic error in L2 writing and included the following objectives:

- To design and use ipsative feedback sheets and individualised action plans for L2 writing students in response to error analysis in nine weekly (timed) 300-word essays, following the Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

- To improve student output in the form of morphosyntactic accuracy in L2 writing.
- To gain an appreciation of students' attitudes regarding preferred forms of feedback for (a) goal-focused feedback, (b) feedback on current performance, and (c) future-oriented (generic) skills feedback.

Context and participants

This AR project was conducted within UQ College, the English language centre at The University of Queensland. My 10-week Bridging English (BE10) class was invited to participate with each invitee (N=16) agreeing to participate. The English levels of the 16 participants ranged from B1+ to C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) reflecting their varied entry points into the program. All students were from Mainland China and aged between 21 to 32 (female, N=9; male, N=7) and the course was presented online via Zoom.

The research was conducted as a single cycle (10 weeks: April–July 2022) in accordance with the normal duration of the BE10 course and my preference to work with an intact student cohort for at least 10 weeks (the minimum period of enrolment for pathway students). As the site of my employment, the selection of participants involved convenience sampling (i.e., utilising a pre-selected student grouping) and the students thus represented a non-random sample (Creswell 2008:155). Nonetheless, as non-experimental research with relaxed assumptions of representativeness and homogeneity in sampling, and no testing of hypotheses, the sample was considered representative of a normal academic L2 writing class and relevant for the stated research objectives.

Research focus

Student errors in L2 academic writing are an important source of information for the teacher as well as the learner. Specifically, error analysis provides a measure of progress in writing development, while also offering insight into the learning process itself (Richards 2015:19). A third feature of error analysis in L2 writing is the feedback opportunity provided to the learner. To this end, Selinker (1972) emphasises error as an idiosyncratic and logical process of rule construction in the formation of a personalised 'interlanguage'. Important for academic writing development, in this schema, is the individual nature of language development and thus identification – and appropriate correction – of morphosyntactic error.

Despite the ongoing nature of language development, feedback on grammatical accuracy is typically situated in a single production (e.g., a student's weekly essay) and assessed by criteria that lack a performance aspect in relation to a student's past and ongoing folio of work. This method of formative assessment arguably conforms to assessment of learning versus that of assessment for learning (Stobart 2008) and sees a concomitant focus on criterion-referenced grades. Accordingly, this approach focuses more on a 'performance gap' (Hughes 2011) than learner progress per se. When considering learner motivation, criterion-referenced feedback

may be counterproductive as it mimics (and foreshadows) summative assessment – an understandable source of anguish for many language students. Ipsative (self-referential) feedback, by contrast, may offer learners a more genuine form of formative assessment as it provides a metric of individual performance lacking in conventional writing feedback and offers to complete the feedback loop in a meaningful way.

Feedback processes are addressed in Hattie and Timperley (2007) who categorise feedback by *task*, *performance processes*, *self-regulation*, and *personal factors* in the learner. In establishing a feedback loop, and closing the gap between performance and the desired output, they propose that effective feedback distinguishes between:

- *Feedup*: enabling learners to answer questions about specific performance goals.
- *Feedback*: enabling learners to answer questions about where they currently are.
- *Feedforward*: enabling learners to answer questions about where they now need to go.

This model of feedback aligns with the Hughes, Smith and Creese (2015) ipsative ‘performance goal’ which differentiates between current and past (as well as future) student work and contrasts with the predominant ‘performance gap’ deficit approach. An important element of a ‘performance goal’ approach is the ability to initiate constructive dialogues – *learning conversations* – between teachers (or peers) and students in providing answers and interpretation on *feedforward* questions posed by students. Hughes (2011) diagrammatises a cumulative scheme for learning conversations in successive assessments (Figure 1).

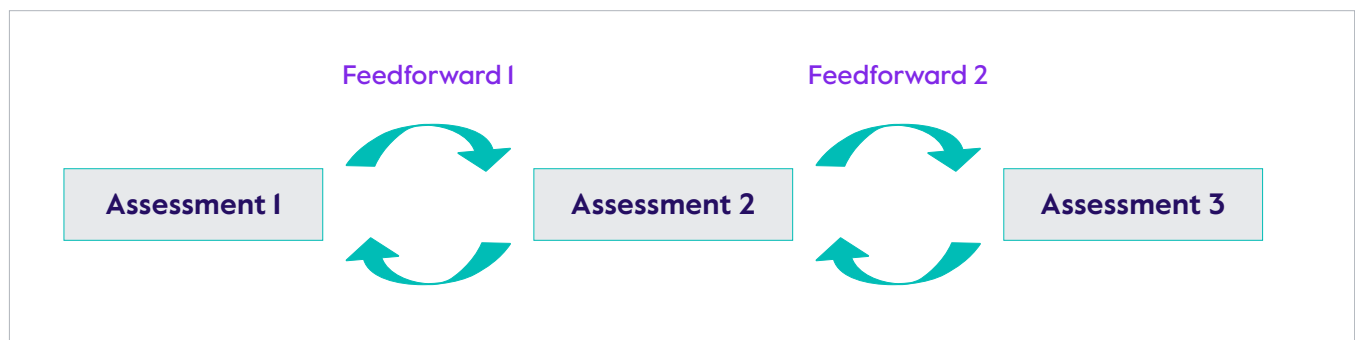


Figure 1: Ipsative feedback scheme for three successive assessments (Hughes 2011)

In Figure 1, student progress is determined from the implementation of Feedforward 1 by comparing Assessments 1 and 2. Feedforward 2 then builds on Feedforward 1 if remedial action is not enacted by the student; subsequent feedforwards build on each preceding round of feedback and a picture of progress is built for both learner and teacher to incorporate into learning conversations.

In consideration of feedback for morphosyntactic error correction for L2 writing students, examination of the literature reveals an absence of studies

involving ipsative feedback. The current study was thus motivated by a desire to enhance students' intrinsic motivation in the pursuit of ipsative 'personal bests' for grammatical accuracy and to circumvent the potential for demotivation via the (unintended) consequences of discontinuous, summative-style feedback. Aligned with these considerations, this article addresses two major research questions (RQs):

1. To what extent does ipsative feedback targeting morphosyntactic error (measured according to Dulay et al's (1982) *Surface Strategy Taxonomy* outlined in Appendix 1) improve grammatical accuracy in L2 academic writing students?
2. How does ipsative feedback associate with student affective measures pertaining to the (i) importance, (ii) explicitness and (iii) preferred forms of written corrective feedback?

Study details

In generating valid knowledge, AR attempts to solve a localised, immediate problem and presents authentic, emic accounts (Zuber-Skerritt 2001). AR also has a 'proliferating methodology' (Greenwood and Levin 1998). Accordingly, the current study gathered and triangulated quantitative and qualitative data to best approximate student cognitive and affective outcomes. The following section outlines the stages of the AR cycle prior to discussion of data analysis.

Stage 1: Attitudinal data

To assess student feelings and preferences for writing feedback, I developed pre- and post-study surveys. Constructs were operationalised to measure (a) the importance of feedback in L2 writing; (b) the usefulness of specific forms of feedback presented on an explicitness continuum, and (c) the perceived utility of criterion-referenced feedback vs. peer-referenced feedback vs. ipsative feedback. Appendix 2 presents a copy of pre- and post-study questionnaires. To assess longitudinal trends of feedback preference in response to the use of writing feedback in the study, it is noted that the post-study questionnaire reprints Questions 1 and 3 of the pre-study questionnaire verbatim.

Stage 2: Cognitive data

Participating students (N=16) were asked to complete a timed essay as per normal writing class procedures and received a weekly feedback sheet upon return of their essays for nine weeks of the 10-week session. Alongside normal teacher feedback, students were tasked to download Grammarly™ (free version) and to generate weekly reports (Appendix 3 shows a copy of a student's Grammarly report). Grammarly reports provide a score out of 100 (based on grammatical accuracy averaged across similar submissions) and a corresponding list of *critical* and *advanced* errors (outlined in more detail in the findings section), which students were asked to reflect on weekly in written reflections. To collate data and to help reinforce the ipsative nature of the feedback, students were asked to compile a writing folio containing:

- a. Original essays (with my feedback)
- b. Grammarly reports
- c. Written reflections detailing their progress vis-à-vis earlier Grammarly reports

Stage 3: Student learning conversations

To assist student progress, *learning conversations* were staged on a one-to-one basis at various points during the course. These informal conversations had the aim of answering, interpreting and/or guiding student feedback/feedforward questions and were conducted in situ (i.e., within Zoom breakout rooms as feedback was given). Pertinent comments were transcribed and an ipsative focus was taken with attention given to ‘personal bests’ and consistent linking of past, present, and future output in writing.

Stage 4: Validation of Grammarly report data

Following the collection of nine weeks of writing data (i.e., Grammarly scores + *critical errors*), all current BE10 teaching staff were invited (by email) to provide scores for a sample (N=9) of the student essays. These nine essays were drawn from three students and sorted according to Grammarly scores into *low/mid/high* scoring essays. Essays were coded to shield student identity and presented in a Google Drive folder to consenting teachers (N=6). Teachers were asked to grade each paper according to the IELTS Writing Task 2 public descriptor with the original bands (1–9) modified to the equivalent UQ College bands for writing (i.e., 1–5). Appendix 4 is a copy of the recruitment email sent to teachers.

Following the description of the various components of the AR project, the study is presented diagrammatically in Figure 2:

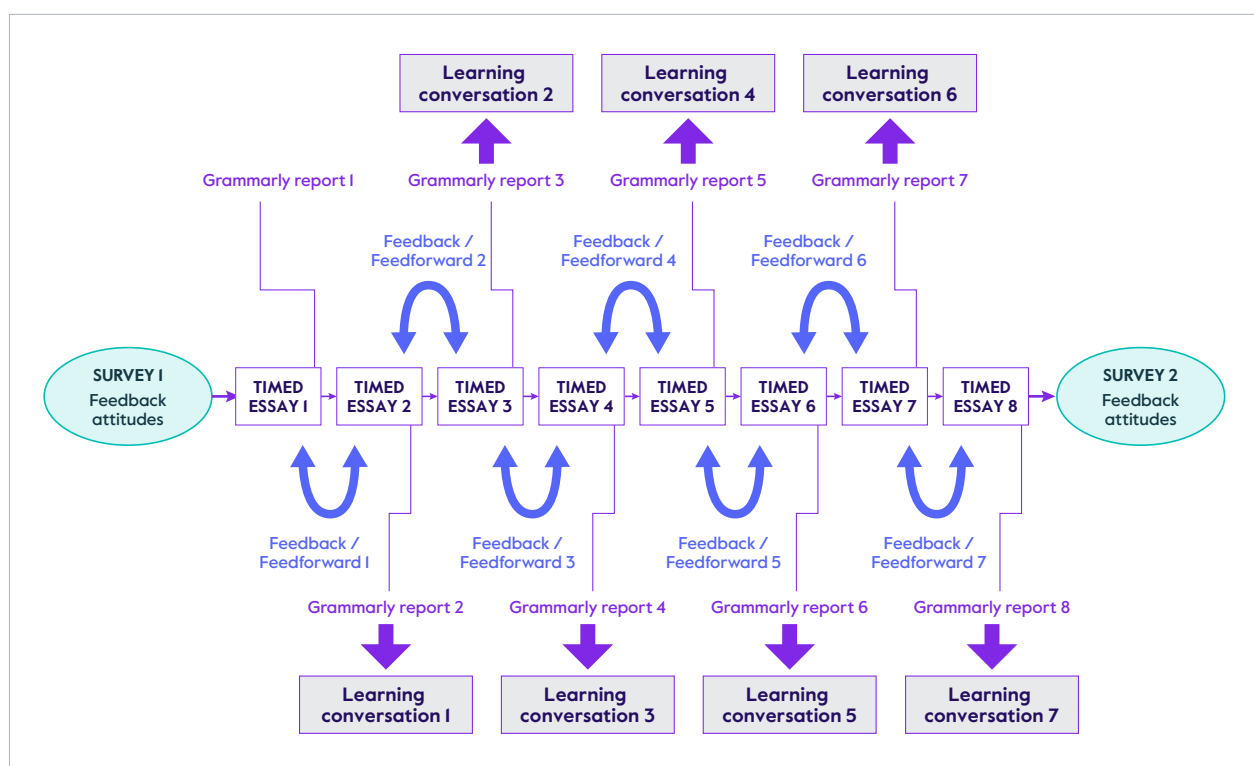


Figure 2: AR research design

Findings

Triangulation of student quantitative and qualitative data was conducted in accordance with the mixed methods approach and arranged according to the two RQs, which are reiterated below. Specific findings are then related to each research question.

RQ1

To what extent does ipsative feedback targeting morphosyntactic error (measured according to Dulay et al's (1982) *Surface Strategy Taxonomy*) improve grammatical accuracy in L2 academic writing students?

In the assessment of ipsative feedback on grammatical accuracy, attempts at data cleaning were performed, despite the use of non-parametric testing in analysis. To this end, a student was excluded from analysis due to (a) non-submission of ≥ 2 first draft essays and (b) failure to submit all weekly essay rewrites. This reduced the cohort to $N=15$ for subsequent analysis.

In initial examination of first draft data, a related-samples Friedman's two-way analysis of variance test suggested a significant difference existed in weekly essays ($\chi^2 F(6) = 17.52, p < .05$) though visual examination of the data suggested that any directionality was confounded by unusually low first draft Grammarly scores in Week 7 essays ($\bar{x} = 29.9$; $SD = 10.9$). Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for weekly first drafts. Post-hoc testing confirmed this apparent anomaly as removal of Week 7 data showed that no overall significant difference existed in the within-samples Grammarly first-draft writing scores ($\chi^2 F(5) = 3.838, p < .573$).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (weekly first draft essay Grammarly scores)

Week	Mean (SD)
1	50.6 (25.4)
2	63.3 (20.9)
3	56.3 (23.7)
4	58.4 (13.4)
5	54.6 (18.8)
6	48.3 (25.7)
7	29.9 (10.9)
8	52.7 (20.9)
9	66.6 (21.9)

Attempts were then made to assess the effects of ipsative feedback on grammatical accuracy in weekly rewrites. Figure 3 shows that, unlike successive first drafts, mean rewrite scores were higher than weekly first drafts. In analysis, this finding may be

more meaningful than the averaged scores for weekly first drafts as it provides a more granular picture (i.e., emphasising remedial efforts made by individual students).

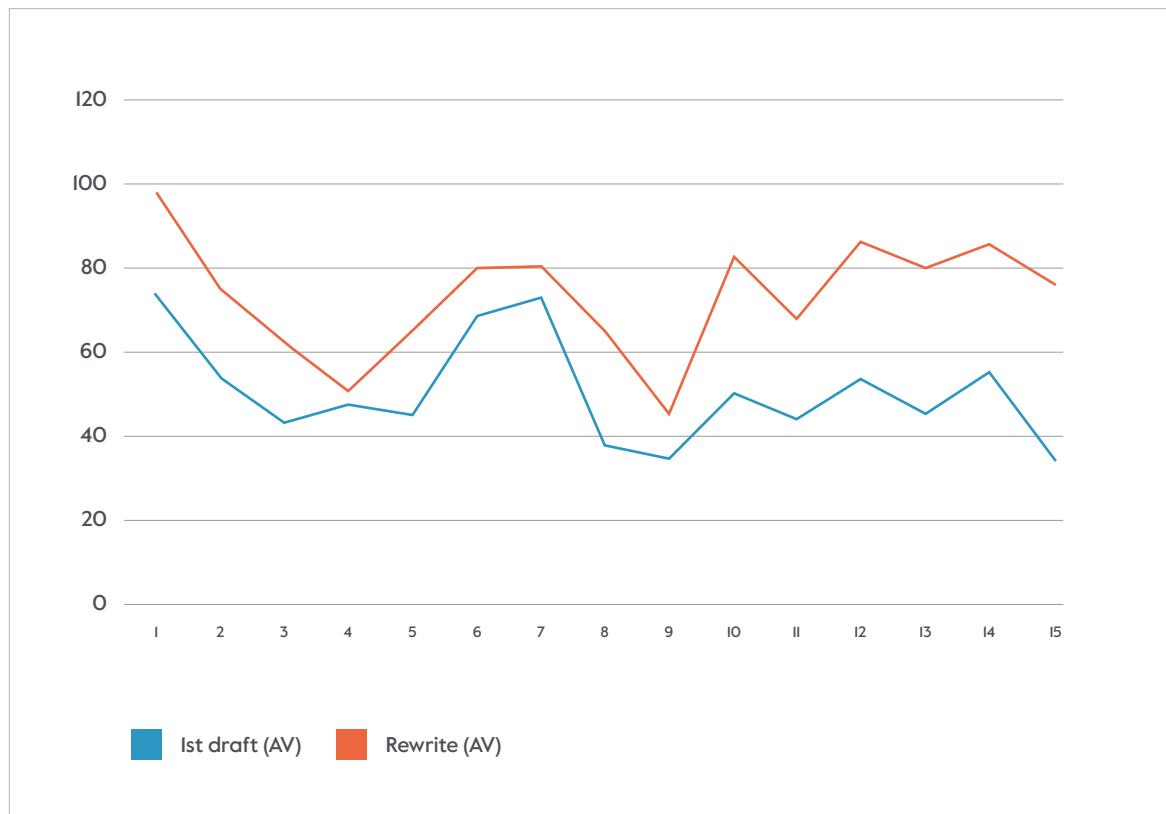


Figure 3: Weekly first draft/rewrite Grammarly scores

Following description of Grammarly report scores, I examined the forms of errors that students produced. Here, reference to Dulay et al (1982) was made in identification of surface error forms. Following Dulay et al (1982), error forms included:

- *Omission*
- *Addition*
- *Misformation*
- *Disordering*

Grammarly critical error types were categorised according to the above error forms and assessed for type and frequency across the nine weekly essays. Figure 4 outlines the different Grammarly critical errors – of which *correctness* errors were felt to be representative of Dulay et al (1982) surface errors and sufficient for the scope of this AR project.

CRITICAL	
CORRECTNESS (red underline):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wrong or missing prepositions - Misspelled words - Faulty subject-verb agreement - Incorrect noun number - Pronoun use - Faulty tense sequence - Determiner use - Misplaced words or phrases - Confused words - Incorrect verb forms Conjunction use - Punctuation in compound/complex - Sentences - Improper formatting - Redundant words - Modal verbs
CLARITY (blue underline)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unclear sentences - Wordy sentences - Passive voice misuse
VOCABULARY (green underline)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement (free version)

Figure 4: Grammarly critical errors

Examination of critical error data revealed a visible decrease in both averaged (displayed in Figure 5) and summed (Figure 6) critical errors across the nine weeks of the intervention. This initial observation was confirmed in statistical analysis – with or without inclusion of Week 7 data – with a Friedman’s test signifying a significant statistical difference existing between the start and finish of the intervention ($\chi^2 F(7) = 31.47, p < .001$). Further analysis was conducted on the specific nature of morphosyntactic error. Here raw score data from all student essays (i.e., Weeks 1–9) revealed that omission errors accounted for the highest proportion of error (43%); *misformation* (35%), *disordered* (21%) and *addition* (1%) errors comprised the remainder. As specific errors often crossed between different error forms, the most prevalent forms were chosen as representative of each critical error.

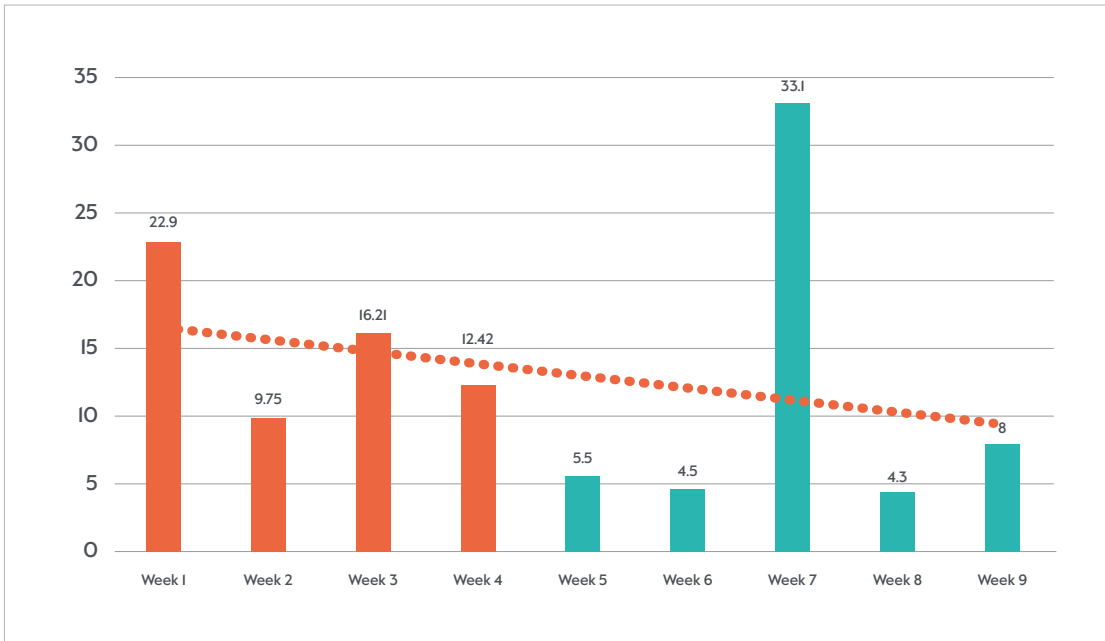


Figure 5: Critical errors (averaged) for each week (N.B. Week 2 data represents group essays)

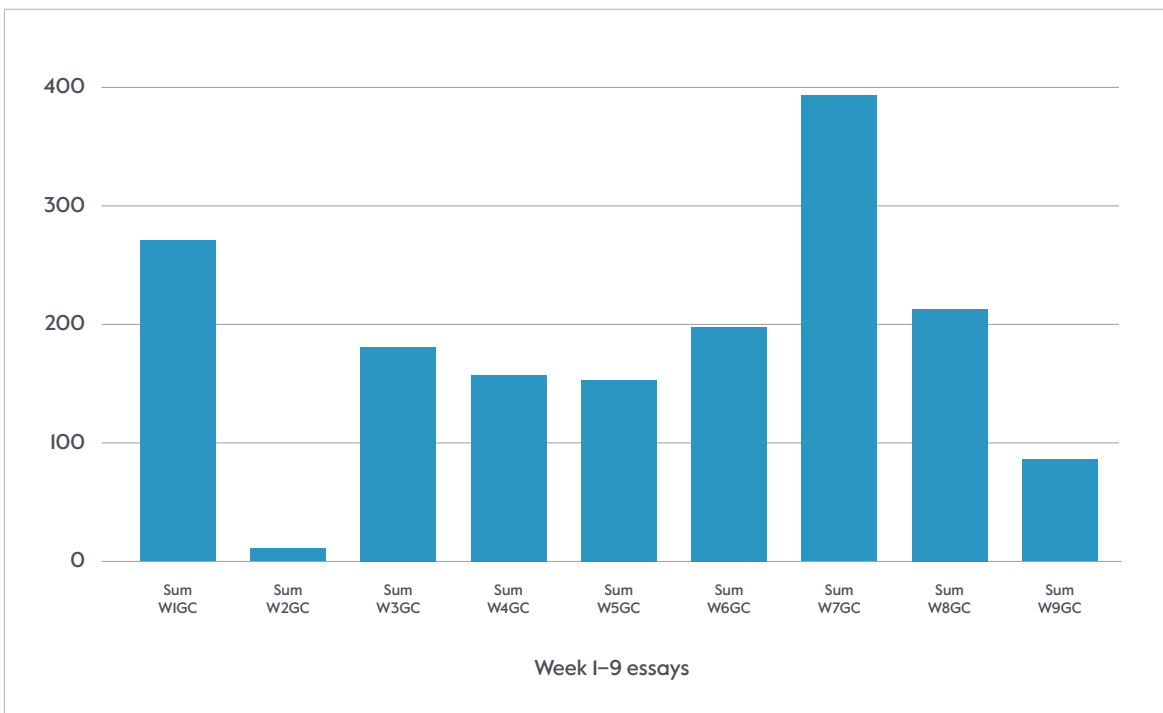


Figure 6: Critical errors (summed) for each week (N.B. Week 2 data represents group essays)

Figure 7 shows the error breakdown and Table 2 lists the specific errors for each error category.

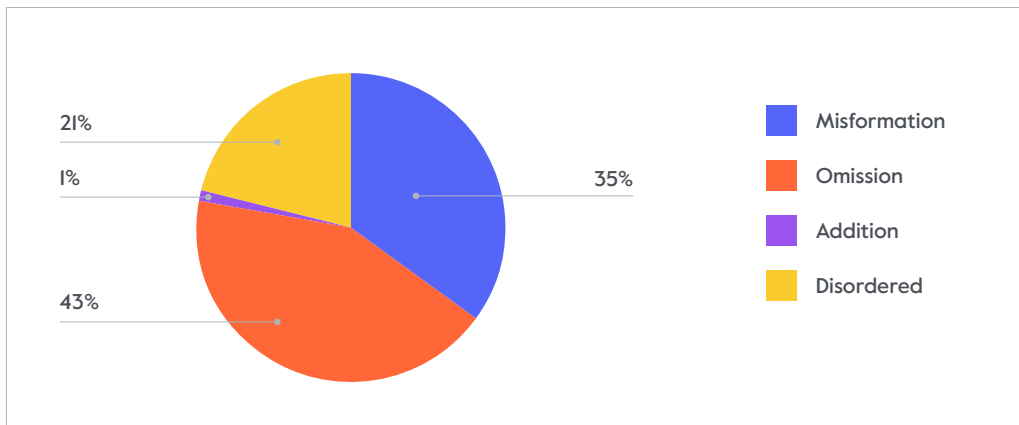


Figure 7: Morphosyntactic error (addition/disordered/misformation/omission errors)

Table 2: Grammatically critical errors categorised by Dulay et al (1982) *Surface Strategy Taxonomy* error forms

Error category	Grammatically critical errors
Omission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determiner use • Preposition use • Pronoun use • Conjunction use • Incomplete sentence • Punctuation
Misformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misspelling • SVA • Noun # • Verb form • Modifiers • Tense sequence
Disordered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formatting • Confused language • Inconsistencies • Misplaced word/phrase • Incorrect phrasing
Addition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modal verb use

Subsequent analysis of longitudinal trends in critical errors revealed distinctions between error categories. An overall decline was seen in disordered errors; meanwhile, moderate increases in overall error production were seen in misformation, omission and addition errors (graphs presented as Figures 8–11 in Appendix 5).

RQ2

How does ipsative feedback associate with student affective measures pertaining to the (i) importance, (ii) explicitness and (iii) preferred forms of written corrective feedback?

RQ2 sought to ascertain student affective measures associated with writing feedback. Specifically, this question related to the importance of writing feedback (Survey Question 1), the usefulness of specific forms of feedback presented on an explicitness continuum (Survey Question 2) and the perceived utility of criterion-referenced feedback vs. peer-referenced feedback vs. ipsative feedback (Survey Question 3).

Pre- and post-survey instruments involved a 100% response rate providing a sample for analysis of 16 students (descriptive statistics are shown in Table 3). Examination of pre- and post-intervention statistics for Survey Question 1 (Importance of feedback) shows a high degree of correlation and minor grade-level variance (see Table 4 for pre-post intervention mean scores and Pearson correlation coefficients [r]). It was thus concluded that feedback per se is viewed very positively by students. Meanwhile, assessment of Survey Question 3 (perceived utility of criterion-referenced feedback vs. peer-referenced feedback vs. ipsative feedback) revealed a shift in preference between criterion-referenced feedback to that of ipsative feedback following the nine-week intervention.

Table 3: Student survey data

Survey item	Responses
Q1 Importance of feedback (1= <i>unimportant</i> /5= <i>extremely important</i>)	Mean (SD) Pre: 4.75 (.44) Post: 4.68 (.7)
Q3 Utility of type of writing feedback a) Criterion-referenced b) Ipsative feedback c) Peer-referenced	Pre: N (%)/Post: N (%) 10 (62.5)/3 (18.8) 5 (31.3)/13 (81.2) 1 (6.2)/0 (0)
Gender Female Male	9 (56.3) 7 (43.7)

Table 4: Pre- and post-intervention survey data (Survey Question 1: Importance of feedback)

Scale items	N	Pre-intervention mean (SD)	Post-intervention mean (SD)	Pre-post correlation (r)
1	16	4.75 (.44)	4.68 (.7)	0.895

Survey Question 2 (perceptions of explicitness), which was presented in Survey 1 only, assessed participants' perceptions of corrective writing feedback and involved a feedback typology adopted from Thao and Duy (2017) (results are shown in Table 5). Trends emerged in response to explicitness: Items 3 and 4 (explicitly marked with error and correction, or indication of error and correction, respectively) are viewed as relatively useful while Items 5,6 and 7 (progressively less explicit) score the lowest amongst both groups.

Table 5: Student responses (Survey Question 2: Written feedback explicitness)

Item number / Type of feedback*	Not useful at all	Not useful	Doesn't matter	Quite useful	Very useful
	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)
1. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. [look at Section 2 in Grammar book; 'am' underlined]	3(18.8)	4(25)	1(6.25)	6(37.5)	2(12.5)
2. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. ['am' underlined only]	1(6.25)	6(37.5)	3(18.8)	2(12.5)	4(25)
3. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. ['have been' (wrong tense); 'am' underlined]	0	0	3(18.8)	2(12.5)	11(68.7)
4. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. ['have been', 'am' underlined]	0	1(6.25)	7(43.8)	7(43.8)	1(6.25)
5. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. ['wrong tense']	1(6.25)	5(31.3)	4(25)	4(25)	2(12.5)
6. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. [no comment]	16(100)	0	0	0	0
7. Since I arrived in Brisbane, I am very lonely. ['oh – that is not good to hear!']	13(81.3)	3(18.7)	0	0	0

Finally, student comments obtained during ongoing *learning conversations* (as per Stage 3 of the research design) appear to confirm the desirability for explicit, self-referential feedback. Table 6 shows a representative sample of student responses to the question 'How do you feel that having a weekly Grammarly report/score is helping you develop your writing?':

Table 6: Student feedback obtained during learning conversations

It makes me know more about different types of essays and make me familiar with the writing methods of them.

This method is the best for my essays' rewriting. During the period, I will find many of mistakes that I made and correct as soon as possible.

Can help me make the essay correct the error which I cannot realize, but it cannot help me really improve the writing skills because I repeat errors.

It is easy for me to find some mistakes in the essays and see the improvement I make every week.

It can give me intuitive feedback that helps me to know if I get some progress objectively.

Conclusion and reflections

Conflation of the terms in AR, *action* and *research*, suggest a directionality in promoting transformative change despite an iterative, cyclic methodology. As such, the findings of the current AR should be assessed for their suitability in future interventions in promoting grammatical accuracy. Major findings of this initial round of research include:

1. Reductions in morphosyntactic error frequency occurred with ipsative feedback.
2. Consistent gains in grammatical accuracy were seen in weekly rewrites.
3. Surface error forms followed a specific frequency in production: *omission* > *misformation* > *disordered* > *addition* type errors.
4. *Disordered* type errors improved with ipsative feedback while the other error forms did not.
5. Students showed a preference for explicit feedback.
6. Ipsative feedback was preferred once students had been exposed to it.

In assessment of the above findings, the conclusion can be reached that ipsative feedback has the potential to target specific deficiencies in grammatical accuracy though it requires a certain level of explicitness in its use. In the current study, this is perhaps exemplified in the general nature of 'personal bests' via a score of grammatical accuracy that included numerous sources of error. In subsequent rounds of investigation, it would thus be advisable to target specific error form/s, perhaps those with the highest frequency of occurrence in student output (i.e., *disordering* or *misformation* surface errors). Further research could also explore whether resistance to error correction is associated with any one form of error or perhaps whether writing development conforms to a continuum of error form frequency. Linked with this point is the observation that student writing worsened considerably near the end of the course (Week 7). Of interest in this regard would be analysis of the universality of such end-of-course declines in grammatical accuracy, a finding which at present is confirmed only in anecdotal form amongst teachers at the study site.

Central to the cognitive and affective results of the study is the observation that student awareness and involvement in the feedback process appear to be key in writing development. As described earlier, this could be due to enhanced student motivation, though appears to depend on a certain level of teacher-directedness (i.e., in providing explicit feedback) to be most effective. Future rounds of research should thus be mindful of psychosocial measures inherent to Chinese L2 students in an EFL context, perhaps incorporating data obtained from classroom climate instruments. Informing further research, also, is the desire for self-reflexivity in the action researcher, including an awareness of the tendency towards framing conclusions from existing assumptions.

In conclusion, error analysis is central to L2 writing development as it presents a picture of individual proficiency and also offers insights into more general patterns of writing development. As such, AR can bridge the gap between student-centric and institutional needs such as with appropriately designed methods of ipsative feedback. As AR also has the power of self-improvement for the investigator – in this case, an academic writing teacher – it should be incorporated as an essential element of professional development within the institution.

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Appendix I: Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay et al 1982)

<p>Definition: Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) describe the Surface Strategy Taxonomy as ways the surface structures of text are altered. The authors categorise these alterations into four main classes of error: (1) omission, (2) addition, (3) misformation and (4) misordering.</p>		
	Example of error	Student writing
<p>Omission Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (Dulay et al 1982).</p>	<p>Omission of 'be' verb after modal verb</p>	<p>Peter can *[...] happy too.</p>
<p>Addition Addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance (Dulay et al 1982).</p>	<p>Addition of -ing verb inflection</p>	<p>He always *running in the afternoon.</p>
<p>Misformation Misformation errors are characterized by using the wrong form of structure or morpheme (Dulay et al 1982).</p>	<p>Misformation of 'be' as verb</p>	<p>They *is the best students.</p>
<p>Misordering Misordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or groups of morphemes in a well-formed utterance (Dulay et al 1982).</p>	<p>Noun phrase word order</p>	<p>Fish have eyes with *color red.</p>

Appendix 2: Pre-/post-study questionnaire instrument

(n.b. Questions 1 and 3 were reprinted verbatim for the post-study questionnaire)

1. I consider writing feedback to be:

1) *not at all important* *fairly important* *neutral* *quite important* *extremely important*

←-----→

(Please mark the line to show how you feel about the statement)

2. The following sentences all have the same error and a teacher has given a different type of feedback for each one. For each sentence circle the number that best describes how useful the feedback is.

For example, if you think the feedback is very useful way to point out an error then circle 5. If you think the feedback is not a useful way to point out an error then circle 1.

1 = Not useful at all (useless) 2 = not useful 3 = doesn't matter 4 = quite useful 5 = very useful

Look at section 2 in the grammar book

A. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

B. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

Have been (wrong tense)

C. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

Have been

D. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

wrong tense)

E. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

That's sad to hear!

F. Since I moved to Brisbane, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Choose one (1) statement that best describes your feelings about writing feedback:

- o I think that I would improve my writing quickest by following set rules for essays (assessment criteria)
- o I think that I would improve my writing the quickest by reflecting on errors made in my own previous writing
- o I think that I would improve my writing the quickest by comparing my writing with other students' writing

Appendix 3: Sample Grammarly report (excerpt)

Untitled

by Malcolm Kirkwood

General metrics

2,089	330	19	1 min 19 sec	2 min 32 sec
characters	words	sentences	reading time	speaking time

Score



This text scores better than 23% of all texts checked by Grammarly

Writing Issues

59	35	24
Issues left	Critical	Advanced

Plagiarism

This text hasn't been checked for plagiarism

Writing Issues

10

Clarity

5

Wordy sentences



4

Unclear sentences



1

Passive voice misuse



39

Correctness

9

Misspelled words



3

Confused words



6

Incorrect noun number



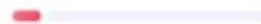
4

Wrong or missing prepositions



1

Mixed dialects of English



2

Incorrect verb forms



1

Punctuation in compound/complex sentences



1

Faulty tense sequence



5

Determiner use (a/an/the/this, etc.)



1

Incomplete sentences



4

Faulty subject-verb agreement



1

Conjunction use



1

Unknown words



8

Engagement

8

Word choice



2

Delivery

2

Incomplete sentences



Whether both¹ companies and consumers are getting² benefits form³ advertising utilization or not is discussed. This essay argues that using advertisements is advantageous for buyers and supplers⁴ because of quick understanding of products and increaseing⁵ profits.

Adimittedly⁶, advertising has some bad⁷ impacts. Firstly⁸, wasting⁹ consumers⁹ money to buy a product that you¹⁰ don't need. For example, the advertisement shows that running with¹¹ a sport¹² uniform with special fibers¹³ can prevent sweat and makes you comfortable when you are running. However, you only wear the clothes once because you are always busy with work and have no time to exercise. Secondly, advertising can do harm to the innovation of the product¹⁴, especially to some various products have¹⁶ similar funtions¹⁵. Improving the funtions¹⁷ of the product is taking¹⁸ a large of money and¹⁹ it is hard to predict if the improvment is^{20 21} accepted. Spending²² the same or less money on making the advertisements better can make profits with less risk.

However, more merits can be found²³ in commercial advertisements. To begin with, advertising help consumers spend less time on searching information on²⁴ the products²⁵. Most of advertisements²⁶ are simple and brief for leaving deep^{27,34} impression on^{28,29} consumers mind^{30,34}. Consumers can easily match the messages from the advertisement³¹ with their requirement³². Then, celebrity in the^{33,34} advertisements can help company³⁵ to sell more products³⁶. Because their fans are willing to buy the products if the celebrity are performing in the³⁷ advertisements. As long as the celebrity is the represent of this brand³⁸, they will buy things from this brand and become the brand loyalty³⁹. At the same time, if

1.	both	Wordy sentences	Clarity
2.	geting → getting	Misspelled words	Correctness
3.	form → from	Confused words	Correctness
4.	supplere → suppliers	Misspelled words	Correctness
5.	increasing → increased	Misspelled words	Correctness
6.	Adimittedly → Admittedly	Misspelled words	Correctness
7.	bad → destructive, harmful	Word choice	Engagement
8.	You are firstly, or You were firstly	Incomplete sentences	Delivery
9.	conumers → consumers', consumer's	Incorrect noun number	Correctness
10.	that you	Wordy sentences	Clarity
11.	with → in	Wrong or missing prepositions	Correctness
12.	esport → sports	Incorrect noun number	Correctness
13.	fibere → fibres	Mixed dialects of English	Correctness
14.	de harm to → harm	Wordy sentences	Clarity
15.	funtione → functions	Misspelled words	Correctness
16.	<i>Secondly, advertising can do harm to the innovation of the product, especially to some various products have similar funtions.</i>	Unclear sentences	Clarity
17.	funtione → functions	Misspelled words	Correctness
18.	taking → takes	Incorrect verb forms	Correctness
19.	, and	Punctuation in compound/complex	Correctness

Appendix 4: Copy of email sent to teachers

Dear teacher,

As you may be aware, I am doing an Action Research project with English Australia (details here: <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/professional-development/action-research>)

As part of the research, I aim to gather the opinions of experts in the field of grammatical accuracy in EAL instruction - i.e., you!

IF you could spare 5+ minutes, please consider helping me out by reading through a student essay (or a couple of them!) and score the essay for grammatical range / accuracy (1-5) as per normal grading protocols.

Please use this link. It contains the full instructions, grading sheet and sample essays.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EM-HM0li3GFOByWDJfPnpQk5l-apC8CM?usp=sharing>

Kind regards,

Malcolm

Instructions on the link:

1. Please read 1 or more of the sample essays
 - a. Please focus on **GRAMMATICAL RANGE & ACCURACY** *only*
2. Using the BE10 writing test criteria (link below), please enter a score (1-5) for the sample essay/s
 - a. Enter a score for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE & ACCURACY** *only*
 - b. For this, please download the marking spreadsheet and email me your designated result/s: (m.kirkwood@ugcollege.uq.edu.au)
3. Stand by for delivery of your special treat!

LINK: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EM-HM0li3GFOByWDJfPnpQk5l-apC8CM?usp=sharing>

Appendix 5: Longitudinal trends in critical errors

N.B. The figure numbers below are continuous with other figures in the text.
(Week 2 data in each figure represents group essays)

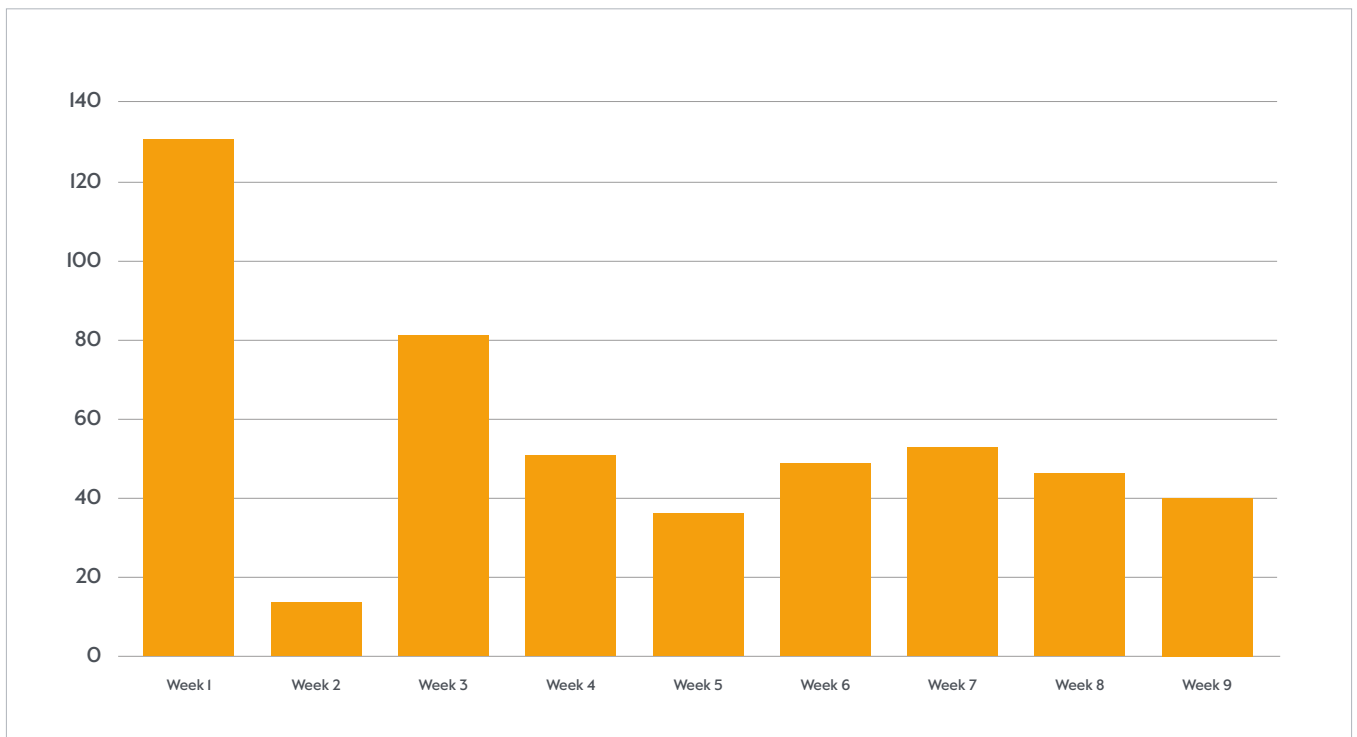


Figure 8: Disorder errors (averaged by week)

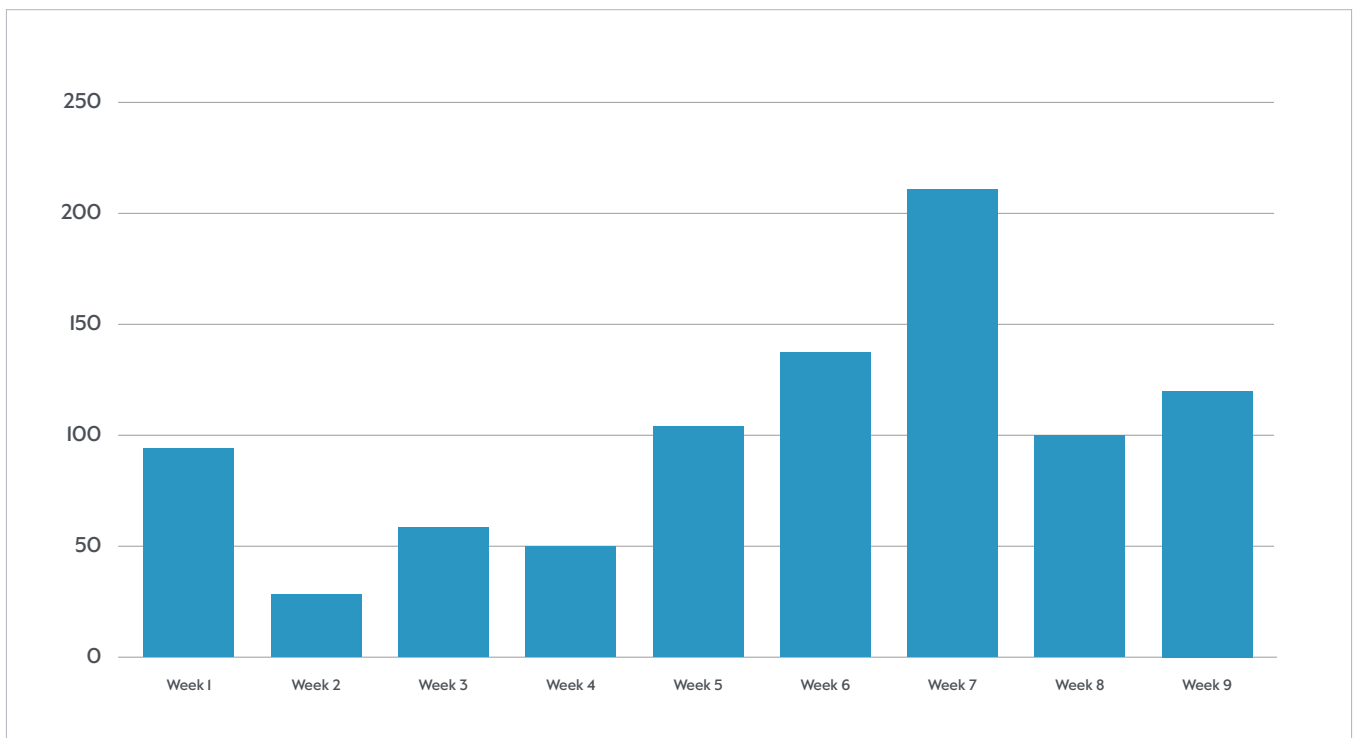


Figure 9: Misformation errors (averaged by week)

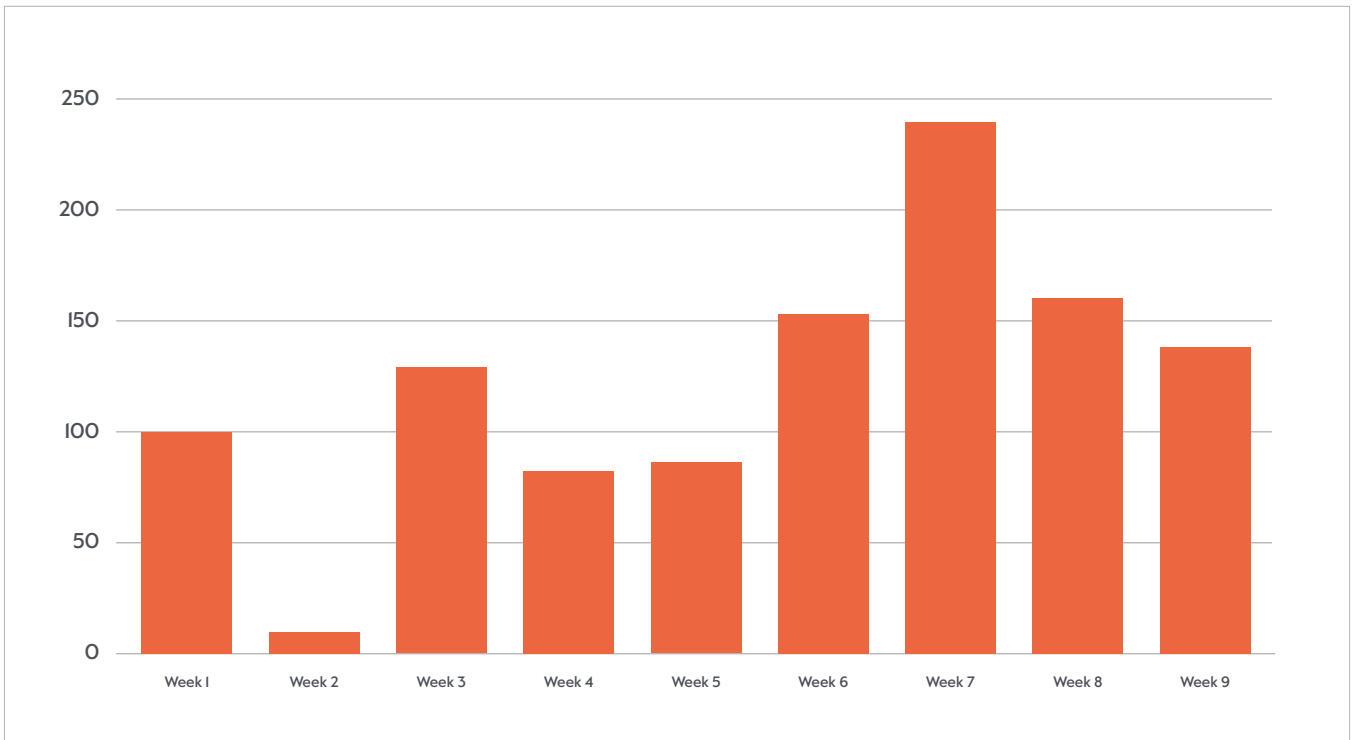


Figure 10: Omission errors (averaged by week)

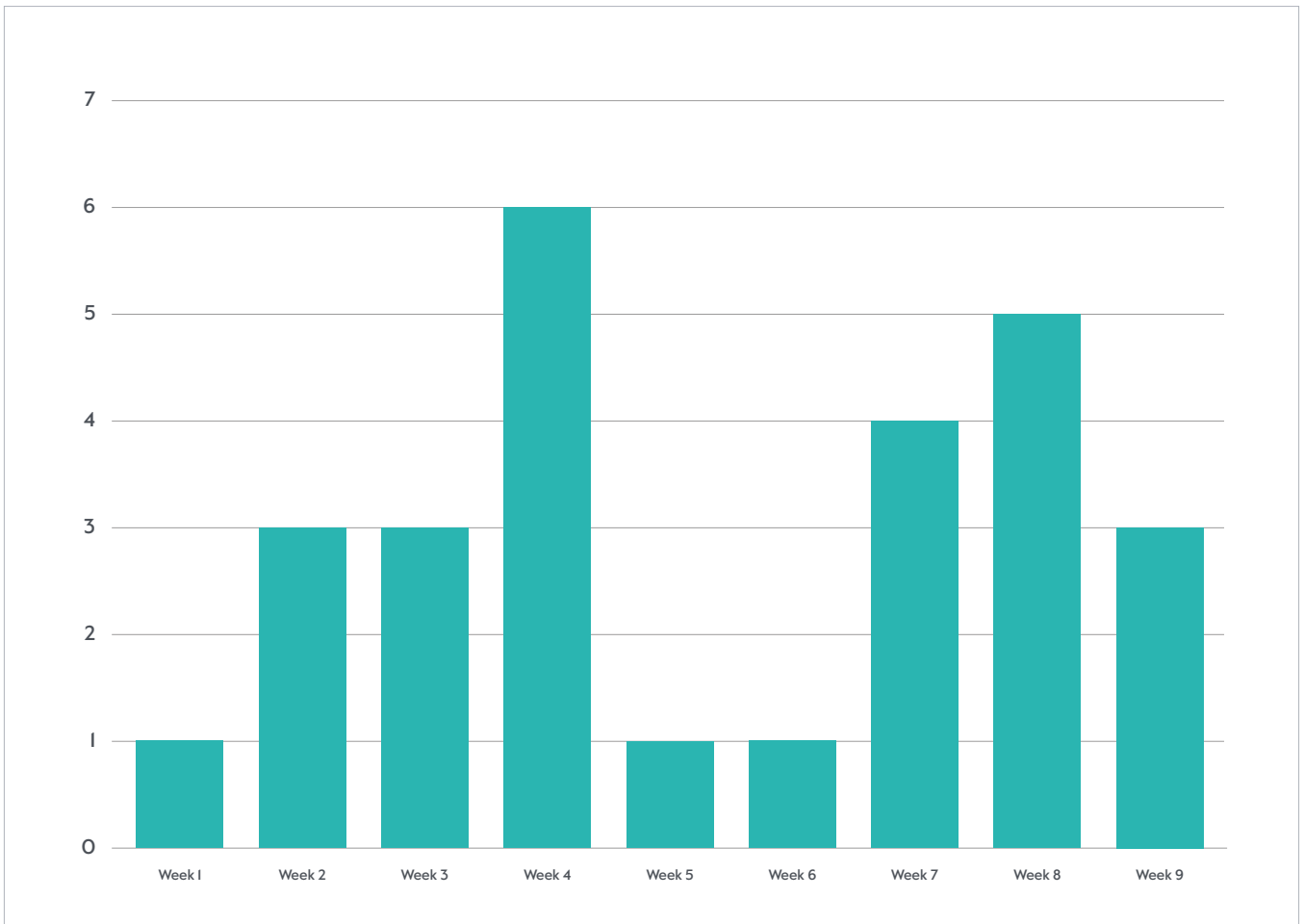


Figure 11: Addition errors (averaged by week)

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