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EDITORIAL

The three articles in the 2025 issue of *The TESOLANZ Journal* will be of interest to both ESOL teachers and language teaching researchers.

Rosemary Granger and Anthea Fester's article investigates the use of emojis and stickers in multimodal collaborative learning in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, their findings extend our understanding of emoji and sticker use in social media apps, highlighting their role in supporting and mediating language learners' communication on collaborative platforms, as well as in relationship building. Interestingly, the study also reveals the impact of teachers' use of emojis and stickers, which is perhaps something for more of us to consider.

The second article, by Jacqueline Tagg, examines the role of non-academic factors in achievement on tertiary-level EAP programmes. Building on a critical literature review, this qualitative study investigates the experiences of international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds who transitioned from a university-embedded EAP programme to full tertiary-level study at a New Zealand institution. It identifies academic, cultural, and emotional factors that interact dynamically and situates them within a proposed Holistic Academic Integration Model.

In the third article, Zu Liyang explores the linguistic needs of a Chinese migrant worker in New Zealand's hospitality industry. Taking a mixed-methods case study approach from an English for Specific Purposes perspective, the study adopts a longitudinal view of a migrant's language needs and presents a trial lesson designed to address them. Through interviews, questionnaires, on-site observations, and customer reviews, the study illuminates the complex linguistic challenges faced by migrants working in the food and beverage industry in New Zealand.

Book reviews by Elizaveta Tarasova (*English complex words: Exercises in construction and translation*), Natalia Petersen (*Generative AI in higher education: The ChatGPT effect*), and Hanna Svensson (*Language assessment literacy and competence, Volume 1: Research and reflections from the field*) complete this year's issue.

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

Oliver Ballance
January 2026

ARTICLES

EMOJI AND STICKER USE IN MULTIMODAL COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: AN EAP STUDY

Rosemary Granger & Anthea Fester, Wintec | Te Pūkenga, Hamilton

Abstract

In the last decade, the use of mobile apps for language education purposes has garnered attention from researchers and teachers. Part of this interest has been associated with the increased use of social networking applications (apps) such as WhatsApp and WeChat (Kacetl & Klímová, 2019; Li, 2018). Closely connected to this increase has been an exponential use of emojis and stickers in social media chats. However, there seems to be a gap in the literature around the appearance of these graphicons in a social networking app used to promote collaborative and supportive engagement of learners in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) environment. This study sheds light on the use of these graphicons in an EAP environment. In this article, the term graphicon, as defined by Herring and Dainas (2017), refers to graphical icons such as emoticons, emoji, stickers, GIFs, images and video clips. Initially, interaction patterns between learners and learners, as well as between teachers and learners, were analysed by the researchers. Following on from that initial analysis, the second analysis framework (Danesi, 2016) explored relationship building posts. In the initial pattern analysis one of the findings indicate that teachers often used emojis to soften messages related to academic tasks. Overall, the results indicate that most emoji and sticker use performed the function of injecting friendliness and positive feelings compared to the tone-enhancing function. However, for tone-enhancing, teachers used the most emojis. This connects to the earlier mentioned findings that teachers often used emojis to soften messages in serious work-related messages.

Introduction

Given the global growth of EAP programs and the increasing reliance on social media for academic and social interaction (especially among culturally diverse learners) studies into the use of emojis and stickers are crucial for all parties in the interaction to understand how these are used and what appears to be the key messages conveyed. In addition, the NZCEL EAP Level 4 is very challenging and support and collaboration from peers and teachers is essential for success at this level. The teachers also wanted to see the extent to which the use of emojis and stickers might contribute to relationship building in this context.

This article describes research carried out as an extension of findings reported in Fester and Horvath (2022), who investigated the contribution made to relationship building and collaborative learning by *WeChat* messaging in four EAP classes. The current article focusses on the use of emojis and stickers in the *WeChat* messages exchanged in the four classes. While emojis and stickers are examined in terms of their contribution to

relationship building, in other words, through a socio-cultural lens, their functions are also viewed through a semiotic lens.

There is an array of research available on the online presence of different education groups and the use of apps (Kacetl & Klímová, 2019; Li, 2018). However, there has not been a great deal of research on interactions in *WeChat* which focus on emoji and sticker use in EAP classes and where teacher engagement is also included. A couple of reasons might account for this paucity in the research. It could be that *WeChat* is underrepresented in the EAP research and social media environment where teachers interact with students, as the lack of literature appears to suggest. It could also be connected to the regional popularity of the app, as not much research into educational use of *WeChat* outside of Mainland China seems to have been conducted.

There are several differences between emojis and stickers. Tang and Hew (2019) explain that emojis are small pictographs which are encoded in Unicode and can therefore be displayed consistently across different platforms. Stickers, however, are larger, more elaborate images, which are not part of the Unicode system, are highly personalised and often designed by particular messaging platforms, and hence cannot be used across different platforms.

In 2024, the number of emojis on Unicode reached almost 3,800 (Emojipedia, n.d.). Stickers were first used in 2011, about 14 years after emojis were created in Japan. Once they were introduced, sticker use rapidly gained traction, initially mostly in Asian-based social apps such as WeChat. In 2020, Asian-based mobile platform users made far greater use of stickers than western-based users. However, from 2020 onwards, there were signs that sticker use on western-based platforms was on the increase (Konrad et al. 2020).

Research background

Two key theoretical tenets underpin this research, namely, socio-cultural and semiotic. These are inextricably interconnected and valuable in terms of providing guiding principles for the project.

Socio-cultural perspective

Since the turn of the century numerous researchers have investigated the connection between socio-cultural (SC) theory and language learning (Ganem-Gutierrez, 2018; Panhwar et al., 2016; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004). Some aspects investigated have included the link between SC theory and classroom learner engagement and peer support, technology use in language teaching, and the social interaction made available with smartphone apps. Inevitably, most of the researchers in this space revisit the foundational work of Vygotsky (1978) who advocated for the notion that social interaction is crucial for cognitive development and that learning occurs primarily in social settings before individual learning takes place.

Some of these studies have focused on SC theory as it relates to the use of technology for language learning (Ganem-Gutierrez, 2018; Li, 2018; Kacetl & Klímová, 2019), while others have highlighted the development of language pedagogy. One line of enquiry is that of Panhwar et al. (2016, p.183) who posit that "the theory has the potential for forming new context-orientated language teaching-learning pedagogies" thereby supporting teachers "in maximising the effectiveness of their teaching and their students' learning".

There are several ways in which the benefits of socialising within culturally suitable spaces can be enhanced in language teaching and some of these are through using collaborative activities, encouraging reflection and online participation. The use of a social media smartphone app to support language learning closely aligns with the ideas proposed by the above-mentioned SC theory researchers. This is because the app use can encourage social interaction, peer support, speed of engagement, informal opportunities for language development and these social interactions can lead to more cognitive engagement.

Semiotics theory: The use of emojis and stickers

The notion of social interaction as an essential part of language cognitive development (as espoused by Vygotsky) is further enhanced in this research. The authors perceive the use of social media (and by extension emojis and stickers user) as a connection between the socio-cultural lens, where social interaction is essential for cognitive development, and semiotic theory. As emojis and stickers are symbols used to create meaning and to communicate specific messages, they are underpinned by pragmatic and semiotic theoretical perspectives as well.

Originally social media apps were viewed as a means of informal communication. However, their use has evolved, and, in education, they are recognised as learning support tools (Perez et al., 2023). In addition, text messages no longer only contain texts; they have evolved to include emojis and stickers and these inclusions have enhanced text messaging communication. As stated by Danesi (2017) and further highlighted by Logi and Zappavigna (2021), emojis have become a focus of linguistic investigation because of their increasing usage as well as their developing meaning-making potential.

Semiotics has been defined by Hamel (2010, p. vii) as "the study of sign processes (semiosis) or signification and communication, signs and symbols and is usually divided into three branches: Semantics, Syntactics, and Pragmatics". Put simply, the main thrust of semiotic theory is on the interplay between signs and symbols and the role these play in communication. Initially semiotic research on emojis focussed on their attitudinal (affective) meaning, but more recent research has investigated their pragmatic, phatic and semantic functions (Logi & Zappavigna, 2021).

Pragmatics is the study of language use in context (Levinson,1983). According to Tang and Hew (2019), the meaning of emojis is co-dependant on the context they are used in. The communicative context includes not only the surrounding text but also participants and situation. Danesi (2016, p. 96) suggests that "knowing how to employ emoji strategically constitutes a form of pragmatic competence" and further states that it is a type of code switching that occurs when users move between "alphabet and emoji writing". In the Danesi (2016, p. 97) study, the use of emoji code was not common between student and teacher interactions and one participant stated that the person would only use emojis with a professor who they thought was friendly and who they had known for a while.

Several studies such as Kim et el. (2022) and Sia et al. (2024) have investigated the effect of the use of emojis by the instructor on the relationship between teacher and student in a higher education online environment. These studies concluded that instructors would not lose their credibility, as some had feared, and, in fact, the closer bond between instructor and student had led to increased motivation and better performance on the part of the students. However, the effect of emoji and sticker use on relationship building and collaboration in student-to-student interaction does not seem to have been a focus of study.

Pragmatic functions identified by Herring and Dainas (2017) include reaction and tone modification which were first identified by Danesi in 2016. Danesi (2016, p.100) notes that "the most basic *pragmatic function of emoji…is to add emotional tone and to emphasize certain phatic aspects of communication"*. The term *phatic* comes from Malinowski (1923) and refers to the exchange of words and phrases that are more important for their social functions than their dictionary meanings (Danesi, 2016). Sampietro (2016) introduced a different perspective and focused on the interpersonal functions of emojis, arguing that emojis are used to "align with the interlocutor, to express informality or to enhance phatic communion and expressive speech acts, especially greetings" (p.109).

Logi and Zappavigna (2021) used a social semiotic analysis of emoji-language semiosis. They propose an analytic framework using Systemic Functional Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to identify how emoji and language interact to make meaning. They noted the convergence of their findings and those of pragmatic semiotics researchers such as Herring and Dainas (2017) and Danesi (2016) including the "adding tone" function which Logi and Zappavigna (2021, p.20) describe as part of proximal attitudinal prosody "where attitude realised by emoji 'washes' across co-occurring language".

The issue of whether graphicons can make meaning independent of text has also been a point of interest for linguists such as Dresner and Herring (2010), Herring and Dainas (2017) and Danesi (2016). In attempting to answer this question, Danesi categorised

emojis into two groups: *adjunctive emojis* that make meaning together with language and *substitutive emojis* which take the place of language.

Several researchers have focused on the differences between emojis and stickers and have highlighted the fact that stickers display enhanced or exaggerated emotions and are cartoon-like (Wang, 2016; Konrad et al, 2020; Laddha et al., 2020). Laddha et al. (2020, p. 13156) mention that stickers are used "to visually express a nuanced range of thoughts and utterances to convey exaggerated emotions". Also, Laddha et al. (2020, p. 13156) state that stickers display "a graphic alternative for text messages" while emojis are used in combination with texts. However, stickers have evolved to include text as well, as seen in the study reported below. Konrad et al. (2020) conducted a study on a comparison of the use of stickers and emojis by a group of English-speaking Facebook messenger users. Their findings identified three conditions for the use of emojis and stickers, namely, mood at time of send, closeness to recipient and reasons for non-use. One key conclusion was that stickers tended to be "used more in closer relationships, and emojis are more appropriate than stickers for distant relationships" (Konrad et al., p. 226). Another conclusion was that stickers are thought by users to be more "intense" and so not used for semi-serious messages. Stickers are also thought to be playful and cute. In one study conducted in South Korea by Lee (2017), some functional and strategic uses of stickers were identified including the use of stickers for representing self, sustaining a certain social status, managing impressions of oneself, substituting stickers for opening greetings or closing messages. A similar study conducted by Zhou et al. (2017) in southern China focussed on the use of emojis and stickers in *WeChat* posts. That study revealed similar reasons for the use of stickers as the Lee (2017) study. However, one interesting point of difference was that participants in the Zhou et al., (2017, p. 752) study indicated that they also used stickers "when they have nothing to say or do not know what to say". Li (2018), in an exploratory study, found that one of the participants, a Chinese L2 student whose Chinese proficiency was beginner-level, used some multimodal linguistic and semiotic resources, including stickers to enable him to participate in chats with native speakers on *WeChat*. Gu et al. (2023, p.6) quotes an interviewee as saying, "when it is hard to describe the feelings, I used emojis". This, too, is a possible reason for choosing to use emojis.

Research into emoji and sticker use has a bearing on the current study because voices like Konrad et al. (2020), Lee (2017), and Gu et al. (2023) have emphasised the effect of the use of emoji and stickers on the rapport between students and fellow students, and between teachers and students. The NZCEL Level 4 EAP course that the participants were enrolled in is regarded as a high stakes course because learners need to achieve to gain entry to their mainstream degree or diploma choices. By using emojis and stickers in a social media app, students may find their interactions more relaxing, collaborative and supportive. In addition, the use of these graphicons highlights the nuanced nature of emoji and sticker use (Laddha et al., 2020). The use of stickers and emojis arguably provide students with a more comfortable space to receive advice and to support each

other. The multimodality collaborative aspect of this study with the use of emojis and stickers is further enhanced by the fact that these are face-to-face classes; students engage in the Moodle online space as well as in the social media *WeChat* space. Those who are comfortable with the multimodal engagement can also support those who have queries or face challenges (Fester & Horvath, 2022), thus making it a collaborative multimodal space.

Aims of the study

The present study aims to explore the use of emojis and stickers for relationship building within the interactions between learners and learners, and learners and teachers in *WeChat* groups in an EAP environment. The main thrust of the larger study was to evaluate the use of a social media app, in this instance *WeChat*, as a tool to enhance learners support of each other as well as teachers support of learners in a collaborative online space across the New Zealand Certificate in English Language (NZCEL) Level 4 classes. The research questions and sub-questions which are the foci of the present study were:

Research question

How were emojis and stickers used in the WeChat interactions between students and students and between students and teachers across four streams (classes) in a Level 4 EAP semester course?

Sub-questions

1. In what kinds of interaction patterns (student to student, teacher to student or student to teacher) were emojis and stickers mainly used?
2. Were there any indications that emojis and stickers were used to replace language?
3. Did the emojis and stickers used in these interactions contribute to relationship building and if so, how?

Context and participants

The current study is based on the data collected in the larger study which investigated relationship building and collaborative learning by *WeChat* messaging in four EAP classes. Prior to the research being undertaken, the project received ethics approval from the participating institute's ethical committee. The study was conducted in a language centre at one of Aotearoa New Zealand's institutes of technology. The language centre offers a range of the NZCEL programmes. Participants were recruited for this study from the NZCEL Level 4 Academic programme. These learners were mainly at the Upper Intermediate, High B1 level (Exam English, 2019) on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). At the language centre, the students are put into classes called streams as they enrol. All the 74 learners in the Level 4 programme across four streams agreed to have their *Wechat* posts included in the research project analysis. These participants came from countries in South America, Central Europe, East Asia and South Asia with ages ranging from 18 to 55 years.

The teacher gave the cohort of learners a choice of which social media app would be used. Probably because many of them were from a Chinese background, they chose *WeChat.* Anecdotal evidence based on class chats indicated that the learners from a non-Chinese background were happy to use *WeChat*, with some saying that they were curious about *WeChat* and would like to get to know how it worked and how the platform compared with others that they used.

There were four teachers across the streams. Two teachers co-taught each stream. *Stream A* and *B* had the same two teachers and *Stream C* and *D,* had the same two teachers. Of the two teachers for each class, one taught the Reading and Writing modules, and the other teacher taught the Listening and Speaking modules. Each class had 20 hours of face-to-face classes and a Moodle site which was used mainly for dissemination of material, as an assessments repository and to provide interactive activities for added self-study related to the course content. Thus, the social media app was used as an additional way of interacting quickly with classmates and teachers during class time or after class. In addition, we chose to collect the data in streams in order to do some comparison analysis for the findings.

Methodology and design

This report originated from a larger enquiry into the use of a social app to support and encourage collaboration within an EAP programme. At the start of the 18-week semester course, a *WeChat* group was set up for each class, and the teachers were included in the chats of the streams that they taught. Over the semester, the chat posts were collected by the Listening and Speaking teachers for each group. They took screenshots or photos of the chats and stored them for analysis. It is these screenshots that are the focus of the data analysis in this article. In terms of research gathering tools, Gray (2018, p. 494) describes analysing documents (in this case, the *WeChat* posts) as aligning with unobtrusive data gathering. In this project, the screenshots from the personal social media interactions fall under the umbrella of digital archives. The key thrust of the study was on the value of using a social media app to enhance collaboration, reflections, and support between learners and between teachers and their learners.

The analysis of the use of emojis and stickers in the *We Chat* posts was guided by a slight variation of the reflexive thematic analysis promoted by Braun and Clarke (2022). This type of reflexive thematic analysis aligns with the way the article authors perceive the space that they hold as researchers, and how they engage with their qualitative data to systematically develop their coding, themes and sub-themes with respect to the participants. They see this process as an iterative process where they went back, revisited and reflected on the posts on numerous occasions. On these occasions, discussions occurred about the posts and their meanings within the context of the *WeChat* conversations and how the researchers in this study's own assumptions may impact on the messages. This was to ensure the researchers had a better grasp of the messages, focusing on 'critically interrogating' what and how they analysed and reported on the

posts. Braun and Clarke's (2022, p. 35) reflexive thematic analysis discerns six main phases or steps to follow when conducting thematic analysis. These six phases are titled (in order), "dataset familiarisation, data coding, initial theme generation, theme refining, defining, and naming and writing up."

For our thematic analysis we used two separate categorisation frameworks; the first was a revised classification developed by Fester and Horvath (2022) and the second was Danesi's framework which showed *Relationship building posts.* The first framework consisted of three main interaction patterns between participants in the *Wechat* class groups. The framework was partly based on the earlier study (Fester & Horvath, 2022) as the concepts of non-academic and academic boundaries and the three-fold interaction patterns identified, namely students to students, teachers to students and students to teachers were used. If emojis appeared on posts related to academic questions, academic administration or study, they were classified as academic-related and if they were on posts sending birthday wishes or supporting a classmate through health and family issues, they were classified as non-academic. The division between adjunctive (added to the text) and substitutive (used in place of written text) emoji or sticker use was added to the analytical framework. These interaction patterns represent the context in which the emoji and stickers were used. The context includes the participants (teacher/s and student/s) as well as their roles as sender or recipient/s. The topic (academic and non-academic) is also part of the context as is the situation, in this case, a *WeChat* group in each of the four classes which operated as an additional opportunity for collaboration and support alongside daily face to face classes.

In one of the first steps, the two researchers on the project met to *familiarise themselves with the dataset.* This was done by looking at the types of emojis and stickers, where they occurred, where they were used the most and who used them. The *data coding* had several sub-phases, and the researchers worked together to do an initial coding of a sample of the screenshots. We looked at a sample of emojis and stickers (separately) from each of the four classes. For the first sub-phase, we looked at how the sample would be coded for academic versus non-academic analysis patterns. This initial coding was done for our first intercoder reliability or standardisation of the first coding sub-phase. After that, for the second sub-phase, we took the same sample from across the four classes, and we coded them according to the three interaction patterns that we had identified (student to student, teacher to student and student to teacher). We then reviewed our coding of the sample and discussed any variations. After that, we allocated two classes to each of us (four classes altogether) and we coded the rest of the emojis and stickers according to academic vs. non-academic topics and into the three interaction patterns. If we were unsure of any, we circled the emoji or sticker on the hard copies we were working on, and then when we met to review our coding together, we decided how we would code any anomalies. The next coding sub-phase was to divide the emojis and stickers into adjunctive (adding to a written message) or substitutive (instead of a text or standalone) types. We repeated the above sub-phases where we did some coding together

and then went off to code our allocated two classes separately. We coded these manually using tables to document the data.

Once we had reviewed our coding, we noted that there were no differences in the intercoder reliability for the adjunctive or substitutive coding. For this first classification stage, the third phase of Braun and Clarke (2022), which is called the *initial theme generation* phase had a variation as the themes were not projected from the data as such because our classification framework 1 and 2 guided the themes. So, once our coding was done our *initial theme generation* was completed as well. The next phase, was the *theme refining, defining and naming* phase. For the researchers, this stage resembled a revisiting of the coding, refining the classification and calculating all the data to develop the tables.

After the initial classification, the emojis and stickers were classified using the work of Danesi (2016) on relationship building posts. We needed to complete the initial framework coding before embarking on the Danesi coding as we needed the coding for the first stage to build on to the Danesi pattern coding. Our approach to this classification could probably be described as a more deductive approach as Danesi's framework already existed and we were applying it to a different dataset, namely, emojis and stickers, and analysing these in terms of whether they were relationship enhancing. Danesi's classification was chosen as it connected strongly to our focus on collaboration and supportive learning environments. Danesi (2016) divides the main pragmatic functions of emojis into two categories: adding tone and injecting a positive mood. In keeping with these two categories, our data was analysed based on whether we decided that an emoji was adding tone or injecting a positive mood. Of these functions Danesi regards the tone-enhancing function as the more important as emoji are a visual means to convey prosodic (emotive) meaning. As Danesi (2016 p.96) says, "In the absence of physical tone, which might lead people to read a negative content in a message, the smileys are discourse particles for rendering the tone positive or at least calm and assuaging". The same emoji, for example a smiling face, might be either tone enhancing when attached to a message from teacher to students about an assignment (indicating that the teacher wished to be supportive), or it could inject a positive mood when attached to a message of encouragement from a fellow student.

For the second classification framework, which was Danesi's *Relationship building posts,* we followed the same coding process as we did for the first classification framework from the familiarity *with dataset*, *data coding*, *initial theme generation* and then the *theme refining, defining and naming*. We spent several meetings revisiting the way that we had coded and classified the emojis and stickers.

Once we had used the first five phases of the thematic process for both classification systems, we went on to the final writing up phase where we designed our final tables

(See Table 1 to Table 8 below), discussed the best way to design these and then wrote up the findings for each of our two classification phases.

Results

In this small study, it is relevant to mention that the learner participants attended face-to-face classes. In class, they were probably mainly focused on the specific guided class content. Also, when they were put in groups to work together, these smaller learner groups would mainly have focused on the specific tasks they were given for the group interaction. However, outside of class when they interacted via the *WeChat* app, they could focus on any aspect of their learning or any social aspect they were happy to share with their classmates.

Tables 1 to 8 illustrate the overall figures derived from the analysis of the emoji and sticker use.

Table 1:
Overall emoji and sticker usage in academic/non-academic-related posts

Category of posts	**Number of posts**
Emojis	
Academic-related posts	269
Non-academic-related posts	551
Total posts using emojis	820
Stickers	
Academic-related posts	66
Non-academic related posts	153
Total posts using stickers	219
Emojis + stickers	1039
Total number of posts	3419

For the semester when the data gathering occurred, there was a total of 3419 posts across the four streams. About 30% of these posts contained emojis and stickers (Table 1). The difference between the number of posts containing emojis and those containing stickers was noteworthy, with posts containing stickers making up just over 25% of these posts. This might be due in part to sticker use being used more commonly on Asian-based mobile platforms than on western-based platforms (Konrad et al., 2020).

When the content of the posts was analysed using the academic vs non-academic categories, it was clear that emojis and stickers were most used when attached to posts which contained non-academic content (See Figure 2 below). Examples of the use of emoji/sticker use on academic and non-academic posts can be seen on the screen shots Figure 1 and Figure 2 below:

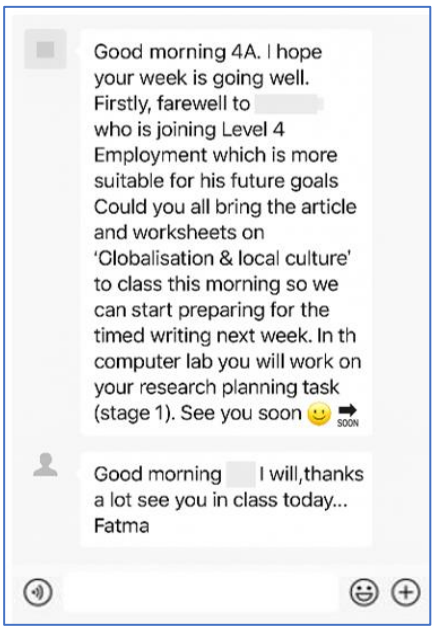

Figure 1: Example of emoji use in an academic post between teacher and student

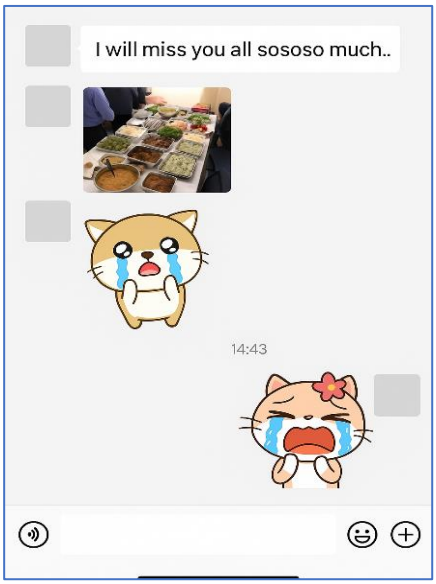

Figure 2: Example of sticker use in a non-academic post between students

The researchers chose to further analyse the data related to emojis and sticker use according to streams to see whether the interactions within each stream were similar so that generalisations could be made. As can be seen in Table 2 to Table 6 below, there were variations from stream to stream in several aspects investigated.

Table 2:
Emoji interactions from students to students by stream

Interaction pattern	**Emoji interactions**						
students—students	**Stream**	**Academic: Adjunctive**	**Academic: Substitutive**	**Total**	**Non-academic: Adjunctive**	**Non-academic: Substitutive**	**Total**
	A	5	10	15	115	34	149
	B	7	7	14	10	8	18
	C	0	1	1	63	19	82
	D	17	3	20	37	28	65
Total		29	21	50	225	89	314

Table 2 on emoji use in interaction between students shows that Stream D had the highest number of posts for academic adjunctive use of emojis and Stream C had no academic adjunctive emoji use. In terms of the total use of emojis for academic adjunctive as well as for academic substitutive use, Stream D also had the most. However, for non-academic use of emojis, Stream A had the highest use of emojis for adjunctive and the highest total emoji use between students. Overall, there was far greater adjunctive emoji use than substitutive use, with overall totals of 254 and 110, respectively. Stream A had the most emojis for non-academic adjunctive use (115) as well as for non-academic substitutive use (34) compared to Stream B that had the lowest for both, with 10 and 8, respectively. This data shows that the four Streams varied greatly in their use of emojis. Also, these interaction patterns between students further consolidates the work by researchers such as Ganem-Gutierrez (2018), Li (2018), and Kacetl and Klímová (2019), who support the socio-cultural claim for better language learning via social interaction.

Table 3:
Emoji interactions from students to teachers

Interaction pattern	**Emoji interactions**						
Students-teachers	**Stream**	**Academic: Adjunctive**	**Academic: Substitutive**	**Total**	**Non-academic: Adjunctive**	**Non-academic: Substitutive**	**Total**
	A	17	2	19	0	13	13
	B	12	0	12	37	9	46
	C	10	1	11	5	1	6
	D	27	8	35	27	1	28
Total		66	11	**77**	69	24	93

The total of emojis used in student to teacher interaction shown in Table 3, is much lower (93) than the number used in student-to-student interaction (314). In each stream, there was also an increase in the number of emojis used adjunctively in an academic context. This suggests that students were likely to interact directly with teachers on academic matters and were more likely to send supportive posts to their classmates on non-academic matters. The use of emojis in Stream A is an example of this tendency where 115 emojis were attached to non-academic posts sent to peers while there were no emojis attached to non-academic posts sent to teachers. Stream C uses the smallest number of emojis in their academic posts to both students and teachers. However, there is a big difference between the number of emojis used by this stream in a non-academic context to fellow students (82) compared to the number used to teachers (6). Overall, as mentioned earlier, what is interesting, as Danesi (2016) noted, is that it was uncommon for students to use emojis when interacting with the teacher unless students were very comfortable with the teachers. However, the present study, which was conducted several years after the Danesi study, shows that students were clearly comfortable and friendly enough to use emojis when interacting with their teachers. It could also be a sign of the times, in that currently social media app use has moved along, and that it is more prevalent for emojis to be used in student-teacher interactions. Nevertheless, the data does suggest a level of comfort between the students, their classmates and their teachers. This may have to do with classroom face-to-face relationships too.

Table 4:
Emoji interactions from teachers to students

Interaction pattern	**Emoji interactions**						
Teachers-students	**Stream**	**Academic: Adjunctive**	**Academic/ Substitutive**	**Total**	**Non-academic: Adjunctive**	**Non-academic: Substitutive**	**Total**
	A	74	10	84	76	5	81
	B	48	2	50	51	0	51
	C	3	1	4	1	0	1
	D	3	1	4	8	3	11
Total		128	14	142	136	8	144

There is a big difference between the total number of emojis used by teachers in their interaction with students in streams A (165) and B (101) and the total number of emojis used by teachers interacting with students in streams C (5) and D (15) (See Table 4 above). Interestingly, in all streams, the numbers of emoji used by teachers where the content was academic is very close in number to the number used for non-academic posts. This could be due to the desire on the part of teachers to show friendliness and support for students when dealing with both academic and non-academic matters. The

use of these emojis by teachers to demonstrate support for students clearly aligns with the work on socio-cultural theory such as that of Panhwar et al. (2016) who postulate that additional social tools like emoji use in messages provide new technology contexts for teachers to support and enhance the students' learning.

What is also interesting here is that the researchers had expected to see a correlation between the teachers' use of emojis and the students' use of emojis in their interactions with their teachers. This expectation was based on the idea of linguistic convergence when there is a power differential between participants. In this case, the less powerful (perceived to be the learners) would imitate what the more powerful (perceived to be the teachers) are doing (Kauhanen, 2020). Thus, because of the high number of emojis used by the teacher of Stream A (165) it might have been expected that students in that stream would also have used a high number of emojis; but this was not the case as only a total of 32 emojis were attached to posts to their teacher. What was even more striking was the large number of emojis (63) used by stream D in their posts to their teacher who used only 15 emojis in their communication with their students.

Table 5:
Sticker interactions from students to students

Interaction pattern	**Sticker interactions**						
students-students	**Stream**	**Academic: Adjunctive**	**Academic/ Substitutive**	**Total**	**Non-academic: Adjunctive**	**Non-academic: substitutive**	**Total**
	A	1	2	3	5	37	42
	B	2	2	4	4	4	8
	C	0	2	2	25	33	58
	D	0	2	2	0	7	7
Total		3	8	11	34	53	87

Table 5 presents the sticker interaction from *students to students* and shows that by far the highest number of stickers used were by students in Stream C (58) and only two of these were academic. The high number of stickers used in this group might have been because many students who participated in this group appear to have been Asian. As mentioned earlier, sticker use on Asian social media platforms is more prolific than their use on western platforms (Konrad et al., 2020). Stream C was also the only group who sent posts in Mandarin from time to time, even though they were required to send posts in English. It is not certain whether this had anything to do with the fact most of these posts that contained Mandarin were sent after class hours. Also, this group of students may have felt that they wanted to use their first language as it was more natural to do that when interacting with other Chinese learners.

Table 6:
Sticker interactions from students to teachers

Interaction pattern	**Sticker interactions**						
students-teachers	**Stream**	**Academic: Adjunctive**	**Academic: Substitutive**	**Total**	**Non-academic: Adjunctive**	**Non-academic: substitutive**	**Total**
	A	0	1	1	5	4	9
	B	2	0	2	4	3	7
	C	18	25	43	0	5	5
	D	8	0	8	3	1	4
Total		28	26	54	12	13	25

When students communicated with teachers (see Table 6 above), in Stream C, sticker use was much higher than that of any other stream in the academic context. The numbers for the other three streams did not reach double figures in any of the usage categories. In addition, the number of stickers (total 54 academic and 25 non-academic) sent from students to teachers (especially in Stream C), suggests that these students were comfortable sending stickers to their teachers for both academic and non-academic matters. Furthermore, this could also suggest that these learners felt that they were supported by their teachers and therefore felt comfortable using stickers when interacting with them. Stickers can be perceived to be a lighter and almost playful way of delivering a message.

Some researchers such as Konrad et al. (2020) have suggested that stickers are used for close relationships and not for serious or semi-serious interaction. Many of the serious academic messages that teachers posted contained emojis (we perceived these as softening the message), but they did not contain stickers. This would align with the findings of Konrad et al. (2020). However, students did use stickers for some serious messages such as, when they were unsure about some assessment instructions. Therefore, students did not appear to use stickers in the way suggested by Konrad et al. (2020) since they were comfortable using stickers to engage with their teachers even in semi-serious situations. The use of stickers from teachers to students, however, was negligible (one academic and 13 non-academic related stickers). This is likely to be a result of the teachers' lack of familiarity with Asian social media platforms and stickers.

Table 7:
Overall Emoji and Sticker Adjunctive and Substitutive Usage

Category of posts	Number of posts
Emojis	
Adjunctive posts	653
Substitutive posts	167
Total posts using emojis	820
Stickers	
Adjunctive posts	78
Substitutive posts	141
Total posts using stickers	219
Emojis + stickers	1039
Total number of posts	3419

Following up on the work by Herring and Dainas (2017) and Danesi (2016), where they speculate about whether emojis can carry messages on their own, further analysis of emoji and sticker use, focussed on their adjunctive and substitutive use was carried out in this study. As can be seen in Table 7 above, in the case of emoji use, adjunctive use far outnumbered the posts where an emoji or a sticker appeared with no written text (substitutive use). The reverse was true of sticker use, where substitutive use was almost double adjunctive use (See Table 7). This is not surprising as stickers are mostly used without additional text. As Laddha et al. (2020) suggest, the sticker is the message.

However, sometimes words appear on the picture itself (Figure 3). Emojis generally support the written text. Where emojis are used on their own in this data, they are used to express agreement with a previous post, for example the use of the thumbs-up emoji 👍 or the smiley face emoji 🙂(Figure 4). Here it is also evident that the use of emojis creates an interplay between semiotic use and socio-cultural approaches for collaboration and support for language learning.

Figure 3: An example where words appear on stickers

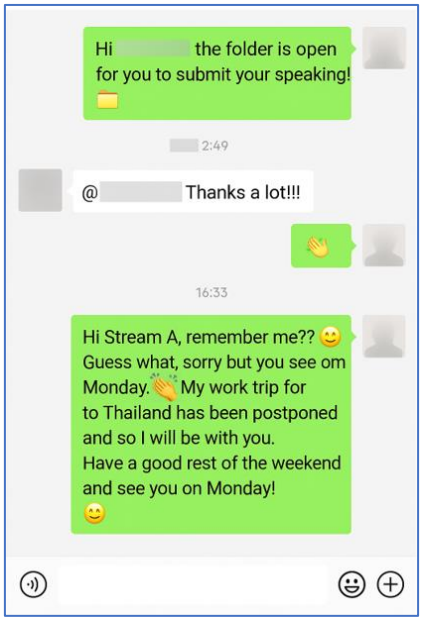

Figure 4: Example where an emoji (👋) shows agreement with the previous post

Table 8:
Relationship building posts by streams (Danesi, 2016)

Academic/admin/ study			**Non-academic**		
1. Injecting friendliness, positive feelings (Danesi, 2016, p.95)					
Stream A			***Stream A***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	38	2	T-S	38	9
S-T	10	8	S-T	42	15
S-S	24	0	S-S	112	24
Stream B			***Stream B***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	32	0	T-S	51	2
S-T	6	1	S-T	34	6
S-S	9	3	S-S	19	7
Stream C			***Stream C***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	3	0	T-S	1	0
S-T	6	35	S-T	1	1
S-S	3	0	S-S	26	22
Stream D			***Stream D***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	2	0	T-S	5	0
S-T	33	8	S-T	27	2
S-S	32	3	S-S	50	3
2. Tone-enhancing – avoiding misunderstanding/ softening etc (Danesi, 2016, p. 96)					
Stream A			***Stream A***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	49	0	T-S	24	0
S-T	8	0	S-T	2	1
S-S	3	12	S-S	7	3
Stream B			***Stream B***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	25	0	T-S	16	2
S-T	4	1	S-T	2	1
S-S	1	1	S-S	2	1
Stream C			***Stream C***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	0	0	T-S	0	0
S-T	1	13	S-T	6	0
S-S	7	0	S-S	54	18
Stream D			***Stream D***		
	Emojis	*Stickers*		*Emojis*	*Stickers*
T-S	1	0	T-S	1	0
S-T	10	1	S-T	3	0
S-S	9	0	S-S	9	0

Following the analytical framework incorporating academic and non-academic-related emoji and sticker use as well as the three-fold interaction patterns, the data was further categorised based on Danesi's (2016) suggested relationship building posts options. Table 8 above shows the emoji and sticker use for all participants across the four streams. In the absence of language tone or body language, emojis can be used to avoid misunderstandings in messages and perform tone-enhancing pragmatic functions. Another pragmatic function of emojis is to inject positive feelings and friendliness (Danesi, 2016).

Table 8 reveals that there were a greater number of emojis used in this study that performed the function of injecting friendliness and positive feelings than those that performed a tone-enhancing function. The teachers were likely to have made a special effort to create a positive atmosphere in the chats to make students feel relaxed and supported to positively impact on their learning. The largest number of emojis and stickers performing the first function (injecting friendliness and positive feelings) were used between students in non-academic posts, thus contributing to relationship building and collaboration. Emojis used for tone-enhancing were used most often by teachers when giving instructions and discussing assessments. While dealing with more serious issues, such as these mentioned above, the teachers appear to use emojis to make students aware of their ongoing support. Danesi's (2016) framework, which focuses on tone-enhancing and injecting friendliness into relationships, aligns with the semiotic nature of emoji and sticker use. It also supports better socio-cultural connections associated with the sociocultural theoretical lens discussed in the literature above. According to Danesi (2016, p.95), "Overall, the emoji forms are 'mood enhancers,' generally imparting, maintaining, or reinforcing a sense of togetherness among interlocutors". Linking these two theoretical lenses i.e. pragmatic and socio-cultural approaches, has the potential to lead to stronger support and collaboration between classmates as well as between teachers and students, as is demonstrated by the above data.

Discussion

The findings in this paper extend our understanding of emoji and sticker use in social media apps as a supportive and collaborative platform and for relationship building. They add to the body of literature on the use of these graphicons in an EAP programme environment with learners from diverse backgrounds. The support and collaboration displayed in this research amongst participants align with research into SC theory on language development and socially supported environments, which was postulated by Vygotsky and endorsed more recently by other theorists (Ganem-Gutierrez, 2018; Kacetl & Klímová, 2019; Panhwar et al., 2016). This alignment is especially relevant in the research around the use of technology for teacher effectiveness and student learning. Furthermore, whereas researchers such as Panhwar et al. (2016) and Kacetl and Klímová (2019) conducted their research in English as a foreign language environment, this project was based in an environment where English is the most widely-spoken official language.

The results in this study add to the body of literature around semiotic theory, particularly in regard to the interplay between signs, words and symbols for successful communication and for relationship building. Specifically, the findings reinforce the value of emoji and sticker use for potential meaning-making, as posited by Danesi (2016) as well as Logi and Zappavigna (2021). When Danesi's relationship building structure was used to analyse the *WeChat* posts between learners and between learners and teachers, it was clear that the vast majority of emojis and stickers used injected friendliness and positive feelings. In this way, students and teachers created a supportive environment which paved the way for collaboration. In this context, occurrences for collaboration were seen. Examples included when students helped each other, or the teacher helped them to understand assessment instruction; sometimes, this took the form of a simple thumbs up for clarity or a smiley if the student understood something. There would often be a follow up discussion in class to clarify what was asked in the *WeChat* posts as well. It was in the classroom that collaboration was also evident. Posts with the emoji and sticker interaction seemed to help students feel more comfortable and trust each other more around vulnerabilities or uncertainties. This was further reinforced by tone-enhancing emojis and stickers which served to soften semi-serious messages, such as those related to assessments (Table 4). As mentioned, these emojis which were used to soften semi-serious messages, were mainly sent by the teachers. Based on the results reported in this study, the work of Herring and Dainas (2017) on tone modifications and reactions for pragmatic functions as well as that of Danesi (2016) in terms of relationship building, have been extended to include the use of a social media app in an EAP environment.

There are several ways in which the findings shared could inform teaching practices in an EAP environment. One way was that it extended the use of English to after class use. This meant that instead of going home and mostly speaking in their first language, students could continue using English and be cognitively engaged in producing suitable responses. In addition, often when they had to answer questions or explain how to do something technical related to Moodle or assignments, the classmate would need to use troubleshooting thinking (problem solving) which would engage a different part of the brain and different language. The learners had face-to-face classes, and they used the social media app as an additional support system. This means that when they were unsure about anything that was happening, they would send questions or information through *WeChat*. This could help the student feel less anxious about academic matters and it could also mean that if they were busy with an assignment, they could often ask a question related to the assignment and get an immediate response from their classmates or teacher. They could then continue with the assignment rather than having to wait for class time to seek clarification. Often students who have digital challenges found that their classmates would support them by sending a positive or thumbs up emoji. Danesi (2016) also suggests that the use of emojis displays a pragmatic competence and a type of code switching (see literature above) in use, and so it is worth mentioning that the

students potentially demonstrated an ability to have this pragmatic competence and were able to code-switch between alphabetic and emoji code.

Where the findings of this study differed from the findings of Konrad et al. (2020) was on the issue of the use of stickers for closer relationships and for preference of emojis over stickers on semi-serious topics. Results showed that students used more stickers in their posts to teachers on Academic matters than on Non-academic matters but almost the same number of emojis on Academic and Non-academic matters when they corresponded with their teachers. This suggests that students were comfortable with the teachers as they felt relaxed enough to send stickers as well as emojis. Students probably also unconsciously recognised the mix of the formal and semi-formal platform that the social media app could encourage. Regarding the teacher's lack of sticker use, as observed earlier, teachers in New Zealand were likely to be unfamiliar with the functions of stickers as identified by Lee (2017). This could therefore be the reason they were used very rarely by teachers in their interaction with students.

In the Zhou et al. (2017) study mentioned earlier, where the participants were all Chinese, reasons provided for the use of stickers was that they did not have anything to say or did not know what to say and so resorted to using a sticker. Gu et al. (2023) reported that an interviewee had said that they used emojis when it was hard to describe a feeling. In contrast to Gu et al.'s (2023) study, there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that these students chose to use emojis or stickers because they found it hard to describe their feelings. Indeed, the data in the current study showed that the emojis used as substitutes for texts were quite simple as in the use of a smiley or "thumbs up" emoji to show agreement or support. It is possible that the use of these emojis were a result of the sender wanting to save time rather than of the sender being unable to communicate these sentiments. This is in line with the views of Dresner and Herring (2010) and Herring and Dainas (2017), when highlighting the use of emojis to create meaning independent of text.

Limitations and recommendations

This study has several limitations including the fact that it would have been useful to have interviewed participants around their use of emojis and stickers at the time that the data was gathered, but that was not the focus of the initial project. The forging of a digital identity by using visual resources available on social media apps was not the focus of the current study but would be an interesting facet of social media interaction to examine in future studies.

As a small-scale study, this research revealed some interesting data that could be further investigated with more participants or even within a longitudinal study over several classes with the aim of researching more patterns of behaviour with diverse class participants. Within this research area, it is only in the past decade that studies into social media app use in the classroom have been undertaken and research into emoji and sticker

use, especially as they pertain to English language learning and support, is relatively new. The small-scale study reported here adds to the body of research related to multimodality and semiotic practices in EAP environments. A comparative study on how emojis are used in mainstream tertiary studies with English as a first language students compared to an EAP programme could also show interesting similarities or differences in the use of these graphicons.

Conclusion

This small-scale study that used two specific relationship-related frameworks revealed some interesting findings. These include the choices made by some of the teachers to use emojis as tone-enhancing and softening when they shared some serious academic instructions or assessment-related content with the students. It also demonstrated that students were comfortable with their teachers and that they felt they could use emojis and stickers to deliver messages to the teachers. Finally, as we mentioned earlier, students appear to find the NZCEL Level programme very challenging because many of them need this level to go into their mainstream chosen programmes, and using a social media app certainly encouraged collaboration and support between the students as well.

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: THE ROLE OF NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS IN EAP PROGRAMME SUCCESS FOR TERTIARY STUDY

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Abstract

This article examines the critical role of non-academic factors in shaping English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme outcomes for international students transitioning to tertiary study. Drawing on qualitative data from Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) students enrolled in an EAP programme in New Zealand, the study highlights that academic preparation alone is insufficient for a smooth transition. Participants consistently identified challenges with informal communication, cultural adaptation, and classroom participation, as well as the importance of peer support and access to wellbeing resources. The findings emphasise that success in higher education cannot be separated into academic, social, or emotional domains, but rather emerges through the dynamic interplay of these factors. By reframing EAP as a strategic site for transformation, this research calls for programmes to embed socio-cultural and wellbeing dimensions alongside traditional academic skills. It contributes to TESOL and international education scholarship by offering an evidence-based, context-specific model of student support.

Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education has reshaped universities worldwide, creating new opportunities for cultural exchange, research collaboration, and economic growth (Arkoudis & Baik, 2020; Jones & Killick, 2018). Over the past two decades, English-speaking countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have become major destinations for students seeking globally recognised qualifications. In New Zealand, international students now represent a significant share of tertiary enrolments, reflecting the broader role of English-medium education as both a commodity and a pathway to global mobility.

While international students enrich institutions socially and academically, they face challenges that extend beyond coursework. For students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB), these challenges are intensified by linguistic and cultural adjustments that can hinder participation and achievement (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Meeting language-entry requirements does not always translate into confidence in informal communication or an understanding of academic and cultural norms (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). This disconnect between measured proficiency and lived experience raises concerns about the adequacy of current support systems.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes are designed to bridge this gap through training in academic writing, reading, listening, and presentation skills. Yet research shows that language instruction alone is insufficient. Successful transitions depend equally on resilience, peer networks, and the ability to navigate cultural expectations (Li, 2017; Kim et al., 2023; Glass & Westmont, 2014). These findings point to the interdependence of academic, social, and emotional domains in international student success (Arkoudis & Baik, 2020).

The first year of university represents a particularly demanding period, as students must adjust simultaneously to new academic expectations, unfamiliar cultural norms, and changing social contexts (Jones & Killick, 2018). For international students, this process is often more complex due to limited access to established support networks, which can increase the risk of social isolation and stress, and reduce engagement with their studies (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). These combined challenges are associated with poorer wellbeing and lower student retention over time (Dvořáková & Greenberg, 2020).

Although New Zealand institutions increasingly emphasise inclusive education, research highlights a mismatch between the support students need and what they receive (Li, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2015). Most EAP programmes, while strategically positioned as gateways, remain underutilised as platforms for holistic student development.

This article reports on a doctoral study of 12 NESB students who completed the English for Otago (EFO)[1] programme. Findings show that while EFO strengthened academic preparation, student success also relied on informal communication competence, peer networks, and wellbeing. These insights informed the development of the Holistic Academic Integration Model (HAIM), which positions academic foundations, socio-cultural competence, and wellbeing as interdependent pillars. HAIM reframes EAP as a transformative transition hub and contributes to TESOL and international education scholarship by advancing evidence-based, context-specific models of student support. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to examine how NESB students experience their transition from a university bridging programme into mainstream study, and to identify the academic, social, and emotional factors that enable or hinder their success.

Literature Review

International education research has grown exponentially over the past two decades, reflecting the increasing importance of global student mobility. However, much of the early literature focused on students' academic adjustment, often measured through grades, retention rates, and graduation outcomes (Andrade, 2006). While academic

[1] EFO is a 12-week, pre-sessional EAP programme designed for international students who have received conditional admission to the University of Otago. It focuses on developing academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, while familiarising students with the expectations of tertiary study in New Zealand.

performance is undoubtedly important, scholars have argued that this narrow definition of success risks ignoring other factors central to students' overall development, including mental health, sense of belonging, and ability to navigate cultural differences (Arkoudis & Baik, 2020; Jones & Killick, 2018). Recently, Aizawa et al. (2025), have critiqued the sector's continued reliance on English proficiency as a proxy for readiness, arguing that preparedness in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings requires far broader socio-academic competencies than language scores alone can capture. Five important components of HAIM synthesise research across five key domains—academic success, socio-cultural adjustment, intercultural competence, wellbeing, and EAP pedagogy—to establish the need for a holistic model such as HAIM.

Academic Success and the Role of EAP

EAP programmes have long been viewed as a means of levelling the playing field for NESB students entering English-medium universities. These programmes aim to develop students' proficiency in academic English and equip them with the skills required for university-level assignments, such as essays, reports, and presentations (Read, 2008). However, several scholars (Li, 2017; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011) have highlighted a persistent gap between the language skills emphasised in EAP courses and the broader demands of university life. This aligns with Aizawa et al.'s (2025) recent argument that proficiency-based measures of readiness overlook the complex blend of academic, communicative, and cultural capacities required for genuine preparedness in English-medium instruction contexts. For instance, students may excel at formal writing yet struggle to contribute confidently to seminars, understand colloquial speech, or interpret culturally nuanced interactions with lecturers.

This disconnect highlights the longstanding observation that competence in general academic writing does not necessarily carry over to effective performance within specific disciplinary contexts (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). While many institutions have invested heavily in EAP pathways, evaluations often focus narrowly on measurable gains in test scores rather than students' long-term adjustment and persistence (O'Loughlin, 2015). These findings highlight a need to broaden the remit of EAP programmes to include social and cultural competencies.

Socio-Cultural Adjustment and Acculturation

Berry's (2015) acculturation theory remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding international student adaptation. According to Berry, individuals respond to cultural transitions through four strategies: assimilation (adopting the host culture at the expense of one's own), separation (retaining home culture while rejecting host culture), integration (maintaining home culture while participating in the host culture), and marginalisation (rejecting both). Research consistently shows that integration is associated with better psychological health and academic outcomes, whereas marginalisation leads to disengagement and stress (Ng et al., 2017).

However, achieving integration is not solely the responsibility of students. Many educational institutions provide inclusive environments where diversity is valued, and intercultural engagement is facilitated (Arkoudis & Baik, 2020). Studies have shown that international students often report limited interaction with domestic peers, leading to feelings of exclusion (Glass & Westmont, 2014). Without structured opportunities to build intercultural relationships, students may remain confined to co-national friendship groups, which, while supportive, can hinder language development and cultural adaptation.

Intercultural Competence and Communication

Intercultural competence refers to the ability to navigate cultural differences effectively, adapt communication styles, and interpret social cues (Jones & Killick, 2018). For international students, intercultural competence is closely tied to both academic participation and social belonging. Yet, intercultural communication training is often absent from formal curricula, leaving students to develop these skills informally.

Research by Terraschke and Wahid (2011) highlights the challenges international students face in informal communication contexts, such as understanding humour, idioms, or colloquial language. These difficulties can limit participation in class discussions and group work, perpetuating stereotypes of international students as passive learners. Programmes that intentionally embed intercultural training, peer mentoring, and opportunities for informal interaction have shown promising results in improving students' confidence and engagement (Sim & Choo, 2025).

Wellbeing and Mental Health

Wellbeing is increasingly recognised as a critical determinant of academic success (Dvořáková & Greenberg, 2020). International students often face heightened pressures, including financial stress, homesickness, and cultural adjustment challenges. Studies consistently report higher rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among this group compared to domestic peers (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Despite the availability of counselling services, many international students underutilise them due to stigma, language barriers, or lack of awareness (O'Loughlin, 2015). Embedding wellbeing resources within EAP programmes provides an opportunity to normalise help-seeking behaviours and offer culturally sensitive support. Research shows that students who receive proactive wellbeing interventions early in their studies are more likely to persist and achieve academically (Kim et al., 2023).

The Case for Holistic Models

Although numerous studies advocate for holistic support, practical implementation remains inconsistent. Li (2017) argues that while EAP programmes are well-positioned to serve as transition hubs, their potential is often unrealised because they remain

narrowly focused on language instruction. Recent policy and institutional directions emphasise the importance of inclusive practices, urging higher education providers to adopt frameworks that address the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning. However, there remains a lack of comprehensive models that integrate these elements systematically.

The Holistic Academic Integration Model (HAIM), introduced in this paper (Figure 1 below), seeks to fill this gap by conceptualising academic preparation, socio-cultural competence, and wellbeing as mutually reinforcing pillars. The following sections describe the methodology, findings, and theoretical rationale for this model, demonstrating how EAP programmes can be reimagined as catalysts for holistic international student success.

Methodology

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) who transitioned from a university-embedded EAP programme to mainstream tertiary study in New Zealand. The study was grounded in an interpretivist and constructionist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the perspectives and experiences of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By prioritising participants' narratives, the study aimed to generate deep, context-rich insights into the interplay of language preparation, social integration, and wellbeing in international students' success.

Research Design

A qualitative longitudinal research design was selected to capture both immediate and longer-term reflections on students' transition. Data collection occurred in two phases: (1) during the final weeks of the English for Otago (EFO) programme, and (2) at the end of the students' first semester of mainstream university study. This approach allowed participants to reflect on their preparation in real-time while also identifying gaps or successes after entering their degree programmes.

An inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to identify patterns across interviews, ensuring findings were firmly grounded in participants' voices rather than pre-existing frameworks. This design reflects best practice in TESOL and applied linguistics research, where understanding individual learner trajectories provides richer insights than standardised testing alone (Li, 2017).

Setting: EFO Programme

The study took place at the University of Otago, a research-intensive university in New Zealand, and focused on its EFO programme. EFO is a 12-week, full-time, credit-bearing EAP course designed to prepare students for direct entry into undergraduate or postgraduate study. The course includes:

- University-Style Lectures and Tutorials: Students experience authentic university teaching formats, practising notetaking, participation, and presentation skills.
- Assessment Tasks: These replicate university assessment demands, including essays, research reports, and oral presentations.
- Discipline-Specific Streams: Students entering health sciences or commerce are introduced to relevant academic genres, including case studies and lab report writing.
- Academic Integrity Training: Emphasis is placed on referencing, citation practices, and understanding academic honesty policies.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Invitations went out to all EFO students across two consecutive teaching periods, and 12 students chose to take part. Participants had completed the programme, were from non-English-speaking backgrounds, were enrolled full-time, and agreed to two interviews over the following six to 12 months. To ensure confidentiality, each student was given a pseudonym.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and capacity to elicit rich, personal narratives. Interviews were conducted in English, lasting 45-60 minutes, and followed a conversational format to build trust and encourage reflection. The broad thematic areas that guided the interview questions for both Phase One and Phase Two are outlined in Appendix A (see Appendix A).

- Phase One (EFO Completion): Explored students' experiences of the EFO programme, perceptions of preparedness, and immediate challenges.
- Phase Two (End of First Semester Mainstream University Study): Focused on actual transition experiences, academic demands, social integration, and wellbeing.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for member checking to confirm accuracy.

Findings

Analysis of the 12 participants' narratives revealed that while the EFO programme provided valuable academic preparation, this alone was insufficient for a smooth transition into university life. Thematic analysis identified three overarching themes: Communication and Cultural Understanding, Peer Support and Social Networks, and Wellbeing and Mental Health.

Communication and Cultural Understanding

Although participants felt well equipped for formal academic tasks, they reported difficulty navigating informal English, fast-paced conversations, and local cultural references. This gap often led to feelings of exclusion in social settings and uncertainty in everyday interactions. As one student reflected, "I could understand the lectures, but

I struggled with simple conversations with my classmates. They used so many expressions I had never heard before". Others described challenges adapting to the interactive style of New Zealand classrooms, where speaking up in tutorials was expected but intimidating. A participant noted, "In my country, we listen to the teacher, we don't interrupt. Here they ask for opinions all the time, and I was not confident". Cultural differences also created uncertainty about academic norms, such as how to address staff or interpret assignment expectations. Together, these accounts illustrate that mastery of academic English is only part of what students need; intercultural competence and informal communication are equally crucial for academic and social integration.

Peer Support and Social Networks

Friendships formed within EFO cohorts emerged as a central factor in students' adjustment. These networks provided emotional reassurance, practical guidance, and a safe space to practise English without fear of judgment. One student explained, "Without my friends from EFO, I think I would have been very lonely. We shared information, helped each other with assignments, and even studied together". Peer support also extended into degree-level study, with participants describing collaborative learning, sharing notes, and explaining concepts in their first languages to aid comprehension. However, participants consistently reported barriers to connecting with domestic students, who often arrived with established social circles. As one participant put it, "It's hard to break into local groups. They already have their friends from high school". This limited interaction left many feeling excluded from the wider university community, highlighting the dual importance of international peer networks for stability and opportunities for intercultural connection for growth.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The third theme underscored the emotional challenges of studying abroad, particularly in the first semester. Many participants described loneliness and homesickness, especially those living alone. One recalled, "At night, I felt so homesick I couldn't sleep. I called my parents, but it made me cry more". In addition, family expectations and financial sacrifices generated significant pressure to succeed, with one student sharing, "My family sacrificed a lot for me to study here. I felt I could not fail. Every assignment made me so anxious". Such pressures often compounded existing stress from cultural adjustment. Despite available services, many students did not access wellbeing support due to stigma or lack of awareness. As a participant explained, "In my country, going to counselling means you are crazy. I didn't feel comfortable to go". These findings suggest that EAP programmes could play a stronger role in normalising wellbeing support and providing early, accessible pathways to help.

Summary of Findings

Participants' stories reveal that while EFO successfully developed academic literacy, its lack of explicit focus on informal communication, intercultural engagement, and wellbeing left students underprepared for the broader challenges of university life. Students repeatedly emphasised the central role of peer networks in navigating these gaps, illustrating the resilience and agency of international learners. However, these networks often formed along linguistic or cultural lines, limiting opportunities for integration with domestic peers.

The findings reinforce the argument that academic, social, and emotional success are interdependent. When communication barriers prevent engagement, students become socially isolated, which in turn heightens stress and undermines confidence. Conversely, students with strong support networks demonstrated greater adaptability, academic persistence, and satisfaction. These insights provide the empirical foundation for HAIM, which aims to address these gaps systematically.

Discussion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of international students' transition to tertiary education. Academic English proficiency is necessary but insufficient; communication competence, peer networks, and wellbeing play equally critical roles. These findings support calls for holistic support frameworks in EAP and higher education more broadly (Arkoudis & Baik, 2020; Kim et al., 2023).

Academic Proficiency Alone Is Not Enough

The EFO programme developed students' academic writing and reading, yet many felt unprepared for informal communication. This confirms Terraschke and Wahid's (2011) view that academic genre proficiency does not transfer easily to spontaneous speech or cultural references. Students from Confucian-heritage systems struggled with expectations for verbal participation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) critique EAP's narrow focus on academic literacy. Here, students felt confident with assignments but struggled with tutorials, group work, and email etiquette. Such gaps can reinforce stereotypes of passivity and marginalise students (Jones & Killick, 2018).

Acculturation and the Social Dimension of Learning

Berry's (2015) acculturation model explains participants' varied outcomes. Integrated students—balancing home culture with host engagement—reported greater confidence and persistence. Others, isolated or confined to co-national groups, experienced stress and loneliness. Similar patterns are reported by Ng et al. (2017). Integration requires institutional support. Participants described limited opportunities for contact with domestic peers due to established social circles and lack of structured intercultural

initiatives. Glass and Westmont (2014) found that belonging enhances academic engagement across student groups, underscoring the campus-wide benefits of inclusion.

Friendships formed within the EFO programme helped students navigate their transition by providing both academic assistance and emotional reassurance (Li, 2017). However, these peer networks sometimes remained inward-looking, limiting opportunities for sustained engagement in English. This pattern aligns with concerns that, without structured support for intercultural interaction, international students may socialise primarily within co-national or familiar groups rather than developing broader connections across the university community (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

Wellbeing as a Prerequisite for Academic Success

Isolation, homesickness, and stress were common, echoing evidence that international students face higher risks of depression and anxiety (Dvořáková & Greenberg, 2020). Some avoided counselling due to stigma, highlighting cultural barriers to help-seeking.

Embedding wellbeing into EAP provides a key intervention point. Normalising counselling services and teaching stress-management strategies within a low-stakes environment can reduce stigma (Kim et al., 2023). Participants' accounts showed that emotional strain undermined academic focus, confirming Misra and Castillo's (2004) finding that stress predicts underperformance.

Rethinking the Role of EAP Programmes

Although EAP programmes are frequently positioned as peripheral or purely skills-based support within universities (Li, 2017), this study demonstrates their capacity to function as comprehensive spaces that support students' academic, social, and transitional needs. By embedding intercultural training, peer mentoring, and wellbeing education, EAP could address multiple dimensions of student success. This approach aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes inclusive, flexible teaching for diverse learners (Meyer et al., 2017). Reframing EAP as strategic rather than remedial positions it as central to equity-focused higher education.

The Case for a Holistic Model: HAIM

Findings demonstrate the need for a framework integrating academic, social, and emotional domains. Current fragmentation—EAP for literacy, student services for wellbeing, orientation for culture—creates missed opportunities.

HAIM addresses this by presenting three interconnected pillars:

- Academic Foundations: contextualised literacy tied to disciplinary tasks, such as lab reports and case presentations
- Socio-Cultural Competence: embedded training in participation norms, email etiquette, and intercultural communication

- Wellbeing and Resilience: proactive wellbeing education, peer mentoring, and resilience-building integrated into EAP

HAIM draws on ecological models of education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and scholarship recognising language learning as both social and emotional (Gregersen & Mercer, 2022). By embedding these pillars in EAP, institutions can provide early, integrated support that strengthens both academic outcomes and personal wellbeing.

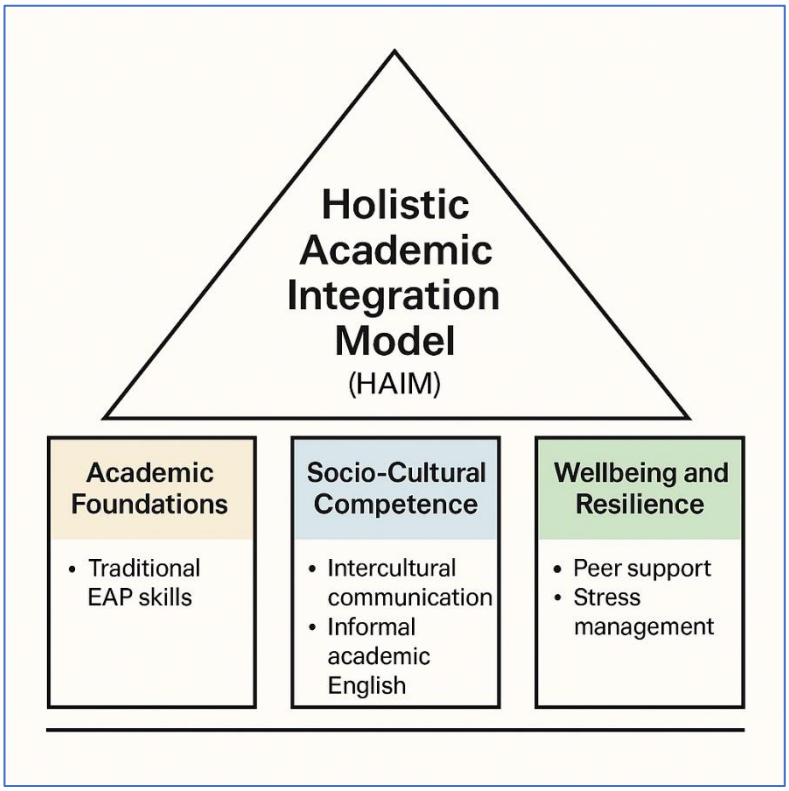

Figure 1: Holistic Academic Integration Model (HAIM) illustrating the three interdependent pillars (academic, socio-cultural, and wellbeing) that collectively support international students' transition to tertiary study.

Summary

In summary, by grounding HAIM in qualitative data, this study contributes a New Zealand perspective to international scholarship on evidence-based, context-specific student support, highlighting the value of practitioner-researcher approaches in TESOL. It reframes EAP as a transformative space where academic, cultural, and emotional domains interact dynamically—communication challenges may lead to isolation and stress, while strong peer networks and early wellbeing support foster resilience and academic success.

Holistic Academic Integration Model (HAIM)

The findings from this study demonstrate that academic success for international students cannot be achieved through language proficiency alone; it requires integrated support that addresses academic preparation, socio-cultural competence, and emotional wellbeing. Based on these findings and supported by international literature, HAIM was developed as a conceptual framework for rethinking EAP programme design. HAIM emphasises that these three dimensions are interdependent pillars, working together to create equitable, inclusive learning environments that support international students' transition to tertiary study.

Pillar One: Academic Foundations

Academic Foundations remain essential to EAP, but HAIM emphasises discipline-specific literacy, critical thinking, and interactive learning over rote skills. This study found that students valued EFO's structured writing instruction, referencing training, and introduction to university-style assessments. However, many participants reported that while they could write essays, they lacked confidence in oral participation and group work.

HAIM proposes that EAP courses explicitly integrate:

- Discipline-Specific Genres: Students entering health sciences should practise writing lab reports, deliver case presentations, and interpret academic literature relevant to their field.
- Interactive Academic Skills: Training should include participation in seminars, asking questions, and debating, helping students move beyond "safe" written communication.
- Metacognitive Awareness: Students should be guided to reflect on their own learning styles, cultural expectations, and strategies for success in different academic contexts.

Research supports this approach: Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) argue that EAP must prepare students for the full communicative demands of their disciplines, while Read (2008) highlights the value of diagnostic assessment to identify specific areas for support. By contextualising literacy instruction, Academic Foundations empower students to enter degree programmes with confidence and adaptability.

Pillar Two: Socio-Cultural Competence

Socio-Cultural Competence addresses the cultural dimensions of learning often left implicit in higher education. Participants repeatedly described feeling uncertain about expectations for tutorial participation, group dynamics, and communication with lecturers. This pillar focuses on making these 'hidden' rules explicit and creating opportunities for intercultural engagement.

Core components include:

- Intercultural Communication Training: Students should learn practical strategies for understanding colloquial expressions, humour, and conversational norms in the host culture.
- Classroom Culture Orientation: EAP can demystify expectations such as critical thinking, questioning lecturers, and collaborative group work, reducing anxiety.
- Structured Intercultural Opportunities: Pairing EAP students with domestic conversation partners or embedding group projects with local students fosters authentic interactions (Sim & Choo, 2025).
- Cultural Reflection: Students should be encouraged to share their own cultural perspectives, positioning them as contributors rather than passive learners.

Jones and Killick (2018) emphasise that developing intercultural competence is a fundamental outcome of higher education and is relevant to all students, rather than being limited to those from international backgrounds. Programmes that intentionally embed intercultural learning benefit domestic students as well, creating more inclusive classrooms (Glass & Westmont, 2014). By prioritising cultural competence, HAIM reframes the role of EAP away from remedial orientation and toward the development of shared cultural understanding between students and the wider academic community.

Pillar Three: Wellbeing and Resilience

Participants' accounts of loneliness, homesickness, and anxiety highlight that wellbeing is a critical foundation for learning. Without emotional safety, students struggle to engage academically. However, many participants expressed reluctance to seek support, citing stigma or lack of information.

HAIM advocates for integrating wellbeing initiatives directly into EAP curricula, normalising help-seeking as a strength rather than a weakness. This pillar includes:

- Mental Health Literacy: Workshops explaining counselling services, stress management strategies, and coping techniques for culture shock
- Peer Mentoring: Connecting incoming EAP students with experienced international students to share strategies and reduce isolation
- Holistic Orientation: Extending orientation activities beyond administrative information to include social events, wellness sessions, and community-building
- Resilience Training: Practical activities to develop self-efficacy, adaptability, and reflective skills (Gregersen & Mercer, 2022)

Research shows that students who receive wellbeing interventions early in their studies are more likely to persist and succeed academically (Dvořáková & Greenberg, 2020). Embedding this content in EAP courses leverages a crucial window where students are receptive to guidance and have yet to encounter the full pressures of their degree programmes.

Interconnections

HAIM emphasises that these three pillars do not stand alone but are part of an interconnected system:

- Students who are confident in informal communication (socio-cultural competence) are more likely to form supportive peer networks, enhancing wellbeing.
- Strong wellbeing practices allow students to engage more fully in challenging academic tasks, reinforcing academic foundations.
- Academic confidence, in turn, enables students to participate socially, reducing isolation and promoting integration.

This cyclical relationship aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which conceptualises learners as embedded within overlapping systems—academic, social, and cultural—that influence each other. HAIM applies this perspective to EAP design, proposing that holistic preparation is essential to break cycles of isolation and underperformance.

Implications

To embed non-academic support systematically within EAP programmes, a more integrated approach is required—one that positions language development alongside social, emotional, and cultural learning. Drawing on constructionist principles and the findings of this study, HAIM is proposed as a framework with three interdependent pillars (see Figure 1 above). Programme delivery should involve cross-departmental collaboration with counselling, international support, and academic advising services to ensure continuity from EAP into mainstream study (Lee et al., 2024). Peer-led workshops and assessment formats encouraging interaction—such as group presentations and peer feedback—can reinforce integration (Sim & Choo, 2025). Embedding intercultural communication workshops, establishing peer mentoring schemes, and providing dedicated wellbeing resources are practical strategies that address the challenges faced by NESB students. Curriculum developers should also design assessments that foster collaborative learning and intercultural exchange, reducing barriers to participation.

While this research is situated in a New Zealand university, the issues identified—informal communication competence, peer support, and wellbeing—reflect patterns commonly reported across Western tertiary contexts. Recent studies highlight that international students often experience social isolation, uneven peer integration, and emotional strain despite strong academic performance, suggesting these challenges are not unique to any single institution or country (Lorenzetti et al., 2023). Although institutional strategies and EAP structures vary, the insights generated here offer transferable lessons for universities seeking to strengthen international student transition and success.

HAIM underscores that international student achievement relies on more than academic language proficiency. Its three pillars—Academic Foundations, focusing on discipline-specific EAP skills; Socio-Cultural Competence, emphasising intercultural communication and adaptation to local norms; and Wellbeing & Resilience, encompassing stress management, peer mentoring, and access to support—work dynamically rather than in isolation. By conceptualising these dimensions as interconnected supports, HAIM reframes EAP from a remedial course into a transformative platform for holistic student development and equitable integration into tertiary study.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that international student success in higher education extends well beyond academic English proficiency. Drawing on longitudinal interviews with 12 students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the research reveals that difficulties with informal communication, limited intercultural engagement, and emotional strain often persist even when students excel in formal academic tasks. Peer networks emerged as crucial supports, yet these connections were frequently confined to international cohorts, limiting opportunities for meaningful interaction with domestic students. Collectively, these insights highlight the need for transition support that attends to the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of student life.

HAIM responds to this need by positioning academic preparation, socio-cultural competence, and wellbeing as interconnected pillars of success. Unlike traditional models that separate these domains into discrete services, HAIM proposes a coordinated, embedded approach within EAP programmes, leveraging their role as students' first sustained point of contact with the university. This reframes EAP from a remedial service to a strategic transition hub capable of influencing wider institutional practice and promoting more inclusive learning environments.

The findings reinforce the argument that academic, social, and emotional success are interdependent. When communication barriers prevent students from engaging, they experience increased social isolation and stress, and reduced confidence. Conversely, students who developed strong support networks—whether peer-based, institutional, or community-oriented—showed greater adaptability, academic persistence, and overall satisfaction. These patterns underline the critical importance of integrated support systems that recognise the relational nature of learning and adjustment.

Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of HAIM through longitudinal and comparative studies, focusing on outcomes such as academic performance, persistence, engagement, and wellbeing across different contexts. Practitioner-led research can further refine its implementation, and incorporating domestic students' perspectives will deepen understanding of intercultural dynamics on campus. In returning to the central

aim of this study—to understand how NESB students navigate their transition from a bridging programme into mainstream university study—the findings illustrate that success is shaped not only by academic preparation but also by students' informal communication competence, peer relationships, and wellbeing. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the findings arise from a small cohort within a single institutional context, which naturally limits the breadth of perspectives captured.

In conclusion, this study affirms that language learning is inseparable from social and emotional development. By adopting HAIM, universities can provide holistic and equitable support, enabling international students not only to succeed academically but also to thrive personally and socially in their new environments.

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Appendix A. Interview Question Areas

This appendix outlines the broad thematic areas that guided the semi-structured interviews in phase one and phase two, rather than presenting a fixed list of verbatim questions.

Phase One - While Students Were Enrolled in EFO:

• Students' expectations of the benefits of completing the English for Otago bridging programme.
• Perceptions of the academic skills taught in EFO relating to those required for mainstream university study.
• Expectations of their transition to university life.
• Perceptions of their communication skills with teaching staff and other students.
• Perceptions of their future academic success.
• Impressions of their own English language skills.
• What was surprising or unexpected about their experience at the Otago University Language Centre.

Phase Two - After Students Completed Their First Year of University:

• Experiences of their transition into mainstream university life.
• Perceived benefits of the English for Otago bridging programme in relation to academic skills taught.
• Impressions of their own English language skills after their first year.
• Coping strategies used to deal with issues relating to academic study.
• Reflections on their academic success, including what they would like to have known before entering university.
• Recommendations for future English for Otago students.
• What was surprising or unexpected about their experience at university.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE AND NEEDS IN HOSPITALITY: A CASE STUDY OF A CHINESE MIGRANT IN NEW ZEALAND

Liyang Zu

Abstract

The hospitality industry is a major employment sector for migrant communities in New Zealand, with many Chinese migrants engaged in various roles within the food and beverage sector. Situated within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this study adopts a case study approach to investigate the English language needs of a Chinese adult female migrant managing a family-owned Chinese restaurant in Wellington, New Zealand. This study investigates the participant's English language use and needs in daily restaurant operations. The results indicate that the frequency and content of English output are closely related to the roles and responsibilities undertaken by the learner. The ability to communicate with customers in an accurate, fluent, and culturally appropriate manner emerged as a core language learning need. These findings inform the pedagogical goals and content design of a learner-centered English home tutoring program tailored for this specific context.

Introduction

The language proficiency of migrant populations plays a critical role in facilitating both their daily work and social integration in host countries. In New Zealand, employment is perceived as the primary motivation for learning English (White et al., 2002). Despite diverse employment, the hospitality industry remains the sector with the highest concentration of migrant workers (Employment New Zealand, 2025).

Chinese citizens constitute a significant component of New Zealand's migrant population (Stats NZ, 2025). Although many are highly educated and skilled, English proficiency continues to pose a significant challenge to employment and settlement experiences, partly because their prior exposure to English has typically occurred within classroom-based, examination-oriented learning contexts (Department of Labour, 2012; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Tian, 2019).

Given the critical role of English language proficiency in integration and the high representation of migrants in hospitality, there is a need to explore how Chinese migrants use English in these contexts. This study investigates the forms of English required for restaurant operations and service, and the context-specific English language needs of Chinese migrants in this sector.

The primary motivation for this case study is from my volunteering experience as a home tutor in Wellington. My learner is an adult female migrant who operates a family-

owned Chinese restaurant. Our weekly sessions at her restaurant provide opportunities to observe and explore her use of English in daily business operations.

Shang et al. (2023) found that beyond language proficiency, cultural identification with the host country plays an important role in reducing interpersonal conflict at work. This emphasizes the relevance of examining both language use and cultural adaptation in the context of migrant-operated restaurants.

Literature Review

The study of English in the hospitality industry represents an important area within ESP research, where language use is inherently context-dependent and influenced by the situational dynamics of workplace communication (Basturkmen, 2010). Blue and Harun (2003) argued that language use in hospitality contexts, including restaurant settings, has become increasingly standardized into a conventionalized form, typically rehearsed and carefully constructed, formally oriented, and governed by its own rules and norms. Hospitality staff are required to ensure clarity and accuracy in communication with customers, while simultaneously employing politeness strategies—such as friendly greetings and appropriately phrased expressions—to convey service quality and enhance customer satisfaction (Noorani, 2024).

Within ethnic hospitality settings, research has examined the use of multiple languages and the effects of labelling strategies on customer perceptions. Kim et al. (2017) conducted a survey in Perth, Australia, to investigate customer responses to different language labels. The study compared literal translations of original Chinese names with ingredient-based descriptive English dishes. The results indicated that customers generally perceived dishes with original language names as more authentic and responded more positively, while concise explanatory labels helped mitigate apprehension toward unfamiliar ingredients. Nevertheless, Choi et al. (2017) explored customer attitudes toward authentic language (Thai) and English menus during ordering at a Thai restaurant. They found that, although unique and unfamiliar labels could enhance perceived authenticity, they may also increase the cognitive load in fast-paced or crowded dining environments, leading to frustration or confusion. These studies suggested that ethnic restaurant managers need to assess both target customers and situational conditions when designing bilingual menus or providing dish descriptions and explanations.

More research found that English use in restaurant enterprises and the hotel service industry varies according to employees' job responsibilities and the specific operational contexts in which they work. For instance, Bartlett (2005) identified "a similar schematic structure" (p.314) in beverage-ordering interactions, based on audio recording and on-site observations of daily English conversations in two coffee shops and a coffee cart near a university. Similarly, the front desk staff in hotels follow

established communicative practices, employing strategies such as repetition, clarification, and self-repairing to enhance the efficiency of guest interactions (Kwan & Dunworth, 2016; Guntoro, 2021; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023).

Although there are general conventions for language use in the hospitality industry, research has found that actual language practices vary depending on factors such as the positioning and characteristics of individual dining establishments. In a five-star resort in Vietnam, Bui and Cheng (2024) found that staff members' English use needed to be not only formal and standardized, but also authentic and natural, tailored to specific job roles and service contexts within the hotel. Moreover, Mahardika (2018) investigated that while listening and speaking were prioritized across three-star hotels in Bali, expectations regarding linguistic formality varied, and communication practices were shaped by both English norms and local etiquette.

The present study is grounded in the theoretical foundations of ESP and needs analysis. Basturkmen (2010) emphasized that the process of needs analysis in ESP should consider not only the specific domains in which learners use the language but also combine these domains with an objective assessment of learners' current proficiency, perceived needs, and the teaching context. Building on this, the ESP language teaching as a learner-centred instructional approach addresses learners' language needs arising from their current or future academic or occupational goals (Anthony, 2018). This implied a focus on the relationship between the English needs of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and their usage contexts to further enhance their communicative competence. In addition, the analysis of language needs for adult migrant groups extends beyond job-related responsibilities to include their settlement and integration needs as members of the host society (Han, 2009; Wette, 2011; Belcher, 2012). As Kubota and Chiang (2012) demonstrated, ESP instruction for adult migrants should take into account the ways in which gender, race, class, identity, and other social factors shape language needs.

While ESP research has extensively examined English use in the hospitality industry, particularly among staff in hotels and large catering establishments, far less attention has been paid to the English language use of Chinese migrants working in everyday operations of small, family-run restaurants in English-speaking contexts. By focusing on this under-researched setting, the present study aims to address this gap and provide insights into the specific English language requirements of this group.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study approach within the field of ESP. Referring to the needs analysis methodology for case studies summarized by Long (2005) and Hyland's (2006) discussion of data collection methods, this study aimed to

investigate the English language use and needs of a single participant in her daily restaurant operations. The findings of this study were expected to provide a valuable reference for the design of learner-centred tutoring sessions, while also offering pedagogical implications for English language instruction tailored to migrant groups working in the hospitality industry.

Participants

The study involved one learner and one expert with extensive experience in teaching English to migrant and refugee groups. The learner was an adult female migrant from China. She and her family operate a small Chinese restaurant in Wellington that specializes in Malatang, a popular Chinese street food whose name literally translates as "numbing spicy soup" in English. Overall, the learner was assessed as a beginner in English, yet her relatively higher proficiency made her the main agent for English-mediated communication in daily restaurant operations. She worked as both the owner and the receptionist of the restaurant, being responsible for taking orders, preparing beverages (particularly personalized tea beverage ordering), and managing the reservations and takeaway services.

The expert in this study was the coordinator of the home tutoring volunteer program. Since many of the English learners participating in the program are migrants and refugees, and a considerable number are currently employed across various positions in the New Zealand hospitality industry, English for hospitality has emerged as a primary area of language learning need for these learners. The coordinator not only possesses extensive experience in assessing learners' language proficiency but is also highly familiar with the learners' workplace environments in the hospitality sector, using this knowledge as a key criterion for matching volunteer home tutors with learners.

Data Collection

Long (2005) argued that language teaching needs analysis should be informed by multiple sources of data, with triangulation employed to validate the researcher's findings. Furthermore, as Vandermeeren (2005) illustrated, language needs in the business domain could be categorized along two dimensions: a qualitative dimension, concerning the necessity of possessing certain language competencies, and a quantitative dimension, referring to the frequency with which language is required.

Data was collected over a period of about six months, including both qualitative and quantitative sources. The qualitative data was primarily derived from interviews and on-site observations. The interviews consisted of a formal interview with the learner at the initial meeting and a semi-structured interview with the expert. Moreover, the on-site observations were carried out at least twice monthly, with a focus on the learner's use of English in the daily business activities. To minimize disruption to the learner's restaurant operations, with only one formal observation conducted during peak

operating hours, observations were primarily carried out during one-on-one volunteering instructional sessions. The learner could briefly step away from the class to fulfill her duties when customer service was required. These real-time interactions between the learner and customers would be systematically observed and recorded to provide authentic data for the analysis of workplace language use.

Furthermore, for a complete understanding of the learner's language needs, expectations, and perceived lacks in self-assessment, a bilingual questionnaire in Chinese and English was prepared for quantitative data collection. The questionnaire focused on language use in daily restaurant operations and adopted a Likert-scale format to identify and prioritize the learner's language needs.

Finally, the data collection of need analysis would also include 125 customer reviews of the learner's restaurant on Google Maps. The reviews of the restaurant could not only reflect the actual communication between staff and customers but also reveal customers' views on the staff's English proficiency and professional skills (Bui & Cheng, 2024). Additionally, as Anthony (2018) emphasized, even in courses that have been developed and adapted to align with learners' needs, instructors could continue to conduct classroom observations and implement modifications to further enhance instructional effectiveness when necessary.

Data Analysis

This study analysed the learner's English language learning needs within her current workplace context by examining recorded instances of the learner's English use on the job and observing the specific roles she undertakes in operating her restaurant. In addition, customer feedback and evaluations, along with insights gained through consultations with an expert who has extensive experience in language education for migrant communities, were used to identify both the learner's perceived and latent language learning needs and goals.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the Human Ethics Guidelines of Victoria University of Wellington. Prior to the collection of needs analysis data, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the intended use of the data, and their right to participate voluntarily.

Results of Needs Analysis

This section presents the results of the needs analysis by interpreting data collected through interviews, on-site observations, surveys, and a bilingual questionnaire, employing triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

Overall English Learning Needs in Restaurant Operation

The division of roles and responsibilities in family-run restaurant operations is often indistinct. Accordingly, the investigation into the learner's language use focused on specific tasks and conversations in which English was required in the restaurant operations. Drawing on data from the learner's English language needs questionnaire and on-site observations, the frequency of English use was found to vary depending on the specific contexts involved in all aspects of the restaurant's day-to-day operations. Table 1 illustrates the learner's English use in various contexts, organized in descending order of frequency.

Table 1:
Contexts and Frequency of English Use in the Learner's Restaurant Operation

English Use Contexts/Tasks	**Frequency of English Use**
Recommending dishes to new customers	More than 90%
Conversation with delivery drivers and customer service on food delivery platforms	More than 90%
Compliance and official communication	More than 90%
Managing phone reservations	About 75%
Inquiring about customers' feedback	About 75%
Dealing with complaints	About 50%
Managing revenue and filing taxes	About 50%
Making small talk with customers	About 50%
Serving customers: such as greetings, taking orders, explaining the menu, serving food, and payment methods	About 50%
Communicating with suppliers, restocking and purchasing ingredients	About 25%
Managing communication between the kitchen and front-of-house staff	0%

The frequency with which the learner uses English across different restaurant operation contexts suggests that, due to her multiple roles, she must dynamically shift between her first language, Chinese, and her second language, English, to manage varied tasks and sustain the restaurant's daily operations. Nonetheless, even within an English-speaking environment, her use of Chinese remains substantial in routine workplace interactions. One contributing factor may be the transliterated presentation of the signature dish "malatang" on the restaurant's menu and signage, where Chinese pinyin is used instead of a literal English translation. This linguistic choice tends to attract customers already

familiar with the dish, particularly Chinese patrons, thereby increasing the frequency of Chinese-language interactions.

Although the use of Chinese in restaurant operations is not uncommon, the learner reported experiencing considerable pressure when communicating with English-speaking customers due to her limited English proficiency. In real-life interactions, English communication demands both accuracy and efficiency, which meant that she seldom used—or found it difficult to rely on—translation tools. When confronted with unfamiliar expressions from customers, she frequently relied on their facial expressions and gestures to infer meaning and sustain the interaction. While such exchanges occurred in authentic communicative settings, her dependence on inferences limited her ability to convert this input into productive language use. The learner reported that, although she could often approximate the meaning of what others were saying, she remained uncertain about specific vocabulary items and how to use them appropriately in her own English production during future interactions.

In more complex interactions, such as responding to customer complaints or communicating with delivery drivers, the learner found it difficult to produce effective spoken English to negotiate favourable outcomes. As a result, these exchanges often concluded either in unilateral concessions to the other party's requests or without any resolution. More notably, within authentic restaurant-operating contexts, the learner tended to prioritize communicative efficiency—namely, resolving immediate operational issues—which left limited cognitive capacity to attend to accurate sentence structures or context-appropriate hospitality expressions. Combined with the influence of her first language and the lack of timely, explicit corrective feedback, this led the learner to assume that if her English was understood, it was therefore correct. Over time, this resulted in the development of habitual expressions that diverged from conventional English norms within the catering industry.

Among the four English language skills, listening and speaking were regarded as the most frequently used and the most essential in the context of restaurant operations, which is consistent with Mahardika's (2018) study conducted in Bali that identified these two skills as the primary English language needs of food and beverage staff in their daily work. Furthermore, although the learner indicated in the questionnaire that vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency were all important and necessary aspects of English learning, the interview data revealed a clearer prioritization. When discussing her primary learning goals and the most pressing English-related challenges encountered in restaurant operations, she emphasized an urgent need to acquire business-relevant vocabulary and to master its correct pronunciation.

Actual English Use in Restaurant Operation: An Example from Food Ordering

Through on-site observations of the learner's daily business operations, it was found that her English communication tends to be brief and direct, primarily consisting of isolated words and simple sentences, with a frequent use of the present tense. Taking food ordering as an example, Table 2 (below) presented a comparison of the variation in learners' language output when interacting with Chinese-speaking customers versus English-speaking customers.

Table 2:

Comparison of Learner's Language Output When Interacting with Chinese-Speaking and English-Speaking Customers During Food Ordering

Chinese-Speaking Food Ordering (Translation)	English-Speaking Food Ordering
Learner: What would you like to eat today? Malatang again? （今天吃什么呀？还是麻辣烫？）	Learner: Here, here. *(gesturing for the customer to place the bowl with ingredients on the scale beside the cashier)*
Customer: I'll have spicy stir-fried hot pot. （香锅吧）	L: Malatang?
L: Alright. Would you like it spicy? （好，要不要辣？）	Customer: Uh... yes.
C: Medium spicy is fine. （中辣就可以）	L: How spicy?
L: Got it. Would you like coriander? （好嘞，要不要香菜？）	C: A little spicy.
C: Yes, coriander please. （要香菜）	L: Coriander?
L: Would you like rice? （要米饭吗）	C: Uh... no, thank you.
C: Yes, one portion of rice. （要一份米饭）	L: Rice?
L: Okay. Anything else? （好的 要不要其他的？）	C: Yes, please.
C: That's all for today. （今天就不用了）	L: *(points to the amount on the cashier screen)* Card? *(gestures to the card reader)*
L: Alright, that will be 24.80 dollars. Pay by cash or credit card? （好的，24.80，现金还是信用卡？）	C: All right. *(completes payment)* Thank you. And... can I get this as a takeaway, please?
C: Credit card, please. （信用卡吧）	L: Takeaway, okay, okay. Thank you.
L: No problem. Please have a seat — it'll be ready shortly. （好的，坐一下，马上就做好）	
C: Okay, thank you. （好的，谢谢）	

The transcribed interaction between the learner and the customer revealed that the food-ordering process followed "a similar schematic structure" of discourse (Bartlett, 2005, p. 314). Compared with her interactions with Chinese-speaking customers, the learner's use of English appeared markedly more concise and, as shown in the transcriptions, frequently lacked key pragmatic features such as greetings, politeness markers, and mitigated tones.

Furthermore, when eliciting customers' preferences during the ordering stage, the learner tended to rely on isolated lexical items or simple interrogatives. This pattern reflects her attempt to balance accuracy and communicative efficiency in English interactions, given her beginner-level proficiency. Notably, although her English output in the transcripts appears limited and shows minimal use of conventional catering-industry expressions, real-world observations and customer reviews on Google Maps indicate that the learner displays warmth and responsiveness when interacting with customers. Such behaviors, to some extent, fulfil conventional standards of politeness and appropriateness within hospitality settings.

Challenges of English language use in restaurant operation

According to the collected data, the greatest challenge in using English during restaurant operations lay in appropriately expressing, explaining, and recommending Chinese-specific ingredients and dishes. A synthesis of Table 1 (above) and the interview findings identified dish recommendation to new customers as both a high-frequency context of English use and a prioritized learning need for the participant. However, the interview and on-site observation data revealed that, although new customers occasionally expressed interest in signature dishes or daily specials, effectively recommending dishes and describing ingredients in English remained a significant challenge for the learner, highlighting the limitations of her current language proficiency.

This difficulty might be largely attributed to the gap between the authentic names of dishes and ingredients and their English translations. For example, the restaurant's signature dish was Malatang, which presented using its original Chinese name rather than a descriptive English translation such as "numbing spicy soup". The widespread use and preservation of native dish names might have heightened the cognitive load for unfamiliar customers trying to interpret the menu, while also presenting difficulties for restaurant staff to clearly and effectively communicate dish-related information in English (Choi et al., 2017).

Another challenge in English language use was how to balance the cultural authenticity of the learner's restaurant with the customers' comprehension and acceptance, as illustrated by the unique ordering method associated with Malatang in the learner's restaurant. In contrast to the common menu-based ordering pattern, Malatang was

characterized by its extensive selection of ingredients, high degree of individualized combinations, and rich diversity in flavor. Also, according to the Malatang ordering instructions displayed in the learner's restaurant, customers were required to go through at least six steps before receiving their meals: retrieving shared utensils (typically a tong and a plastic bowl), selecting preferred ingredients from the fridges, weighing them, choosing the desired flavor and soup base, selecting a staple food (such as rice), and expressing individual preferences. The complexity of the ordering process meant that restaurant staff need to be prepared to provide clear and accurate language guidance and assistance to new customers who are unfamiliar with the procedure.

Finally, based on suggestions from the semi-structured interview with the expert, the English tutor should consider the learner's current language level, communication habits, and the need to communicate clearly, concisely, and understandably with interlocutors. Moreover, learner-centered instruction might face the challenge of lacking authoritative and systematic instructional materials, such as published textbooks. Therefore, it was essential to integrate learner's workplace experiences into instruction by incorporating authentic tasks, case analyses, and role-playing activities, thereby aligning language learning more closely with learner's needs.

Learning Goals and Objectives from Needs Analysis

Based on the data collected, it can be concluded that the learner's frequency of English use in daily restaurant operations varies according to the tasks and situational demands she encounters. These tasks also differ in how often they arise: situations requiring predominantly English communication for compliance or formal purposes occur relatively infrequently, whereas contexts involving bilingual (Chinese–English) customer service are highly frequent. Many other tasks, as indicated through communication with the learner, are spontaneous and difficult to anticipate. Meanwhile, as a learner assessed at a beginner level of English proficiency yet responsible for the majority of English-mediated interactions in the family-run restaurant, she must navigate dual pressures when producing English: meeting general standards and conventions of catering-industry English, while simultaneously accommodating her current proficiency level, habitual communication patterns, and the situational constraints of each interaction.

For these reasons and based on an analysis of the learner's English learning needs, the goals and objectives of the instructional programme should primarily focus on enhancing the learner's listening and speaking skills, which are most critical in her daily restaurant operations. These goals should take into account both accuracy and communicative efficiency in the learner's English output, align with her existing linguistic habits (such as the relatively fixed structure of the ordering process), and reflect her current proficiency level, while also drawing on standard expressions commonly used in the hospitality industry. Accordingly, the learning goals and

objectives are summarized and presented in Table 3. The instructional content should be tailored and adjusted according to the learner's everyday communicative contexts, with particular emphasis on facilitating the transfer of classroom-based language input to real-world workplace interactions.

Table 3:
Goals and Objectives of the ESP Course Informed by Learner Needs Analysis

Linguistic Features	**Learning Goals**	**Learning Objectives**
Listening	To develop learner's English listening ability to understand the requirements accurately from customers.	To accurately comprehend English expressions related to various aspects of restaurant operations, such as customers' needs, takeaway and delivery services, ingredient supply, and reservation management in English.
Speaking (Fluency)	To improve learner's accuracy and fluency in spoken English.	To guide new customers through the ordering process in English. To proactively offer dish recommendations to new customers.
Vocabulary	To expand learner's vocabulary related to the food and beverage industry.	To accurately pronounce commonly used English expressions in restaurant operations. To use appropriate and polite expressions in conversations with customers.
Grammar	To encourage students to use more complex and varied sentence structures in everyday communication.	To use complete sentences in spoken communication. To use the past and future tenses to describe events that have occurred and make future commitments when handling customer complaints.

A Trial Lesson

Combined with the previous analysis of the learner's language learning needs, the results revealed a diverse range of language demands, shaped by her multiple work responsibilities and the varied English-speaking tasks she encountered. Nevertheless, the acquisition of hospitality-related operational vocabulary and expressions, as well as improving the accuracy and fluency of spoken English continued to be the learner's foremost priority. This focus was also consistent with her long-term objective of English learning, while developing her business within the local context.

Lesson Design Rationale and Learning Objectives

The lesson was designed based on a content-based instructional approach, grounded in an analysis of the learner's specific communicative needs in a real-world restaurant service context. First, the instructional content was purposefully developed to address domain-specific tasks that was to develop the learner's pragmatic competence in using

English polite expressions in order-taking phrase while aligning with the learner's prioritized linguistic goals (Brinton, 2012). Then, the lesson design was also informed by the learner's previous language learning experiences and practical knowledge (Parkinson, 2000; Ngan, 2011). The instructional design integrated the learner's hands-on experience in her restaurant operations and considers her prior English learning patterns. It adopted a form-focused approach to guide the learner in noticing and using contextually appropriate language forms that supported content comprehension and communication. Besides, the designed lesson was learner-centred, and the use of the target language (English) as the primary medium of instruction would be adjusted through simplification to align with the learner's beginner-level English proficiency (Ngan, 2011). Meanwhile, the learner's first language (Chinese) would be used as a supportive instructional language when needed to facilitate understanding. Finally, as Basturkmen (2025) emphasized, "ESP is a context of teaching that is very much driven by the need for practical outcomes for learners" (p.2). The lesson would incorporate oral output activities such as role-plays and dialogue rehearsals, enabling the learner to rehearse the English interactions taught in class within the authentic context of her restaurant.

The teaching goals and learning objectives of the designed lesson were for the learner to identify polite expressions in English appropriate to her specific restaurant context, modify originally brief and direct customer interactions during order-taking into more polite and contextually appropriate English dialogue, and demonstrate accurate pronunciation and fluent oral production during the role-play and rehearsal activity.

Lesson Plan and Tasks

In accordance with the volunteer program's plan for the home tutoring course, the lesson was delivered in a one-on-one format, lasted for a minimum of one hour, and was scheduled during off-peak hours at the learner's restaurant.

According to on-site observations of the learner's interactions with customers, the food ordering process in her restaurant followed a relatively fixed structure. However, textual transcription of the ordering dialogues revealed that the learner often relied on single-word utterances when posing questions in English. This pattern suggested that, in the ordering process, the learner prioritized efficiency in obtaining information while overlooking the use of polite expressions that were essential in the service industry. Therefore, the instructional content is designed based on the English interactions during the ordering process (Basturkmen, 2025), with a particular focus on the polite expression "Would you like…" used to inquire about customer preferences (Yates, 2016). This emphasizes the use of polite language in the context of the hospitality industry, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4:
Lesson Plan and Tasks

Topic: How to use polite English when communicating with customers in the order-taking process?	
Time	**Content**
10 mins Lead-in and Warm-Up	1. Watch an English dialogue video on ordering food in a restaurant, with subtitles provided to support comprehension and notice language forms. 2. Compare the learner's Chinese and English expressions used during the food ordering process to examine the linguistic differences.
20 mins	● Core linguistic structures: *Would you like...?* (1) Meaning in both Chinese and English (2) Grammatical structure and sentence-making practice *A. Would you like+noun / to + verb phrase?* *E.g. Would you like a drink?* *B. What would you like+noun / to+ verb / for+noun ?* *E.g. What would you like, a soup base or a dry base for your Malatang?* (3) Pronunciation and fluency practice *Would‿you like...?* *What would you like... → What'd‿you like...?* ● Additional polite phrases (1) Polite expressions: *Please, Thank you, and Take your time.* (2) Positive feedback: *Okay / Awesome / Excellent / Good choice*
15 mins	● Improve your original expressions (1) Using the "*Would you like...?*" or "*What would you like…*?" structure along with other appropriate English polite expressions when interacting with customers.
15 mins	(2) Role-play and rehearsal Note: In this role-play and rehearsal activity, the learner assumes the role of a restaurant server and the tutor acts as the customer. The full food ordering procedure will be rehearsed at the cashier counter. (3) Summarize and highlight the key points of this lesson.

Evaluation and Reflection

The lesson designed in this study was implemented in real-life settings and extended beyond one hour. During the session, the learner indicated that she had never been exposed to polite expressions commonly used in the hospitality industry in English-speaking countries. As a result, introducing contextualized language use and relevant sentence structures took more instructional time than initially expected.

In the role-play and simulation activities, it became apparent that replacing the learner's entire existing ordering routine with polite English expressions posed significant challenges. This was largely due to the cognitive demands involved in processing multiple streams of information during the ordering process. In addition to confirming customer preferences, the learner, acting as the waitress, was responsible for accurately converting customer requests expressed in English into Chinese for communication with the kitchen staff, who were also Chinese-speaking migrants. Under such circumstances, requiring the learner to reconstruct the entire ordering interaction in polite English proved overly demanding. Therefore, it was ultimately deemed more feasible to selectively integrate polite expressions into key stages of the ordering process—for example, replacing isolated segments with expressions such as "Would you like some coriander?" and enhancing customer interaction through positive feedback during discussions of flavour and ingredient preferences.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was based on a single participant and her specific language use context, and the scope of the observed and collected data was therefore limited, which constrains the generalization of the findings. Consequently, the results cannot be readily applied to all immigrants working in the restaurant industry in New Zealand. In addition, the study relied primarily on a single participant and an expert, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives captured. Finally, as the research drew on experiences from authentic home-tutor volunteer sessions, it allowed direct observation of the participant's language use in everyday classroom interactions related to restaurant operations. However, this also made it difficult to obtain supplementary data from other stakeholders, such as colleagues, customers, or supervisors, potentially introducing a degree of subjectivity to the study.

These limitations suggest that future research could incorporate more longitudinal observations to track changes in participants' language use and needs within restaurant workplace contexts. Additionally, by diversifying data sources and perspectives, expanding the participant sample, and exploring a broader range of authentic English use scenarios in the restaurant industry, future studies could enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of the findings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex linguistic challenges face by a Chinese migrant working in the food and beverage industry in New Zealand. Through interviews, questionnaires, on-site observations, and customer reviews, the research captured both the authentic communicative practices enacted by a migrant in her family-run restaurant and the tensions she experienced as a beginner-level English learner attempting to balance meaning-focused communication with the linguistic conventions of the hospitality industry. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the receptive

and expressive demands placed on migrant workers in service settings and highlight the language need for targeted ESP support that responds to their workplace realities.

Furthermore, the insights gained from the design and implementation of the home tutor volunteering programme, together with the learner's feedback, offer practical guidance for developing similar English courses for ESL learners in comparable workplace contexts. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on English use in hospitality workplace settings by providing an illustrative case of a migrant learner working in a small family-run restaurant. It underscores the centrality of context-based language instruction in empowering migrant workers to participate more confidently and effectively in their professional environments.

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Appendix A. A Questionnaire for English Language Need Analysis

Questions	More than 90% (always) 超过90% （总是）	About 75% (often) 约75% （经常）	About 50% (sometimes) 约50% （有时）	About 25% (rarely) 约25% （很少）	0% (never) 0 （从不）
1. How frequently do you use English in the following situations? 请问您在以下场景中的英语使用频率如何？					
Making small talks with customers 与顾客寒暄					
Serving customers: such as greetings, taking orders, explaining the menu, serving food, and payment methods. 服务顾客：如问候、点餐、解释菜单、上菜和付款					
Recommending dishes to new customers 向新客人推荐菜品					
Inquiring about customers' satisfaction with the dishes 询问客人对菜品的满意度					
Dealing with complaints 处理投诉					
Conversation with delivery drivers and customer service on food delivery platforms 与外卖员和平台客服的交谈					
Managing phone reservations 管理电话预定					

Managing communication between the kitchen and front-of-house staff 管理前后厨沟通					
Communicating with suppliers, restocking and purchasing ingredients 和供应商沟通，原料补充及进货					
Compliance and official communication 与政府和行业沟通					
Managing revenue and filing taxes 管理营收及申报税务					
Other situations (please specify) 其他（请列出）					
2. How frequently do you use each of the English language skills in the daily operations of the restaurant? 您在餐厅日常经营中使用英语各项技能的频率是怎样的？	**More than 90% (always) 超过90% （总是）**	**About 75% (often) 约75% （经常）**	**About 50% (sometimes) 约50% （有时）**	**About 25% (rarely) 约25% （很少）**	**0% (never) 0 （从不）**
Listening 听力					
Reading 阅读					
Speaking 口语					
Writing 写作					

3. How important do you consider each of the English language skills in the daily operations of the restaurant? **您认为在餐厅日常经营中使用英语的各项技能的重要程度是怎样的？**	**Very important** **非常重要**	**Important** **重要**	**Moderately important** **一般重要**	**Slightly important** **轻微重要**	**Not important at all** **完全不重要**
Listening 听力					
Reading 阅读					
Speaking 口语					
Writing 写作					
4. Please evaluate your level of proficiency in the four English language skills. **请您评价自己在四种英语技能上的掌握程度.**	**Excellent** **极好**	**Good** **很好**	**Fair** **一般**	**Poor** **较差**	**Very Poor** **很差**
Listening 听力					
Reading 阅读					
Speaking 口语					

Writing 写作					
5. Which aspect of English language learning do you consider the most in need of improvement? **对于英语学习的各方面，您认为最需要学习的是？**	**Strongly needed** **极其需要**	**Needed** **需要**	**Moderately needed** **一般需要**	**Slightly needed** **轻微需要**	**Not needed at all** **完全不需要**
Vocabulary 词汇					
Grammar 语法					
Pronunciation 发音					
Fluency 流利度					
Others (please specify) 其他 （请列出）					

Appendix B. Interview Questions with The Learner

1. Basic Information 基本信息
1.1 Which city in China are you originally from? 你来自中国的哪座城市？
1.2 How long have you been in New Zealand? 你来到新西兰多久了？
1.3 How long has your restaurant been in operation? 你的餐厅大概经营多久了？
2. **English Proficiency 英语能力**
2.1 How many years did you study English in China? 你在中国大概学习英语多久？
2.2 Have you participated in any structured English learning programs in New Zealand (e.g., classroom-based courses)? If yes, how long did you study and how was your experience? 你在新西兰是否有参加过系统地英语学习项目，例如参加班级学习？如果有，请问学习了多久？感受如何？
2.3 What do you enjoy most about learning English? 你认为英语学习中最喜欢的部分是什么？
2.4 What do you find most challenging in learning English? 你认为英语学习最具有挑战的部分是什么？
2.5 How much time do you spend on English learning in your daily life? 你在日常大概能投入英语学习的时间是多少？
2.6 Do you engage in any self-directed English learning activities? 你在日常是否有自学英语的活动？具体是怎样的？
2.7 Are there any courses or learning activities that you particularly enjoy or would recommend? 有哪些课程或者学习活动是你喜欢或者推荐的？
3. **English Use in Restaurant Operation 餐厅经营中的英语使用**
How frequently do you use English in your restaurant operations? 在餐厅经营中，你使用英语的频率如何？
In what situations do you need to use English? 有哪些情况是需要使用英语的？
Have you encountered any problems or difficulties when using English? 当使用英语时，是否发生过问题或者困难？
What areas or content do you think should be prioritized in your English learning at this stage? 你认为当下最需要优先学习的内容和部分是什么？
What are your goals for learning English? 你的英语语言学习目标是什么？

BOOK REVIEWS

Twardzisz, P. (2023). *English complex words: Exercises in construction and translation.* John Benjamins. ISBN 9789027213938, Paperback ISBN 978902721392, E-Book ISBN 9789027249708

Reviewed by Elizaveta Tarasova, English Teaching College, Palmerston North

English word-formation has long occupied an uncertain place in applied linguistics and TESOL. Although there are a number of rich theoretical descriptions of morphological structure (e.g., Bauer 2003; Booij, 2010; Plag, 2018; Lieber, 2021), relatively few resources have attempted to translate this scholarship into pedagogically meaningful, empirically grounded activities for learners. This is somewhat surprising given learners' documented difficulties with derivation, compounding, and semantic transparency. Piotr Twardzisz's new book *English Complex Words: Exercises in Construction and Translation* aims to fill this gap by combining morphological analysis with corpus-informed tasks and multilingual translation exercises.

The book is organised into three major sections: prefixation, suffixation, and compounding and covers 43 prefixes, 53 suffixes, and 13 compound types. This broad coverage reflects productivity-based accounts of English morphology (Bauer et al., 2013) and aligns with research that emphasises the importance of affix knowledge for vocabulary development (Nation, 2013; Laufer & Goldstein, 2004). Each entry follows a consistent pedagogical template: a concise overview of the form, origin and meaning of the affix or compound; a "Construction" section where learners are encouraged to manipulate forms and explore corpus data; and a "Translation" section that requires learners to compare the English output with equivalents in a wide range of languages.

This structure is well grounded in both theory and practice. Emphasis on usage, constructional patterns, and learner-driven hypothesis testing connects with construction morphology (Booij, 2010) as well as usage-based approaches (Bybee, 2010), which stipulate that morphological knowledge emerges from repeated form-meaning pairings rather than as the product of abstract rules. Many tasks are also implicitly connected to key theoretical concepts such as productivity, transparency, blocking, and lexicalization, which rarely appear in teaching materials despite their importance in morphological research.

The book's most distinctive contribution lies in its translation component. By juxtaposing English complex words with equivalents from more than 40 languages, the tasks encourage learners to examine typological contrasts in derivation, compounding, and morphological marking. This approach reflects comparative morphological work (Haspelmath & Sims, 2013) and aligns with research on cross-linguistic transfer in bilingual lexical processing (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). The activities that ask learners to evaluate Google Translate outputs against native-speaker judgments are particularly engaging as they clearly demonstrate the limitations of machine translation (MT) in

handling morphological ambiguity, idiomaticity, and semantic nuance. Such tasks also link to emerging research on MT literacy in language education (e.g., Ducar & Schocket, 2018), which is definitely a timely topic to consider.

The author identifies a broad intended readership, i.e., advanced undergraduates, postgraduate students, translation trainees, and TESOL practitioners, and the book is very accessible to upper-level learners. However, it will serve best as a supplementary resource in morphology and translation courses or as a targeted tool in advanced TESOL contexts. The alphabetised affix lists, concise explanations, answer keys, and use of authentic corpus examples make the volume easy to navigate and support a data-driven learning approach (Johns, 1991; Boulton & Cobb, 2017). For teachers working in multilingual classrooms, the contrastive translation tasks offer a practical way to engage with learners' linguistic backgrounds and encourage reflection on how L1 systems shape their understanding of English word-formation.

Despite these strengths, several limitations should be mentioned. First, although the multilingual comparisons are most useful, the translation data are heavily weighted toward Indo-European languages. Given the linguistic profiles of learners in Australasia and elsewhere, more attention to Sinitic, Semitic, and Pacific languages would enhance classroom relevance of the book. Examples illustrating non-concatenative morphology (e.g., Arabic) or compounding behaviour in languages such as Mandarin would also add depth and versatility to translation tasks.

Second, the difficulty level of the exercises varies considerably. Some exercises function as straightforward vocabulary practice, while others require corpus queries, advanced inferencing, or sophisticated translation competence. While this variability allows flexibility, there is also a risk of cognitive overload for less experienced learners. A more explicit sequencing rationale or clearer guidance on task selection would strengthen the pedagogical framing and provide support for instructors.

Third, the omission of conversion (zero-derivation), even though justified by the author, somewhat limits the book's comprehensiveness. Conversion is one of the most productive (and pedagogically challenging) word-formation processes in English (Plag, 2018). A brief overview of this and a small set of exercises would have been beneficial.

Finally, while the theoretical background is intentionally streamlined, some readers may find it more minimal than necessary. Concepts such as degrees of productivity, morphological competition, semantic compositionality, or prosodic constraints are only lightly touched upon. This restraint certainly enhances accessibility, but it also leaves some theoretical motivations implicit, hence the book is better suited as a supplementary resource.

Despite these limitations, *English Complex Words* is a useful resource that succeeds in weaving together morphological reasoning, contrastive analysis, and digital literacy within a cohesive pedagogical framework. The volume is likely to be welcomed in morphology courses, TESOL programs, and translation training contexts. For researchers, the volume also raises valuable questions about how morphological competence develops, how learners draw on cross-linguistic comparisons, and how data-driven tasks can complement more traditional rule-based instruction.

In sum, Twardzisz offers a resource that is empirically rich, pedagogically versatile, and responsive to the multilingual realities of contemporary language learning. The volume will equip the learners and instructors with effective tools to explore English word-formation in depth. It is definitely a welcome addition to the growing body of work at the intersection of morphology, TESOL, and translation studies. Future editions may benefit from broader typological coverage and the inclusion of conversion.

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Chan, C. & Colloton, T. (2024). *Generative AI in higher education: The Chat GPT effect.* Routledge. ISBN 9781032599045 Paperback ISBN 9781003459026 Ebook

Reviewed by Natalia Petersen, Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington

Rapid developments in the field of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have created much hype regarding its capabilities. Universities have been developing policy and guidelines for staff and students, as they come to terms with its prevalence. However, some educators may still feel ill equipped or reluctant to use these tools in their teaching practice. This is where Chan and Colloton's book *Generative AI in Higher Education: The Chat GPT Effect* is a timely addition to the literature, as it provides a comprehensive read for those wanting to develop a deeper understanding of GenAI and explore what it means to integrate these tools in curriculum.

Drawing on their respective fields of expertise, Chan and Colloton adopt an interdisciplinary approach as they delve into the technical and educational aspects of GenAI. Chapters which deal with technical matters unpack terms such as Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI), Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), and Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). They provide an historical account of AI's developments and predict GenAI's role in education and society in the future.

Chapters that explore GenAI from an educational perspective, emphasise the importance of AI literacy for educators and students. They highlight the strengths and weaknesses of using ChatGPT in curriculum design and discuss ChatGPT's capabilities in relation to Bloom's taxonomy, providing discipline specific case scenarios on how GenAI could be used to address higher-level critical thinking skills. AI educational policy development is also a focus, with advice regarding policy design and implementation for higher education institutions.

While the book becomes somewhat technical at times, content remains accessible thanks to the layout and the authors' clear intent to educate their audience; visuals, diagrams and tables help bring the content to life, and questions/reflections at the end of each chapter provide further food for thought.

Throughout the book, Chan and Colloton are keen to address GenAI's weaknesses with clear policy guidelines and AI literacy awareness. However, while the authors promote an integrated approach to AI tools for tasks and assessment, the reality of using GenAI in its current form, where users are bombarded with options of support with every prompt, and where AI detection is near impossible, begs the question whether these measures will stem the tide of overreliance, or whether stricter regulation is needed.

In addition, while most advice provided in the book is grounded in ethical values and integrity, suggestions that supervisors can use GenAI tools to review research proposals and draft theses, and that journal article reviewers can use them to review articles seems to contradict concerns regarding data privacy.

Overall, the authors provide comprehensive coverage of GenAI. Rich in content, the book is user-friendly and provides a practical reference for educators, students and policymakers. This book may not shift perceptions of GenAI in higher education, but it will certainly provide readers with a thorough knowledge base. While some of the practical suggestions may become outdated with continued advances in GenAI, concepts around AI literacy and policy will undoubtedly have more longevity.

Baker, B. & Taylor, L. (2024). *Language assessment literacy and competence. Volume 1: Research and reflections from the field.* Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-009-80231-4 (Pbk) 256 Pp.

Reviewed by Hanna Svensson, English Teaching College, Palmerston North

Language Assessment Literacy and Competence Volume 1: Research and Reflections from the Field explores the concept of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), a growing field of research and theorisation. The construct of LAL concerns itself with the conceptual knowledge of language testing as well as the practice of testing. In the context of LAL, 'literacy' is used in its broader sense as referring to competence in and understanding of a particular area (c.f. 'computer literacy') and promotes the idea that stakeholders involved in language assessment need to become 'literate' or competent in this area. The book is the first volume of two, with the second volume focusing on case studies; this review refers to the first volume only.

The book begins with an introductory chapter by Lynda Taylor which provides a personal reflection on her own development of language assessment literacy as well as a chronological overview of the development of LAL more generally. This is followed by Section 1, which contains eight empirical research studies from diverse contexts, with various languages, for various purposes, and involving various stakeholders. The section provides an interesting overview of the kinds of research undertaken in LAL and the breadth of the field, and chapters are presented in the format expected from research articles. Section 2 contains seven scholarly reflections – shorter chapters based on research, experience, and reflections. These chapters also touch on a range of contexts and languages and are thought-provoking.

One of the strengths of the book is its range—covering different geographical locations, different languages, different assessment contexts, and high-stakes international assessments as well as local classroom assessments. It is not surprising then that one of

the main themes is the importance of context; that generalised understandings of assessment need to be balanced with the local, professional, and linguistic context in which a particular assessment and assessment practice is situated. Another important theme that is highlighted in the introduction and pursued throughout the book is the importance of understanding the various stakeholders within language assessment: their beliefs and attitudes, and how they interact, position themselves, and collaborate.

As someone with experience in teaching as well as assessment development and oversight, I found the book interesting and thought-provoking. Several things stood out to me. Firstly, Language Assessment Literacy is not only for assessment developers or item writers, but all stakeholders in the assessment process need to develop some measure of LAL. What this looks like will vary between stakeholders and between context. For example, as Chapter 13 suggests, in contexts where assessments are based on teacher judgement rather than standardised high-stakes assessments, teachers need to develop a high level of literacy in language assessment. Secondly, understanding the context and ensuring that assessments align with the needs of all stakeholders involved is crucial. This point was made strongly in Chapter 8, which deals with language testing in aviation, but would be applicable to any context where our aim is to assess whether test takers/learners have the linguistic and communicative skills needed for the actual context in which they will use them. As Chapter 8 suggests, we may need to consider whether formal assessments sufficiently take into consideration the communicative competence required. Thirdly, while specific language assessment literacy has its place, it is also important to draw on what we know from general assessment literacy, including principles of good teaching and assessment-for-learning practices that are applicable across education rather than specific to the language teaching context. This is highlighted in Chapter 13 and is a good reminder to draw on other disciplines and educational theory more generally. Lastly, and importantly, Lynda Taylor's own journey towards assessment literacy, as described in Chapter 1, highlights two aspects that I have found to be very true: language assessment literacy is best developed through apprenticeship—practical application with guidance—and sound assessment practice requires a supportive Communitive of Practice. I think these aspects are particularly important in a smaller context, like the ESOL context in Aotearoa New Zealand, where it is easy to feel isolated in one's practice.

Overall, while the book makes it clear that language assessment literacy is a concern for a range of stakeholders, including test developers, teachers, and learners, the book itself is more suited for those interested in a more academic or conceptual understanding of the topic. It would be ideal as a first step towards research in the area, and as a resource for gaining an overview of the field while also exploring new ideas, perspectives, and research. It is less useful as a practical guide to the development of language assessment literacy; however, it does provoke thinking of how we can best ensure strong LAL in our contexts.

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 2026 issue of *The TESOLANZ Journal* are now open. We welcome manuscripts on a rolling basis throughout the year.