THE TESOLANZ JOURNAL

VOLUME 32 2024

ISSN 1172-9694

The TESOLANZ Journal is published once a year by TESOLANZ, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Aotearoa/New Zealand (Incorporated), Te Ropu Kaiwhakaako Reo Ingarihi ki Iwi Reo Ke. The journal is double blind peer reviewed. A subscription to the journal is included in the annual membership fee of the Association. Enquiries about membership and subscription to the journal should be addressed to:

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EDITORIAL

The three articles in the 2024 issue of the *TESOLANZ Journal* will be of interest to both ESOL teachers and language teaching researchers.

Paula Arkensteyn's article investigates the extent to which teachers in New Zealand tertiary English language classrooms are queering their teaching practice in response to the Tertiary Education Strategy's call for safe and inclusive learning environments. Based on interviews with teachers and their managers at three institutions, the study identifies common constraints—including curriculum load, course materials, cultural expectations, and teachers' own uncertainty about how to address gender and sexual diversity. Despite these barriers, the study highlights teachers' recognition of the importance of inclusive practices and offers practical suggestions for integrating queer perspectives into everyday teaching.

The second article, by Rosemary Erlam, Tiancheng Zhang, and Morena Botelho de Magalhães, explores the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in language assessment design. Focusing on a reading assessment used in the University of Auckland's Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) programme, the authors investigate whether GenAI can generate reading texts and comprehension items that meet professional standards. While the generated reading text was positively received by expert reviewers, the associated questions were rated as less effective. The study concludes that GenAI shows promise as a support tool, but human oversight remains essential to ensure the quality and validity of assessment materials.

In the third article, Naheen Madarbakus-Ring and Stuart Benson examine the vocabulary appropriacy of TED Talks used in a commercial EAP textbook. Using lexical profiling tools, they analyse the vocabulary demands of 12 TED Talks included in *Keynote 2*. Their findings reveal that while the overall vocabulary load is generally appropriate for the textbook level, some talks are more lexically demanding than others, potentially posing challenges for learners. The authors recommend that teachers provide additional vocabulary support to help learners engage with these authentic listening materials more effectively.

Book reviews by Rachael Harding (Walková's *Linguistic Approaches in English for Academic Purposes*), Ha Hoang (Bauer's *English Phonetics, Phonology and Spelling for the English Language Teacher*), Abdelhamid Safa (Pentón Herrera's *English and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*), and Natalia Beliaeva (Huber's *Tri-constituent Compounds*) complete this year's issue.

Our thanks to all contributors, reviewers, and readers who support *The TESOLANZ Journal*.

Oliver Ballance
May 2025

ARTICLES

"TRYING TO BE INCLUSIVE BY BEING STANDARD WHICH IS ACTUALLY BEING EXCLUSIVE": QUEERING THE TERTIARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Motivated by the aspirations of the Tertiary Education Strategy's call for safe learning environments which take into account learners' identities (Ministry of Education, 2020), this study investigates inclusivity in English language classrooms in New Zealand, focusing on rainbow communities. Using three case studies (a university and two polytechnics), I explore the extent to which teachers are queering the classroom and the constraints that prevent this happening. Findings from semi-structured interviews reveal that both teachers and their managers recognise the importance of queering the classroom. However, teachers articulated a range of barriers including the curriculum load, coursebooks, cultural expectations of the student cohort and their own lack of knowledge. These perceived constraints are discussed to identify potential opportunities to increase inclusivity.

Introduction

Education is a key component in attempts to address marginalization of rainbow communities. In recognition of this, the Tertiary Education Strategy has called for safe learning environments which take into account learners' identities, including their gender and sexuality (Ministry of Education, 2020). There is a corresponding expectation that staff capabilities are developed to support teaching and learning practices that value diverse identities.

This directive is welcome; research in tertiary institutes in New Zealand has noted room for improvement. As an example, a study into the campus climate at Otago University identified that members of rainbow communities have concerns regarding their physical and emotional safety (Treharne et al., 2016). In a study at Waikato University, staff and students highlighted different perceived levels of safety in different departments. Safer spaces were created when more people were 'out', and when straight and cisgender staff (discussed below) were open to discussing diversity. Recommendations included education of both staff and students (Brown et al., 2020).

To clarify potentially unfamiliar terminology, in this article, rainbow or rainbow communities is used as an umbrella term similar to LGBTQAI+: "The term 'rainbow' seeks to unite people of minority sexual orientations, genders, and sex characteristics, without needing to rely on longer acronyms" (Gender Minorities Aotearoa, 2023), with the pluralisation recognising that there are many diverse communities under this umbrella. 'Queer', included in the title of this article in the form of 'queering', is

used as a reclaimed word with an inclusive and positive meaning incorporating those who sit outside cisheterosexuality (encompassing both heterosexuality[straight] and cisgender [those whose gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth]). Cisheteronormativity, a concept used widely in this article, is a social construct which assumes cisheterosexuality as the norm. This leads to the marginalisation of rainbow communities—a consequence of which, I argue, is the need for teachers to queer the classroom.

In terms of teaching and learning practices specific to English language teaching, Nelson (2006, p. 8) points out that "excluding queer perspectives and knowledges from our classrooms and our [research] literature is, in effect, a way of enforcing compulsory heterosexuality, which hardly seems an appropriate role for language educators and researchers". Research in language classrooms highlights exclusionary practices with rainbow students reporting explicit avoidance of queer issues by teachers in a range of contexts globally, including tertiary institutes, high schools and community classes, both in situations where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) and as a second language (ESL) (e.g. Evripidou, 2020; Güney, 2021; Nelson, 2010). These researchers argue avoidance can result from a lack of training around how to incorporate a queer perspective, concerns about a backlash for broaching a sensitive topic, or can be a reflection of the teacher's own cultural and religious background.

These practices can alienate rainbow students as they are not able to express their own identities. Queer students in Japan reported that they had withdrawn from EFL classes due to assumptions surrounding what Moore (2016) describes as heteronormativity in the materials i.e., classrooms are "constructed as domains in which straight people are interacting exclusively with straight people" (Nelson, 2006, p. 2). It can also lead to bullying and mental health issues (Paiz, 2019). In turn, teachers who express prejudicial or homophobic attitudes can negatively affect the construction of gender and sexual identities for heterosexual learners (Gao, 2020).

To date, no investigations have taken place specifically in English language classrooms in New Zealand. It is important to have such investigations because language is a vehicle for social normativity. Barrett (2014) notes that the varieties of language which are legitimised tend to be those advantaged through societal and economic factors and that "theories of gender and sexuality raise important issues regarding marginalization and social normativity that are highly relevant in understanding the social implications of formal linguistic approaches" (p. 196). Within English language education, both research literature and learning materials have been identified as predominantly heteronormative (see Nelson, 2006), likely also to mean cisheteronormative (see Gender Minorities Aotearoa, 2023, for discussion).

Research Questions

My research was undertaken as a dissertation towards a Master's in Applied Linguistics. During my earlier studies, I chanced upon an article entitled "Queering ESL Teaching" (Paiz, 2018) and realised I had never reflected on my practice from a queer perspective. In addition, I was not aware of any discussion amongst my peers or in my professional development specifically for language teachers. This led to my interest in this topic. This study aims to identify the extent to which ESL teachers in the tertiary context in New Zealand recognise rainbow communities as a group worthy of respect and inclusion and whether they respond by incorporating appropriate teaching and learning practices. The support of management is considered key to achieving this (Barozzi and Ojeda, 2014; Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015); therefore, as well as interviewing teachers, I interviewed their line managers. In order to identify the constraints and opportunities of queering the classroom, this research is guided by three questions:

1. How confident and competent are teachers to queer the classroom?
2. How confident are managers to encourage queering of the classroom?
3. What constraints and opportunities are there to queer the classroom?

Methodology

Setting and Recruitment

Institutes were targeted to provide a geographical spread in order to get an understanding of the national context (in two urban areas, a provincial area and in both main islands) and included two case studies from polytechnics and one from a university. The rationale for this was to acknowledge the potential influence of sociocultural factors and to increase confidentiality.

An ESL teacher and their line-manager were interviewed at each targeted campus. As noted, the input of managers was sought as their views have an influence on teachers. For example, in some contexts, teachers have reported concerns about a backlash (Barozzi & Ojeda, 2014; Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015). Furthermore, Tran-Thanh (2020) emphasises the importance of clear policy to encourage inclusivity, so interviewing the managers also had the potential to capture knowledge of wider institutional policies (Barr & Seals, 2018).

As part of the ethics procedure, I recognised the potential for pressure or coercion to participate if I had a pre-existing relationship with a prospective participant. I addressed this by approaching institutes with whom I had no pre-existing relationship. This research also explores how successfully an institute is responding to an objective of the Tertiary Education Strategy, meaning that managers and teachers may have been wary of criticism and resultant loss of face. Trust and clear communication with the goal of enhancing buy-in was essential to the recruitment and openness of

participants (Nelson, 2008). The participants were also provided with the option to withdraw at any time within two weeks after the interview.

Participants did not need to identify as a member of rainbow communities to take part in the study and were not asked a question pertaining to this directly. In preparation for the interviews, I conducted practice interviews with two colleagues to identify potential problems (following Rolland et al., 2019). These practice sessions highlighted that the participant's rainbow identity (or otherwise) could be inferred from the answers. The practice interviews also gave insight into the length of time required to cover the content.

Interviewees for the study were recruited through cold calling. The staff member I spoke to at each of the first three targeted institutes was unknown to me. All three staff members agreed to participate and they recruited the second participant (either a direct line-manager, or a teacher in the programme/course they coordinated) through linear snowball sampling (Evripidou, 2020). Of the final six participants, I had previously worked with one participant, but only in a casual part-time context.

In my information sheet for participants, I clarified that although I was taking measures to maintain confidentiality, there was a small chance they could be identified because the English language teaching community is relatively small.

Researcher Reflexivity

As a middle-class, cisgender, straight, middle-aged, Pākehā woman, I recognise I may be subject to cisheteronormative thinking, and reflected on this while conducting the analysis with the support of my dissertation supervisors, one of whom is a member of rainbow communities. This ongoing reflexivity and support has provided important warrants for interpretations. Given the dearth of research on attitudes of both teachers and managers towards queering the classroom in English language teaching, and the lack of research on English language teaching in the tertiary context in New Zealand, I bring my experience as a classroom teacher and this process of critical reflection to this important research.

Data Collection

In recognition of any potential discomfort caused by discussing a traditionally taboo subject, I conducted face-to-face interviews in a location on campus chosen by the participants (see Rolland et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews were used because they leave room to explore topics raised by the participants (Rolland et al., 2019). Pseudonyms were also used with participants' names from the city polytechnic starting with C, the regional polytechnic with R and the university with U, as described in the table below.

Table 1:
Summary of interview data

Institutional Type	Line Manager	Interview Location	Interview Length	Teacher	Interview Location	Interview Length
City polytechnic	**C**harlotte (also teaches)	Classroom	36:07	**C**harles	Classroom	25:55
Regional polytechnic	**R**ose	Office meeting room	27:50	**R**uby	Office meeting room	31:23
University	**U**rsula (also teaches)	Private office	36:03	**U**riah	Classroom	35:22

The interview questions were adapted from a questionnaire originally developed for pre-service EFL teachers in Spain (Barozzi & Ojeda, 2014) and subsequently modified for use with EFL teaching professionals in Vietnam (Tran-Thanh, 2020). They were designed to gain insight into the participant's background knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about rainbow communities and their perception of the appropriacy of introducing a queer perspective. In addition, at the end of the interview, participants were asked to rate their confidence in queering the classroom on a scale from 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident). This 'measure' offered an accessible opportunity for reflection and summary.

One working day prior to the interview, an email was sent asking the participants to reflect on 1) the amount of queer content in their course books, and 2) any discussion of rainbow communities which may have come up in class. This provided time for participants to recall any critical incidents prior to the interview and acted as a prompt for participants to reflect on "their own beliefs, decision-making practices, values, theories about teaching and attitudes to the practice and their students" (Christison & Murray, 2022, p 215). The focus on course books was deliberate because I expected it would give them an insight into the lack of queer content (see also Dumas, 2010; Paiz, 2018). The following response showed that Ruby (teacher) had had time to reflect on a range of coursebooks.

> When I was reading and looking into the questions that I might be asked…I thought "Gosh, it's all very heteronormative". Not even just this core one, but everything previous, even IELTS books.

To supplement and warrant the interpretations offered by participants, a linguistic landscape study was carried out on each campus. I documented the visibility of rainbow communities by photographing signage in selected areas (see Szabó & Dufva, 2020).

Approach to Analysis of Interview Data

In the first instance, I made use of reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the data from the interviews. This approach recognises that I have engaged with theory and, as a result, I cannot be truly objective (Braun & Clark, 2021). In line with the approach, I did not use pre-conceptualised themes as a framework. Instead, initial themes were generated from the coding in an inductive process i.e., from the data. From these themes, a number of constraints were identified. This required deep engagement over a period of time following the recommended steps of "immersion in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, and returning" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p 332).

Existing research and queer theory provided a lens for deductive analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022). Queer theory draws on poststructuralist theory, which argues that social constructs are not fixed, and neither is, what is considered, reality. In line with this, the recognition of the homosexual/heterosexual binary as a social and cultural construct (Nelson, 2008), makes it a particularly fruitful lens through which to approach my data.

The resultant data was used to identify constraints which I report on in the next section.

Constraints Identified in the Data

Coursebooks

Overall, there was a lack of awareness prior to the interview that mainstream course material in English language teaching could be intentionally designed to represent a cisheteronormative worldview. Almost all participants articulated the use of reflective practice to better understand their own beliefs regarding this, such as this comment by Uriah (teacher) from the university site:

> I thought 'Oh this is a great topic and it's got to be involved in the curriculum a little more as well'.

In our interactions, participants indicated awareness that certain topics were not covered in coursebooks. Charles (teacher) deftly encapsulated this avoidance by saying "they don't want to tread on anybody's toes" and, in terms of rainbow communities, he felt the American publishers "wouldn't go there at all". Charles also indicated that he would only feel confident about incorporating queer content if it was presented in a coursebook, an opinion similarly reported by EFL teachers in Greece and Turkey (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015; Güney, 2022). Participants felt it was reasonable to expect publishers to incorporate queer content and Charlotte (manager), wondered if more recent coursebooks may already include it.

In fact, critics note that publishers of coursebooks for the global market avoid queer content for commercial reasons. In addition to 'sex', publishers are also known to

avoid other topics encompassed by the acronym PARSNIP (Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Narcotics, Isms and Pork) (Mishan & Timmis, 2015). As Paiz (2019) astutely argues, although at first glance neutrality may seem unproblematic, avoidance reinforces a heteronormative worldview. [1]

Curriculum

A second theme was the lack of perceived space in the curriculum. The time it would take to incorporate queer content was commented on at both the university and city polytechnic. As pointed out by Uriah (teacher), course content is largely dictated by the coursebook:

> For a 15-week course we have to get through one coursebook which is ten units. The timing for getting into discussions about transgender issues and environmental issues and things like this—the time's not there.

Charles (teacher) felt "under pressure from all the other things we have to get through" and said that queer content would have to fulfil a language or narrative function or it "would be a sideline".

Both Ruby (teacher) and Charlotte (manager) felt the focus of the qualification was the main constraint. Ruby said she did not go in depth into gender or "even culturally within New Zealand" because "the vocabulary and the topics we do don't allow for that" i.e., they do not reflect New Zealand society. However, she also mentioned, she "recreates" the coursebook and "brings in her own content":

> Other times we've gone into other pieces of reading which would be relevant to group discussion or something else around New Zealand, you know, conservation, that sort of space.

Ruby saw this as an opportunity to *"*bring in the queer community*"*, thereby, embracing her agency as a teacher to negotiate, adapt and transform educational material in the classroom (Kirsch et al., 2020).

In the following excerpt, Charlotte also considers whether queer content could be included in the curriculum:

> There's just no place in the programme to bring in these other issues. I mean, possibly there is. But it's all like 'Here's your research essay' and we give them a choice of three topics and we have certainly never even thought about choosing one of those related to gender identity.

Charlotte recognises here that topic matter is not dictated by the guiding document. Using "certainly" and "even" in the phrase "we have certainly never even thought

[1] As noted previously, while heteronormative is widely used in existing research, the term cisheteronormativity, incorporating both gender and sexuality, reflects more current thinking.

about" may indicate she now thinks there could be space in the curriculum, but she has never been exposed to the idea of incorporating queer content.

A lack of time and the focus of qualifications are given as reasons why it would be difficult to incorporate a queer perspective. However, the interviews provide some evidence of teachers seeing a place for queer content in order to reflect New Zealand society. They observe that it would prepare students for academic study and to interact socially, thereby recognizing that gender/sexuality literacy is necessary to 'take part in and to critique contemporary discourses' (Nelson, 2006).

Cultural Expectations

Cultural expectations were another prominent theme to arise from the interviews. An issue when teaching a multicultural cohort is the cultural expectations of certain ethnic groups (Güney, 2021; Moore, 2016) as raised by Ruby (teacher):

> You don't know what background someone's coming from or what they are thinking inside their head.

Participants drew on their own background knowledge and experience with ethnically diverse cohorts when referring to their beliefs about cultural expectations. In the following excerpt, Ursula (manager) refers to cultures which she believes hold contrasting views regarding rainbow communities:

> Students in our classes will come from countries where, of course, views on rainbow communities vary, and in places like Thailand I think it's probably just very accepted and it's fine…There are some cultures, though, where that perhaps would not be appropriate to talk about, let alone accept or encourage. And I am thinking perhaps of [the] Middle East, because they are so strict, as you know, with women's freedoms.

Ursula indicates her views on the acceptance of rainbow communities in different countries are widely held by saying "of course". Similarly, she emphasises the prominence of the belief about the restrictive nature of women's freedoms in the Middle East by using "as you know". However, when speculating on how different cultural views and expectations might impact on incorporating queer content, she hedged by saying that it "perhaps would not be appropriate" which indicates there may or may not be a place for it. The appeals to shared understandings and the hedging in her statements have the effect of mitigating their force.

In the following excerpt, Charlotte reflects on promoting inclusivity in a multi-cultural context and how that relates to rainbow communities:

> We're very used to getting inclusiveness in that area. Why have we never thought about this other area?

This question would suggest that the process of reflection allowed her to see that the omission of a queer perspective was in conflict with her underlying values (Christison & Murray, 2022).

Reflection also gave Uriah (teacher) a new viewpoint in that he recognised this omission had the following unintentional consequence:

> In that way, it's a standard class—trying to be inclusive by being standard which is actually being exclusive.

The use of "actually" (reported by Vine, 2017, as suggesting surprise) seems to depict a breakthrough point for Uriah because he articulates a key point in queer theory—that the exclusion of a queer perspective reinforces the cisheteronormative hegemony (see Nelson, 2006). This also highlights the importance of reflective opportunities provided by research.

The majority of participants were able to recount having at least one student they identified as queer in their current context, and recognised there is likely to be wider representation. As Ursula (manager) said:

> Obviously, in any group of people, what are the odds? The chances are that someone there is not heterosexual.

When asked how other students interacted with members of rainbow communities, the interviewees invariably noted a lack of conflict by responding: "Fine, fine. There were no issues with him in the class" (Charlotte) or "they are very accepting" (Uriah).

This suggests that the cultural expectations of classmates were not a constraint in practice, which raises the question of how much this constraint is perceived rather than real.

Teachers' Preparedness

A final theme emerged regarding how prepared the teachers felt to queer the classroom. In line with other studies, the participants expressed a positive attitude towards incorporating a queer perspective (see Barozzi & Ojeda, 2014; Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015; Tran-Thanh, 2020). They made it clear that inclusivity was core to their beliefs because classes "need to reflect society" and they did not "want anyone to ever feel isolated or excluded".

However, background knowledge and preparedness was considered a major obstacle when rating how confident they felt at this point about introducing a queer perspective. The reasons were outlined in the following comments by Ruby:

> I am coming from a heteronormative perspective, um I feel I wouldn't have, I'm not equipped with enough knowledge to get it right, and I wouldn't want

> to get it wrong, at all. How can I speak on that if I am not part of this community?

Uriah also expressed concerns about not having support:

> Unfortunately, because the textbook isn't going to do it, it's not going to support us with the foundation, we have to do it ourselves.

The use of "unfortunately" and "support" suggests difficulty or effort. Charles was also clear that he lacked sufficient knowledge:

> As you say the coursebooks are not terribly in line with it. And…I wouldn't take it upon myself to do it because I don't know enough.

The feeling of lack of preparedness was reflected in the low self-reported ratings for confidence in the teachers' ability to queer the classroom (Research Question 1) which are reported below.

Table 2:
Self-reported confidence of teachers to queer the classroom and managers to encourage queering of the classroom

Institutional Type	**Line Manager**	**Rating**	**Teacher**	**Rating**
City polytechnic	**C**harlotte (also teaches)	3	**C**harles	3
Regional polytechnic	**R**ose	5	**R**uby	2.5-3
University	**U**rsula (also teaches)	4-5	**U**riah	1-1.5

Ratings: 1 to 5 (1 not at all confident to 5 very confident)

In contrast, managers were more confident in their staff and themselves, and provided average to very confident self-reported ratings (Research Question 2).

Response to Perceived Constraints

In terms of my final research question *What constraints and opportunities are there to queer the classroom?,* opportunity exists in the form of the positive responses from teachers and managers.

Teachers articulated valid concerns about having a lack of knowledge and 'getting it right'. Their perceived lack of knowledge should not, however, be a reason to maintain the status quo. Griffin et al. (2007, as cited in Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015) claim teachers do not need to be experts or members of rainbow communities to introduce queer content. Even within communities, there are various understandings

and cultural nuances (Davis, 2014), meaning that no one is an expert. Summerhawk (1998, as cited in Evripidou, & Çavuşoğlu, 2015) suggests that at a basic level, all teachers know that queer people exist and about their struggles to claim rights and recognition. Basic information on queer identities and terminology can be found on the websites of rainbow organisations such as InsideOUT Kōaro and Gender Minorities Aotearoa.

While teachers were concerned about cultural expectations, they should also question their own preconceptions about how comfortable or conservative students are based on their backgrounds. Teachers reported a lack of conflict which suggests that the cultural expectations of classmates were not a constraint, which raises the question of how much this constraint is perceived rather than real. Along these lines, Nelson (2015) discovered Japanese students felt comfortable rather than awkward about having a gay friend or teacher in an American context. In a predominantly Afghani ESL class in Australia, Curran (2006) found all of the students were genuinely interested in queer issues.

Teachers should also question their own preconceptions about how comfortable or conservative students are based on their backgrounds. As an example, research on Muslim students in ESL classrooms in the United States found "cultural context influences learners' ideas and positionings about sexuality" (Güney, 2021, p. 71). Engaging learners and teachers with diverse backgrounds and attitudes can best be addressed through queer pedagogy which challenges thinking through a discourse inquiry approach (Curran, 2006; Nelson, 1999; 2008). As an example, when presented with a cisheteronormative stereotype of a family structure in a coursebook, teachers can 'trouble' these assumptions by eliciting a range of family structures.

While most teachers talked about finding resources to queer the classroom, queer content need not be introduced as a sideline, but rather integrated into themes which already exist in the curriculum, such as cultural diversity, human rights, or famous people (Evripidou, & Çavuşoğlu, 2015; Merse, 2015). This allows for the recognition and addressing of other discriminatory themes and cultural perspectives and reduces the marginalization of queer identities (Evripidou, & Çavuşoğlu, 2015). Nelson (1999, p. 377) suggests "selecting resources that include even a brief mention of lesbian, transgender, bisexual or gay thematic content or perspectives can be a way for teachers to incorporate gay themes in ways that students are likely to consider authoritative and legitimate".

Conclusion

Inclusivity is a key objective of the Tertiary Education Strategy, but excluding queer perspectives reinforces the dominant cisheteronormative view, leading to marginalisation. As the onus is on teachers to queer the content, it is essential to raise their awareness and increase their confidence. To this end, the perceived constraints

of coursebooks, curriculum, cultural expectations and teacher's preparedness have been questioned. This shows that queering the classroom can be achieved by challenging preconceptions and incorporating rainbow communities as a norm, rather than as a focus of a standalone class.

This was a small scoping study and may not reflect attitudes across all tertiary institutes or even staff within these institutes. Future research could widen the net to find examples of practitioners who are queering the classroom, including an investigation into English language teaching in primary and secondary schools. There could be valuable examples of best practice as well as opportunities for professional development. In addition, given the concerns of teachers around cultural expectations, more research needs to be done with multi-cultural classes to secure the students' viewpoints.

Finally, I offer an inspirational example which emphasises the importance of this research. Despite feeling overwhelmed and underprepared, this comment from Ruby shows a recognition of rainbow communities and a first step to queering the classroom:

> Why can't we bring in the wider viewpoint here and that there are other genders, there's other pronouns, there's other sexualities beyond, you know, I guess, what you are culturally restrained to and what you are supposed to believe is right.

By reading this article, you may also have taken that first important step.

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USING GenAI IN ASSESSMENT DESIGN

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Abstract
This research report examines the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in assessment design. It explores to what extent GenAI can generate a text and items that would be suitable for a reading comprehension assessment task. The context was a Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) programme at Waipapa Taumata Rau | the University of Auckland, designed to identify students who might benefit from academic English language support as they begin tertiary study. Refined GenAI prompts were used to generate a reading text and corresponding assessment items. The text and items were evaluated by five experts in language assessment. Although the text received generally positive feedback, the items garnered mixed reviews. The findings suggest that while GenAI has the potential to assist in generating assessment items, human oversight remains necessary for ensuring their quality and relevance.

Introduction

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has potential for use in assessment design, with, for example, important positive implications for contexts where there is a need to continually generate new versions of existing assessment tasks.

Traditional AI systems often relied on rule-based algorithms and static datasets, but more contemporary Language Learning Models (LLMs), 'trained' on huge corpora, can dynamically generate output which is context-aware. Such models may be useful in the design of specific tasks, for instance, in reading assessment, they may be used to draft reading passages or prototype test items. This research report focuses specifically on evaluating whether one LLM application (Microsoft Copilot) can generate a reading text and associated comprehension questions that meet minimum acceptability thresholds for Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) in English-medium universities. The scope of the report is intentionally limited to text and item generation, excluding investigation of other important assessment processes, such as validation or scoring.

Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) at Waipapa Taumata Rau | the University of Auckland (WTR | UoA)

Faced with increasing numbers of students from diverse language backgrounds, universities have the challenge of optimising success for these students as they undertake study in a tertiary environment. A first step is to identify whether they have the standard of academic English that would enable them to succeed in an English-medium environment. With this aim, some universities have adopted a PELA program to identify students who may be at risk and who could benefit from academic English

language support. The Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment programme (Elder & Erlam, 2001), known as DELNA, is the WTR | UoA PELA and the context for this report. All students enrolling at the University are strongly encouraged to participate in DELNA, and compliance is mandated by some faculties.

As part of their initial contact with DELNA, students complete a Screening assessment, consisting of a vocabulary assessment and a cloze elide task. Students scoring below a minimum satisfactory standard (Elder & von Randow, 2008) are required to take the DELNA Diagnosis. The Diagnosis comprises three separate assessment tasks: Listening, Reading and Writing.

The potential for GenAI

Due to issues around test security, it is important that the DELNA team, in association with a partner institution, the Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, continue to develop different versions of each of the three assessment tasks that comprise the Diagnosis. However, designing each assessment task is time consuming and labour intensive. If, on the other hand, it were possible to use GenAI for the generation of assessment tasks, the benefits would be obvious, both in terms of saving time and reducing workload demands.

This brief research report, therefore, explores the potential of GenAI for assessment design focusing on the DELNA Diagnosis reading assessment task and seeks to answer the following question:

> To what extent can GenAI generate reading texts and assessment items that effectively address the requirements of PELA?

Procedure

Our report draws on the methodological frameworks established by Lin & Chen (2024). This procedural paradigm involves: 1) Utilizing existing reading test passages as templates for GenAI-generated text imitation; 2) Refining prompts based on subskill specifications and question type requirements to guide GenAI in item generation; 3) Implementing a two-tiered evaluation protocol: first, initial quality assessment by research team members and, second, expanded expert review panel evaluations.

Information about the Diagnosis reading assessment text and questions/items is provided in the DELNA handbook (The University of Auckland, n.d.). This information was important as a basis on which to design the GenAI prompts used for this project. The handbook specifies that the reading assessment comprises two reading passages of a combined length of approximately 1,200 words. The topics of these texts need to be of general interest and not require subject-specific knowledge. The range of question/item types that may be used to assess comprehension of the text include cloze, summary, information transfer, multiple choice, true-false and short-answer items. The handbook also outlines the skills that students are to be assessed on (see Table 1):

Table 1:
Skills assessed in the reading task

List of skills assessed in the reading task
• ability to read quickly
• ability to find specific information
• ability to locate causes and effects, sequences, contrasts
• ability to distinguish between main points and evidence or supporting ideas
• ability to select words which fit the meaning and the grammatical structure of the text (cloze)
• ability to summarise main topics
• ability to draw a conclusion based on information in a passage
• ability to distinguish between fact and opinion
• ability to reorganise information in a passage in another way (e.g., insert it in a chart, graph, map or diagram)

Microsoft Copilot, accessed through a WTR | UoA account to safeguard data privacy and intellectual property, was the GenAI programme used for the purposes of this study. To ensure high-quality outputs, we implemented a structured approach guided by precise prompts. Building on insights from the DELNA Handbook with respect to text and question types, the GenAI was provided with refined prompts to generate a 700-word reading text and associated assessment items (we decided to work with one instead of two reading texts). Recognizing the critical role of prompt accuracy in determining GenAI output quality, we adopted the 'chain-of-thought' prompting method (Wei et al., 2022). This approach breaks down complex tasks into sequential, logical steps, enabling the GenAI to produce coherent and contextually appropriate outputs.

Here is the prompt that was used for the text creation phase:

> Write an article for a university academic English reading assessment. We will use this article to create test questions. The total length of the text is approximately 700 words. The topic should be of general interest and not require specialist subject knowledge. Please ensure the article content allows for question design around [*specific subskills were listed; see Table 1 for an indication of these*].

We used another DELNA reading assessment text as Copilot's learning sample, omitted here for confidentiality.

From several candidate texts, one titled 'The Evolution of Urban Green Spaces' was selected. Text generation was followed by question creation. GenAI was directed to create questions targeting the specific subskills, with clear instructions provided about the expected question type and whether each skill or question type should reference a specific paragraph or the entire text, for example:

> create a multiple-choice question based on the first paragraph to assess the skill of understanding the contextual meaning of figurative language.

This process was iteratively refined to align with academic standards, ensuring both the text and questions met the desired levels of quality, relevance, and rigor. (See Appendix 2 for the text and question items).

The subsequent phase of the study involved an evaluation of the text and assessment items by a panel of five qualified experts. Two were DELNA Language Advisors, two WTR | UoA lecturers, and another was an international language assessment expert familiar with DELNA. Each independently evaluated the text and its 15 accompanying items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral, 5=strongly agree) to determine their suitability. In addition to numerical ratings, participants were asked to provide written justifications for each score, ensuring transparency in their evaluative judgments.

Results

All five experts agreed that the text, 'The Evolution of Urban Green Spaces', met the DELNA handbook requirement that the topic be of general interest, avoiding subject-specific vocabulary. Overall, the text was rated at 4.2 (the maximum was 5, i.e., strongly agree), which indicated general agreement that it was appropriate (see Appendix 1, Table 1). One expert wrote:

> I think that one of the strengths of GenAI is to produce texts which have the kind of characteristics that reading test developers have traditionally looked for: well structured, presenting factual information, and points of view on non-technical topics; avoiding giving offence to anyone.

While the overall response to the text was positive, opinions on the quality of the items were, however, less favourable. The average overall rating for the items was 2.76 (see Appendix 1, Table 2) and 10 of the 15 items were rated at an average of less than 3 (that is, neutral), indicating that their average rating was in the disagree/strongly disagree categories.

The following section presents three items (in the form of three extracts), which were judged problematic in that they scored an average of less than 3. The issues that are likely to have contributed to these low ratings are discussed. For each item, relevant text is included where appropriate, and information is given in parentheses and in italics, as it was for the expert raters (but not for test takers) about the specific skill being assessed. Answers are also provided, as they were for the raters.

Extract 1: Item 3

Item 3

Paragraph 2
Historically, the concept of urban green spaces dates back to ancient civilizations. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is an early example of a man-made green space designed for aesthetic and practical purposes. In medieval Europe, monasteries often included gardens that served both spiritual and medicinal functions.

According to paragraph 2, in the context of the passage, the word 'aesthetic' is closest in meaning to: (*Understanding general academic vocabulary*)

A. Functional
B. Medicinal
C. Spiritual
D. Decorative

Answer key: D

Item 3 was rated at 2, indicating an average of 'disagree' in terms of its acceptability. There were two main reasons given for this low rating; the number of raters who referred to each is given in parentheses. The first of these was that 'decorative' was not a good synonym for 'aesthetic' (*n*=3), and the second was dissatisfaction with the distractors B and C (*n*=2). As one rater said: "I am not sure that lifting two adjectives from the next sentence is a good strategy for creating [the distractors]".

Extract 2: Item 4

Item 4

Paragraph 4
In the present era, the conception and utility of urban green spaces have transformed to align with the dynamic demands of urban inhabitants. Green roofs and vertical gardens epitomize pioneering approaches to addressing spatial constraints in highly urbanized areas. These ecological infrastructures contribute not only to the visual enhancement of the urban landscape but also play a crucial role in stormwater management, curtailing energy usage, and alleviating the urban heat island phenomenon.

What are two examples of innovative approaches to addressing spatial constraints in highly urbanized areas? (*Searching for specific information*)

(i) .....
(ii) .....

Answer key: green roofs / vertical gardens

Item 4 also had an average rating of just 2, indicating consensus that this item was in the 'disagree' category. Test-takers were not directed to the part of the text, as they were in item 3, in which to find answers to this question, so some degree of searching was necessary. However, arguably, this was significantly helped by the inclusion of the phrase 'spatial constraints' in both the text and the question, meaning that test takers did not need to make links between the words/phrase 'innovative' and 'pioneering approaches.' One of the experts described this item as too easy, in that both the wording of the question and the two answers were 'lifted' from the same sentence with no paraphrasing.

Extract 3: Item 15

Item 15

Which paragraphs should have the following headings? (*Understanding the main idea of a text or part of a text*)

Heading	**Paragraph**
(i) The Economic Benefits of Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___
(ii) Challenges Facing Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___
(iii) The Role of Technology in Enhancing Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___

Answer key: (i) 6 (ii) 8 (iii) 10/

Item 15 was designed to assess comprehension of the main idea of a text (or part of). It was rated at an overall of 2.6. There was some discrepancy in ratings with this item, in that two raters agreed that the item was acceptable, while the other three rated it in the disagree/strongly disagree category. These raters indicated that the item was too easy, since key phrases from each heading occurred in the first line of each of the respective (answer) paragraphs. As one rater said: 'this is just a low-level scanning task'. The first sentences of each of the (answer) paragraphs appear in Extract 4 below so that the reader can see the similarities (and in each case the words that appear in the 'headings' are underlined for the reader).

Extract 4: First sentences of paragraphs from Item 15

Paragraph 6
Furthermore, urban green spaces are instrumental in bolstering the economic vitality of metropolitan areas.
Paragraph 8
Despite their benefits, urban green spaces face several challenges.
Paragraph 10
In addition, technology is playing an increasingly important role in the management and enhancement of urban green spaces.

For purposes of comparison, an item which was rated highly at 3.6, was item 13 (see Extract 5 below), the highest rating that any of the items received. It aimed to assess the same construct as item 15.

Extract 5: Item 13

Item 13

Which of the following best summarizes the main themes of the passage regarding urban green spaces? (*Understanding the main idea of a text or part of a text*)

A. Urban green spaces have evolved from historical gardens to modern parks and continue to play a crucial role in improving air quality and biodiversity.

B. The primary function of urban green spaces is to provide recreational opportunities for city dwellers and support tourism and local economies.

C. Urban green spaces contribute to sustainability, economic vitality, social cohesion, and public health, but face challenges like urbanization and climate change.

D. The development and maintenance of urban green spaces are now heavily reliant on technological advancements like smart sensors and IoT technologies.

Answer key: C

Discussion and Conclusion

This small-scale study underscores both the promise and challenges of using GenAI to develop reading comprehension assessment materials. While GenAI demonstrated proficiency in generating a text suitable for English-medium university assessments, its ability to produce valid test items proved inconsistent.

These inconsistencies highlight critical questions about GenAI's current limitations and the necessity of human oversight in assessment design. Notably, these challenges are not exclusive to GenAI; even human-designed test items require rigorous validation to ensure quality. However, GenAI introduces unique complexities, such as the need for meticulously crafted prompts and systematic verification of outputs for accuracy and relevance. To address these limitations, future research could explore technical refinements such as classifier guidance (using AI models to filter or steer outputs toward desired criteria) or few-shot training (fine-tuning GenAI with small, high-quality datasets of validated test items). Such approaches may help mitigate issues like inadequate paraphrasing and weak distractors, ultimately enhancing GenAI's reliability in assessment design. A conclusion is that human involvement is still a necessary component of assessment design, one that is endorsed elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Hao et al., 2024; Shneiderman, 2022; Zhang et al., in press). In a collaborative model, human involvement would be required, along with GenAI input, to specify the skills being assessed and the question types that would be appropriate for such an assessment. GenAI could be used to generate assessment items, but human involvement would be necessary for the review and refinement of these items.

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Appendix 1. Expert judgement data

Table 1:

Mean rating for text quality

Expert	1	2	3	4	5
Rating	3	4	4	5	5

Table 2:

Mean ratings of items

item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
m	2.6	2.6	2	2	3	2.4	2.8	3.4	3.4	2.8	2.6	2.4	3.6	3.2	2.6

Appendix 2. Text and questions

The Evolution of Urban Green Spaces

Paragraph 1

Urban green spaces, such as parks, gardens, and green roofs, play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life in cities. These areas provide residents with opportunities

for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction. Additionally, they contribute to environmental sustainability by improving air quality, reducing urban heat islands, and supporting biodiversity. Like the lungs of a city, these green spaces breathe life into urban environments, purifying the air and providing a sanctuary from the concrete jungle.

Paragraph 2
Historically, the concept of urban green spaces dates back to ancient civilizations. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is an early example of a man-made green space designed for aesthetic and practical purposes. In medieval Europe, monasteries often included gardens that served both spiritual and medicinal functions.

Paragraph 3
The modern urban park movement began in the 19th century, influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent urbanization. Cities like London and New York recognized the need for public green spaces to counteract the negative effects of industrialization, such as pollution and overcrowding. Central Park in New York, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, became a model for urban parks worldwide.

Paragraph 4
In the present era, the conception and utility of urban green spaces have transformed to align with the dynamic demands of urban inhabitants. Green roofs and vertical gardens epitomize pioneering approaches to addressing spatial constraints in highly urbanized areas. These ecological infrastructures contribute not only to the visual enhancement of the urban landscape but also play a crucial role in stormwater management, curtailing energy usage, and alleviating the urban heat island phenomenon.

Paragraph 5
Research has shown that access to urban green spaces has significant health benefits. Studies indicate that spending time in nature can reduce stress, improve mental health, and enhance physical well-being. For instance, a study conducted in Japan found that “forest bathing,” or spending time in forested areas, can lower cortisol levels and blood pressure.

Paragraph 6
Furthermore, urban green spaces are instrumental in bolstering the economic vitality of metropolitan areas. They possess the potential to elevate property values, thereby generating substantial revenue for local governments through increased property taxes. Additionally, these verdant spaces serve as significant attractors for tourism, drawing both domestic and international visitors who contribute to the local economy through their spending on accommodation, dining, and entertainment. For instance,

meticulously maintained parks and botanical gardens can transform into iconic landmarks, enticing a steady stream of tourists and residents alike. This influx of visitors not only stimulates commercial activities in adjacent areas but also promotes the growth of ancillary businesses such as cafes, restaurants, and retail shops.

Paragraph 7
Moreover, urban green spaces play a vital role in fostering social cohesion. Parks and community gardens provide venues for social activities, cultural events, and community engagement. These spaces can help bridge social divides by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and fostering a sense of community.

Paragraph 8
Despite their benefits, urban green spaces face several challenges. Urbanization and population growth put pressure on land use, often leading to the reduction of green areas. Additionally, maintenance and funding for these spaces can be limited, affecting their quality and accessibility. Climate change also poses a threat, as extreme weather events can damage green infrastructures.

Paragraph 9
To address these challenges, cities around the world are adopting innovative approaches. For example, Singapore has implemented a comprehensive green plan that includes the development of green corridors and the integration of green spaces into urban planning. Similarly, Copenhagen's "Climate Resilient Neighborhoods" project focuses on creating multifunctional green spaces that can adapt to changing climate conditions.

Paragraph 10
In addition, technology is playing an increasingly important role in the management and enhancement of urban green spaces. Smart sensors and IoT (Internet of Things) technologies are being used to monitor soil moisture, air quality, and plant health in real-time. These technological advancements enable more efficient and sustainable maintenance practices, ensuring that green spaces remain vibrant and healthy despite the challenges posed by urban environments.

Paragraph 11
In conclusion, urban green spaces are essential for the well-being of city dwellers and the sustainability of urban environments. As cities continue to grow, it is crucial to prioritize the development and maintenance of these spaces. By doing so, we can ensure that urban areas remain liveable, healthy, and resilient for future generations.

Questions
*You should not spend more than **25 minutes** on this section. Make sure you base all of your answers on the information given in the text.*

1. In Paragraph 1, urban green spaces are compared to the "lungs of a city." What is the intended meaning of this metaphor, and how do green spaces function in a way that is similar to lungs in the human body? Circle the correct answer.
A. Green spaces filter out pollutants and provide oxygen, much like lungs filter air and provide oxygen to the body.
B. Green spaces are a decorative feature in cities, similar to how lungs are an important part of the human anatomy.
C. Green spaces are large and expansive, resembling the size and shape of lungs.
D. Green spaces connect different parts of the city, just as lungs connect different organs in the body.

2. According to the information provided in Paragraph 1, complete the sentences using the exact words from the text.
Urban green spaces improve city life by offering places for _____, rest, and community engagement and promoting environmental sustainability through better air quality and _____.

3. According to paragraph 2, in the context of the passage, the word 'aesthetic' is closest in meaning to:
A. Functional
B. Medicinal
C. Spiritual
D. Decorative

4. What are two examples of innovative approaches to addressing spatial constraints in highly urbanized areas?
(i) .....
(ii) .....

5. In Paragraph 5, what does the term 'cortisol' most likely refer to?
A. A compound found in tree bark
B. A hormone related to stress levels in the body
C. A traditional practice involving nature walks
D. A substance used to measure soil quality

6. Complete the following timeline with the correct events related to the evolution of urban green spaces. Note: Two of the options are extra and will not be used.
Events:

a. Monasteries cultivated gardens that had dual purposes, offering both medicinal benefits and places for contemplation.
b. Private gardens became popular among the wealthy for leisure and relaxation.
c. Innovative solutions like green roofs and vertical gardens emerged to address the challenges of densely populated cities.

d. The concept of green spaces was exemplified by a famous garden, combining both aesthetic and practical functions. e. Community gardens began to appear in urban areas, providing residents with spaces to grow their own food. f. Urban areas developed public parks to provide relief from the detrimental effects of rapid industrial growth.

Timeline:

Time Period	Event
Ancient Civilizations	
Medieval Europe	
19th Century	
Contemporary Times	

7. Based on paragraph 6, which of the following can be inferred about the impact of urban green spaces on local economies?
A. Urban green spaces primarily serve as recreational areas with little to no economic benefit.
B. The presence of well-maintained parks and gardens can lead to an increase in local government revenue.
C. Urban green spaces discourage tourism because they take up valuable real estate.
D. The presence of urban green spaces can lead to a decrease in property values due to increased maintenance costs.

8. According to paragraph 7, what can be inferred about the role of urban green spaces in communities?
A. They are primarily used for individual relaxation and personal space.
B. They can contribute to reducing social inequalities by encouraging interaction among diverse groups.
C. They are only beneficial for cultural events and not for everyday social activities.
D. They primarily serve as venues for large, organized events rather than informal gatherings.

9. Which of the following are challenges faced by urban green spaces as mentioned in Paragraph 8? Select three.
A. Decreased recreational activities
B. Urbanization and population growth
C. Limited maintenance and funding
D. Lack of public interest
E. Reduction of green areas
F. Climate change and extreme weather events

10. Read the following statements and decide whether they are true, false, or not given based on the information provided in Paragraphs 9 and 10.
True: The statement agrees with the information in the passage.

False: The statement contradicts the information in the passage.
Not Given: There is no information on this in the passage.

(i) The "Climate Resilient Neighborhoods" project in Copenhagen includes the creation of green spaces that can handle various climate-related changes.
☐True
☐False
☐Not Given

(ii) Singapore's comprehensive green plan includes the use of smart sensors and IoT technologies to monitor urban green spaces.
☐True
☐False
☐Not Given

(iii) Smart sensors and IoT technologies are only used to monitor air quality in urban green spaces.
☐True
☐False
☐Not Given

11. According to the information provided in Paragraphs 9-10, complete the sentences using the exact words from the text.
Cities are using innovative strategies to tackle urban green space challenges. Singapore's green plan integrates _____ and green spaces into urban planning, while Copenhagen develops adaptable multifunctional spaces. Technologies like smart sensors and IoT monitor environmental factors in _____, promoting efficient and sustainable maintenance to keep these spaces vibrant and healthy.

12. Based on Paragraphs 9, 10, and 11, what are the primary strategies cities are using to enhance urban green spaces, and why are these efforts critical?
A. Developing green corridors and using smart technologies; these efforts ensure urban green spaces are visually appealing.
B. Integrating green spaces into urban planning and using IoT for real-time monitoring; these strategies maintain urban vibrancy and resilience.
C. Constructing vertical gardens and green roofs; these methods reduce energy consumption.
D. Focusing on biodiversity and promoting social interactions; these efforts reduce maintenance costs.

13. Which of the following best summarizes the main themes of the passage regarding urban green spaces?

A. Urban green spaces have evolved from historical gardens to modern parks and continue to play a crucial role in improving air quality and biodiversity.
B. The primary function of urban green spaces is to provide recreational opportunities for city dwellers and support tourism and local economies.
C. Urban green spaces contribute to sustainability, economic vitality, social cohesion, and public health, but face challenges like urbanization and climate change.
D. The development and maintenance of urban green spaces are now heavily reliant on technological advancements like smart sensors and IoT technologies.

14. Based on the passage, how does the author feel about urban green spaces?
A. The author believes urban green spaces are unnecessary and a waste of resources.
B. The author thinks urban green spaces are beneficial but not essential for city living.
C. The author views urban green spaces as crucial for enhancing the quality of life and ensuring environmental sustainability in cities.
D. The author is neutral about urban green spaces and merely presents their historical evolution.

15. Which paragraphs should have the following headings?

Heading	**Paragraph**
(i) The Economic Benefits of Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___
(ii) Challenges Facing Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___
(iii) The Role of Technology in Enhancing Urban Green Spaces	Paragraph ___

EXAMINING THE VOCABULARY APPROPRIACY OF TED TALKS' LISTENING SELECTIONS

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Abstract
TED Talks is a common resource for educators to adapt and use in English for Academic Purposes courses. The recent development of TED Talks textbooks has provided teachers with further support, offering suitable frameworks to use when teaching listening. However, research suggests that while such frameworks benefit learner progress, the presence of medium-frequency and low-frequency lexical items may create comprehension difficulties. This study examines the vocabulary load and word level difficulties of 12 TED Talks included in the textbook, Keynote 2. Although analysis conducted using general word lists shows that the vocabulary level was appropriate to the textbook level, additional lexical analyses show that each TED Talk varies in lexical difficulty depending on word frequency. These results reveal that learners may need more vocabulary guidance when listening to the chosen TED Talks in the textbook to improve their lexical knowledge and attend to their listening difficulties.

Introduction

The textbook is considered a core teaching component for many English Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in tertiary-level education. Sun and Dang (2020) explain how textbooks provide a fundamental source of vocabulary that can help learners maximise their learning with the textbook content by paying special attention to the most useful words. Commercial textbooks with resources, such as TED Talks, are useful tools to develop learners' vocabulary in language learning. Although such commercial textbooks are well-developed and structured instructional tools for the classroom, resources not explicitly created for the textbook may contain vocabulary that is lexically demanding and, in turn, hamper learners' progression in their language learning.

In recent years, second language research (i.e., Siegel, 2019) has investigated the suitability of resources in listening instruction. Specifically, authentic resources are defined as "a stretch of real language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to carry a real message of some sort" (Field, 2008, p. 270). In turn, textbooks have increasingly been created to include language extracts from speakers in authentic rather than scripted situations. In 2015, Cengage Learning developed a textbook series (http://ngl.cengage.com/ted) which utilise TED Talks as authentic listening materials on EAP courses. TED Talks are now widely used and cognitively validated for use on university courses, largely due to their university lecture-style and PowerPoint visuals (Elk, 2014). However, few studies have analysed

if these TED Talk selections are suitable as listening resources. Therefore, this study reports on the vocabulary categorised by frequency bands and the creation of word lists to assist learners in comprehending the TED Talks selected for Cengage Learning's Keynote 2 EAP textbook.

Literature Review

Lexical Profiles in Textbooks

Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) use three frequency bands to categorise vocabulary that helps us understand how learners can learn more effectively. Nation (2006) used the British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English (BNC/COCA) lists to categorise vocabulary by word families (e.g., root words and all related words are counted as one) into three frequency bands, as shown below:

Table 1:
Vocabulary Frequency Band Categories (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014)

Frequency Band	**Word Families/word types**	**Example words**
High-Frequency	First, second, and third 1,000 families	give, take, go in, the, of
Medium-Frequency	Fourth to eighth 1,000 families	browse, influence, slippery
Low-Frequency	From the ninth group onwards	rendition, abrasion, sophomore

Researchers can use these lexical profile bands to categorise vocabulary into high, medium, and low-frequency words to identify the potential vocabulary difficulty of the different types of words included in listening texts and resources. Knowledge of high-frequency vocabulary is important because these word families, in addition to proper nouns, transparent compounds, and marginal words, appear frequently in texts and provide the learner with 95% coverage of a text, which is considered the minimal threshold for comprehension (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014). Consequently, comprehension will be affected if these items are unknown (Nation, 2006). Within a language course, the repeated occurrence of items is crucial for learners (Macalister & Nation, 2020). Several studies investigating vocabulary in textbooks highlight knowledge of high-frequency words as the minimum level for comprehension (Sun & Dang, 2020; Yang & Coxhead, 2020), while less important, medium-frequency words help learners develop their reading and fluency of authentic texts (Yang & Coxhead, 2020). Although knowing medium-frequency and low-frequency words can help determine the potential difficulty of vocabulary in resources for learners, identifying these vocabulary categories may be time-consuming and problematic for teachers.

More traditional methods of word classification include considering the differences between high-frequency (e.g., the first 1,000 and 2nd 1,000 words) versus medium-frequency and low-frequency words (e.g., the words which occur outside the most frequent 2,000 words). For this reason, many researchers have applied the General

Service List (GSL) (West, 1953) as a common starting point in their investigations. The list includes the first 2,000 word families—or high-frequency words—which form the basic word list used by many researchers to examine vocabulary in course materials (Hsu, 2009), word occurrences, and the repetition of words (Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010). Subsequent studies have also turned to using Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA lists which includes 25,000 words categorised into 25 1,000 word lists. For example, in several studies conducted by Dang (see Dang & Webb 2017; Dang et al., 2022), the researchers highlight BNC/COCA lists as more relevant than the GSL for such lexical analyses for high-frequency words. However, Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) comment on the need to investigate a broader lexical coverage by expanding the high-frequency analysis to include medium-frequency and low-frequency lists. One possibility they suggest, as shown in Table 1, is raising the high-frequency cut-off points to the most frequent 3,000 words to acknowledge learners' potential "learning milestones" and offer more accurate pedagogical criterion for teachers (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014, p. 492). As a result, studies have found that BNC/COCA provides a better analysis of the high-/medium-/low-frequency words represented in textbooks (Sun & Dang, 2020).

In listening, few studies have focused on investigating the vocabulary difficulties of chosen resources. However, O'Loughlin (2012) did analyse 29,716 running words of all the listening texts in the first three levels (i.e., Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate) of the *New English File* textbook series. He found a variance between each of the listening resources and that the vocabulary difficulty increased as each unit in the textbook progressed. O'Loughlin also commented on the disparity between the broader range of 1,045 word families used across the three levels, compared to 860 word families found in the Intermediate book alone. He notes how if the 185 omitted word families are not repeated again from the elementary and pre-intermediate levels of the textbook, then there is an assumption that the learners have mastered these words at the lower levels. As O'Loughlin observes, the lack of mastering vocabulary knowledge may be problematic for learners and cause vocabulary difficulties as they use higher textbook levels in the series. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the vocabulary frequency and potential vocabulary difficulties for learners to understand the suitability of the chosen TED Talk for each sequential unit.

TED Talks for Vocabulary Learning

In language learning, understanding the lexical coverage, meaning "the percentage of running words in the text known by learners" (Nation, 2006, p. 61), can help identify how much vocabulary knowledge learners need to comprehend the text (Yang & Coxhead, 2020). Researchers (see Laufer, 1992; Hu & Nation, 2000; van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013) have suggested two fundamental thresholds to identify appropriate vocabulary knowledge: 95% and 98%. Learners achieving 95% coverage indicates "acceptable or reasonable" comprehension, while 98% coverage indicates "very good or ideal" comprehension (Sun & Dang, 2020, p. 2). To help learners reach these high levels of comprehension, investigating the potential lexical coverage of textbooks can

help identify known, and more importantly, unknown words in the text which may cause difficulties in learning.

As TED Talks are now commonly used in language teaching classrooms, it is important to identify their suitability for learning. TED Talks provide learners with accessible, topical, and engaging resources for their language practice. Since 2007, the global non-profit TED has run a website (http://www.ted.com), which showcases TED Talks, a freely available and accessible resource presenting over 300 research topics categorised under six themes: Business, Design, Education, Global Issues, Science and Technology (Hloba, 2016). These content-rich presentations given by expert speakers provide teachers and learners with access to transcripts and subtitles in over 100 languages and have become frequently used for L2 instruction purposes on EAP courses. Table 2 shows some empirical studies that have investigated the vocabulary load of TED Talks.

Table 2:

Previous Research Applied to TED Talks (adapted from Madarbakus-Ring, 2025)

Study	**TED Talks**	**95% coverage**	**98% coverage**
Coxhead & Walls (2012)	**60 Talks**	**4,000**	**9,000**
	Business,	5,000	9,000
	Design,	5,000	8,000
	Entertainment,	5,000	8,000
	Global Issues,	5,000	9,000
	Science,	5,000	8,000
	Technology	5,000	9,000
Elk (2014)	**3 Talks**		
	Angela Duckworth "The Key to Success? Grit"	3,000	-
	Graham Hill "Why I'm a Weekday Vegetarian"	3,000	-
	Faheed Al-Attiya "A Country With No Water"	3,000	-
Liu & Chen (2019)	**2089 Talks**	-	-
	Culture,	3,000	6,000
	Design,	3,000	6,000
	Entertainment,	3,000	6,000
	Global Issues,	3,000	5,000
	Science,	3,000	7,000
	Technology	3,000	6,000
Nurmukhamedov (2017)	**400 Talks**	**4,000**	**8,000**
	Business,	4,000	8,000
	Global Issues,	4,000	8,000
	Science,	4,000	10,000
	Technology	4,000	8,000

The observations in Table 2 show that learners need between 3,000 and 5,000 word families to achieve 95% coverage and between 5,000 and 10,000 word families to

achieve 98% coverage. Coxhead and Walls (2012) examined 60 TED Talks (10 talks from each of the six themes) and found that the different talks reached 95% lexical coverage between 4,000-5,000 words and 98% lexical coverage by 9,000 words. When examining a larger corpus, Nurmukhamedov (2017) noted the 400 TED Talks he analysed needed 4,000 word families to achieve 95% comprehension and 8,000 word families to achieve 98% coverage. The biggest corpus by Liu and Chen (2019) analysed 2089 TED Talks. Their results found only 3,000 word families were needed for 95% comprehension and between 5,000 and 7,000 word families were needed for 98% comprehension. Similar to Liu and Chen's (2019) analysis, Elk's (2014) small-scale study of three individual talks showed only the first 3,000 word families were needed to achieve 95% comprehension. These studies indicate that TED Talks include a large variance in vocabulary knowledge, and subsequently, learners need a broad vocabulary repertoire to understand the different talks.

These differences in lexical demands illustrate two main difficulties for learners when using TED Talks. First, in line with Field's (2008) concerns regarding language suitability, the language in TED Talks' may be difficult for learners. Elk (2014) found that Nation's (2012) first 3,000 word families provided approximately 90% lexical coverage for the three chosen TED Talks in her study. Elk concludes that these TED Talks had suitable lexical coverage for Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) B1 intermediate learners. Similarly, Coxhead and Walls' (2012) analysis of 60, four-to-six-minute TED Talks categorised the talks into 10 topics. Analysing the running words by frequency and academic word lists, the researchers found that TED Talks appear to have language closer to written texts compared to spoken language. They suggest that EAP learners need to know at least 5,000 word families to scaffold their TED Talk listening (similar to the vocabulary load required for reading newspapers). Thus, teachers can help determine the vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency required by their learners by using vocabulary profiles for TED Talks selections to enable them to successfully comprehend resources for their language level.

Second, 'fixation' on new or unknown vocabulary may create difficulties for learners. Goh (2000) identifies how learners' abilities to process the speech stream in real-time is affected by the demands that unfamiliar word items place on their attentional resources. *Paying more* attention to word-level problems can mean learners struggle to redirect their attention, which inevitably leads to isolated word interpretations (Goh, 2000). Vandergrift (2012) comments that lower-skilled learners have difficulty processing rapid speech as limited vocabulary and language experience focusses their attention on word recognition. Thus, encountering unknown or unfamiliar words creates attentional issues for learners when listening to TED Talks. Although previous studies show that learners need between 3,000-5,000 word families (see Table 1) to comprehend TED Talks, further research is needed to investigate individual lexical profiles of TED Talks chosen for listening practices in textbooks. As learners will be more exposed to

medium-frequency band words in these chosen TED Talks, it is more important to determine its vocabulary load to assess their suitability for the appropriate proficiency level.

Method

Research context and research questions

In this study, the BNC/COCA 25,000 word lists (Nation, 2012) were used for analysing the lexical profile of the listening component in a commercial, TED Talks-themed textbook. This led to the following two research questions:

1. What is the lexical coverage in the TED Talks, using Schmitt and Schmitt's (2014) high, medium, and low vocabulary bands?
2. What medium-frequency band vocabulary is in the supplementary TED Talks word lists for the Keynote 2 textbook?

Research Instruments - Keynote 2 Textbook

This study analysed the commercial textbook, Keynote 2 (see Bohlke et al., 2016). The Cengage title was created in 2015 and was used for the Academic English program at a public university in Japan. The textbook uses TED Talks for every listening in all 12 units and is described as suitable for CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) A2/B1 or pre-intermediate/ intermediate learners. Each unit consists of content-based activities and material that focus on using the four skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing). From the five lessons for each unit, the first three lessons build knowledge for completing the TED Talk in the fourth lesson. The lessons help learners by priming them about the real-world topic, introducing content-based material, and providing support through vocabulary and images. In this study, all 12 Keynote 2 units were used in Semester 2, spanning 14 weeks for an Introductory English course for Freshmen.

Data collection and data processing

A hard copy of the textbook was purchased to prepare each TED Talk from the listening section for analysis. Each of the talks were tabulated by unit, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3:
Keynote 2 Listening Texts: TED Talks Speaker, Title, Time, and Vocabulary Tokens by Unit (Madarbakus-Ring & Benson, 2024, p. 8)

Unit	TED Talk	Listening Time	Number of tokens
1	Munir Virani - "Why I Love Vultures"	6.03	954
2	A.J Jacobs - "The World's Largest Family Reunion"	9.44	1,466
3	Ann Morgan - "My Year Reading a Book from Every Country in the World"	12.04	1,922
4	Daria van den Bercken - "Why I Take the Piano on the Road and in the Air"	9.31	582
5	Roman Mars - "Why City Flags May be the Worst Designed Thing You Have Ever Noticed"	18.09	3,017
6	Jarrett Krosoczka - "How a Boy Became an Artist"	18.40	3,283
7	Andras Forgacs - "Leather and Meat Without Killing Animals"	8.59	1,149
8	Alessandra Orofino - "It Is Our City"	15.16	1,902
9	Joy Sun - "Should You Donate Differently?"	7.35	1,050
10	Tan Le - "A Headset that Reads Your Brainwaves"	10.31	1,440
11	Louie Schwartzberg - "The Hidden Beauty of Pollination"	7.33	415
12	Nizar Ibrahim - "How We Unearthed Spinosaurus"	6.03	940
	Total	**128.08 mins/secs**	**18,120 tokens**

As the teacher's book was unavailable, transcripts for each of the TED Talks were copied and pasted from the official TED website (www.ted.com) before being prepared for analysis. Each transcript was manually checked by correcting or changing any spelling of words to American English for consistency (e.g., categorise to categorize), revising any unrecognised words due to their misspellings, and removing hyphens and apostrophes from the original text. The document was then saved as a Microsoft Word document and opened as a text (.txt) file on the Notepad program. Following previous studies (i.e., Nation et al., 2016), the data was checked and cleaned again by deleting spaces, omitting any missed apostrophes or hyphens, and rewriting any contractions (i.e., didn't = did not) to match the BNC/COCA word lists (Nation, 2016). Words were also added to update the existing BNC/COCA and supplementary word lists to help continuously modernize the word lists with new additions (Nation et al., 2016). If words were not in the BNC/COCA word lists but satisfied the criteria of Bauer and Nation's (1993) word family scale, they were subsequently added to their word families in the existing lists. For example, the items needed to meet levels three to six of Bauer and Nation's (1993) criteria on the word family scale were considered. The criteria, which identified the most frequent regular derivational affixes, frequent and orthographically regular affixes, regular but infrequent affixes, and frequent but irregular affixes, were checked for the item to be added to the list. Identified proper nouns (e.g., *Spinosauraus),* compound words (e.g., *headset*), and abbreviations (e.g., *ETA*) were added to their respective word lists. The data was saved again as a text file for use with a vocabulary profiler.

Once the text file was prepared, the transcripts of each TED Talk was analysed using the BNC/COCA 25,000 word lists. To investigate the research questions, the Range Program (Heatley et al., 2002) using Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA 25,000 base list words and four supplementary lists were used to create a word list profile. The BNC/COCA word lists were chosen to analyze vocabulary using different frequency levels and the large word list corpus size. The BNC/COCA 25,000 divided the data into the first 25 1,000 most frequent word families based on their frequency. The program also uses Nation's (2012) supplementary word lists (i.e., proper nouns, marginal words, transparent compounds, and abbreviations). For research question 2, the initial BNC/COCA profile was used to categorise the words by their high-level and low-frequency bands as suggested by Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) (see Table 1). To create these lists, the baseword lists were used to list the words by each of Nation's (2012) baselists. The supplementary lists were not used. Due to space restrictions in this paper, although a low-frequency list was also created (see Appendix 1), only the medium-frequency words are presented in this study. Providing medium-frequency lists aims to aid teachers in supporting their learners with suitable lexical support when using these TED Talks resources, Based on these analyses, the following section presents the lexical profile and medium-frequency band word lists for each of the TED Talks' listening selections by unit.

Results

This study investigated the lexical profile and medium-frequency band word lists for the TED Talks in Keynote 2. Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA 25,000 word lists and supplementary lists were used to determine 95% and 98% comprehension thresholds. Tables 4 and 5 show the results for each TED Talk by unit.

High, medium, and low frequency vocabulary in TED Talks

Table 4 presents the total percentage of the vocabulary tokens when high-frequency (1,000-3,000 words), medium-frequency (4,000-8,000 words), and low-frequency (9,000-25,000) bands are grouped together, as outlined by Schmitt and Schmitt (2014). Six units (i.e., Units 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9) included between 90% and 96% high-frequency words and between 1.04% and 2.65% medium-frequency words. The other six units consisted of between 88% and 94% high-frequency words, although three units (i.e., Units 1, 4, and 12) included less than 90% words in the high-frequency bands. Further, Units 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, and 12 all included between 3.09% and 6.70% medium-frequency words. When the word lists are grouped together by the frequency bands, the medium-frequency numbers (shown in red in Table 4) highlight the potential difficulty that learners would have when listening to these specific TED Talks.

Concerning the higher number of medium-frequency words, Unit 1 and Unit 12 included 5.66% (54 tokens) and 6.70% (63 tokens) from the 4,000 to 8,000 word list respectively. Four other units (Units 4, 7, 10, and 12) also included between 3.09% and 3.96% tokens from the 4,000 to 8,000 word list. This indicates that medium-frequency vocabulary in

these TED Talks is likely to impose a greater lexical burden on learners relative to the other units in the textbook.

Table 4:
Comparison of High, Medium, and Low Frequency Vocabulary Bands in TED Talks

Unit	High-Frequency (1,000-3000)	Medium-Frequency (4,000-8,000)	Low-Frequency (9,000-25,000)
1	88.05	**5.66**	1.24
2	93.80	2.11	0.14
3	93.50	1.04	0.68
4	89.87	**3.09**	0.34
5	90.39	2.65	0.46
6	94.58	1.81	0.57
7	94.08	**3.30**	0.71
8	93.66	1.90	0.10
9	96.19	1.73	0.10
10	92.85	**3.96**	0.49
11	92.63	**3.64**	0.60
12	87.86	**6.70**	0.55

Note: Red numbers show the medium-frequency words beyond 3% coverage.

Proposed supplementary medium-frequency word lists for Keynote 2

Table 5 shows the division of the medium-frequency TED Talks-specific words that learners could use to support discrepancies in their vocabulary knowledge (see Appendix 1 for the low-frequency word list). Concerning high-frequency words, all 12 TED Talks achieved between 77% and 87% coverage with the first 2,000 word families. As expected, each TED Talk included sequentially fewer words as the bands progressed. However, the variation in the number of words from each subsequent medium-frequency list for each TED Talk is inconsistent. Units 1, 11, and 12, had a higher number of medium-frequency words, presenting learners with around 20 words included in the more difficult word list. In contrast, Unit 4 and Unit 11 included around 12 words in the medium-frequency band, suggesting that these would be easier for learners to understand. Although using textbooks may suggest that the level of difficulty increases with each subsequent level, this may not be the case. Thus, teachers need to consider which lexical items in the medium-frequency bands could create difficulties for learners when using these listening resources.

Table 5:
Individual medium-frequency word lists for TED Talks used in Keynote 2

Unit **List**	***1***	***4***	***7***	***10***	***11***	***12***
K4	ecological greed insult predator prey vegetarian	prejudice couch jazz keyboard sheer	brew herd exotic greenhouse horizon insect matrix multiply polar scar	blink cognitive cube impulse interface robot suite array consistency differentiate generation dynamic helicopter identical realm	butterfly monarch vanish	predator fossil bizarre spine fling compact expedition lim magnificent prey skull specimen
K5	extinct bald demon dumb ecology pastoral	awe influence	batch cellular dairy durable elastic hamburger implant mankind mimic pastry slaughter sterile tan toll transparent wallet	facial algorithm tan gel paste analogy heighten sensor technician wireless	intersect lapse mankind mystic seduce	dinosaur skeleton paddle elusive quest sediment slender
K6	turbine garbage horrific mythology revel scarlet	den melancholy browse	humane biopsy	scalp neuron fidelity intuition intuitive scroll	regenerate coma	aquatic buoy slippery
K7	carcass decompose		coax opaque yogurt	electrode, personalize		crocodile hind reptile
K8	vulture cobra com cremate personify ramification	com	com daisy figurative	cortex com	pollinate com	palaeontology unearth com

Discussion

The study investigated the lexical profile of 12 TED Talks used as listening texts in Keynote 2. The following discusses three main inconsistencies concerning the appropriate lexical coverage, the vocabulary knowledge, and the individual word lists needed to support learners.

TED Talk inconsistencies

TED Talks in Units 1, 11, and 12 were found to be lexically more demanding than the TED Talks in the other nine units. Although the TED Talks lexical profile showed the same thresholds as previous research of 3,000 word families for 95% comprehension and 5,000 word families for 98% comprehension (see Elk, 2014; Liu & Chen, 2019), three units presented lexical difficulties for pre-intermediate learners. Units 1, 11, and 12 reached 95% coverage at 3,000 and 6,000 word families but ranged between 5,000 and 8,000 word families to achieve 98% coverage. Upon further review of the units in question, one reason for their lexical difficulty could be due to their topics being more scientific, focusing on areas such as the conservation efforts of vultures (Unit 1), the coevolution of plants and pollinators (Unit 11), and the discoveries by paleontologists and archeologists (Unit 12). These findings of the lexical analysis were similar to Coxhead and Walls' (2012) and Nurmukhamedov's (2017) studies, suggesting that learners will need more guidance and support when completing Units 1, 11 and 12 as the higher vocabulary thresholds in these units would be difficult for the targeted pre-intermediate proficiency level. As the textbook units do not increase in difficulty in sequence, teachers should consider scaffolding or reordering the units to aid learners with potentially problematic words that they may encounter. Therefore, teachers may need to offer the appropriate scaffolding to prime learners for the TED Talk prior to completing the unit.

Second, learners could use TED Talks-specific word lists spanning from the medium-frequency 4,000 to 8000 word lists to prepare for the listening text, as shown in Table 5. Priming learners before they listen can help scaffold their learning in the while-listening stage. As Elk (2014) found in her study, providing learners with words they will encounter in the TED Talk helps them to address their difficulties by inferring meaning for unknown words (parsing), using another word if they came across an unknown word (perception), or using the information they had to understand the general meaning (utilisation). Similarly, Hloba (2016) used TED Talks to help learners attend to key vocabulary by using transcript excerpts to introduce new words. She suggests that learners listen to the talk and complete an information transfer activity before focusing on form using the transcript in a written or spoken activity in post-listening. These approaches illustrate how vocabulary instruction can help learners to independently identify and address their listening problems using TED Talk-specific word lists. As Goh (2000) identifies, equipping learners with the support they need to pay attention to unfamiliar word items can help them to redirect their attention to avoid fixating on new words while they listen. Similarly, word lists can help support learners' comprehension of real-world topics. Using specific vocabulary connected to the TED Talk to introduce related images and prediction prompts can better prepare learners for the topic and vocabulary knowledge gaps that learners possess. In turn, teachers are better able to prepare learners for real-world topics in authentic resources and scaffold suitable tasks to help them deal with more difficult talks in the textbook.

Although using textbooks may suggest that the level of difficulty increases with each unit, Keynote 2 provides challenges for teachers seeking to present a scaffolded approach for their learners. As these difficulties are not sequential, teachers would need to create categorised vocabulary band word lists, as shown in Table 5, to help prime learners and build their vocabulary knowledge to the required 8,000 word list. Using these lists before listening could aid better understanding of the chosen TED Talk for the unit. Further, certain units are more lexically demanding for learners. Attention should be given to Unit 1, 11, and 12 as these TED Talks included higher 95% and 98% thresholds, were shorter in length, and consisted of more medium-frequency vocabulary than the other TED Talks. As Sun and Dang (2020) note, one approach is to identify the medium-frequency and low-frequency words in texts to alleviate any potential lexical difficulty for learners. In line with findings from previous studies (Eldridge & Neufeld, 2009; O'Loughlin, 2012; Sun & Dang, 2020), knowing which TED Talks fail to reach the 95% and 98% thresholds can help teachers to support learners.

Pedagogical Implications

There were two pedagogical implications for teachers and learners from this study. First, the results highlighted the importance for teachers to analyse individual listening texts in textbooks using an online vocabulary profiler (see Cobb, 2000). While the commercial publisher's identification of textbook levels may help guide teachers, a further analysis of individual listening texts using word lists helps to ascertain the individual lexical demands for learners. Coxhead and Walls (2012) and Dang (2022) illustrate how teachers can use vocabulary software, such as the Compleat Lexical Tutor Vocab Profile, to generate a profile to identify the first 1,000/2,000 plus proper nouns, academic word list (AWL), and off-types word list. These results provide teachers with the vocabulary load to understand the potential lexical difficulty for each TED Talk. Second, teachers can lessen the learning burden by identifying any indiscretions of coverage and outlying units which are more lexically demanding for their learners. With the results from this analysis, teachers can provide support for learners by creating medium-frequency and low-frequency word lists to accompany supplementary materials (i.e., glossary, prediction prompts) prior to each unit to overcome potential vocabulary difficulties in these specific listening texts. Using these lists to prime potentially difficult medium-frequency words during before-listening could help learners to identify key words as they listen. Further, identifying the vocabulary in transcripts before listening could aid learners by shadowing the speaker, parsing connected words, or inferring meaning from context as they listen.

Limitations and future research

Regarding limitations and future research, a more detailed analysis of the TED Talks used in all six Keynote textbooks could add specific insight into the vocabulary load of the listening texts selected for the series. This could indicate more clearly where the threshold is achieved for each textbook and the potential medium-frequency and low-frequency word lists needed to support learners in their listening. Next, an in-depth

analysis using the same word categories for each data set could present more helpful comparisons for each of the word types, word families, and lemmas used in each unit. In turn, these lists can help identify the types of words which learners need to comprehend the content. Lastly, investigating the use of TED Talk-specific word lists could help to measure learners' understanding with comprehension questions and summaries related to medium-frequency word lists could provide valuable insights into their potential vocabulary difficulties.

Conclusion

This study presented the lexical profile and vocabulary load by frequency of 12 TED Talks used in a commercial textbook. The results showed inconsistencies in specific units that could affect listening comprehension. Specifically, a higher percentage of medium-frequency and low-frequency words were found in three units, indicating that learners may find the TED Talks more lexically difficult than the prescribed difficulty for pre-intermediate learners. Therefore, it is important that teachers are aware of the need to identify the potentially difficult words in listening texts and create supplementary materials, such as TED Talk-specific word lists, to use with the textbook. Additionally, instruction to train learners in using effective vocabulary learning strategies, such as explicit learning using specific word lists and priming topic knowledge, can prepare learners for using authentic resources. With further vocabulary analysis, lexically appropriate listening tasks can be tailored to identify potentially difficult medium and low-frequency words to help prime learners and support their language learning goals.

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Appendix 1

Individual low-frequency word lists for TED Talks used in Keynote 2

Unit List	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
K9	fetish, monogamy	mitochondria	Twitter, orgy		cede, populace, scourge	prom, rendition, saunter, sitcom, solace	collagen, alligator	annul			nectar	scorpion
K10	feral, goof		yome, upshot, xenophobia		alderman, mascot, paraphernalia, plop	angst, hamster, lynch, mascot		pothole	android		canary	conical
K11	rabies, anthrax, condor	staid			whet, firsthand	karaoke	sentient			abrasion, cortical		
K12	beagle				cheesy	hyper, ninja	filo			axon		
K13			mindset			coed, nerd, superhero						
K14			blog, tweet			sophomore				Avatar	tweet	
K15			anglophone							Brainwave		Micro-structure
Other	caracara (K23)			allegro (K16) chaconne (K23)	escutcheon (K17) podcast, saltire (K18)	platypus (K16) Snoopy (K17)	multilayered (K17) bioreactor (K20)					coelacanth (K19) pterosaur (K20)

BOOK REVIEWS

Walková, M. (2024). (Ed.). Linguistic Approaches in English for Academic Purposes: Expanding the Discourse. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 9781350300309 240 pp.

Reviewed by Rachael Harding, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

This book introduces novel theories and methodological approaches to English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The conceptualization of EAP is subject to many interpretations (Kirk, 2018) but at its core EAP learning and teaching focusses on language, discourse, and communication skills (Hyland, 2006). Interestingly, the international contributors to this edited volume use a linguistic lens "applying theories that are marginalized and underexplored" (pg. xv) to explore diverse linguistic frameworks and EAP contexts. Consequently, new perspectives on concepts and theories within the expanding field are shared along with ideas for future research. Regarding the format of the book, each chapter sets the context for the research, discusses findings, and includes sections on pedagogical implications and applications. As a result, the target audience includes EAP practitioners, TESOL professionals, applied linguists, researchers, and students.

To reflect academic English discourses and competencies, chapters are categorised under the following:

1. Fluency and Range of Expression
2. Complexity and Accuracy
3. Appropriateness to Academic Rhetorical Conventions

Under the first grouping 'Fluency and Range of Expression', in their analysis of authentic seminar interactions and metaphors, the authors indicate that there are differences between what is currently taught versus what should be considered more of a priority. For example, Wang and Chan (Chapter 2) found that in authentic seminar interactions, formulaic language as presented in EAP textbooks was in fact rather limited, suggesting that such functional language was not as useful as learning how to manage conflict in groupwork or generate ideas and arguments on the spot. Similarly, Marr (Chapter 3) suggests that EAP teaching could focus on metaphors to aid students to better understand how meaning is constructed drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics. Both studies highlight the need for authentic expression in written and spoken language.

The focus of the next three chapters under the heading 'Complexity and Accuracy' are underpinned by proficiency development and skill advancement in EAP students. Tarasova and Beliaeva (Chapter 4) conclude that vocabulary teaching in classroom practice should focus on developing awareness of level-appropriate word parts. Through processing and production of such vocabulary, in other words, attention to

morphological complexity, there is a noticeable impact on the quality of a student's writing. Similarly clausal complexity can affect text production.

Casal and Qiu's work (Chapter 5) suggests that lower proficiency students should be instructed on non-finite clause production (when and how to use them) since, in their results, they discovered that expert writers demonstrate a wider use of them. In the subsequent chapter, Rosmawati (Chapter 6) argues that the metatheory of Complex Dynamic systems (CDS) can not only be applied to the linguistics field but also in EAP research and teaching. The CDS theory, as a methodological approach, can be used to investigate emerging language development along with the offerings of tools and analyses to build learner-centred EAP classrooms.

In 'Appropriateness to Academic Rhetorical Conventions', the themes in all three chapters focus on critical writing skills, evaluation, and construction of texts. Wyatt (Chapter 7) discusses the usefulness of applying the analytical framework of Grice's principles, namely the maxim of relation, quality, quantity, and manner, to analyse journal article abstracts. He suggests that writers who reflect on the principles in their work can enhance connection between their writing and their readers. Meanwhile, Yakhontova's study (Chapter 8) examines communication, language and function of research article comments or responses with a view to enhancing the writing skills of EAP and doctoral students. She concludes that, compared to the evaluative nature of peer reviews, other functions of article responses highlight the voice and visibility of the commenter's own research. By understanding and knowing the conventions of evaluative genres such as these, students have raised awareness of feedback literacy. Effective text production is also a theme in the next chapter by Sawaki (Chapter 9). In this case, a proposed flexible model which integrates structuralism, cognitive linguistics and pragmatics and a pedagogy that is metaphor oriented. In brief, the chapter points out that the utilization of conceptualizing elements adds to knowledge and the ability to construct appropriate original texts.

In summary, this book offers varied approaches and examples across diverse contexts, levels, and linguistic backgrounds. The content includes pedagogical implications and recommendations; however, not everything will be applicable to all teaching contexts and levels. For a person wanting to add to and broaden their knowledge and practice, the elaboration of concepts and frameworks are accessible, and the chapters provide comprehensive references to relevant literature. The book is a fairly demanding read with content to process and reflect on in each distinct chapter, so a recommendation is to be selective in choice of chapter. Overall, the book and the wider series of 'New Perspectives for English for Academic Purposes' aims to encourage research and scholarship within the field of EAP, providing multiple useful stimuli.

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Bauer, L. (2024). English Phonetics, Phonology and Spelling for the English Language Teacher. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-032-60794-8 (pbk.) 177 pp.

Reviewed by Ha Hoang, Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

I would like to start with the conclusion: this is *the* book on English phonetics, phonology, and spelling that every English teacher should read.

By look, the book is pleasing with an aesthetic mix of a dark red brick colour and a white-on-black image of a wavelength on the cover. It is lightweight, printed on carbon-neutral paper with a teacher-friendly font size. The sections, chapters, and index support quick search and reference purposes.

Surely, those should not be the reasons why busy English language teachers should read the book. Practice-verified opinions are below.

The book provides the right amount of information on English phonetics, phonology, and spelling for a busy teacher without imposing a limit on further professional development. It has four parts. Part I, *Introductory material*, introduces the scope of the book and provides background information about phonetics—general knowledge about consonants, vowels, and phonemes, and how they are usually articulated and transcribed. Part II, *Mostly phonetics*, describes consonants, vowels, prosody, phonotactics and syllables, and provides advice for teachers. Part III, *Phonology*, covers sound changes influenced by adjacent sounds, morphophonemics, stress rules and free variation. Part IV, *Spelling*, addresses English spelling, including the spelling of consonants, vowels, and names and other difficult words. Each chapter presents detailed information and explanation about the corresponding topic, summarises the key points in a *Highlights* section, and finishes with practical advice under the heading of *What should the teacher do?* The tables, figures and examples in each chapter are ready for classroom purpose, and the authors' observations and comments about the variation in English pronunciation are gems that could liven up a pronunciation practice session. The book ends with a concise list of reading and references for further interest.

Surpassing its informativeness, the value of the book lies in its graceful understanding of the situation that English teachers face: Given the differences in the way different varieties of the English language are spoken, which is the "right" way to teach? A rigid adoption of a model or an easy-going attitude towards pronunciation would result in both a unidimensional worldview and systematic defects in learner language. If there is a middle path, which principles should teachers adopt to introduce features, give feedback, and intervene without disrupting fluency and damaging learners' confidence? The author recommends using a model and allowing for divergence from it. The book

itself offers a methodological model for this: While the description and discussion of the chosen "model" in the book is in Standard Southern British English (the language the author speaks), the author makes it clear that the model teachers have in mind for their students "need not be the model described here" (Bauer, 2024, p. 11).

More meaningfully, the book asks teachers to exercise agency to make decisions about modelling and allowing divergence of the sound features, raising awareness and opening discussions about how learners may want to sound and present themselves. By doing so, the book also encourages teachers to equip themselves with knowledge and practice of pronunciation of the target language to support both their learners and themselves in making successful pedagogical decisions.

The book is not an activity book with ready-to-photocopy handouts. However, this does not affect its direct contribution to teaching and learning. It would be an excellent reference point when one needs to learn about or refresh their understanding about the topics involved. The examples, explanations and recommendations in the book can lend themselves to teachable moments such as quick pronunciation exercises and learning tips. The topics and the sequencing of information offer a foundation for a pronunciation syllabus to supplement a course, a tutoring programme, or a personal pronunciation coaching course. Teaching teams could use the book as an opportunity for professional development time and design an accompanying collection of tasks and activities to meet their learners' needs.

There is no shortage of books on English phonetics, phonology, and spelling for English language teachers, but *English Phonetics, Phonology and Spelling for the English Language Teacher* is not technical, overloaded, or prescriptive. It strikes a fine balance between research and practice, reflecting the author's passionate and tireless devotion to English phonetics and phonology and its implications to language teaching. If you teach ESOL learners, this is the book to keep and refer to again and again. I recommend bookmarking page 55, 103 and 122.

Pentón Herrera, L.J. (Ed.). (2022). English and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education: Global Perspectives on Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices. Educational Linguistics, vol. 54. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86963-2. ISBN 10: 3030869628, ISBN 13: 9783030869625. Paperback (1st ed. 2022), 359pp.

Reviewed by Abdelhamid Safa, IPU New Zealand, Palmerston North, New Zealand

The unprecedented surge in global displacement, with over 103 million people forcibly displaced by mid-2022—including 32.5 million refugees, a third of whom are children—exposes a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions (UNHCR, 2023). The stark contrast between regions with robust support systems and those grappling with overwhelming needs underscores the complexities of this issue. Education emerges as a pivotal strategy in mitigating the crisis' impact and fostering inclusion across diverse contexts.

Pentón Herrera's edited volume addresses this critical need. The book explores effective strategies for supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), offering comprehensive insights divided into five parts. The structuring of the material into five separate thematic sections implies a comprehensive and well-considered organizational principle. This principle aims to furnish relevant insights for a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including educators directly engaged in the process of instruction, researchers dedicated to the investigation of the complexities associated with this student demographic, and policymakers responsible for the formulation of educational policies and the allocation of resources. Furthermore, the incorporation of varied international perspectives significantly augments the volume's potential to offer adaptable and contextually appropriate methodologies.

This resource is vital for educators and policymakers, particularly in light of the current global challenges, as it provides practical guidance for creating inclusive educational environments for displaced students.

Part I: Setting the Foundation

In Part I, Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco (pp. 9-24) argue in favour of a perspective that emphasizes the inherent capabilities of SLIFE, portraying them not as obstacles but as valuable assets within the broader educational landscape. This conceptual realignment, while gaining increasing promotion, continues to be underapplied in numerous settings. In this section, the authors provide an initial theoretical justification for such a paradigm shift, establishing the conceptual framework for the practical implications explored in subsequent chapters.

Part II: Overview of SLIFE

Here, Pentón Herrera (pp. 25–42) surveys educational systems in the US, Australia, Canada, and the UK, highlighting both structural obstacles and support mechanisms for SLIFE. Harris (pp. 43-60) extends the scope to adult learners navigating linguistic and cultural adjustments. Linville and Pentón Herrera (pp. 61-82) join Montero and Al Zouhouri (pp. 83-102) in a detailed exposition of the vital need for educational approaches sensitive to trauma. They emphasize that these strategies must be firmly planted in a nuanced comprehension of each learner's unique background.

The findings from these analyses are echoed by another study by Pentón Herrera and Byndas (2023) which delves into the educational journeys of Ukrainian refugees upon their arrival in Poland. The convergence between these scholarly works strongly emphasizes the need for a cohesive and integrated plan. Such a plan should involve the careful crafting of policies, the provision of crucial mental health support, and the thoughtful development of educational methods, all working in concert to address the challenges arising from interruptions in schooling.

Part III: Pre- and In-service Teacher Preparation

Custodio and O'Loughlin (pp. 103-124) emphasize how essential targeted professional growth opportunities are for educators working with diverse student populations, while DeCapua and Marshall (pp.125-140) argue that initial teacher education (ITE) programs should integrate frameworks specifically addressing the needs of SLIFE. Ledger and Montero (pp. 141-160) push for ITE that puts students first while working toward fair educational practices. Marrero Colón and Désir (pp. 161-192) explore the struggles faced by SLIFE teens as they navigate different school levels, especially when building reading and writing skills. Their results matches work done by Accurso et al. (2023) on Systemic Functional Linguistics—showing how teaching different text types and focusing specifically on language helps these students learn better.

Part IV: Effective Support in K-12 Learning Environments

Here, Casanova and Alvarez (pp. 193-208) champion teaching approaches that respect cultural differences, treating each student's background as something valuable that enhances classroom learning rather than an obstacle to overcome. Previously, DeCapua (2016) had similarly supported the development of curriculum frameworks that exhibit sophisticated awareness of cultural distinctions. Trinh (pp. 209-226) stresses the need for supportive classrooms where SLIFE who identify as queer feel secure enough to learn effectively. Cruzado-Guerrero and Martínez-Alba (pp. 227-240) put forward picture books without words as a strategy to pull families into the learning process and strengthen literacy abilities building on methods that Hill (2023) examined previously.

Aker, Daniel, and Pentón Herrera (pp. 241-262) explore how problem-based service learning works as an educational approach for these students. They examine how this teaching method embraces cultural responsiveness while developing contemporary

skills. Their viewpoint mirrors findings from Aboderin and Havenga's 2024 research, showing similar conclusions despite different contexts and approaches.

Part V: Effective Support in Adult Learning Environments

Frydland (pp. 263-284) presents a curriculum model utilizing scrolling content which seeks to foster adaptability and self-directed learning for adult students. Birman and Tran (2017) research also underscored the need for well-organized support and clear instruction specifically for refugee learners. Going further in the book, Friedman, Laitfang, and Pilosoph (pp. 285-300) stress the importance of using teaching methods that are both well-structured and clearly explained.

Lypka (pp. 301-320) investigates the application of participatory digital visual methodologies for those in the early stages of acquiring English as a second language. Meanwhile, Mocciaro and Young-Scholten (pp. 321-340) examine grammar instruction and practical language skill development for refugee women. Similarly, Kidwell (pp. 341-355) addresses these topics, focusing on gender considerations when educating SLIFE. Their teaching methods echo Laberge et al. (2019), whose work championed diverse communication techniques that prioritize individual learner requirements and circumstances.

Evaluation

This volume may be regarded as a highly relevant and timely intervention in the field of educational linguistics. It systematically questions deficit-based discourses and promotes context-sensitive, empirically supported educational strategies. The incorporation of both case studies and reflective practitioner insights significantly enhances its accessibility and scholarly contribution.

Reflection

My experiences teaching refugee learners in Egypt and Aotearoa New Zealand have shown me two very different systems. In Egypt, teaching in classrooms that were overcrowded and lacked sufficient funding highlighted the difficulties posed by limited resources and the lack of specific ITE. There are still major hurdles faced in supporting the more than 941,000 refugees currently seeking stability and opportunity (UNHCR, 2025a). In New Zealand, I noticed a different story. Through the national quota programme, around 1,800 refugees have been resettled (UNHCR, 2025b), and the education system responds with genuine efforts—investing in inclusive teaching, bilingual resources, and approaches that respect students' cultural identities. Schools invest in inclusive curricula, offer bilingual resources, and use teaching methods that respect and sustain students' cultural backgrounds.

Seeing these differences made Pentón Herrera's work feel especially relevant. The focus on trauma-informed, equity-driven teaching speaks directly to the kinds of challenges I

observed. It is a strong reminder that education needs to respond to the unique social and institutional settings in which it takes place.

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Huber, E. (2023). Tri-constituent compounds: A usage-based account of complex nominal compounding. De Gruyter Mouton. e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-108169-4 272 pp.

Natalia Beliaeva, KiwiClass: Multicultural Support Services, Wellington, New Zealand

The abundant scholarly literature on compounding is far from answering all questions on compounds. Furthermore, "[t]here is no systematic account in which those aspects that have been examined for two-word compounds are considered for more complex compounds" (p. 12). The book under review aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth study of tri-constituent compounds.

The Introduction outlines the structure of the book, which includes eleven chapters clustered into four parts. Chapters 2 and 3 present a review of the literature in the field, with Chapter 2 focussing on compounding in general, and Chapter 3 presenting 'the state of research on multi-word compounding' (p. 1).

As outlined in Chapter 4, the study uses a descriptive, usage-based approach by analysing a large set of corpus data using a set of quantitative and qualitative methods. Section 4.2, in particular, provides a detailed description of data collection and cleansing which may be insightful for corpus linguistic investigations.

Chapter 5 discusses the methodology of annotation of the internal structure of tri-constituent compounds, including a description of two possible internal structures (right-branching, where a compound on the right is followed by a simple noun on the left, as in *sunflower seeds*, and left-branching, where a noun is followed by a compound, as in *computer database*).

The formal analysis of compounds in Chapter 6 includes a description of compounds' length in syllables, morphological complexity, and a discussion of notable differences in internal structure, including stress patterns. The results of a small-scale pilot study presented in Section 6.4 are used to polemise with Carstairs-McCarthy's (2018) findings and suggest avenues for experimental research on compound stress.

The discussion of semantics of tri-constituent compounds in Chapter 7 is concluded by a statement that they "behave similarly to two-noun compounds but seem to display an even stronger use of the determinative pattern" (p. 95). This provides a starting point for future investigations, though the descriptive study avoids delving into complex cases when the semantic head is hard to determine (see Bauer 2017 for discussion). It is worth noting that the implications in Chapter 7 largely rely on the author's intuitions, e.g., the assumption that "the token frequencies found in the corpus are lower than the degree to which the items and the respective concepts are established in the speech community"

(p. 98). This intuitive assumption, however, provides a promising avenue for further research, building up on Bauer's (2017, p. 64) idea that "there is a referent for the name" represented by a compound, which "does not require that that name should have general, wide-spread and permanent value". At the same time, the assumptions of perceived familiarity based on intuitions are counterproductive as a critique of lexical frequency, since robust effect of frequency is manifested on many levels of word processing (see Brysbaert et al. 2018 for an extensive discussion). Further descriptive analysis of compound structure in Chapter 7 demonstrates that left-branching compounds tend to be more frequent than right-branching compounds, and furthermore, that "the complex heads in right-branching items are predominantly established compounds, such as *football* or *network*" (p. 105). Possible further investigations on this matter could consider criteria of defining 'established compounds', and whether such items are perceived by language users as compounds at all. This, in turn, has implications for the analysis of compositionality in three-noun compounds in section 7.8.

Chapter 8 discusses the productivity in complex compounds by analysing the number of types of tri-constituent compounds containing the same two-constituent compounds, and thus categorising two-constituent compounds on a scale from 'barely productive' (fewer than 10 types) to 'extremely productive' (over 100 types). This categorisation can relate to realised productivity in Baayen's (2009) sense. The author builds on methodology developed in Tarasova (2013) to analyse the differences in productivity of the same two-constituent compounds in the head and modifier positions. Insights from this investigation can be applied to further studies of compounds and morphological productivity in general.

Chapter 9 draws a "portrait of three-noun compounds" (p. 239) by summarising the key findings of the analysis developed in Chapters 3-8. Theoretical and methodological implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 10, followed by an outline of potential avenues for further research in Chapter 11.

Overall, the study bears a largely descriptive character, with statistics used mainly to inform further qualitative analysis. The style of writing is clear and detailed, though it would have benefitted from some revision in terms of conciseness. The book is useful as a reference source for morphologists, students, and teachers, especially in the EAP area.

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Contributions to *The TESOLANZ Journal* are welcomed from language educators and applied linguists both within and outside of Aotearoa/New Zealand, especially those working in Australia and countries in the South Pacific.

2. Empirical **Articles** should in general be no longer than 5000 words, and they should be accompanied by a 150-word abstract.

3. **Reports** on research or practice should be 2000-2500 words. Reports should a) describe the context and motivation for the study, b) highlight gaps or issues, c) describe the innovation, action or research, d) report on and discuss outcomes, and e) include a reflection and future steps. Reports should be accompanied by a 100-word abstract.

4. Referencing conventions should follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th Edition). The reference list at the end of the article should be arranged alphabetically. The reference list should only include items specifically cited in the text.

5. As far as possible, comments should be incorporated into the text but, where necessary, endnotes may be placed after the main body of the article, before the list of references, under the heading Notes.

6. All graphics should be suitable for publication and need no change. Grayscale photographs: use a minimum of 300 dpi. Line drawings: use a minimum of 1000 dpi.

7. It is understood that manuscripts submitted have not been previously published and are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

8. Enquiries and submissions should be sent by email to the editor, Dr Oliver Ballance, oliver.ballance@vuw.ac.nz. The preferred format is MSWord.

9. All submissions should be anonymised and accompanied by a separate 'Author's details' document providing the full name, full mailing address, telephone number and email addresses of all authors.

10. Those interested in submitting a book review should contact the Reviews Editor, Dr. Elizaveta Tarasova, elizaveta@etc.ac.nz.

11. Submissions for the 2025 issue of *The TESOLANZ Journal* are now open. We welcome manuscripts on a rolling basis throughout the year.