

## Adult ESL Learners' Perceptions of Participatory Teaching Methods: A Narrative Inquiry

Leyla N. M. Norman<sup>1</sup> and Zohreh R. Eslami  
Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

### ABSTRACT

*The main goal of adult English as a second language (ESL) education in the United States is to expand learners' employment opportunities through traditional teaching methods with textbooks and fixed, pre-determined syllabi, which may or may not align with learners' personal goals. Many studies compare different adult ESL teaching methods by language proficiency gains, but few focus exclusively on how learners feel about how they are learning English. This is particularly so for participatory education in ESL, in which learners explore relevant topics and take action to improve their lives and society at large while simultaneously learning English. This study is unique in that it examines the perspectives of advanced English learners in a participatory-based English for Professionals class in a southern U.S. city. Using narrative inquiry and action research, the study collects data from individual and focus group interviews, as well as the instructor/researcher's field notes. The findings were grouped into four themes: the practical value of participatory classes, a comparison between traditional and participatory teaching, learners' desired improvements to the participatory approach, and learners' perceptions of their English progress. The study shows that learners appreciate participatory learning but also have some concerns, such as the lack of traditional grammar instruction. The study discusses how the teacher-researcher addressed these concerns during a semester.*

**KEYWORDS:** English as a second language, adult education, ESL, narrative inquiry, participatory pedagogy, learner perception.

---

Adult education in the United States aims to provide self-sustaining employment opportunities through job training, postsecondary education, and English language learning. Government-funded adult education classrooms tend to follow traditional, teacher-led instruction informed by a pre-made syllabus or a textbook, primarily following the Functional Literacy paradigm (Eyring, 2014).

Adult education in the U.S. heavily emphasizes workforce education, potentially disregarding students' goals (Ouellette-Schramm, 2023) and prioritizing employer needs (Atkinson, 2014; Pickard, 2016). Auerbach and Burgess (1985) emphasize how English curricula often only help prepare learners for lesser social roles by hindering learning and critical thinking. This narrow focus can undermine learners' aspirations and confine them to low-skilled jobs, even if they desire employment (Arnold, 2014). Consequently, learners may feel disconnected from their

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: A Ph.D. student in Bilingual/ESL Education at the Department of Educational Psychology, Texas A&M University, Harrington Education Center Office Tower, 540 Ross St., Suite 705, College Station, TX 77843, USA. E-Mail: [leylanorman@tamu.edu](mailto:leylanorman@tamu.edu)

educational experience and fail to complete their courses (Eyring, 2014), sometimes leading them to seek volunteer-run classes with inadequate English literacy instruction (Pickard, 2016).

Given that, as adult ESL instructors, we want to ensure that learners continue to come to class and feel that their learning experience is relevant to their life goals, we wondered what the outcome would be if the first author collaborated with the advanced-proficiency learners in her adult English for Professionals classroom to create a syllabus and lessons (Crookes, 2013). Inspired by critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1970/1993), and participatory education, we aimed to create a classroom where learners actively participate in syllabus creation (Ahmadi & Hasani, 2018; Pakdaman et al., 2022), as adults value immediate application and active learning (Knowles, 1980). The goal was to establish a collaborative learning environment and objectives aligned with the learners’ specific learning goals (Knowles et al., 1984).

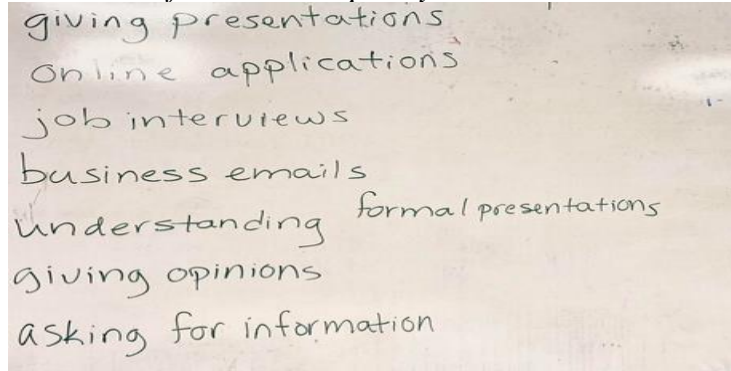
We aimed to establish a teaching setting where learners could communicate their desired areas of learning, enhancing their lives through reduced reliance on textbooks and increased active inquiry. Completely participatory classes very likely do not use pre-prepared materials, but becoming completely critical pedagogically oriented educators takes time (Crookes, 2013). The learners in this study prefer a balance of participatory and traditional approaches, as will be seen in the results’ discussion and is in line with S. Y. Huang’s (2011) finding that more traditional and critical literacy lessons can both be taught in the classroom, particularly if students prefer it. Ultimately, our aim was to support the learners by understanding their backgrounds and interests and using a dialogic approach focused on relevant topics (Auerbach, 1995).

### **A Participatory ESL Guidebook**

A guidebook published within a master’s thesis by Haley Wiggins (2004) called “Moving forward: A learner-centered and participatory approach to teaching community adult ESL” was used as the point of reference for teaching the adult learners in this study. Despite being almost two decades old, Wiggins’ guidebook was still valuable because it is a detailed guide and covers adult learning standards called Equipped for the Future from the National Institute for Literacy (Stein, 2000). It also discusses the participatory curriculum development framework and how to use the standards in the framework. It covers learners defining their English proficiency levels and setting personal learning goals. Additionally, it explores teaching learners to create their own lesson texts and student-led topic selection via a visual representation called a code (Auerbach, 1992). Communicative activities based on the texts learners create are discussed as well.

### **Figure 1**

*Some Goals for the Participatory Class as Determined by Learners*



*Note.* Other topics that were not available via photograph included small talk and phone calls/voicemails.

Participatory pedagogy aims to emancipate students from oppression. However, it was crucial that to understand the learners' specific needs. In contrast to Freire's (1970/1993) more ambitious goals, the participatory approach used in this study focused on empowering individual learners, rather than focusing on broader societal change. It is our belief that the most effective change would occur by helping our learners enact positive transformations in their personal lives.

### **Learner Perspectives on Language Learning Approaches**

References abound on participatory education (e.g. Davis McGaw & McGaw Evans, 2021) and language teaching (e.g., Richard-Amato, 2010). Articles and books have detailed what this approach is and how to enact it for decades. Few studies on participatory language teaching explore learners' perspectives in detail, as most focus on its theoretical and practical implementation aspects. However, some articles discuss learners' thoughts on participatory classrooms. For example, Gómez and Cortés-Jaramillo (2019) conducted a study on participatory teaching in Colombia at a public school with 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. Learners were interviewed to better understand how they viewed their curriculum, which involved a community-based improvement project. Students' perspectives on participatory learning changed over time, as they began to see that non-traditional methods and community issues could help them learn English effectively. In 2021, Mousavi and Ketabi reported on the level of class participation and engagement of female English learners in Iran in a class taught through "participatory critical pedagogy." They found that, while some learners may have had a difficult time transitioning to the new form of teaching, women generally enjoyed the critical pedagogy approach to their English classes, as shown by their reflective journals, interviews, and increased interaction and engagement in class. One student noted, "I think it was quite hard to cope with the new method, but it was much fun and I had more chance to communicate and interact with the learners and the teacher without being shy or afraid of doing mistakes." Another student noted, "I think it is a really good idea to involve students in planning and deciding about the learning tasks and projects" (Mousavi & Ketabi, 2021, p. 43).

Areas related to participatory language teaching have a richer literature on student perspectives on particular teaching and learning approaches. Zyphur (2020) found that students in an online ESL class in a community college during COVID felt confident discussing the theme of work-life balance outside of class and enjoyed learning English through dialogue. In a quantitative study of male high school students in Iran, Abdollahzadeh & Haddad Narafshan (2016) found that students in the experimental group learning through a critical pedagogy approach had a higher level of intrinsic motivation compared to the control group learning with more traditional methods. Both groups had the same level of extrinsic motivation.

Studies on students' perceptions of project-based learning in language-learning contexts have also been conducted. Saricaoğlu and Geluso (2019) found that in a project-based introductory linguistics course in which Turkish and American students collaborated online, both groups thought positively about it, even though it required more effort than typical university courses. In another study by Deveci (2018), undergraduate students learning collaborative writing in an English course in the United Arab Emirates had positive perceptions of project-based learning.

Korean students of English as a foreign language expressed mixed perceptions of Task-based language learning (TBLT), as shown by Y. Kim et al. (2017). Similarly, Lazareva and Karnaukhova (2021) explored the attitudes of 137 undergraduate senior students in Russia via a questionnaire. They found that TBLT was favorably viewed by most, particularly for developing vocabulary and oral speech. However, the students were less positive about TBLT's ability to support grammar improvement, reading comprehension, and writing and listening skills. D. Huang (2016) found that students in a TBLT English class at a Chinese university generally enjoyed this

approach. A study by González-Lloret and Nielson (2015) among border patrol agents along the U.S.-Mexico border found that both current and former students felt that the TBLT approach supported their need-to-know Spanish in their professional role. While studies that focus on students' perspectives on participatory learning in a language classroom are scarce, there are more studies focusing on students' perspectives of other language-learning approaches, such as broadly critical-pedagogical in nature, project-based learning, and TBLT.

The data collection instruments used in previous studies to explore the perspective of language learners include focus and individual interviews, journals, and student reflections. The present study employs narrative inquiry, a form of qualitative research discussed in more detail later. Other narrative inquiry studies that focus on the perspectives of English learners (on topics other than the pedagogical approaches used in their classes) include that of Yung (2020) and Almalki (2021). Yung (2020) focused on the disparity in access to private English tutoring in Hong Kong for an economically disadvantaged English learner and concluded that the learner took drastic steps like borrowing money to pay for English classes to escape poverty. Almalki (2021) explored the experiences of female visually impaired English learners at a Saudi Arabian university.

Our study is unique in that it is conducted in an English as a second language context and focuses solely on adult English learners' perceptions of participatory teaching and learning in the classroom. Unlike previous studies, it only examines the perspectives of adult learners with the goal of highlighting students' voices. This study aims to explore how a class of adult ESL learners perceives the participatory approach to teaching.

## **Teaching Context**

The research for this study was conducted between January and March 2023. The first researcher was the instructor of the class, as she works in an adult education program in the American South that operates within the Functional Literacy paradigm and focuses on basic skills and literacy. She considered the ESL program guidelines in her teaching but also went beyond it, crafting her role to advocate for her learners (Haneda & Sherman, 2016, 2018). The “story of school” states that instructors are expected to use the textbook to teach to help students achieve financial self-sufficiency. However, the instructor made her own not-so-“secret story” by trying out participatory learning mixed with some more traditional methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Fortunately, the administration team was flexible enough to empower the instructor to teach the students using participatory learning, an affordance not granted to many adult ESL instructors. She worked in a temporary building behind the gym of a church, with no Internet access except through a spotty cell phone signal and no copy machine on-site. Learners are committed to the free classes, but due to life obligations, they often cannot attend.

## **Philosophical and Methodological Foundations**

### **Social Constructivism, Narrative Inquiry, and Action Research**

We hope that this small narrative inquiry and action research study can support policy change focused on listening to students' opinions of how they learn. Discussing Caine et al. (2018), Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022) point out that “narrative inquiry has the potential to inform policy because it is attentive to lives first” (p. 4). Our aim was to forefront the learners' experiences to promote participatory teaching in adult ESL programs (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Thus, social constructivism was used to frame this inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each person creates

personalized meanings from their experiences, which are influenced by interactions and cultural and historical forces (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While unique, their realities are true (Lincoln, 1992).

Narratives are “a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative inquiry may rankle some because it is not precise in a quantitative sense (J. Kim, 2016). However, it is the best form of research for this naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because learners share their individual truths, which are situated in the three-dimensional narrative space: temporal, social, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, it emphasizes “the individual over the social context” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). This is what makes it a potent form of research. It empowers the teacher to have relationships with their students and gives space for their experiences and stories to take center stage (Caine et al., 2018).

These narratives focus on experiences that occur over time (Caine et al., 2018). This retelling of learners’ experiences and thoughts is just one interpretation. The teacher’s interpretation is a part of her being and viewpoints and is connected to her relationships with her learners (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2012). A reader may interpret the experiences differently. For readers, researchers, and the teacher the interpretations can change as they are dynamic and fluid (J. Kim, 2016).

Utilizing the paradigmatic mode of analysis, or analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995), we analyzed the participants’ narratives in an iterative fashion to identify common themes that emerged from the data and then organized them into broader categories (J. Kim, 2016). Open-ended questions in the interviews and focus group were used to probe participants’ answers with follow-up questions as intriguing information arose (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The teacher (first author) turned her research lens on her class and adjusted how she was teaching while still in the middle of research and analysis. The intention was to validate students’ voices and perspective by acting on the feedback they provided the teacher about participatory teaching. This recursive process turned this study also into a self-reflective action research study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) in which one of the goals was practical and aimed at improving the teachers’ instructional practices to align closely with students’ voices and perspectives.

As a narrative inquirer, the teacher/researcher relationship with the learners was meaningful in the research (Caine et al., 2018). This study aimed to create space for their stories and to learn about social justice concerns as they relate to English language education for adults in the United States (Caine et al., 2018).

## **Participant Observation**

As a “complete” participant observer in the study (Tracy, 2020), the first researcher had the advantage of already having access to the setting and potential participants. She was able to collect data as an observer of her own class and conduct interviews with the students without interrupting the flow of instruction (Queirós et al., 2017). Her role enabled her to serve as a legitimate insider and gather relevant data (Tracy, 2020). Being an insider is helpful from a naturalistic point of view. However, it could present difficulties in that she could have been influenced by her knowledge of the teaching setting and failed to question intriguing data (Tracy, 2020). Her role as the participants’ teacher could have affected the students’ orientation to and attitudes towards the inquiries. The participants may have provided what they thought was desirable to the teacher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Even so, the voices that learners provided have helped to shape the teacher’s pedagogical practices and choices in response to the students’ needs.

## Participants

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. The study was approved by the university’s institutional review board. Each participant signed a consent form and was provided a copy. To protect the participants’ identity, specific details about the learners were omitted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017). Pseudonyms are used, and their continent of origin is mentioned instead of their countries. Member checks were used to ensure interview and focus group content accuracy, and needed changes were incorporated. The researchers have tried to share the participants’ experiences as agreed by them through member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to view the process as “a negotiation of shared unity” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3).

Irregular attendance is common in adult education classes due to other obligations like work, university, and caregiving. From a typical class attendance of 12 to 15 individuals, four volunteered for individual interviews, and six participated in a focus group. Two individuals took part in both the focus group and individual interviews, making a total of eight participants. Among the participants, there were four females and four males. Three females and one male participated in the interviews, while two females and four males joined the focus group. Participant demographics and their involvement in interviews and the focus group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participants*

Name (Pseudonym)	Interview/Focus Group	Gender	Continent of Origin
Alexandra	Both	Female	South America
Jeong-Ja	Focus Group	Female	Asia
Hye-Young	Interview	Female	Asia
Ibtisam	Interview	Female	Asia
Jaquez	Both	Male	South America
Feng	Focus Group	Male	Asia
Norul	Focus Group	Male	Asia
Ki-Jung	Focus Group	Male	Asia

The participants are literate in their native languages and participated comfortably in the focus group and individual interviews without interpreters. They are considered advanced English learners according to the testing system of the adult education program in which they are enrolled.

## Data Collection and Pursuing Rigor

Individual interviews, ranging from about 30 minutes to an hour, took place at various public locations. The focus group was an hour and a half long and took place in a participant’s home for accessibility and audio recording purposes. Detailed notes during the interviews were taken and a field notebook for lesson and participatory curriculum implementation observations was maintained. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as the participants spoke. Therefore, their use of English has not been adjusted.

Rigor and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were established in several ways. Credibility was established via cross-checking transcripts and recordings and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Transferability was provided by offering detailed information about the teaching context and participant information. Additionally, different sections of transcripts were

coded to create an audit trail to establish dependability. Iteratively examining data in transcripts, recordings, and the researcher's journal entries, along with member checking, confirms data triangulation and offers multiple perspectives for data interpretation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

## Findings

Four themes emerged from my conversations with learners: (1) the practical value of a participatory class, (2) traditional home country teaching vs. participatory teaching, (3) desired changes to the participatory class, and (4) learner perceptions of progress in English.

### Practical Value of a Participatory Class

During interviews and the focus group, the practical value of the participatory class was discussed. Jaquez mentioned this during his interview in a restaurant on a weekday afternoon, where he expressed his disinterest in theoretical topics in an English class. He wants to improve his ability to listen to people he hears speaking English and to fluidly communicate his thoughts through speech. He explained that he has a goal in a year to be able to: "Understand everything, be able to have a fluently conversation with a American native, maybe in a restaurant, in the club, in whatever, a park" (Jaquez). Jaquez wants to be able to take on a more active role in his life in the United States than he currently can. He wants to understand what he hears and expresses that he wants to obtain work that fits his education and experience.

Finding work is definitely a goal of many of these learners (Arnold, 2014), which aligns with the focus of publicly funded ESL education in the United States (Atkinson, 2014; Ouellette-Schramm, 2023; Pickard, 2016). Even though we were not using the traditional textbook for the class, the class's unit on job interviews, a topic that the class had chosen to work on at the beginning of the semester, was relevant and practical.

In the focus group, other student goals emerged that were not related to finding work (Ouellette-Schramm, 2023). In the focus group, Jeong-Ja mentioned that she was nervous when the researcher (teacher) took over as the class's teacher at the beginning of the semester. However, she later began to think a bit differently about the way the class was going:

**Jeong-Ja:** *So, I was a little bit worried about that because change the teachers. . . I think we try to learn with our own goal, and we set the goal with our needs. I think you want to fulfill our needs. We set the five levels, if you guys remember. The one, two, three, four, five. It's very good time to think about that, why I want to try to learn the English, why I go to ESL class every week. We have many chance to write in journals, and she repeated that. And we talk with other topics. And it's quite amazing, yeah. So, I think it's very good for this semester.*

Involving students in setting the learning goals for the class, helping them to identify their personal goals, and providing learning opportunities to fulfill them are critical tenets of participatory education (Auerbach, 1992, 1995). At the beginning of the semester, Jeong-Ja determined to write regularly in a diary when we set personal goals as an activity in class. She stated that she liked to write in the journal because she did not usually have an opportunity to write paragraphs in English. She said that she takes about an hour to write in her journal while her

children do their homework. Ki-Jung has a goal to improve his writing and speaking skills. He is a graduate student at the local university and has to interact with classmates and professors regularly.

*One thing I like, most like thing from this class, I had rather a chance to participate in speaking or writing some, express myself in English because I really need to expose in that situations. It's very good point of this semester. (Ki-Jung)*

Norul had similar thoughts to Ki-Jung about the practical value the class offers for being able to hear and speak English.

*For me, this class is good because it's the only place I can heard English and speak English is my class. Because of home, with my wife, with [inaudible]. . . And groups of friends, friends groups, is [from his home country]. And the only place that I can speak English is this class because of nobody can speak [his language]. (Norul)*

To wrap up the discussion on the value of our participatory class practical focus, we will look at a part of the focus group conversation with Jaquez leading the conversation.

**Jaquez:** *I don't like the theory classes as a way to learn because the real life didn't work in this way:*

**Jeong-Ja:** *Yeah.*

**Jaquez:** *Yeah?*

**Teacher:** *Got it.*

**Jaquez:** *And maybe just start to focus in the grammar, or in the current way, only doing exercise of the book. But you can't, or you lose the opportunity to learn, how to ask, "Sorry, I don't understand. Can you repeat? Hey, what is this?" This is the way that, for example, in a work environment, in an office, a peer talking about anything. We need to learn how to ask, "Sorry, I don't understand. Can you repeat? Hey, what is this? This is. . .? And I think it's very useful for us as professional students to learn this abilities. And to learn in the process, in the way of our natural environment.*

**Alexandra:** *Yeah, I understand. It's like, in real life, no one's going to say, "Okay, give me the preposition."*

**Jaquez:** *Yeah, sure [inaudible]. . .*

Ki-Jung later expressed that he agreed, but he wanted to make sure that the class focused more on grammar than it currently did. This desire for a heavier emphasis on grammar is explored in more detail in later sections. Adults desire practical and immediately applicable learning experiences (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 1984). Participatory classes, as supported by learner conversations (Auerbach, 1992, 1995), fulfill this desire. In these classes, learners contribute to designing their syllabus and engaging in activities such as job interview practice, exploring personal interests, daily English exposure, journal writing, utilizing learning standards, and acquiring practical strategies for effective English communication. Although traditionally taught ESL classes address practical aspects of learners' lives, Jaquez suggests that a focus on grammar and technicalities may not always align with students' preferred learning methods or goals.



## Home Country/Traditional English Teaching versus Participatory Teaching

Learners' past experiences learning English in their home countries tended to focus on more traditional forms of teaching. Learners said they learned grammar and vocabulary and relied heavily on memorization. To Jaquez, when he first began to learn English, a more traditional approach was helpful.

*Because, in the past, it worked in me because I needed to understand the grammar, I need to know the vocabulary. I need to start to learn to read and this kind of things. And now I'm focusing to gain fluency, to gain this common way to speak. (Jaquez)*

Hye-Young took a different approach to discussing this topic, relating her contrast of how education of children (instead of adults) is approached in her country through cram schools, in which she described the learning as "passive."

*And thinking about learning English, of course we have very good and very expensive private learning center to learn English. Yeah, they're very expensive. Many kids went there from the Kindergarten. I didn't make my kids go there, but it is kind of syndrome. (Hye-Young)*

Ibtisam also corroborated Jaquez and Hye-Young's experience in another country. She mentioned that learning in the U.S. was "more interactive" and that, in her country, the focus was on memorizing grammar, not on how to use it in context. She also mentioned that in a conversation class she was simultaneously taking at a local church, she does not receive grammar correction. Ibtisam presents an interesting contradiction: learners want to know how to use grammar in a communicative context but also want error correction when they make mistakes in conversations. Some classes may focus too much on communication for learners' tastes (as Ki-Jung mentioned). Ibtisam contrasted these traditional learning experiences with the learners deciding what they want to learn about in class.

**Ibtisam:** *The teacher is asked about like, "Do you want guys learn something?" We can list our topics based on our needed or favor. And the teacher provided us guidance or method that makes us easy to follow the topic that we already chose. And then, after that, we choose it first. And the teacher is just, they have a program and something like that to make us easy to follow the program that we choose.*

**Teacher:** *Mm-hmm. . . So do I understand correctly that you like choosing what you can learn and then the structure that makes it possible to?*

**Ibtisam:** *Uh-huh. And to practice.*

Ibtisam saw the opportunity to learn something related to her goals as a positive aspect of participatory learning. Arnold (2014) discusses that vocational English can meet learners' goals of securing employment and help them gain needed English skills, especially when learners participate in choosing the curriculum. Ibtisam shared that she wanted to improve her job interview skills and eventually earn a master's degree in law. She liked that she could take an active role in deciding what to learn, which supports Arnold's (2014) and Auerbach's (1995) idea that learners should be involved in deciding what to learn in an adult ESL education context.

Ibtisam described the opportunity to interact in class as “collaborative” and felt positive about it. Alexandra further discussed it, saying she had never attended a formal English class and that this was her first one. She described that she enjoys learning through a variety of interactive activities, like role-plays, and by interacting with her classmates, who often have different perspectives than her. Alexandra went on to say that she appreciated the less rigid class structure we have compared to more traditional classes, and Norul said something similar to Alexandra about the class structure, as follows:

*And this class, it's more flow. I like the different activities that we do. It's not always the same, and we can adapt. I like how we can study something or have a subject, and, when the class go through the day, I don't know how to say it, can change because we found, or we discussed something else that is born through the class. But is not like the original topic. (Alexandra)*

*If I'm being honest, your unstructured class is amazing to me. Because when I arrive to class, I don't know anything about what today I learn in English. And this is amazing for me, learning about the culture, learning about grammar, learning about new words, learning about to give presentation to people. . I don't think in the other classes, structured classes, we can't try this, all of this kind of situation in one, in three hours in one day. (Norul)*

Interaction through partner and small group activities, and whole class discussion help promote an environment in which students can practice the language they are learning (Loewen & Sato, 2018). This group of learners is more reluctant to speak out loud in a whole-class setting, but they generally are very engaged when working in pairs or small groups. The silence in the whole group is particularly to be expected, as they may experience anxiety, which causes them to be reluctant to speak (Krashen, 1982). They may also be from cultures where silence instead of discussion in the classroom is the norm (Choi, 2015). The variety of interactive activities helps to motivate the students and keep them engaged and returning to class.

Participants expressed that taking part in classes in their home countries was not always a positive experience. Ibtisam mentioned that she, as a child, attended an outside-of-school English institute (such as the cram schools Hye-Young discussed in her country).

*I didn't really like how the method in there because, when we made mistakes, or we didn't get a good score in test, we had some kind a different treat not in a good way. So, sometimes, I doubt to asked or give my opinion because I'm afraid to make mistake or I feel myself slow to understand the lesson. But, in here, I've been striving to improve my confidence not afraid to make mistake. (Ibtisam)*

This is one of the major foci in this class: be proud of yourself as a learner, and feel free to express yourself because the class is a safe place to play with the language. Jaquez recognized this when he said:

*Really, this changed my mind because I always feel so frustrated, so maybe dumb, because I didn't know how to speak, I can't to speak fluently, and yeah. . . Really, I appreciate this so, so much. For me, it was different point of view, and I think that it's totally different from anything [inaudible] in a positive way, with this positive spin. (Jaquez)*

Participatory education, emphasizing collaboration and interaction, fosters a supportive environment for learners to acquire a new language and boost confidence (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Its flexible structure allows for immediate exploration of personally relevant topics (Auerbach, 1992, 1995). In contrast, traditional English learning in participants' home countries often involved heavy emphasis on vocabulary and grammar memorization, limited opportunities for practical application, and a sense of shame associated with poor performance on exams or progress assessments.

### **What Learners Want to Change about the Participatory Class**

Not everything about the participatory class was viewed positively by learners. They shared ideas they had for improvements, and the teacher worked to implement some of their suggestions during the semester to respond to their needs. When Jaquez was asked what he would change about the class, he responded:

**Jaquez:** *More time. More hours.*

**Teacher:** *More hours!*

**Jaquez:** *Really, the focus of the course I like so much. This focus, the way of how the class is conducted, I think that is very good. However, I like if it's possible to have more hours.*

**The teacher (interviewer) responded:** *I get that. Unfortunately, like, we're funded for six hours a week. You know? That's what they'll pay us.*

This statement from Jaquez speaks to the fact that U.S. adult education is woefully underfunded (Roumell, 2021). Jeong-Ja mentioned in the focus group that the lack of wireless Internet connection in our workplace is a downside to our class. Sometimes, we go outside to get a cell signal to access information online for activity research or our class documents on Google Drive. This was noted in the field notebook on February 08. The teacher wrote, "No Internet in class. Hard to research app," during an activity in which learners were researching an English-learning app to present to the class in groups.

We also discussed how to make the WhatsApp group more active and exciting for students since weekly homework activities that are optional were posted there. Alexandra mentioned that she wanted to have more practice opportunities, suggesting more activities around TED Talks, as it was done one or two times before the focus group. Norul mentioned:

**Norul:** *In the first weeks of I joined your class, your WhatsApp work was very active. . . And that is because of your activities.*

**Teacher:** *Yeah, I felt like I was posting too much. I felt like I was overwhelming you, and I needed to back off.*

**Norul:** *No. No, please, go ahead.*

In response to the learners' request, the teacher worked on adding more activities. Very few people actually participated. Around two months before the term ended, the teacher tried to motivate them externally with a coffee shop gift card. One person responded via WhatsApp and got the gift card.

Jaquez also mentioned that the teacher should prioritize homework and activities based on the needs of the students. He suggested that different groups could be formed and have them work on various tasks according to their preference for improving a particular skill area.

In this conversation, Alexandra and the teacher discussed the possibility of taking field trips or doing a regular class service-learning project in which we volunteered in the community when she suggested that she would like to interact with more native English speakers. In response to this, the class took four field trips in the community: to the local workforce center, the regional food bank, the local university for a campus tour, and a class at the same university where learners interacted with future teachers.

Hye-Young discussed that she sometimes has trouble communicating with other moms from her kids' school because she does not understand the idioms in their text messages or, sometimes, American culture in general. She also mentioned one of the most-discussed suggestions that has been interwoven throughout this study: more grammar is needed. She also clarified: "But it should not be like a grammar lecture. It shouldn't be, but, sometimes, just point out. . . You did it. I know you talked like that. Yeah, you pointed our mistake or yes" (Hye-Young).

Ibtisam also stated that she would like to have lessons in which grammar is linked to learning the particular type of situations in which it is used, as opposed to the fact that just the rules without context is grammar is learned in her country. Norul, who mentioned he likes the "unstructured" format of our class clarified that we also need "a grammar structure." So, the consensus from the learners that participated in this study seems to be, "Teach us more grammar, but don't overdo it."

Students' desire to engage with grammar-focused activities was also noted in the researcher/teacher field notebook. For example, on January 18, she wrote, "Checked in with them yesterday and today: what went well, what didn't. Yesterday - I talked too fast. They liked vocabulary from standards sheet. Today, liked pronunciation practice, IC+IC=, before and/conjunction. Nothing not like." "IC+IC=, before and/conjunction" refers to putting a comma before a conjunction in a sentence with two independent clauses, such as in "The cat ate, and the dog ran." They enjoyed learning about the grammar point, and there was nothing that they seemed to dislike.

After the focus group and individual interviews, the teacher worked to incorporate more grammar into lessons, but she struggled with it. As she noted in her field notebook on March 7 the class began a job interview unit in a textbook, and "the grammar lesson [on modals] had nothing to do with job interviews, really, and felt forced and out of place." However, the students seemed to enjoy the lesson. We also focused on question word order that day because the teacher wanted to support learners in building questions they could ask employers during job interviews. She felt conflicted about using sub-par resources to give students the grammar they wanted and tried to compensate by teaching grammar she thought was more relevant to the topic.

In the focus group, a discussion on student motivation emerged, with Feng suggesting more pressure from the teacher on students to do homework. Journals are optional, as the WhatsApp group with weekly activities provides practice opportunities. Participation has been mixed, but some students have reported engagement in their journals or in in-person conversations, or private WhatsApp conversations. Feng said:

*Really, I want to see some pressure from you. . .For example, the journals. . .To learn English, and then you said no pressure. . .I mean, that's no way to improve much. There's no way. You have to learn. You have to study hard, and two or three or four hours a week, it's not enough, for sure.*  
(Feng)

Jaquez responded that he thought it was up to them, as adult learners, because they “have the ability to choose how much effort [they] like to put in.” Alexandra stated that she understood both sides: added pressure encourages people to commit to getting work done, but she also noted that she is very busy outside of class. Feng, in the end, acknowledged the difference of opinion. The consensus seemed to be that students must pressure themselves, and the teacher’s job is to provide the opportunity and encouragement. Jaquez stated: “I think that the really important things is it’s to maintain motivate, motivate the students.” The coffee shop gift card mentioned earlier was meant to help provide a momentary external motivation and a sense of competition as pressure for students. The teacher tried to pressure students a bit like Feng wanted, but it did not yield results. Norul added:

*We have a big pressure ourselves. When I haven't done my homework, I am very upset, and I am very shamed. . .But if, [Teacher], you ask from us to done our homeworks, maybe I don't go to class because I am not done.*

The teacher had never considered that aspect of giving adults homework. Face-saving is so important in teaching and learning another language (Galmiche, 2017), and this is something that she usually thinks about in the context of speaking up in class or learners’ participation in the WhatsApp group when they are given homework activities.

### **Learner Perceptions of their Progress in English and Self-Confidence**

Some of the learners that participated in this study did not begin the semester in January 2023 and joined later. Despite this, we were interested to get a feeling for how learners perceived their English was progressing. The results were mixed. For example, Jaquez stated that he felt he was making progress with his self-confidence, primarily because of the shift in his mindset referenced earlier that learning is a process and that he should be proud of himself for his work. He said that he felt “frustrated” and “punished to not know. . .to don’t know how to talk,” Whereas Alexandra felt her English and self-confidence had improved:

**Jaquez:** *And, additionally, I think the critical point was your recommendation, your observation that we should be very proud to be learning. Yeah? And I changed my focus totally because, yeah, maybe I'm pursuing a master and maybe I feel really dumb because I'm saying, "Hey, you're studying a master, and you can't talk well in English. And you can't. . .Yeah? With a master, Ph.D. professor, and, now I say, "Hey, don't worry."*

**Teacher:** *What evidence do you have that your confidence and your language have improved?*

**Alexandra:** *Well, I'm speaking now, and I get confidence to come here and actually do this activity because, in the past, I think that I don't take the risk because it was like, "Oh. Oh, no. I don't want to." A few weeks ago, I*

*actually be present in a Zoom reunión [Spanish for “meeting”]. Yeah, in a Zoom meeting. It was all in English, and I have to speak in English, too. . . It’s like I’m getting motivate for doing these different things and actually put the importance that this really has for me.*

She went on to point out that she has more confidence to speak to someone in the street in English and to read subtitles and books in English. She is also gaining more confidence to recognize when words are misspelled in English.

Other students were not confident that either their English or their self-confidence had improved much over the semester. Hye-Young, for example, relayed an event she had just gone through where her English proficiency caused her to feel ashamed and defeated. She said: “Honestly, . . . Maybe it was last week’s [event where she used English that upset her], maybe it affect on me my mental thinking. So, I don’t want to say it is not because of the class.” When asked what she would like to see as evidence that her English has improved, she responded: “At least I could listen well” (Hye-Young). Later on in the semester, this learner contributed to our WhatsApp group for one of the first times, whereas before, she was very hesitant to do so.

Krashen (1982) identified the affective filter, which refers to the anxieties of learning a new language that can impede progress. In the conversations with learners, not all reported improved confidence in using English, though some did. To create a classroom environment where learners gain confidence in their English abilities and to lower their affective filters, the teacher tried to build more rapport with students, applaud their accomplishments, and make the classroom safe for making mistakes (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022; Wang, 2020). Additionally, the teacher tried to promote community building (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022) and engage students in activities that interest them (Wang, 2020).

## **Discussion, Reflection, and Implications**

This study explored adult ESL students’ perspectives on a participatory approach to learning English, guided by Wiggins’ (2004) thesis. Although a fully participatory classroom as envisioned by Freire (1970/1993) was not implemented, the focus was on supporting learners’ needs and enhancing their self-confidence in using English for personal and professional goals.

A brief side note here is necessary to relay an interesting side effect of the focus group. Norul thought that the focus group was a recurring meeting for students instead of a one-time meeting to discuss their viewpoints. The teacher (first researcher) encouraged him to spearhead the creation of a conversation group, and he did. This group has met about three times so far this semester. Through a supportive classroom environment, realistic projects, and ample opportunities for interaction, we hope to see these learners take action to improve their lives even more. So far, they are attending a learner-created and -led conversation group, going on tours of community organizations, and the semester still has about seven weeks left.

Participants valued the participatory approach to ESL teaching and learning, in line with previous studies (e.g., Gómez & Cortés-Jaramillo, 2019; Mousavi & Ketabi, 2021). They showed minimal dislike for the approach and reported improved self-confidence and willingness to participate in English activities, like Zoom meetings. Positive feedback emphasized a supportive environment for making mistakes, highlighting strengths, and engaging interactive activities. It is worth noting that learners may have shown enthusiasm and receptiveness to learning through a participatory approach because of their relationship with the teacher, knowing they were part of a research study and being motivated to demonstrate positive results (Maxwell, 2018).

Our research focused on understanding these adult learners' perspectives on the participatory approach. Together, the teacher and students set goals at the beginning of the semester. Over time, participation and engagement seemed to grow. As noted in the teacher's field notebook, students were engaged as she and the students what proficiency levels actually meant. Then, in the first text creation, a role-play about a meeting, there was a lot of participation, idea generation, and collaborative refinement of wording, and error correction.

Participatory education involves taking action to liberate oneself and effect societal change (Richard-Amato, 2010). During data collection, learners' feedback was actively incorporated into the class teaching activities by the teacher to enhance the effectiveness of her teaching.

The study revealed that learners desired more structure and grammar-focused instruction in the class, despite the occasional use of pre-made and textbook material and lectures on grammar. Coming from teacher-centered learning backgrounds, they desired changes in teaching methods. As a result, the teacher began implementing some of these changes while the interviews and focus group were still ongoing.

Based on learner feedback, the teacher implemented some changes in her teaching. This included incorporating kinesthetic and visual activities, creating more (as Norul suggested) engaging homework on WhatsApp (with a TED Talk, like Alexandra suggested), and allowing learners to choose activities that suited their needs (following Jaquez's suggestion). She added some grammar activities to the job interview unit after learners asked for more structure and grammar focus. However, she realized the grammar topic was unrelated to job interviews and tried to compensate by teaching a grammar lesson more relevant to the topic. To better cater to adult learners who want immediate applicable knowledge, there is a need to enhance activity differentiation and collaborate directly with learners to select methods, activities, and materials for lessons (Knowles et al., 1984). In the latter part of the semester, the teacher organized four field trips (to the local workforce center, the regional foodbank, on a university campus tour, and to a class at the local university where learners interacted with future teachers) in response to Alexandra's recommendation for field trips and service learning. Although the original idea of implementing a service-learning opportunity proved complex, we hope these field trips will inspire learners to seek similar opportunities within the community.

To increase motivation (albeit externally) and pressure (as Feng suggested), a coffee shop gift card was offered to the first person who responded to a new homework opportunity in WhatsApp. This activity encouraged learners to choose their preferred method of response (e.g., in writing, through video or voice message), aligning with Jaquez's suggestion for more differentiated learning. However, only one person responded, possibly due to the fear of making mistakes in front of the group, and lack of time and general interest.

The participatory approach used in this class has led to modifications in teaching activities and instructional choices aligned with learners' needs and voices. While administrators may prioritize goals like meeting milestones in English progress, securing employment, and pursuing higher education, feedback from the learners in this study indicates that they enjoy and benefit from participatory learning. However, they also see value in traditional teaching methods and materials within adult education. They prefer a balanced approach, with less emphasis on theory and textbooks (S. Y. Huang, 2011). Educators can make small changes within the broader adult education system that prioritize their learners' perspectives and guide their teaching approach. We hope that this study encourages other teachers to engage in job crafting (Haneda & Sherman, 2016, 2018), advocating for their learners and designing classes around their goals and interests.

Pedagogical implications of this study arise at classroom, program, and potentially policy levels. First, program administrators and teachers can actively and regularly query learners about their perceptions of learning. This can inform teaching and curriculum decisions to help ensure that

what and how students want to learn is being considered. Incorporating learners' goals and preferences into the classroom can create a more positive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, listening to students' perceptions about their learning experiences may encourage teachers and programs to move towards a more critical approach to teaching that focuses on intriguing content and engaging activities and away from the teaching of irrelevant content that may not interest adults, particularly older learners (Eguz, 2019). At the policy level, requiring regular surveying of students' needs and learning preferences as part of funding grants and allowing (encouraging) teachers to teach as they see fit without being required to follow a pre-made syllabus or textbook can make positive strides to put students first in the ESL programs meant to serve their needs.

### **Limitations and Opportunities for Future Study**

This study is limited in that it sheds light only on one class in one semester in one community adult ESL program in the United States. Its findings are not generalizable to other settings. However, program administrators or teachers interested in seeking out their own students' perceptions of their teaching approaches and techniques may find the results a springboard to orient their own research into how to best serve their learners. Additionally, the study is limited by its qualitative focus. The study is also limited in that the teacher/researcher relationship with the learners could have influenced their responses (Maxwell, 2018). Furthermore, the researchers' predisposition and view that participatory education could be an excellent way to approach teaching adult ESL learners could have impacted the teaching process and activity choices (Maxwell, 2018). After hearing some negative perceptions students had about learner-centered participatory teaching, however, the teacher reflected on her teaching and tried to better align her own perspective and teaching with the students' needs and preferences by incorporating more traditional teaching techniques to deepen trust with and accountability to the learners.

To enhance future research, a comparative analysis could be conducted on learners' perspectives before and after transitioning from traditional to participatory learning approaches within the same program. This study design could be implemented across various locations and adult ESL programs. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be pursued, although challenges may arise due to variable attendance rates, attrition, and the possibility of advanced students testing out of the program. Evaluating the perspectives of learners in established participatory programs would also provide valuable insights. Moreover, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative aspects of learners' perceptions, as suggested by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), would strengthen the robustness of this study. Employing a combination of surveys and interviews could be a valuable data collection approach. Furthermore, researchers from various backgrounds, including classroom volunteers, administrators, or external individuals, could also undertake this research. Incorporating both teacher and learner perspectives within the same study would provide valuable insights for the literature.

### **Conclusion**

Dewey (1916) warned against imposing our own preferences on others when trying to help them, as it hinders their autonomy. In this study, the teacher initially aimed for a highly participatory approach but ultimately put her goal to be a mostly participatory educator aside and empowered the learners to choose how they wanted to learn English. This involved incorporating traditional methods alongside the participatory approach. Seeking learner feedback is crucial for an enhanced learning experience, even if it means incorporating traditional methods. Effective



communication between teachers, administrators, and learners in English education leads to transformative outcomes and aligns with the goals of government and private funders.

## References

- Abdollahzadeh, H., & Haddad Narafshan, M. (2016). The practicality of critical pedagogy: A case study of Iranian EFL learners' motivation. *Studies in English Language Teaching*, 4(2), 178–193.
- Ahmadi, R., & Hasani, M. (2018). Capturing student voice on TEFL syllabus design: Agentivity of pedagogical dialogue negotiation. *Cogent Education* 5(1), 1–17. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1522780>
- Almalki, W. A. (2021). Challenges faced by female students with visual impairments in learning English as a Foreign Language: A narrative inquiry study. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 18(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.52696/MMCQ1574>
- Arnold, L. (2014). English for new citizens: Contributions of a learner-centered vocational ESL framework. *CATESOL Journal*, 25(1), 129–142.
- Atkinson, M. (2014). Reframing literacy in adult ESL programs: Making the case for the inclusion of identity. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 22(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.5130/lms.v22i1.4176>
- Auerbach, E. R. (1992). *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for Adult ESL Literacy*. Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Auerbach, E. R. (1995). The politics of the ESL classroom: Issues of power in pedagogical choices. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Power and inequality in language education* (pp. 9–33). Cambridge University Press.
- Auerbach, E. R., & Burgess, D. (1985). The hidden curriculum of survival ESL. *TESOL quarterly*, 19(3), 475–495. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586274>
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2017). Ethics in qualitative psychological research. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 259–273). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555>
- Caine, V., Steeves, P., Clandinin, D. J., Estefan, A., Huber, J., & Murphy, M. S. (2018). Social justice practice: A narrative inquiry perspective. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 13(2), 133–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197917710235>
- Choi, J. Y. (2015). Reasons for silence: A case study of two Korean students at a US graduate school. *TESOL Journal*, 6(3), 579–596. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.209>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories—stories of teachers—school stories—stories of schools. *Educational Researcher*, 25(3), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1176665>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1176100>
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crookes, G. V. (2013). *Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis*. Routledge.
- Davis McGaw, M. A., & McGaw Evans, S. (2021). *Participatory pedagogy: Emerging research and opportunities*. IGI Global.

- Deveci, T. (2018). Student perceptions on collaborative writing in a project-based course. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 6(4), 721–732. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.060415>
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. Free Press.
- Eguz, E. (2019). Learning a second language in late adulthood: Benefits and challenges. *Educational Gerontology*, 45(12), 701–707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1690273>
- Eyring, J. L. (2014). Adult ESL education in the U.S. *CATESOL Journal*, 26(1), 120–149.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum International Publishing Group. (Original work published 1970)
- Galmiche, D. (2017). Shame and SLA. *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 11(2), 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.201708233538>
- Gómez, P. A., & Cortés-Jaramillo, J. A. (2019). Constructing sense of community through community inquiry and the implementation of a negotiated syllabus. *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal*, 18, 68–85.
- González-Lloret, M., & Nielson, K. B. (2015). Evaluating TBLT: The case of a task-based Spanish program. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(5), 525–549. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168814541745>
- Haneda, M., & Sherman, B. (2016). A job-crafting perspective on teacher agentive action. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 745–754. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.318>
- Haneda, M., & Sherman, B. (2018). ESL teachers’ acting agentively through job crafting. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 17(6), 402–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2018.1498340>
- Huang, D. (2016). A study on the application of task-based language teaching method in a comprehensive English class in China. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(1), 118–127. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0701.13>
- Huang, S. Y. (2011). Reading “further and beyond the text”: Student perspectives of critical literacy in EFL reading and writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(2), 145–154. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/JAAL.00017>
- Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Kim, Y., Jung, Y., & Tracy-Ventura, N. (2017). Implementation of a localized task-based course in an EFL context: A study of students’ evolving perceptions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 51(3), 632–660. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.381>
- Kiruthiga, E., & Christopher, G. (2022). The impact of affective factors in English speaking skills. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(12), 2478–2485.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: from pedagogy to andragogy*. Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S., Lippitt, G. L., & Knowles, M. Shepherd (1984). *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.
- Lazareva, V. A., & Karnaukhova, A. (2021, July). Research on the students’ perception and evaluation of task-based language teaching approach at the university English classes. In *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Education and Multimedia Technology* (pp. 279–284). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3481056.3481105>
- Lincoln, Y. (1992). Sympathetic connections between qualitative methods and health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 2(4), 375–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239200200402>

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New directions for program evaluation*, 1986(30), 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1427>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Loewen, S., & Sato, M. (2018). Interaction and instructed second language acquisition. *Language teaching*, 51(3), 285–329. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S0261444818000125>
- Maxwell, J. (2018). Collecting qualitative data: A realist approach. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 2–22). [eBook edition]. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070>
- Mousavi, S., & Ketabi, S. (2021). Impact of participatory critical pedagogy interventions on EFL learners' class participation and engagement: The case study of female EFL learners in Iran. *Teaching English Language*, 15(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.22132/TEL.2021.128965>
- Ouellette-Schramm, J. (2023). Self-authored motivations of US adult basic education English learners. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 63(2), 185–205.
- Pakdaman, A., Alibakhshi, G., & Baradaran, A. (2022). The advantages of using negotiated syllabus in EFL classes: exploring the undergraduate students' perceptions. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 22(4), 579–592. <https://www.doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-01-2022-0010>
- Pickard, A. (2016). WIOA: Implications for low-scoring adult learners. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education*, 5(2), 50–55.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2012). Openness and inconclusivity in interpretation in narrative inquiry: Dimensions of the social/personal. In E. Chan, D. Keyes, & V. Ross (Eds.), *Narrative inquirers in the midst of meaning-making: Interpretive acts of teacher educators* (Vol. 16, pp. 1–22). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://www.doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687\(2012\)0000016005](https://www.doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687(2012)0000016005)
- Pino Gavidia, L. A., & Adu, J. (2022). Critical narrative inquiry: An examination of a methodological approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–5. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/16094069221081594>
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration as qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5–25). Falmer Press.
- Queirós, A., Faria, D., & Almeida, F. (2017). Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European journal of education studies*, 3(9), 369–387. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.887089>
- Richard-Amato, P. (2010). *Making it happen: From interactive to participatory language teaching – Evolving theory and practice* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Roumell, E. A. (2021). Where do we go now? Adult and workforce education policy post-2020. *Adult Literacy Education*, 3(1), 75–82. <http://doi.org/10.35847/ERoumell.3.1.75>
- Sarıcaoğlu, A., & Geluso, J. (2019). Students co-learning linguistics through PBL: A cross-cultural telecollaborative implementation. In G. Beckett & T. Slater (Eds.), *Global perspectives on project-based language learning, teaching, and assessment* (pp. 104–125). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429435096-6>
- Stein, S. (2000). *Equipped for the Future content standards: What adults need to know and be able to do in the 21st Century*. National Institute for Literacy.
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Wang, L. (2020). Application of affective filter hypothesis in junior English vocabulary teaching. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(6), 983–987. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1106.16>

- Wiggins, H. L. (2004). *A learner-centered and participatory approach to teaching community adult ESL* (Publication No. 28109056) [Master's thesis, Brigham Young University – Provo]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Yung, K. W. H. (2020). Investing in English private tutoring to move socially upward: A narrative inquiry of an underprivileged student in Hong Kong, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(10), 872–885. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1660667>
- Zyphur, S. (2020). Promoting learner agency through critical pedagogy in the English language classroom. *School of Leadership and Education Sciences: Student Projects*, 2. University of San Diego. <https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-student-projects/2>"<https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-student-projects/2>

### Notes on Contributors

**Leyla N. M. Norman** is a Ph.D. student in Bilingual/ESL Education at Texas A&M University. Leyla has over 10 years of experience teaching English in the United States to learners of all ages. Her research interests include adult ESOL education, advocacy for ESOL learners, participatory pedagogy, and service learning.

**Zohreh R. Eslami** is a Professor at Texas A&M University in Educational Psychology. Her research interests include language teacher education, nonnative teachers of English and discrimination, interlanguage and intercultural pragmatics, linguistic and cultural diversity, English as an International language, English Medium Instruction, computer mediated language learning and teaching, cyber-pragmatics and language and gender construction on social media using multilingual practices.

### ORCID

**Leyla N. M. Norman**, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6172-7559>  
**Zohreh R. Eslami**, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2969-5056>