

# Reflections of Instructors in the United States on the TESOL Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults<sup>1,2</sup>

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## Abstract

The preservice preparation for instructors of adult emergent bi/multilingual learners (EBLs) in the United States has been characterized as lacking uniformity, consistent academic rigor, and practical application to bolster instructors' feelings of self-efficacy and agency in addressing their students' complex psycho-social-emotional and learning needs. Since the *Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults* (2008) often act as the foundation to inform the content of preservice coursework, both in the United States and internationally, this qualitative research study explored the reflections of instructors of adult EBLs regarding their preservice preparation through the lens of these standards via semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited nationwide using existing TESOL listservs and organizations and universities that offer certificate, undergraduate, and graduate preparation programs in TESOL. From the participants who volunteered to be contacted for follow-up interviews, purposeful sampling was used to identify 16 with different levels of preservice preparation and teaching experience. Even though all interviewees felt adequately prepared to teach adult EBLs based on these standards, they could identify areas that should be modified or expanded, especially the andragogical use of educational technology. The findings from this study also identified areas for future research. These findings might also resonate with instructors who teach English to adults internationally because these standards are used globally.

## Resumen

La preparación previa al servicio para instructores de estudiantes adultos emergentes bilingües/multilingües (EBL, por sus siglas en inglés) en los Estados Unidos se ha caracterizado por carecer de uniformidad, rigor académico constante y aplicación práctica para reforzar los sentimientos de autoeficacia y agencia de los instructores para abordar las complejas necesidades psico-sociales-emocionales y de aprendizaje de sus estudiantes. Dado que los estándares para profesores de adultos de ESL/EFL (2008) a menudo actúan como la base para informar el contenido de los cursos previos al servicio, tanto en los Estados Unidos como a nivel internacional, este estudio de investigación cualitativa utilizó entrevistas semiestructuradas para explorar las reflexiones de los instructores de EBL para adultos con respecto a su preparación previa al servicio. Los participantes fueron reclutados en todo el país utilizando listas de organizaciones y universidades que ofrecen programas de preparación para certificados, licenciaturas y posgrados en TESOL. De los 50 voluntarios que aceptaron ser contactados para las entrevistas, 16 fueron seleccionados buscando incluir instructores con diferentes niveles de preparación previa al servicio y experiencia docente. Si bien todos los entrevistados se sintieron adecuadamente preparados para enseñar EBL a adultos con base en estos estándares, pudieron identificar áreas que deberían modificarse o expandirse, especialmente el uso andragógico de la tecnología educativa. Los hallazgos de este estudio también identificaron áreas para futuras investigaciones. Aunque se basan en los Estados Unidos, estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones para los instructores que enseñan inglés a adultos a nivel internacional en función de la influencia global de estos estándares.

As more immigrants and refugees come to the United States and enroll in adult and higher education programs to get the postsecondary credentials they need to get ahead and better understand American culture and society, they often "face challenges and have needs that [are different] from those of other adult learners" (Perry & Hart, 2012, p. 110). Many of the challenges confronting these emergent bi/multilingual learners (EBLs) have less to do with their English-language proficiency and more to do with their "institutional, sociocultural, and material disadvantages" (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 323). Focusing solely on EBLs' limited academic literacy in English and not these other societal dynamics and barriers will never "level the playing field" for these students nor promote their postsecondary achievement. For instance, many adult EBLs struggle to maintain their home languages and cultural practices within a context of discrimination, culture shock (Birnbaum et al., 2012), and increasingly divisive rhetoric that has been characterized as xenophobic, racist, and linguisticist (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Diaz et al. (2016) denounced these deficit, hegemonic perspectives toward EBLs that devalue their existing linguistic capabilities and hold them to the unrealistic expectation of acquiring academic English, often within two years. To counter such expectations, Blanco-Vega et al. (2008) argued that proactive

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interventions and supportive practices should be implemented to facilitate the academic and social adjustment of EBLs and to foster their positive educational outcomes. Ultimately, "learning more about how [adult emergent bi/multilingual] learners make sense of their own learning and how teachers perceive their students' performance can shed light on effective teaching and learning" (Taskiran & Aydin, 2018, p. 1).

Most adult learners must also balance multiple responsibilities along with their academic and language studies (Day et al., 2011; Gaddy, 2014). Adult EBLs in the United States often face other problems, such as being away from or losing family members, being poor or having a lot of debt, losing their personal and professional status, and having difficulty in developing academic English-language proficiency (Magro, 2008). For adult immigrant EBLs, education in a new country can represent "hope, a good job, and security" (p. 28), but adult learners, including EBLs, learn differently from children (Gaddy, 2014). Malcolm Knowles introduced the term *andragogy* to the United States in the 1970s to make this distinction. Adults are generally more pragmatic and focused than children are (Knowles et al., 2015), especially regarding their learning needs and goals, because adults must earn a living, pay bills, and care for their families. Due to these additional responsibilities, adults like to apply what they have learned immediately (Hanstock, 2004).

Adults appreciate classroom dynamics and practices that are more student-centered and that encourage them to become autonomous learners who build on their previous experiential and informal learning (Hanstock, 2004; Hellman et al., 2019). As they acquire English, adult EBLs must be given the opportunity to demonstrate the pragmatic and social functions of language within dynamic, communicative contexts that reflect the "complicated, situated, and socially influenced nature of language learning, immigration, and identity construction" (Warriner, 2010, p. 28).

Acknowledging the complex psycho-social-emotional realities of adult EBLs in any English-dominant country, Doran (2014) affirmed the importance of more holistic instructional approaches that build on and leverage students' cultural backgrounds and strengths while acknowledging the various inequities and challenges they may be encountering. Developing and implementing interventions that focus on the whole person in their social context, particularly the factors that impact their adjustment to American culture (Birnbaum et al., 2012; Blanco-Vega et al., 2008), is critical. As Taskiran and Aydin (2018) cautioned, "teachers should be informed about how their perceptions might affect their teaching and how their students might be affected by [any] negative perceptions" (p. 6) from their instructors. These realities beg the following questions: Do instructors of adult EBLs receive sufficient preservice preparation to develop the self-efficacy and agency required to address the complex learning and psycho-social-emotional needs of their students? More fundamentally, what exactly do effective language teachers need to know and to demonstrate in their practice?

Although many professional associations work with and support educators of adult learners, only one, TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] International Association, Inc., publishes standards and performance indicators related to what instructors of adult EBLs should know and be able to do (Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults, 2008). Clearly, what educators of adult EBLs need to know and be able to do is complex and multifaceted, but there is consistency among the TESOL standards and other TESOL publications targeting English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors of adults. For example, Hellman et al. (2019) identified elements of good instruction for adult EBLs that clearly overlap with the TESOL standards and performance indicators (e.g., differentiation and inclusion) as well as components of adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2015), translanguaging (Dubetz & Collet, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2015; Parmegiani, 2019), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), culturally responsive/sustaining and decolonizing pedagogies, and social justice (Gay, 2002; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Martin et al., 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Their elements of good teaching include: 1) leveraging the resources adult EBLs bring into the classroom; 2) promoting a supportive learning environment that reduces anxiety and builds trust, thus *lowering the affective filter* (Krashen, 1985); 3) using translanguaging practices (i.e., "invite learners' home languages and cultures into the classroom"); 4) demonstrating expectations for success for all learners; 5) making communicative activities engaging and tasks relevant to adults' learning goals; 6) using and practicing authentic language; 7) designing lessons so adult learners engage with meaningful content; 8) differentiating instruction; 9) promoting self-directed learning; 10) making frequent comprehension checks and adjusting instruction accordingly; 11) conducting formative assessments and providing strategic feedback; and 12) incorporating learners'

feedback and reflections when making decisions about summative assessments. As embodiments of the TESOL Standards, these elements also guided the research design and questions for this study.

### Research Questions

Given that the TESOL standards are often used to guide and inform the coursework offered in preservice preparation programs for instructors of adult EBLs internationally, they were the basis for the research questions that guided this study.

1. How do instructors of adult EBLs perceive the alignment of their preservice preparation with the TESOL standards for the preparation of instructors?
2. How did the nature and duration of their preservice preparation influence instructors' feelings of readiness to address their adult EBLs' learning needs?

### Conceptual Framework

Given the complex, multivariate nature of teaching English to adult EBLs, the more generic concepts of teacher knowledge in English-language teaching as described in Shulman (1986, 1987) and Grossman's (1990) framework, coupled with Andrews' (2001, 2003, 2007) emphasis on language proficiency and awareness via teacher language awareness (TLA) and García's teaching of multilingual, multiracial EBLs via critical multi-lingual awareness (CMLA), address the pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of learners embedded in the TESOL standards. Bandura's (1982, 2001) notions of self-efficacy and agency address the performance indicators in the TESOL Standards by detailing how this pedagogical content knowledge should manifest in skillful instruction with students. Taken together, these diverse, yet complimentary, concepts provided an appropriately comprehensive conceptual framework for this study.

### Teacher Knowledge in English-Language Teaching

Shulman's (1986, 1987) and Grossman's (1990) foundational work explored what English instructors needed to know and do so they could teach effectively, including their belief that deficits in preservice preparation can have long-lasting repercussions. Specific components of Shulman's (1987) framework, such as *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK), or demonstrating the ability to teach a content area in comprehensible ways to students; *teacher knowledge* or exhibiting insight into "the complexities of the pedagogical process" (p. 20); and *knowledge of learners*, were complemented by Grossman's emphasis on teaching context. Combined, these components were particularly relevant to this study's research questions.

Despite the common threads and approaches between teaching English in secondary settings—the focus of much of Shulman and Grossman's work—and teaching English as an additional language to adults, there are unique challenges to teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) that suggest Shulman and Grossman's framework might not prove comprehensive enough. With English-language instruction with EBLs, both TLA (Andrews, 2001, 2003, 2007) and CMLA (García, 2008, 2015) are essential components of effective teaching.

### Teacher language awareness

TLA added a dimension or "subcomponent" (Andrews, 2001) to PCK by highlighting a language instructor's ability to use, analyze, and teach language, or what Andrews (2007) defined as the instructor's own command of the language (*user domain*), knowledge of linguistic rules and structures (*analyst domain*), and skill at planning instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse learners (*teacher domain*). Enhanced TLA enables instructors to integrate language with content instruction, respond to language-related questions, recognize dialectical varieties, and socialize learners into content-specific academic language (Lindahl, 2019). Although originally applied exclusively to EFL teaching contexts, Andrews (2003) conceded that TLA may apply equally to instructors whose home language is English. Lindahl (2019) argued that TLA should be incorporated into preservice training coursework as well as supervised student teaching seminars to facilitate the integration of TLA into teaching practice (Lindahl & Baecher, 2016).

### Critical multi-lingual awareness

García (2015) expanded and transformed TLA into CMLA by including additional aspects. Beyond knowledge of second language acquisition as expressed in TLA, García asserted that ESOL instructors

must develop “specialized knowledge about the social, political, and economic struggles that surround the languages [the students’ home and new], about pedagogical practices surrounding bilingualism, and about bilingualism itself” (García, 2008, p. 390) to work with their EBLs effectively. García’s conceptualization of CMLA and respect for bilingualism also align nicely with translanguaging and other elements of the TESOL teaching standards, especially student-affirming, culturally relevant/sustaining, and decolonized pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Martin et al., 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

#### *Teacher self-efficacy and agency*

To challenge the more passive stimulus-response reactivity of behaviorism, Bandura (1982) defined “perceived self-efficacy” as the judgments regarding “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122) versus simply reacting to them. He claimed that social environments may constrain or aid people to behave optimally and that their ability to do so depends, in part, upon “how efficacious they are perceived to be” (p. 131). Often, people give up trying because of the obstacles they face and their doubts about their ability to overcome them successfully. Ultimately, their ability to be efficacious involves changing the social environment so that the competencies they already possess can have the most impact.

In 2001, Bandura challenged the reactive nature of behaviorism further by positing the notion of agency, which refers to “acts done intentionally” (p. 6). Because there is deliberation and choice with agency, there is also “the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution” (p. 8). For Bandura, efficacy beliefs are the “foundation” of human agency because, “unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (p. 10). In educational settings, access to needed resources and support can become factors of effective agency.

#### *Positionality and Terminology*

The author has been a licensed social worker for over 30 years and has worked within the field of adult literacy, primarily with adult EBLs in postsecondary settings, as an instructor, counselor, and administrator for over 20 years. This professional experience and training in TESOL prompted the focus of this study and its research questions. The use of the term “*emergent bi/multilingual learner*” is inspired and affirmed by the work of Otheguy et al. (2015) and Colombo et al. (2019) and is intended to counter the pervasive deficit models in educational contexts in the United States and other English-dominant countries surrounding adults learning English as an additional language, challenge the hegemony of English, and acknowledge and leverage students’ full linguistic repertoires. Similarly, the term “learning English as an additional language” acknowledges the linguistic strengths of our students and their families who are already bi- or multilingual.

#### *Methodology*

Recruitment for research participants occurred using TESOL networks and listservs and contacting organizations and universities that provide preservice preparation for instructors of adult EBLs throughout the United States. The data sources were demographic questionnaires, to ascertain an accurate sample profile, and semi-structured interviews, with the qualitative data analysis informed by Saldaña (2016).

#### *Participants*

Using existing TESOL professional networks, including organizations, colleges, and universities with preparation programs in TESOL throughout the United States, instructors were contacted directly with the goal of selecting a combination of novice instructors with three years or fewer of teaching experience (Faez & Valeo, 2012) and more experienced instructors with 10 or more years of teaching experience who had different levels of preservice preparation. Purposeful sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was used to select 16 instructors with varied preparation backgrounds and levels of teaching experience who were randomly and proportionately selected from the volunteer participant pool. Once eligible research volunteers agreed to participate, a mutually convenient time to conduct the semi-structured interview was established. All participants were given the opportunity to review the interview questions in advance. Prior to the interview, informed consent as mandated by Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards was obtained. A demographic overview of the interview participants, listed by pseudonyms, can be found in Table 1.



Participant	Race	Gender	Preparation	Teaching Exp.
Angela	White	Female	Cert./PhD	10 years
Boyd	White	Male	MA	30+ years
Bryce	White	Male	MA	10 years
Caroline	White	Female	MA	1 year
Constance	White	Female	Certificate	12 years
Crystal	White	Female	MA	3 years
Flor	Latinx	Female	Certificate	3 years
Israel	Latinx	Male	Bachelor	18 years
Jesse	White	Male	Certificate	3 years
Lidia	Black	Female	MA	28 years
Marcia	White	Female	MA	10 years
Petra	Latinx	Female	Cert./MA	22 years
Rachel	White	Female	MA	3 years
Sam	White	Male	Cert./MA	11 years
Sharon	White	Female	Certificate	3 years
Sylvia	White	Female	MA	25 years

Note. Pseudonyms have been used

Table 1: Demographic overview of interview participants

### Data collection

There were two data sources for this study: (1) demographic questionnaires and (2) semi-structured interviews with instructors of adult EBLs.

### Demographic questionnaires

Prior to the individual interviews, research participants completed a demographic questionnaire. Beyond basic descriptive questions (age, race, and gender), the items on the questionnaire explored the level of preparation and years of teaching experience with adult EBLs. The aim of the questionnaire was to develop an accurate sample profile.

### Interviews with instructors

Given that interview participants were located throughout the United States, most of the semi-structured interviews were conducted via *Zoom* and all were audio recorded. The interviews typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interview questions were piloted prior to and revised as needed throughout the course of the study. Even though the interview questions came from the TESOL standards, they were written in a way to explore how self-reflective and analytical each participant was about their teaching practice (Lund, 2016).

### Data analysis

The author/lead researcher transcribed all audio-recorded interviews. Prior to coding, the accompanying transcripts were reviewed and edited by all participants. After this member checking and revision, the transcripts were "solo coded" by hand using a combination of *a priori* codes from the TESOL standards and inductive codes derived from the interview transcripts themselves (Saldaña, 2016). Using the lenses of the research questions and the conceptual framework, the data were analyzed at the sentence level. Multiple rounds of coding occurred to identify and then refine the patterns evidenced in the data. These initial codes were ultimately combined into overarching themes and subthemes.

### Findings

Participants, regardless of the type of preservice program, felt sufficiently prepared to teach adult EBLs based on the TESOL standards, but they did articulate shortcomings. For example, certificate holders felt that their preparation was "practical" and "application-oriented" but did not provide ample time to address all aspects related to effective teaching, especially assessment. Graduate degree holders, on the other hand, felt that their preparation focused "too heavily on theory and research," with the only practical

application provided via the mandatory teaching practicum. Closer analysis of the interview transcripts revealed overarching themes that were a combination of what was embedded in the *a priori* codes within the TESOL standards, like andragogy, student-centered pedagogy, and planning for instruction, and those that were manifest solely via inductive codes, like implementing instruction via the teaching practicum and distance teaching and learning. Clearly, since many of the interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, this reality impacted how instructors reflected upon and evaluated their preservice preparation. The five overarching themes were: 1) andragogy, 2) student-centered pedagogy, 3) preparing for instruction, 4) implementing instruction via the teaching practicum, and 5) distance teaching and learning, with sub-themes in each.

### *Andragogy*

The principles of adult learning theory, or *andragogy* (Knowles et al., 2015), were appropriately incorporated throughout the standards and the performance criteria within the Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults (2008) and were evident in the interview participants' reflections on their preservice preparation. The two principles that came up most consistently in the interviews were the importance of respecting students as adults and promoting learner autonomy and agency.

#### Respecting students as adults

For Israel, Sam, Lidia, Bryce, Marcia, and Flor, empathy and listening nonjudgmentally are the primary ways of showing respect and fostering personal connections with their adult EBLs (Housel, 2021a). Appealing to a sense of common purpose and shared learning goals, Jesse encouraged his younger adult students to become less dependent on their cell phones as a "security blanket" and more reliant on one another as adult learners to foster language acquisition. Boyd articulated a basic tenet of andragogy by how he shows respect to students: "Adults need to know why they are studying something and how it relates to their goals...adults are pragmatic." For Flor, that pragmatism involves finding out what her students want to learn, adapting the curriculum to meet their learning needs, and planning instruction that matches "the realities of [her] students' lives." For example, Marcia and Jesse were both "shocked" at first when they heard stories from refugees or victims of domestic violence. However, they soon realized that allowing students to talk about their experiences helped build stronger personal connections and a stronger sense of community among their students. Similarly, Israel and Rachel were concerned about not only adult students' language acquisition but also their survival needs, including adjusting to a new country and culture. For Israel, "every time I can teach English as well as how to navigate New York City [in all its complexity for immigrants], that's rewarding." He asserted that the main goal of an adult ESOL classroom is to provide "them [adult EBLs] a space to grow," which Sylvia does by encouraging her students to act as mentors and guides to their fellow adult students.

#### Promoting learner autonomy and agency

The instructors of adult EBLs interviewed fostered learner autonomy and agency in a variety of ways. Since Boyd has worked in many higher education settings, he likes to help his students "develop metacognitive skills, so they are reflecting and becoming owners of their own learning." Crystal and Jesse have taught many writing classes, so they have used peer-editing as an activity to foster autonomy and agency. Jesse is thrilled "when the students start to take ownership of the learning process," or what Crystal couched as students becoming self-regulated learners who are "more autonomous and pro-active in their own learning." Sylvia has nurtured learner autonomy by having students read literature independently in her writing classes to promote the acquisition of academic vocabulary and critical thinking skills. Flor strives to promote student engagement through pair and group work where students support one another and become more autonomous because "they can rely on each other to acquire the language, not just the instructor." Sharon likes to give her students resources for self-learning, especially during class breaks. Petra stressed the importance of "giving clear directions to students" and supporting them to "negotiate meaning," which is a skill they can apply in their daily lives outside of their ESOL classroom. Promoting goal achievement through creating career plans is a way that Caroline promotes learner autonomy and agency. Even something as simple as giving her students choices about learning activities and reading materials is a way that Rachel fosters autonomy and agency in her classes. For Angela, language acquisition is fundamentally about personal power that promotes learner agency for adult EBLs in their adopted homelands. Constance shared a great story about student empowerment and agency. She saw one of her students pacing up and down the corridor of her school, in a heated discussion on her cell phone. Moments later, she entered Constance's office, beaming, elated that she had

advocated in English with the transit authorities to get a refund after being charged twice for her fare on her MetroCard.

### *Student-centered pedagogy*

Even though there were many components of student-centered pedagogy covered in their preservice preparation, the three areas raised most consistently were: 1) incorporating their students' background knowledge and lived experience into their instruction; 2) developing awareness and sensitivity to the socio-cultural-emotional factors that can affect learning progress and outcomes; and 3) refining teaching strategies to enhance student engagement by fostering a *community of learners* in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), whether in-person or virtual.

### Students' background knowledge and lived experience

The instructors interviewed usually conducted a needs assessment to gain insight into their students' background knowledge and lived experiences. With these insights, they could plan their instruction more effectively and in a way that was more meaningful to their students. For Lidia, honoring what students bring into the classroom is crucial, which Bryce couched as becoming aware of adult EBLs' "different life experiences...based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background," including being "functionally illiterate in their home languages, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), and true beginners in English." Crystal asserted that discovering what is happening "behind the scenes" with her students is critical so she can understand their behavior and interactions in her adult ESOL classrooms better. Part of this insight for Boyd is understanding a student's sense of identity or "loss of identity and a loss of routine" during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, which impacted dynamics and retention in his virtual classrooms in profound ways. Such insights for Israel honor students' singular humanity and complexity by not "putting them into boxes."

### Socio-cultural-emotional factors

A range of socio-cultural-emotional factors and their impact upon adult EBLs' language acquisition and learning outcomes were mentioned multiple times and were one of the most prominent codes throughout the interview transcripts. Participants' comments and concerns usually focused on motivation, demonstrating empathy and encouragement, attending to adult EBLs' psychosocial needs, providing additional supports, and making referrals to outside agencies as needed (Housel, 2021a). Fundamentally, for Israel, "the state of mind of the students...is really important when it comes to your ability to teach them." For Boyd, helping students make the adjustment to postsecondary and higher education culture was crucial to their academic success. Caroline mentioned supporting students as they adjusted and coped with the constantly changing dynamics surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Constance and Sam discussed the importance of making personal connections with students (Housel, 2021a, 2021b), which can inspire and motivate them to succeed. These personal connections between adult EBLs and their instructors resonated with Gross' (2020) notion of *someone(s)* in trauma-responsive teaching practices.

Conveying empathy and providing encouragement for Israel, Sam, and Flor and simply saying that you believe in your students' capabilities and potential can be enough. For example, an adult EBL in a corporate setting shared with Constance that she learned enough English [to get promoted] because someone in authority believed in her. They said, "You can do this!" Sam and Boyd mentioned the importance of providing outside academic supports, especially in higher education settings, and coordinating services more effectively to serve students better (Housel, 2021a). For Marcia, instructors should "learn to listen," but, "when a student's life circumstances are severe enough...they need to be addressed by a professional," which Sylvia needed to do for one of her students struggling with mental illness. Israel and Jesse stressed the value of "networking" by developing relationships with community organizations to avoid "blind referrals" and easing students' acceptance of needed supports.

### Student engagement and fostering a community of learners

For Rachel, the best way to promote student engagement is to "create a safe space for students to learn," which epitomizes Krashen's (1985) notion of *lowering the affective filter*. Jesse discussed supplementing curricula and keeping classes "dynamic" as a way of engaging adult EBLs. Constance, on the other hand, grappled with the difference between holding her students' attention as a way of promoting engagement and fostering their comprehension and learning: "I can hold students' attention and get them to stay with me, but that's not the same as learning." Rachel, Flor, Israel, Angela, Lidia, Bryce, Marcia, Jesse, and

Crystal all mentioned the importance of “creating a community of learners” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 163) in their interviews, but only Angela mentioned the importance of leveraging her students’ home languages as a resource for English-language acquisition (Housel, 2021a). She challenged the “English only” mandates that are common in many adult ESOL classrooms in the United States, which also emanated from Krashen (1985), specifically his notion of *comprehensible input*, and extolled the virtues of translanguaging (Dubetz & Collet, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2015; Parmegiani, 2019) as a means of acquiring English in more student-centered and affirming ways.

### *Preparing for Instruction*

When preparing for instruction, educators of adult EBLs first thought about the learning environment, teaching context, and culture of the specific adult ESOL program. They then developed lesson plans accordingly and acquired or adapted materials and resources to make them linguistically and culturally appropriate for their students.

### Learning environment, teaching context, and culture of adult ESOL programs

Because of home language enclaves in many larger cities, teaching ESOL in the United States can often feel like an “EFL setting” for Sharon and Boyd, which makes for a unique teaching and learning context. Because of these multilingual and multicultural realities, Boyd asserted that instructors of adult EBLs must grapple with the following question: “What makes for good learning in my particular teaching context?” For Crystal, Constance, and Flor, understanding the unique culture of each adult ESOL program was critical to understanding the teaching context. Based on programmatic requirements, Petra asserted the importance of “contextualized” instruction, so students can acquire content knowledge and the language simultaneously. Aligned with andragogy, Rachel advocated for developing practical learning goals based on each programmatic context and its students’ needs. On a more micro-level, Caroline and Jesse felt that fostering a welcoming and student-centered classroom culture and environment was fundamental to positive student learning outcomes and success. Rachel accomplished this by developing a consistent class routine and gradually “deepening each component of the routine.”

### Developing lesson plans

As a self-identified “over-planner,” Sharon expressed the feelings of other participants regarding the prominence of developing lesson plans in their preservice programs when she said, “I came out of the program definitely knowing how to do lesson plans.” Lidia, Marcia, and Bryce grappled with the “all students are alike” paradigm in their preparation programs, which Haddix (2015) called the “one-size-fits-all factory model” that “attempts to be everything to everyone” but allows “the status quo to prevail” (p. 65). Related to this paradigm, Rachel described the lesson plan templates provided in her preservice program as “controlled and formatted.” Caroline found the “lesson plan templates that they had us use [in preservice preparation], with standards, objectives, and materials, were pretty extensive,” but “a bit unrealistic in practice.” Post-preparation, there is often not much time to develop lesson plans when teaching in multiple programs, given the adjunct nature of teaching adult EBLs in the USA and, for Angela, “there is no incentive monetarily to do a lot of preparation.” Boyd concurred that many adult ESOL schools are “businesses [run for profit]...they [only] pay you for the classes,” and not for preparation.

### Linguistically and culturally appropriate materials and resources

The interview participants usually raised the notion of linguistic and cultural appropriateness when discussing how curricula and materials needed to be “adjusted” and how instruction should be differentiated to address students’ learning needs. Petra engaged her lower-level Latinx students by reading *The Circuit* in one of her classes and having them write a letter to the author. Like Petra, Sylvia has used a variety of immigrant stories, including those of refugees, to resonate with her students’ lived cultural experiences. Crystal mentioned that many adult ESOL programs do not have a “set curricula,” which allows the instructor some “flexibility and freedom” to select “authentic and age-appropriate” materials. Caroline echoed these sentiments by embracing the “freedom to choose our materials” and the “flexibility” in “adapting the curriculum to meet students’ needs while still addressing state standards in adult education.” Sylvia also relished the opportunity to develop her own curricula to address her students’ learning needs and interests in pre-academic ESOL programs. Even when programs have set curricula, Flor and Constance have often found the content to be “too advanced” for their students, so they need to be “constantly modified” and adapted.



Typically, the concepts of individualizing instruction or universal design for learning (UDL) were usually couched as adapting curricula or materials to meet individual students' learning needs, which, in adult ESOL programs, generally means adaptations that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. For Boyd, like Gross (2020), he cautioned to "look beyond the surface" to understand students' behaviors in the classroom and ascertain and assess their needs. For Bryce, "when you see someone struggling, you approach them, acknowledge their struggles, ask what kind of support you can provide, and differentiate instruction" accordingly. Similarly, Lidia asserted that students are "not ashamed" or "hiding needing differentiation and support." Israel and Jesse echoed these sentiments by stating that instructors of adult EBLs should "follow the students, not the book," and Israel cautioned that "each student is basically a class, so you are teaching 15 classes simultaneously." Constance, Caroline, and Rachel have incorporated principles of UDL by using multimedia presentations, especially visual cues (Dubetz & Collet, 2020), or connecting photos with writing samples on WhatsApp for beginning students in their adult ESOL classrooms. Differentiating instruction and providing individualized attention in these ways fostered feelings of self-efficacy and agency for the instructors and nurtured learner autonomy for their adult EBLs.

### Implementing Instruction via the Teaching Practicum

In preservice programs, teaching candidates implement instruction, often for the first time, through a guided and supervised teaching practicum. Like Faez and Valeo (2012), interview participants identified their practicum as the most transformational experience of their preparation as instructors of adult EBLs. They particularly highlighted the importance of good mentors and peer feedback in learning how to check for learner comprehension, solicit learner feedback, and recycle content. For Sharon, her teaching practicum was "really the only class you need to get you started [as an instructor of adult EBLs]." Caroline shared Sharon's sentiments by saying, "I learned a lot from my practicum experiences. I definitely needed the practice, so the practicum clarified concepts presented in the coursework." Similarly, Jesse felt that the practicum helped him bridge the "disconnect between the classroom and [teaching] practice," which Sylvia affirmed. For her, the coursework prior to the practicum "did not provide a lot of practical preparation for teaching." Constance, Boyd, Sam, Lidia, Bryce, and Angela leveraged their experiences of teaching and living abroad, and Israel, Marcia, Petra, and Flor leveraged their experiences as immigrants to the United States to inform and enrich their teaching practice. Petra stressed the importance of classroom management, which was often crystallized for the first time during the practicum experience. As mentioned earlier, Jesse discovered an innovative solution by leveraging "peer-mediated and interactive activities" to cultivate a "community of learners" when students' use of cell phones disrupted the flow of his class (Dubetz & Collet, 2020). Constance also learned how crucial "thinking on your feet" and "being creative" are for an instructor of adult EBLs. Caroline, Rachel, Crystal, Lidia, Marcia, Jesse, Sylvia, and Constance also mentioned how valuable receiving feedback on their teaching through observations, in-person or via video, was to their evolution as educational professionals.

### *Importance of good mentors*

Sharon mentioned that her mentor helped her with scaffolding activities, giving directions, and pacing, and Caroline learned about the registers of English, adjusting "teacher talk," and addressing connected speech through her teaching mentor. Jesse described his mentor as being "very dedicated" and "giving very thorough feedback" on his teaching. Rachel's mentor "made sure that we were working well with the [teaching] materials and resources," including "the ones we selected ourselves." Crystal's mentor prompted her growth by discussing the challenges Crystal was facing with her practicum class. She was given clear feedback and direction about developing "goal-oriented lesson plans" and "pacing and giving clear instructions for activities." For example, her mentor often cautioned, "I think you are going faster than you think you are."

### *Importance of peer feedback*

Participants found that the feedback they received from classmates and peers in their teaching practicum supplemented and enhanced the guidance and feedback they received from their mentors. For example, Rachel had to videotape lessons for peer feedback and to participate in discussion groups after viewing her peers' videotapes. They also did in-person observations with one another with "pre- and post-interviews when we would observe," where each student teacher could request specific feedback on different aspects of their teaching (e.g., giving directions, scaffolding, pacing, etc.). Rachel found that watching others,

often seasoned instructors with years of experience in the field before pursuing a master's degree in TESOL, gave her "many ideas" and "confidence."

In addition to the peer observations that occurred during their preservice teaching practicum, Petra and Sylvia have found peer observations in the field to be extremely helpful in their professional growth and evolution as instructors. Crystal, Jesse, and Caroline advocated for co-teaching with a peer, which provided built-in mechanisms for feedback, guidance, and moral support. With that said, after the intensive guidance and support from co-teaching in her practicum, Caroline found teaching independently post-preparation "jarring" or what Atay (2007) called "reality shock" (p. 214).

### Distance Teaching and Learning

*It's a minority of students that are able to engage with the technology and do the online things very effectively and get as much out of the experience as they can.... (Sam)*

Although Sam and Boyd had extensive online teaching experience prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt shift to distance teaching and learning, this was an area that they learned "on the job" because it was not addressed in their preservice preparation programs explicitly nor comprehensively. Bryce also acknowledged the importance of coursework in preservice preparation that addresses the andragogical use of educational technology. Given that the majority of the data for this study were collected during the peak of the pandemic lockdown, many of the interview participants lamented areas lacking in their preservice preparation, especially related to their struggles adjusting to remote instruction and compensating for the digital divide experienced by many of their adult EBLs (Boeren et al., 2020; Housel, 2021b).

### Remote instruction

Similar to the findings in Housel (2023), most participants mentioned receiving little or no preparation for online or remote instruction. Flor and Sharon mentioned having "some exposure to online activities" in their preservice certificate programs. This minimal exposure prompted Angela to assert the "importance of educational technology," especially for novice instructors of adult EBLs. Crystal learned about using LMSs [learning management systems]," but the "actual synchronous [teaching] time online was new for me." Sharon embraced asynchronous activities in remote learning as a way to enhance content instruction and language acquisition for her students, a notion supported by UDL and Housel (2021a). For Sharon, "asynchronous instruction can become beneficial for people who just need that extra time. They can't move through or process information as fast." For Constance, so much of preparing to teach, especially implementing instruction and conducting informal assessments, involved circulating around a physical classroom to ascertain students' engagement and comprehension (Dubetz & Collet, 2020). She has found remote instruction via Zoom challenging because she cannot "read the room" or informally assess students, especially when "their webcams are off." Despite his extensive experience with online and remote instruction, Sam still found the lack of face-to-face, in-person interactions "demotivating" for both him and his students.

### Digital Divide

The digital divide is a confluence of the instructors' lack of preparation for remote instruction and the students' socio-cultural-emotional factors. With the dramatic shift to distance teaching and learning caused by the COVID-19 public health lockdown, Sam, Boyd, and Flor mentioned having to teach "technology with no resources," especially with students who lacked equipment, sufficient digital literacy, and adequate bandwidth and WiFi (Housel, 2023). For Sam, "that technological curve hit them [adult EBLs] hard. I was trying to provide support to them in those areas as well as deliver content." Rachel found this "learning curve" particularly challenging for beginning-level adult EBLs. Both instructors and students alike needed the equipment (laptops, webcams, and hot spots) to engage in remote instruction effectively and productively, yet Flor found that many adult ESOL programs lacked the funding to provide these needed resources.

The digital divide reinforces the importance of acknowledging and leveraging students' lived experiences to adapt and differentiate instructional approaches to meet their learning needs and realities more effectively (Housel, 2021a). These instructional adjustments are also hallmarks of culturally responsive/sustaining, decolonizing, and student-centered pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Martin et al., 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

## Discussion and Implications

Although the research participants felt adequately prepared to teach adult EBLs following their preservice programs based on the Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults (2008), they were still able to identify shortcomings that should be addressed. Baecher (2012) and Farrell (2012) might say these suggested modifications are providing a preliminary “feedback loop” to these programs. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Provide more instruction and guidance regarding informal and formal assessments, including implementing students’ self-assessment, into teaching practice.
2. Include coursework on the use of educational technology, including andragogical best teaching practices for adult EBLs, especially given the constantly changing nature of educational technology (Housel, 2023)
3. Incorporate discussions of classroom management issues encountered in adult ESOL classrooms into all coursework, not just the teaching practicum. This discussion should include managing disruptive, uncooperative, and seemingly disinterested students.
4. Incorporate the discussion of co-occurring factors (Housel, 2020) and teach best practices for adult EBLs with undiagnosed learning dis/abilities, limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), functional illiteracy in their home languages, mental health issues, social anxiety, as well as those on the autism spectrum (especially given the communicative nature of most instruction in adult ESOL classrooms), those dealing with domestic violence and other forms of trauma, etc.
5. Using trauma-informed and responsive teaching practices (Gross, 2020) should be a part of all preparation courses. This is because many adult EBLs, especially refugees, have experienced trauma.
6. Incorporate more student-affirming, strengths-based approaches like translanguaging (Dubetz & Collet, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2015; Parmegiani, 2019) and culturally responsive/sustaining and decolonized pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Martin et al., 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017) into preservice coursework. These strengths-based approaches attempt to counter the deficit model of learning English as an adult as well as the hegemony of “English only” found in most adult ESOL classrooms in English-dominant countries.
7. Prepare instructors for the realities of teaching adult EBLs in the field by discussing the range and diversity of existing ESOL programs, the ubiquity of standardized formal assessments used, and the disconnect that can occur between mandated assessments, curricula, and adult EBLs’ learning needs.

## Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Increasing the number of interview participants or incorporating follow-up interviews into those already conducted might have yielded richer data. Similarly, given that the TESOL standards apply to EFL instructors of adults as well, this study should be replicated internationally to compare the findings between an exclusively American and an international sample. Given the explosion in the use of educational technology, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, future research should explore the andragogical use of currently available applications and platforms to improve digital literacy and language acquisition among adult EBLs. Translanguaging in ESOL classes for adults in the United States is another area that needs more research. Besides Parmegiani (2019), most research related to translanguaging has been conducted in Pre-K through 12 settings. Future research could also explore the degree to which classroom management issues, co-occurring factors (Housel, 2020), and trauma-informed and responsive teaching practices (Gross, 2020) are addressed in preservice preparation programs for instructors of adult EBLs. Finally, the germination of the *Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults* began in 1999 and was published along with performance indicators in 2008. I would suggest that the standards be re-evaluated. This re-evaluation seems appropriate in a COVID-impacted world because, at present, there is no standard or performance indicator that addresses the andragogical use of educational technology.

## Conclusion

*We can't just grab someone who speaks the language and is somewhat educated and put them in a classroom and say, 'Do your best.' We need, our students need and deserve, more than that. (Israel)*

*Teaching [English] is not a simple case of opening the book and pointing at the page, which I think a lot of people think. (Boyd)*

*There is a lack of respect for teachers, in general, but language teachers especially. There is a fallacious notion that if you speak a language, you can teach the language...the assumption is that anyone can do it, which takes away from the art of teaching. (Angela)*

These quotations support the purpose of this exploratory study: the need for more uniform, thorough, and comprehensive preservice preparation for instructors of adult EBLs in the United States and likely internationally. The findings of this study affirmed the overall quality of existing preservice preparation programs that have used the Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults (2008) to guide the content of their coursework but also identified areas that require modification and expansion. Further research regarding these identified gaps within preservice preparation programs needs to occur among a larger sample of instructors of adult EBLs in the United States and internationally. The outcomes of this research could confirm, disconfirm, or elaborate on the findings from this study.

Fundamentally, our quest should be to counter the fallacy that any speaker of English can teach the language with no preparation or training (Darling-Hammond, 2006). As Angela asserted, we should also strive to elevate the art of teaching adult EBLs so that instructors are treated with the societal respect and dignity and receive the professional support and compensation they so richly deserve. Better prepared and supported instructors will feel appreciated and valued, which, in turn, will heighten their feelings of professional self-efficacy and agency and enhance the quality of instruction provided and the personal connections made to their adult EBLs. In the end, these powerful, impactful human connections are the bedrock of both effective teaching and learning and trauma-responsive teaching practices (Gross, 2020).

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## Appendix

## Interview Questions

*Interviewer:* Thank you for agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview after completing the online survey. I would first like to learn a bit about your experience teaching adult, emergent bi/multilingual students.

- 1) Tell me about your most rewarding teaching experience, either with an individual student or an entire class.
- 2) Tell me about a situation with a student or a class you found challenging.
  - a) How did you handle this situation?
- 3) How did the administrators of your program help you manage this challenging situation? a) In your opinion, could they have handled the situation differently?

*Interviewer:* Now, tell me about your preservice preparation.

- 4) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address planning for instruction (lesson planning, selecting materials and resources, etc.)? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 5) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address implementing instruction (pacing instruction, giving directions, and scaffolding activities)? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 6) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address student assessments, both formal and informal? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 7) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address the importance of the teaching context? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 8) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address using different registers of English and adjusting teacher talk to the students' language proficiency? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 9) In your opinion, how well did your preservice preparation address supporting adult learning, including creating a community of learners and promoting learner autonomy? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.

*Interviewer:* Now, tell me about your professional development experiences and the support you get from supervisors and colleagues.

- 10) What areas do you believe should be addressed in professional development and professional conferences?
- 11) Tell me about your supervisors and teaching colleagues where you work. What kind of support do you get from them? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 12) To what degree does your work schedule or life responsibilities impact your ability to attend to your professional growth? Can you give me an example? Tell me more.
- 13) Is there anything else you would like to share?