



KOTESOL Proceedings 2025

Volume 3: Transforming Voices – Inspiring Identity and Agency



Proceedings of
The 2025 Korea TESOL National Conference
October 18, 2025; Incheon, Korea

Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
(Korea TESOL / KOTESOL)

Edited by Dr. David E. Shaffer

The 34th Korea TESOL International Conference

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Foreword

The 2025 Korea TESOL National Conference, convened on October 18 at SUNY Korea, Incheon Global Campus, Songdo, and was guided by the theme “Transforming Voices: Inspiring Identity and Agency.” The theme explored how teaching and learning can be transformed through the power of voice, identity, and agency. It highlighted inclusive and innovative practices that empower learners and educators alike.

Over the course of the event, the National Conference featured 35 sessions delivered by 43 presenters from across Korea and abroad, including both research reports and workshops. The program was designed to highlight both scholarly inquiry and classroom practice, offering participants opportunities to engage with current trends in English language teaching while also exploring practical strategies for immediate application. The diversity of topics and formats encouraged dialogue and active engagement, ensuring that participants could explore ideas from multiple perspectives.

The plenary address, delivered by Dr. David Tizzard of Seoul Women’s University and Hanyang University, was entitled “Identity Unleashed: Lessons from Korea’s Democratization.” In his talk, Dr. Tizzard reflected on the benefits and challenges of living in a more identity-conscious society, while posing the provocative question of what an identity-free world might look like. His address resonated with participants, encouraging them to consider how these lessons from Korea’s democratization can inform inclusive and transformative practices in English language teaching.

With over one-hundred attendees, the conference reaffirmed the role of the National Conference as a grassroots professional development forum within KOTESOL, highlighting contributions of educators nationwide. It provided a space where educators could connect, collaborate, and strengthen networks that sustain professional growth across Korea’s ELT landscape.

This volume of proceedings captures the scholarly and practical contributions presented at the 2025 Korea TESOL National Conference. The papers collected here reflect the variety of the discussions and the commitment of educators to advancing English language teaching in ways that are innovative, inclusive, and deeply human. It is hoped that these contributions will continue to inspire dialogue and collaboration, transforming voices from the conference into voices in the participants classrooms, their communities, and beyond.

David Shaffer, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
KOTESOL Proceedings 2025

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Contents

FOREWORD	v
CONFERENCE COMMITTEE	vi
PAPERS	
Augmenting Teacher Performance and Awareness Through Written Reflection: A Case Study Christopher Miller	3
The Use of LLMs in Aiding Self-Reflection Christopher Houghton	11
Supporting Student Voice in Academic Writing: Scaffolding, Agency, and AI Literacy Francis Botha	19
True Crime as a Gateway to Academic Argumentation Sharné Botha	27
Assessment and Awareness of AI Literacy Among English Language Learners Jessica Cahill	37
Emergency English: Transforming Crisis Language into Voice and Agency Corrine T. Spencer	43

Papers

Augmenting Teacher Performance and Awareness Through Written Reflection: A Case Study

Christopher Miller

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The research reported in this proceedings article seeks to catalog the benefits of sustained in-depth written reflections over the course of a semester in a South Korean foreign language high school. The author, drawing inspiration from Bolton (2018), composed 22 written reflections with a minimum length of 500 words each between March 5 and June 25, 2025. Primary benefits of reflective writing included a strengthening of professional knowledge bases, principled modifications of materials and teaching practice, and also a deeper awareness of multiple dimensions of the author's teaching practice and areas of professional ignorance.

INTRODUCTION

Kim et al. argue that reflective writing can “help narrow the gap between theory and practice ... to discover knowledge embedded in practice” (Kim et al., 2010; as cited in Farrell, 2015, p. xi). This research report stemmed from a desire to discern the potential benefits of sustained in-depth reflective writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Farrell (2015), taking his inspiration directly from John Dewey, elaborates on the essential attitudes necessary to engage in meaningful and effective reflective practice:

Teachers must be open-minded with an active desire to listen to more than one side of an issue and then to admit they could be wrong. Teachers must be responsible by making careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads. In addition, teachers must be wholehearted in their approach to reflective practice to continually review their beliefs and actions. (pp. 12–13)

According to Bolton (2018), the benefits of reflective writing include recognizing unperceived choices, identifying sources of stress, recognizing what can be changed, learning to work with what cannot be changed, enhancing empathy, rehearsing future behavior, enhancing creativity, making and evaluating decisions, and considering how

to apply professional theory (pp. 28, 225). These authors mention many strategies for engaging in reflective writing. In the interests of concision, I will focus on those which appeared in the data collected for this study. Table 1 summarizes Bolton's rationale for using these reflective writing strategies.

TABLE 1. Reflective Writing Strategies Addressed by Bolton (2018) and Utilized in This Study

Strategy	Rationale
Metaphor	Especially original metaphors. Bolton cites anecdotes of reflective writers undergoing paradigm shifts when they reconceive of managerial functions as conducting a symphony rather than fighting a war. Original metaphors, as opposed to cliches, may be transformed into a "memorable mantra" that can nurture further motivation and growth. Metaphor also serves as a vehicle to make the abstract concrete (pp. 161–162).
Critical Incident	Most associated with Stephen Brookfield. Bolton quotes Brookfield's definition of this concept: "vividly remembered events" (p. 43). Bolton stresses that less intensely remembered events are also potent fodder for reflective writing.
Perspective Taking	Bolton permits fictional narratives when taking another's perspective. Bolton views this strategy as a vehicle to perceive "fresh possibilities," garner insight, and purge emotion (pp. 131–134).
Unsent Letter	This strategy, according to Bolton, builds insight, empathy, and release of emotion (p. 216).
Poetry	"Can enable exploration and expression of 'things we don't actually want to say' but 'desperately need to share'... can succinctly express vital experiences" (Bolton, p. 150).
Ask WHY	The rationale isn't necessarily directly elaborated by Bolton, but it is a strategy that is foregrounded in their work. For instance, they claim: "[Ask WHY] of everything and anything: This is the critical reflexive question form" (p. 238).
Photography	Bolton only mentions this strategy in passing (p. 99). Yet, he endorses it. Lemon (2007) notes photographs can "preserve the appearance of an event or a person or as a metaphor of an experience" (p. 179). Coupled with narrative, [photography] can make us understand" (p. 179) an experience more deeply.

Farrell (2022) likewise endorses reflective writing. He states,

Writing as a tool for professional development has its own built-in reflective mechanism, you must stop ... to consider what you are thinking about, and this helps organize all the passing thoughts.... Then after writing..., you can actually "see" your thoughts and this gives us another chance to consider if they remain relevant. (p. 19)

Hatton and Smith (cited in Farrell, 2022, p. 20) list four levels of writing: descriptive, descriptive reflective, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection. They are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Hatton and Smith's Four Levels of Writing

Descriptive Writing	This is not reflective. It is a report with no justification provided.
Descriptive Reflection	Provides justification. Primarily focused on personal viewpoints.
Dialogic Reflection	More detached. Explores multiple reasons for an incident occurring.
Critical Reflection	Takes account of multiple perspectives. Exhibits awareness of factors beyond the classroom (such as social, historical, and political influences) and the role they have on the functioning of a class.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This conference proceedings paper will address one of the research questions posed in a larger study, interested readers may contact the author directly for further details.

RQ1: In what ways was this process of reflective writing facilitative of positive behavior change as it pertains to my teaching?

DATA COLLECTION

Due to space constraints, descriptions of the data collected (i.e., the reflective writing entries) is omitted. That information is reported in a paper that is currently under peer review. Interested readers may contact the author directly for further details.

METHOD

Following Bolton's (2028) suggestion to eschew formulaic processes for reflective writing (p. 90), I set the following personal guidelines:

1. I would write minimally once a week during the semester (weeks with exams were excluded).
2. Each written reflection needed to be 500 words minimum. There was no maximum word limit. I chose this number to keep the activity sustainable and to allow for a somewhat in-depth treatment of the incident selected.
3. The events addressed in the article had to stem from something that occurred during designated instructional time. Insights relating to professional literature or experiences and interactions outside of the classroom were not part of the data collection or analysis. Though, at the start of this project at least, there were no additional constraints for what

could be considered. This was inspired by a belief articulated by Bolton that in reflective practice “no detail is too trivial...” (p. 114).

As this project developed and evolved, I started to add additional features to many of my reflective entries. These included the following:

1. Giving a title to each written reflection. I chose to do this following Bolton’s (2018) guidelines to have authority in one’s writing (p. 172).
2. Giving an epigram to each written reflection. This followed the same logic as mentioned in the immediately preceding item.
3. Making use of recalling of sensory detail. Most written reflections featured an attempt to recall features of the scene, be it surroundings or features of the student(s) that were the focus of the written reflection. Bolton notes that recalling sensory details through reflective writing may unearth memories that are not readily available (p. 180) and that it may enable “cognitive, affective, and somatic ways of knowing” (p. 161).

RESULTS

Research Question

As stated above, RQ1 is “In what ways was this process of reflective writing facilitative of positive behavior change as it pertains to my teaching?”

As I teach the same lesson content 10 times, I am afforded the opportunity to make minor tweaks to my instruction. Reflective writing allows for explicit listing of changes for subsequent performances of the same lesson. Unfortunately, I did not document every change that resulted from (or at least was partially connected to) engaging in sustained in-depth reflective writing. That undertaking would be challenging methodologically. Nevertheless, through reviewing materials and recordings of teaching performance, I was able to identify important changes that I subjectively deemed as improvements in my instructional delivery, materials production, and planning procedures. A small number of sample changes are provided below.

Coming Down to Students’ Level

I frequently video record my lessons and analyze a variety of aspects of my performance. During one self-observation session, I noticed that my tendency was to stand while interacting with my students who were seated. After writing in-depth about this tendency and my experiences with trying out both standing and coming down to the students’ level by taking a knee when interacting with learners, I began to more

frequently incorporate this interactional technique. Such a move is endorsed by experts in ELT (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020, p. 61).

Revision of Document-Based Materials

Partially as a result of an abrupt change requested by my supervisor at the end of the academic year in 2024, I failed to spot an issue on a document I used to provide feedback to learners about their writing competence in the spring of 2025. I included terminology that learners had yet to learn prior to me giving learners that document (the word “acronym”). This led to a student asking me what “acronym” meant. I wrote a detailed reflection about that incident. I felt I provided the learner with extraneous cognitive load in that moment (see Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller, 2006).

After that mistake, I consciously took efforts to reduce the likelihood of such a mistake recurring. The actions included consistent printing of physical copies and proofreading prior to making documents available to learners. Additionally, I posted cues of the document with the distracting terminology in my work environment as an attempt to remind myself of the need to be attentive to details.

DISCUSSION

Sustained in-depth reflective writing led to positive changes in my teaching. It reinforced my professional knowledge base and increased awareness of multiple tendencies while teaching. I believe reflective writing to be a contributory factor in my professional growth. However, several other factors aided my development as a teacher. For example, I have engaged in near weekly sessions of self-observation of my teaching performance since June of 2024. This is a different form of reflection that undoubtedly informed the reflective writing I engaged in during the time period reviewed herein. Additionally, I have been engaged with professional communities (most notably Korea TESOL) since 2011. Also, I have a fair amount of autonomy, status, and trust with my supervisors at my current place of employment. Likely, reflective writing is less relevant if any of the aforementioned elements are absent.

Recommendations

At the start of this project, I was not able to fully conceive the direction it would take, and many modifications were made during the process of composing written reflections at a rate of more than once per week over the course of a semester. For readers interested in engaging in such a project, I would recommend the following:

Take Pictures

The value of photography for reflective practice has been documented, explored, and recommended by multiple educators (see Benévolo França, 2017; Lemon, 2007). For myself, taking pictures added the ability to compare and contrast aspects of seating arrangements before and after I composed a written reflection on the topic. Additionally, I documented a variety of items via photography throughout the period under consideration: samples of student work (both that which disappointed me and that which impressed me), teaching materials I considered flawed or inadequate in some way, revised materials for future teaching performances of similar lessons, and moments of perceived professional competence in the classroom. The incorporation of photos into my written reflections increased my sense of ownership and connection to the project of consistently engaging in in-depth sustained reflective writing.

Be More Precise About Data Collection

In my collected data, I had dates missing; I did not initially give titles to my reflective entries; I didn't engage in any form of categorization of the nature of the entries until well after the period under consideration in this study. Upon reflection, I see that I could have classified the entries as primarily oriented in an affective, critical (i.e., as in taking account of larger factors beyond the classroom [see Farrell, 2015]), technical, celebratory, or even a self-critical direction. However, I wish to stress that these shifts and expanding levels of awareness emerged somewhat organically through the process of consistently engaging in reflective writing.

Balance the Nature of the Reflections

Relatively early in this project, I noted that my first three written reflections were focused primarily on affective concerns. Thus, I deliberately began to address more technical concerns. Another area where better balance might have been achieved is between those entries that focused on celebratory aspects of my teaching performance and more self-critical entries. According to my content analysis, I classified 14 items as containing self-critical features and six as having predominantly celebratory aspects. This was an unprincipled tendency. Several experts in the field of reflective practice warn against self-laceration (see Farrell in Rob & Matt, 2018) or mistaking reflective writing for "confession" (Bolton, 2018). Certain entries included confession and self-laceration. For instance, my 4-14-25 written reflection included the following: "the result of a teacher's neglect of responsibility." This was in reference to the omission of guided questions to assist students in composing their first draft of a speech. Later in the same entry, I wrote: "I recognize that I have failed this student." This self-critical tendency was also present in later entries, such as 6-13-25 in which I described an incident that involved one group (out of five groups in that class) that had challenges getting started on a project. I labeled that incident as a "pedagogical disaster." This type of self-lacerating confession is a distraction from the primary purpose, in my view, of reflective writing: to improve future performance.

CONCLUSION

This article has reflected on the value of engaging in a variety of reflective strategies culled from well-regarded professional literature over a sustained period of time. Core benefits include exploring different techniques for interacting with students and motivation to make principled modifications to materials. While the benefits of the forms of reflections detailed in this article are relatively straight forward, there is a series of factors, such as professional autonomy, that allows for a fuller realization of the possibilities of professional reflection.

THE AUTHOR

Christopher Miller has been involved in Korea TESOL at the chapter and local level since 2011. He currently works at Daeil Foreign Language High School. Christopher is the recipient of the 2025 Korea TESOL Reflective Language Teacher Award. Email: chriskotesol@gmail.com.

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The Use of LLMs in Aiding Self-Reflection

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INTRODUCTION

When a class encourages a student to develop only one of their four language skills, how can they be expected to adequately reflect on their learning and their studies?

Context

This paper discusses an activity implemented across various university-level academic writing courses, spanning CEFR levels B1 through C2. While students engage in minor reflective practices throughout the semester, the final session is dedicated to a comprehensive semester reflection on their overall experiences and coursework. Beginning in the Fall 2024 semester, I integrated a large language model (LLM) into these reflective exercises. The goal was to help students better recognize tangible improvements in their work and boost their motivation. This intervention addressed a persistent challenge in the course: Because the curriculum focuses strictly on academic writing, students' reading, listening, and speaking skills did not progress at the same pace, making it difficult for them to independently identify subtle changes in their writing style.

Background Information

It has been widely accepted that the role of a teacher is not only to guide their students, but to encourage them to become lifelong learners (Aspin & Chapman, 2000). To achieve this, teachers have been encouraged to engage not only themselves but also their students in reflection, with the aim of instilling intrinsic motivation upon their learners, following the works of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983). Consequently, I have consistently sought effective methods to encourage students to engage actively in both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). However, more recently, scholars such as Tight (2024) have asked the question as to whether reflection as we know it still has a place in higher education or whether educators are imposing it upon their students, whereby they are not benefitting from the tasks. As such, I began to look for a way to encourage students to reflect on their work using the latest tools available. With the recent widespread adoption of LLMs, it has become

a necessity for educators to adapt their classrooms to accommodate these tools, to ensure that our students are prepared not only for today but also for the future. Therefore, I began to look at ways in which the use of an LLM could be integrated into self-reflection.

This paper is an extension of a workshop that was given at the KOTESOL National Conference in 2025, titled *Self-Reflection in the Age of AI*. This article will outline the methodology used and the benefits of the activity, focusing only on the after-action reflective activities. I will walk the reader through the processes used, and then I will discuss my observations.

Problem Statement

This activity aimed to address the issue of what to do when a student's language skill, in particular writing, evolves too rapidly for them to be able to understand the changes that have taken place. The use of an LLM seemed to be a potential solution to this. Thus, I developed a new after-action reflective activity, whereby the students would reflect on their work and then compare this to the reflection generated with the aid of an LLM.

THE USE OF AN LLM FOR REFLECTION IN THE CLASSROOM

This activity was first adopted at the end of the Fall 2024 semester, with time devoted in the final class of the course for the students to complete their reflections. Over the following semesters, I have worked on refining this activity to better aid ESL students in their understanding of their writing evolution. The current iteration of the activity has four sections. I begin the activity by refreshing the class on the benefits of reflection and then ask them to complete each part of the activity, without viewing the next. Thus, they are unaware that I will be asking them to use the AI to aid them in their work. The main purpose of this was to not influence the students as they were writing their reflection and to ensure that they are as honest as possible. The full prompt has been included in the Appendix.

Part 1: Personal Reflection

In Part 1, the students were asked to write a reflection on their own, with no outside help. Students were asked to read their work before class and to annotate their essays, but the prompt specified that they look through their first written assignment and their final assignment of the semester. The first assignment was a piece written in class, while the final assignment was a piece that they had been working on for six weeks. The purpose of Part 1 was for the students to complete the reflection in a typical manner, as to which they had become accustomed. The students were aware of what was expected of them, as we had completed many minor reflective

exercises throughout the semester, however, as a reflection is deeply personal, they were expected to take charge of this piece on their own. After completing the work, the students submitted their reflections on the university's LMS as a plain text file.

Part 2: Asking the LLM for Feedback

In Part 2, the students were instructed to ask their LLM of choice to help them with their reflection, and to paste the complete answer into the submitted document. The wording of the prompt to give to the LLM was not given, as it was left for the students to devise on their own, as I wanted them to explore the available options, thus hopefully encouraging them to do this in all their classes. It also allowed them to remain personal with their AI assistant, as many of them have trained them to communicate with them in their own style.

This was not the first time that the students had asked their LLM for feedback, as we had used it throughout the semester on early essay drafts and to aid them with their brainstorming. Thus, they were familiar with how to draft accurate prompts, to ensure that they got the best possible results. However, this was their first attempt at using it for reflective practices.

Part 3: Comparison

In Part 3, the students were asked to write a comparative paragraph, considering the results from the LLM. Again, the prompt for this was short, as the students had written multiple reflective pieces and were aware that they were expected to go deeper than the few questions posed to them. When teaching a lower-level class, I was more specific in my oral instruction, telling them the “minimum” requirements of the comparison, to ensure that they completed the task adequately and carefully. This was perhaps the most critical stage of the reflective activity, as it enabled students to identify previously overlooked achievements while targeting specific areas for further improvement. Consequently, this practice required careful customization to suit the specific needs of each course and, potentially, each individual student.

Part 4: Semester Questions

Part 4 was a simple exercise, asking the students to submit any questions that they had for me, either on the reflection, the semester, or their future endeavors.

OUTCOMES

In my classes, I have observed a noticeable improvement in the quality of reflections. The LLM identified significant improvements in student writing that had previously gone unnoticed, generally concepts that were much harder to grasp than

language ability, for example, logic, critical thinking, analysis, essay structure, clarity, and argument impact. In Part 1 of the reflections, students invariably focused on surface-level changes such as grammar and word choice, rarely thinking about how their thought processes had adapted throughout the course. The overall goal of the activity was achieved, as the reflections not only helped them to identify growth but also led to higher levels of motivation.

However, the LLM's feedback was not entirely positive. It proved highly beneficial by identifying previously overlooked areas for improvement, such as a lack of personal voice and the quality of evidence – nuances I don't always have the time to review. Depending on the LLM used and the version in operation at the time, these suggestions were either supportive or provided suggestions on how they could make these improvements going forward.

Initially, the LLM occasionally misinterpreted prompts, focusing solely on surface-level edits or offering inconsistent, overly polarized feedback. However, these issues were resolved after refining the prompt instructions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ACTIVITY AND THIS REPORT

While the adoption of an LLM for reflective practices has been successful in my context, there are still some limitations that need to be addressed.

The Accuracy of LLMs

Currently, LLMs are still rapidly developing and as such there are many issues in their implementations. For the purposes of this work, three such issues were identified. Firstly, LLMs are well noted to give more positive feedback than negative (Williams et al., 2025). However, the purpose of the activity is to motivate the students in their studies, for which positive feedback is very helpful, as their own personal reflections are often negative. Furthermore, LLMs are prone to hallucinations, that is, fabricating incorrect answers (Kalai et al., 2025). While this is an issue, the application of an LLM in the reflection should still be useful to the students as although it may have made some mistakes, it is likely that most of the feedback will be beneficial. Throughout the semester, the students were taught to question all feedback from the LLM and to check the answers themselves to make sure that it was accurate. For most, it was evident that they had done this while writing their reflection. However, I plan to adapt the prompt in the future to ask the students to identify the concepts shown by the LLM. Additionally, it is difficult to replicate results, as the LLM is likely to give a similar but different answer every time a question is given to it (Calloway, 2025). Another issue that has arisen more recently, is that when an LLM model is updated, it tends to change its behavior. I would like to see this remedied, through the creation of a local LLM, trained specifically on feedback for students.

The Design of the Prompt

While encouraging students to tailor prompts to their individual styles fosters autonomy, it also results in highly variable outputs. To maximize the benefit of these reflections, establishing foundational prompt constraints is essential. Left unchecked, the LLM tends to default to overly positive feedback, omitting critical areas for improvement unless explicitly instructed otherwise. Recognizing this tendency as a core part of the reflective process, I directed students to re-engage the LLM with more targeted, probing questions. Moving forward, further research into how specific input adjustments alter LLM outputs is vital if educators are to effectively guide students in using these tools for academic purposes.

CONCLUSION

Integrating LLMs into after-action reflective practices proved highly successful, enabling students to recognize the achievements driven by their efforts. Furthermore, the LLM's feedback motivated students to address specific weaknesses that they might have otherwise overlooked. To validate these findings, it would be necessary to hold a follow-up survey in future semesters.

The activity shown in this paper has many limitations, as outlined above, but should not be ignored due to the positive results shown so far, as well as its ease of implementation in most classrooms. The issue around the accuracy of LLMs must be stressed with students so that they are aware that it may make mistakes in the advice given to them. Lately, I have been experimenting with an engaging activity, in which the students complete the reflection task with their usual LLM and then open an incognito window to repeat it with a different program to compare the results. As with any new technology, changes are happening rapidly, and as educators, we must learn to adapt to these changes to best serve our students in their educational journey.

Going forward, I plan to begin to collect data points that can be used for a full-scale research project and to begin the process of training my own local LLM to aid in this feedback through the use of open-source software. However, I believe that the progress seen in my classes thus far shows that this activity has benefits for all students studying in a second language. These results have been replicated by other faculty members in my department who adopted the activity after hearing about its early success. Thus, the use of an LLM in student reflective practices seems to be highly motivational and incredibly useful in assisting students.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX

Reflection Prompt

End of Semester Reflection

Part 1

Open the diagnostic essay from Class 2 (if not, then the first draft of the problem-solution essay). Write about how your writing, ideas, logic, and style have changed.

Questions to think about:

- What do you notice about your writing style then vs. now?
- What improvements have you made during the semester?
- What would you like to continue to improve on in the future?

Part 2

Ask ChatGPT to compare the first draft of your problem-solution essay with the latest draft of your summary-response style. Ask it to look for how the writing style, logic, and flow have improved. Paste the answer below your answer.

Part 3

Compare your response to ChatGPT's. Did the LLM notice anything that you had missed? How does it make you feel about your writing and your improvements this semester?

Part 4

Do you have any questions for me?

Supporting Student Voice in Academic Writing: Scaffolding, Agency, and AI Literacy

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At the University of the Free State, an English-medium institution in South Africa, many students are not first-language English users and are the first in their families to attend university. In their English for academic purposes courses, these students must learn to meet academic writing conventions without losing their individuality. Yet a strong emphasis on formality, combined with the growing influence of AI tools, often silences their voices and results in writing that feels mechanical, formulaic, and devoid of a distinct identity. This paper demonstrates how scaffolding, framed through the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model, can guide students from supported to independent writing while preserving confidence and agency. Practical examples include the use of guided outlines that transition into peer review before students attempt independent drafts. The paper concludes with strategies for integrating scaffolding and AI literacy to help students develop stronger academic identities, clearer voices, and greater independence in their writing.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a conceptual practitioner inquiry that draws on reflective classroom practice to examine how scaffolding, agency, and AI literacy intersect in first-year English for academic purposes (EAP) writing instruction. At the University of the Free State (UFS), an English-medium university in South Africa, many students enter higher education as second-language English users. Most students are the first in their families to attend university, and a significant number cannot find or afford accommodation on campus, resulting in daily commuting. Often, they are the primary financial providers in their families and face extreme financial stress. These factors present many challenges for students, but they also create opportunities for lecturers to adapt their teaching and develop strategies to respond to these contextual constraints. In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools into academic contexts has introduced new layers of complexity to these challenges. The challenge is to guide students in using AI as a support for idea generation, grammar, and structure rather than as a replacement for their own academic voice. This paper investigates how scaffolding practices, specifically the use of guided outlines within the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model, enable students to transition from supported to independent writing while sustaining confidence, agency, and authenticity.

CONTEXT: WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS?

To effectively understand and implement the GRR model, lecturers must first have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds and learning contexts. At the University of the Free State (UFS), a large proportion of first-year students are second-language English speakers and first-generation university entrants. Institutional data indicate that approximately 75% of first-year students are the first in their families to attend university, highlighting a significant shift in the student profile and associated risks for academic success (UFS, 2025). Many students also manage substantial external responsibilities, including financial pressure, long commuting distances, and food insecurity, all of which can affect concentration, engagement, and academic performance. In addition, South Africa's linguistic diversity, including eleven official spoken languages and South African Sign Language, presents further challenges for communication and learning in English-medium classrooms. Research emphasizes that how lecturers perceive and respond to these contextual realities plays a critical role in creating fair, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that enable student success (Strydom, 2017).

THE ROLE OF FIRST-YEAR LECTURERS

First-year academic English lecturers play an essential role in supporting students' transition into higher education. They do this by delivering content, fostering confidence, modeling academic integrity, and building foundational writing skills. Their sensitivity to students' lived experiences ensures learning is inclusive, equipping students with the necessary tools to succeed in higher years. In doing so, they provide essential support to senior lecturers by ensuring that students are better prepared for the academic demands of advanced modules. By clearly understanding their role in shaping students' early academic development, first-year lecturers are better equipped to apply the GRR model effectively and guide students toward confident, independent writing.

THE PROBLEM: SILENCED STUDENT VOICES

Academic writing often prioritizes structure over self-expression, leading students to feel their individuality is lost. Academic literacy refers to the capacity to engage with language in a logical and analytical manner within academic settings. It involves using language to collect information, interpret and evaluate that information, and generate new insights or knowledge (Weideman, 2018). Academic literacy is a vital support, but it can also feel restrictive. This happens when the focus falls too heavily on conventions or when AI tools are used without reflection. Then student

writing can lose its individuality and sound either mechanical or formulaic. When used uncritically, AI tools can exacerbate this issue by producing “perfect” but voiceless text. Students must learn that their perspective matters, and educators need to balance academic expectations with the preservation of identity and agency.

METHOD / APPROACH

This paper adopts a qualitative practitioner-based reflective approach grounded in everyday classroom experience. The primary object of analysis is the guided outline as a mediating scaffolding tool within the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model, examined across different stages of instructional responsibility. Instead of collecting student data, the focus is on the scaffolding materials used in first-year academic writing classes, including guided outlines, structured classroom activities, and the staged movement from lecturer-led to independent writing. The analysis is organized systematically around the stages of the GRR model to examine how these materials support students as they move toward independent writing while maintaining confidence and a sense of voice. The discussion draws on established work in academic literacies, scaffolding theory, and AI literacy to interpret the intentions and pedagogical effects of the teaching design. In this way, the paper follows a systematic practitioner inquiry that uses reflective analysis of teaching practices to develop meaningful pedagogical insights.

SCAFFOLDING THROUGH THE GRR MODEL

This section analyses the guided outline as a mediating scaffold across the stages of the GRR model, illustrating how responsibility, voice, and agency are progressively transferred from lecturer to student. One way of addressing the challenge of supporting students’ transition from lecturer-led instruction to independent academic writing is to use scaffolding as a gradual process that shifts responsibility from the lecturer to the student. The gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model can guide the process. According to Frey and Fischer (2013), the GRR moves in four stages: the lecturer models the skill (I do), the class works through it together (we do), students practice with their peers (you do it together), and finally they apply it independently (you do it alone). Each step gradually transfers responsibility from lecturer to student.

A practical example that can be included is the use of guided outlines that later become the basis for peer review (see Appendix). This staged use of guided outlines illustrates how scaffolding functions as a temporary mediating tool rather than a fixed template, supporting students’ movement toward independence while preserving academic voice and agency. The outline performs a dual role, additionally operating as a checklist through which students can monitor the inclusion of essential elements.

At first, students receive a clear structure that helps them organize ideas. While the educator explains and demonstrates, the role of the students is to be active listeners. This lowers anxiety and makes academic writing feel more manageable.

Within this scaffolding process, responsibility is also graduated in terms of task complexity. Instruction initially focuses on the structure of a single body paragraph before expanding to the organization of the full essay. Guided outlines are therefore first applied at the paragraph level, allowing students to practice constructing topic sentences, supporting ideas, and concluding statements in a controlled and manageable way. Once students demonstrate increased confidence and structural control at the paragraph level, the same outlining principles are extended to the full essay. This progression illustrates how scaffolding operates not only across stages of responsibility but also across levels of textual complexity, ensuring that support is responsive to students' developing competence rather than prematurely withdrawn.

The second stage of the GRR model, often referred to as the “We do it together” phase, emphasizes guided practice through collaboration between the lecturer and the students. During this stage, the lecturer models thinking processes and engages students in shared tasks, providing structured support as they begin to apply new concepts. The questions used during this phase are intentionally designed to prompt students to think about their own thinking, reflect on their understanding of the content, and develop meaningful, summative notes (Stevens et al., 2025). A practical example for this stage is when the lecturer begins a sentence and students complete it, either collaboratively in groups or individually, to demonstrate their understanding. In addition, the guided outline serves as a structured framework for notetaking, enabling students to record key points, examples, and reflections as they engage with the material. This process helps students organize their ideas, deepen comprehension, and begin developing independence in constructing meaning.

The next step is peer review, which invites students to test out their voice and perspective in a safe, supportive space. As students collaborate on the same text, both their personal meaning-making and their collective development and refinement of knowledge can be observed (Kendeou et al., 2014). During this stage, think-aloud interactions between students should also be encouraged, as they promote deeper reasoning, clearer articulation of ideas, and shared problem-solving. By the time students reach the fourth stage of the GRR model (You do it alone), they are ready to work independently. At this point, they have both a clear structural framework and the confidence needed to allow their individuality to emerge in their writing. This stage also fosters student agency, as students start making deliberate decisions about their language, tone, and argumentative direction, producing work that authentically represents their own academic voice. This approach helps students develop independence, confidence, and competence in writing. It is flexible and allows lecturers to adjust support as needed.

Reflection has recently been identified as an essential fifth phase of the GRR model for both lecturers and students (Pearson et al., 2019). If time permits, lecturers can incorporate this additional step to reinforce learning and double-check students' understanding of key concepts. However, this final stage is seldom necessary when

using the guided outline, as students can readily draw on the outline and their notetaking from earlier stages to reflect on their progress and consolidate their learning. Therefore, the inclusion of this newly incorporated stage ultimately remains at the lecturer's discretion, depending on the needs of the lesson and the level of student support required.

By using this outline in combination with the GRR model in class, students engage actively in the learning process, moving from observation to collaboration and ultimately to autonomy.

INTEGRATING AI LITERACY

AI literacy involves understanding how to use and evaluate AI tools responsibly. Researchers have defined the term *AI literacy* as “a set of AI competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies; communicate and collaborate effectively with AI; and use AI as a tool online, at home and in the workplace” (Long & Magerko, 2020). Artificial intelligence is increasingly regarded as a core competency, much like conventional literacy skills such as reading and writing (Kandlhofer et al., 2016). Educators can use AI to prompt discussions about authorship and originality. By comparing AI-generated and student-generated writing, learners can identify differences in clarity, focus, and authenticity, helping students to value their own voices. For example, by using a specific topic, lecturers can show students several AI-generated thesis statements and then ask them to rewrite these in their own words.

Through this activity, students are encouraged to recognize that the thesis statements they produce reflect their own voices. In many cases, their revised versions are even stronger than the AI-generated examples, as they tend to be more focused, more relevant to the specific assignment, and more closely connected to their own perspectives. For instance, students often refine broad or generic AI-generated statements into more precise claims that respond directly to the essay question or incorporate their unique understanding of the topic. This process not only strengthens the clarity and purpose of their thesis statements but also reinforces their confidence in their ability to make meaningful academic contributions. Consequently, developing AI literacy empowers students to make informed decisions, maintain ownership of their writing, and use technology in ways that strengthen rather than replace their academic voice.

CONCLUSION

Integrating scaffolding through the GRR model, guided outlines, and AI literacy provides support for both academic skill development and authentic self-expression. This approach supports the development of students' confidence, structural awareness, and reflective engagement in writing. Furthermore, it encourages greater

engagement in academic writing, as well as improved concentration, participation in class, and interaction with lecturers. Within this framework, students are positioned as active contributors to knowledge, using AI as a learning partner rather than a replacement. As a conceptual practitioner inquiry, this paper contributes a practice-informed framework for understanding how scaffolding and AI literacy can be aligned to support academic voice and agency in linguistically diverse EAP contexts. These strategies build confidence, and confident students preserve authenticity. With authenticity, students find their academic voice.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX

Essay Outline

Essay Title		
Introduction	Background Information (Introduce the topic)	
	Thesis Statement (Topic + Opinion)	
	Roadmap (Main ideas in body paragraphs)	
Body Paragraph 1	Topic Sentence (Main idea)	
	Supporting Sentences 1 & 2	
	Supporting Sentences 3 & 4	
	Concluding Sentence	
Body Paragraph 2	Topic Sentence (Main idea)	
	Supporting Sentence 1 & 2	
	Supporting Sentence 3 & 4	
	Concluding Sentence	
Conclusion	Restate Your Position	
	Summary of Reasons	
	Clincher / Final Comment or Thought	

Note. Provide a basic outline of your essay. Include your planned introduction, topic sentences for body paragraphs, content you plan to include in your discussion, and a concluding idea. (From Maseko, 2025)

True Crime as a Gateway to Academic Argumentation

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Academic literacy and English for academic purposes (EAP) modules are often perceived as remedial or disconnected from students' future professions. This perception is particularly common among first-year law students, who frequently enter university with strong interest in legal content but limited motivation for literacy instruction. When relevance is unclear, engagement weakens and learning remains surface level. This paper presents a materials analysis of a true-crime-based academic literacy task designed to develop thesis writing, argumentation, and source evaluation skills. Drawing on critical digital literacy, argumentation theory, and EAP task design principles, the analysis examines how the task is structured to support academic writing development. The assignment centers on a criminal parole case that requires students to adopt a position, evaluate evidence, and justify reasoning, using discipline-appropriate sources. The analysis suggests that discipline-relevant case studies can enhance motivation, academic voice, and critical reasoning, offering transferable insights for EAP and TESOL contexts where student engagement and relevance remain persistent challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Academic literacy forms the foundation of academic success across disciplines. However, many students, particularly students studying law, enter university with the belief that literacy modules are separate from and less important than core legal subjects. This often results in low engagement and limited transfer of academic writing skills into their main degree modules.

In 2024, I began experimenting with the use of true crime to improve engagement and motivation in the academic literacy classroom. True crime as a genre is familiar to many students, and it carries emotional and ethical stakes that naturally provoke discussion. More importantly, true-crime narratives involve evidence, bias, interpretation, and judgement. These features also form the basis of effective academic argumentation. For this reason, a true-crime writing activity was designed using the Leigh Mathews and Donovan Moodley case. The task asked students to argue for or against granting parole to the convicted killer. Students had to write a clear thesis statement, support their argument with legal sources, and reference their evidence accurately.

Although research on academic literacy and EAP is well established, very little work examines literacy interventions designed specifically for first-year law students, particularly in multilingual African contexts. Law is a discipline that relies heavily on argumentation, evidence evaluation, and written persuasion, yet academic literacy support for law students often remains generic and disconnected from disciplinary practices. There is also limited research on the pedagogical value of true crime as instructional material, despite its natural alignment with the interpretive and evaluative skills required in legal and academic argumentation.

This gap is not only local but international. Across TESOL and EAP contexts, including South Korea and East Asia, teachers report similar challenges in motivating students who see academic writing courses as unrelated to their professional identities (Bai et al., 2022). Many EAP courses continue to emphasize formulaic writing rather than meaningful, discipline-connected tasks. Research increasingly calls for literacy pedagogies that support learners' identities, provide authentic purposes for writing, and connect academic skills with real-world reasoning (Choi, 2021). Li (2022) emphasized that academic literacy development is shaped by disciplinary norms and communicative practices, arguing against one-size-fits-all approaches to literacy instruction. This is particularly relevant in law, where argumentation, source evaluation and written persuasion are central. However, literacy support for law students often remains generic and detached from disciplinary reasoning, contributing to low engagement and limited skills transfer. True-crime-based tasks offer a discipline-relevant pedagogical pathway by engaging students in evidence evaluation, interpretive judgement, and structured argumentation, all of which are central to academic engagement across disciplines.

This paper reports a qualitative materials analysis of a true-crime-based academic literacy writing task designed for first-year law students. The analysis examines how the task is structured to elicit key academic practices, including thesis formulation, evidence-based argumentation, and critical source evaluation. Rather than analyzing student performance, the study focuses on the instructional design of the task and its alignment with argumentation theory, academic literacies, and critical digital literacy frameworks. By analyzing the task instructions and required student actions, the paper identifies the specific academic literacy skills the activity is intended to develop. As no student data are included, the study does not require ethical clearance. The central research question guiding the analysis is the following:

- RQ1. How does a true-crime-based academic literacy task, through its design and instructional structure, support the development of argumentation and academic literacy skills for first-year law students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Literacy for Law Students

Academic literacy involves the ways in which knowledge is communicated in university settings. For law students, this includes constructing claims, evaluating sources, reading legal texts, and writing persuasively. When literacy instruction is perceived as generic, students struggle to see its value. When literacy is connected to law as a discipline, students begin to develop academic identity and confidence. Lea and Street (1998) described this as an academic literacies approach, which positions writing as social, disciplinary, and embedded in context.

Critical Digital Literacy

Critical digital literacy involves questioning texts, recognizing bias, and evaluating credibility. Janks (2010) emphasized that power, identity, and perspective shape meaning. True crime cases expose students to legal documents, news reports, and online narratives. Students must evaluate fact, speculation, and credibility. This develops analytical reading, reasoning, and judgement. Luke and Freebody (1999) described these competencies as moving readers from decoding to critical participation.

Recent scholarship highlights the rapid evolution of academic literacies in response to digital and AI-driven learning environments. Muhammad et al. (2025) argued that digital information and AI literacies increasingly intersect and that higher education must equip students to evaluate evidence, identify bias, and navigate complex multimodal texts critically. These competencies are central to academic literacy, particularly in disciplines such as law, where students must interpret competing narratives and assess the credibility of sources. The use of true-crime narratives aligns with these emerging literacy demands, as students engage with legal media and online texts that require careful evaluation, critical reasoning, and ethical reflection.

Argumentation Theory

Argumentation is central to both academic writing and legal reasoning. The Toulmin model offers a structured way to analyze arguments in context, identifying elements such as claim, grounds, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal. In recent research, Turós et al. (2025) applied the Toulmin model to analyze secondary students' essays on artificial intelligence, finding that while claims and data were frequently present, deeper elements like backing and qualifiers were less common, revealing variation in argument sophistication. This suggests that the Toulmin model can systematically reveal the presence and complexity of argumentative components in student writing, reinforcing its utility as both a theoretical and analytical tool for

developing academic argumentation skills. Students who write a case-based legal argument must formulate a stance, justify it with authority, and recognize counterarguments. This encourages structured thought and clarity. When students choose a side, they move beyond summary and into critical persuasion.

Motivation Theory

Recent research demonstrates that motivation and demotivation operate simultaneously to shape student engagement and academic outcomes. Harun et al. (2024), in a large-scale quantitative study of Malaysian undergraduates, found that intrinsic goal orientation, task value, self-efficacy and supportive learning environments were strongly associated with sustained motivation and improved academic performance. At the same time, their findings show that pressure to achieve high grades and competitive classroom environments can contribute to learner demotivation, reducing engagement and participation. These dynamics are particularly relevant to first-year law students in academic literacy contexts, where writing tasks are often perceived as generic, abstract, and disconnected from disciplinary goals.

The true-crime-based academic literacy task examined in this paper responds to these motivational challenges by centering relevance, choice, and disciplinary identity. By requiring students to take a position on a legal case, evaluate evidence, and justify their reasoning, the task enhances perceived task value and supports self-efficacy, while reducing disengagement associated with decontextualized writing activities. Similar patterns have been observed in legal education contexts. Torres-Téllez (2025) reported that a narrative-based, gamified criminal law intervention significantly increased motivation, engagement, and academic performance among university law students. Although the pedagogical approach differs, the underlying principle is comparable: When student voice and identity are foregrounded, and when learning activities are framed through discipline-relevant narratives that position students as active legal thinkers, motivation and participation improve.

Task Design in EAP

Effective EAP tasks are authentic, cognitively demanding and aligned with disciplinary practice. Hyland (2006) proposed that tasks should mirror how knowledge is used in real contexts. The parole task simulates legal writing. Students write as if they are preparing a parole submission. They are encouraged to use legal databases such as Juta and LexisNexis. This gives academic writing a clear purpose. Willis and Willis (2007) highlighted that task-based approaches support deeper learning through meaningful action.

True Crime as Pedagogical Material

Recent work in criminal justice education has begun to explore the use of true-crime narratives as structured learning tools. Wood and Breach (2021) examined student engagement with the true-crime podcast *Serial* and found that it supported critical thinking, evidence evaluation, and deeper reflection on justice-related issues. Their study showed that true crime can act as a high-impact learning experience because it requires students to interpret conflicting narratives, assess the credibility of sources, and construct arguments based on incomplete information. Students in their study also reported increased motivation and a stronger sense of relevance when academic concepts were connected to real cases. These findings suggest that true crime is not merely a popular genre but a pedagogically valuable entry point into academic reasoning and argumentation. This supports the rationale for using true-crime-based writing tasks in academic literacy settings.

Taken together, these bodies of literature suggest that academic literacy instruction for law students is most effective when it integrates disciplinary relevance, structured argumentation, and tasks that are engaging and encourage sustained participation and confidence.

CONTEXT AND MATERIALS

Teaching Context

The research is situated within a first-year academic literacy module taught in English for law students at the North-West University in South Africa, a multilingual institution where most students speak English as an additional language. Many students have limited prior exposure to academic writing conventions and legal research databases. However, most demonstrate strong interest in law, justice, and forensic narratives. This context is comparable to many EAP and academic literacy settings internationally, where multilingual students are required to develop academic writing skills in English while negotiating disciplinary expectations.

Description of the Task

The task was designed in response to this pedagogical context. It draws on students' existing interest in legal cases and questions of justice to support the development of academic legal writing skills, particularly thesis formulation, stance-taking, argumentation, and evidence-based reasoning. The task design deliberately connects literacy instruction to disciplinary content in order to enhance relevance, confidence, and engagement among first-year law students.

Pedagogically, the activity functions as a scaffolded writing task that guides students from initial stance-taking to evidence-based justification within a legal

decision-making context. The instructional focus centers on a widely reported South African criminal case involving the murder of Leigh Mathews and the conviction of Donovan Moodley. Students received a short factual overview of the case and were then asked to produce a written argument structured in the following way:

- Students were required to take a clear position on whether parole should or should not be granted.
- They had to express this position through a direct thesis statement.
- They were asked to support their argument with at least one credible legal source, such as legislation or case law.
- They were required to reference the source accurately in the required legal style.
- They needed to extend their reasoning through evidence, logic, and principles of legal interpretation.

The task was followed by short reflective questions used only for classroom teaching evaluation. These reflections were not collected or analyzed as research data.

Why True Crime as Material

True crime is particularly engaging for first-year law students because it combines narrative, legal reasoning, and ethical judgement. It captures attention early and reduces the resistance that often accompanies academic literacy tasks. When students work with a real case, they naturally begin to evaluate evidence, question bias, and assess competing interpretations. These practices closely reflect legal reasoning and support the development of critical reading, structured argumentation, and evaluative judgement.

Using true crime also narrows the perceived gap between academic literacy and the discipline of law. Students recognize the relevance of the task without needing further justification, which can strengthen perceived task value and support sustained engagement. Instead of asking why they must write, students already understand that constructing a thesis, evaluating sources, and defending a position are integral to legal thinking.

Research further shows that narrative and case-based crime materials can enhance intrinsic motivation by fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness. A recent study on crime-based role-playing in an online history course found that true-crime narratives increase student enjoyment, engagement, and confidence, particularly because the content felt meaningful and intellectually stimulating (von Germeten et al., 2024). Students were more motivated to participate when the cases felt real, complex, and morally charged. These dynamics make true crime a powerful pedagogical tool in law-aligned academic literacy classrooms.

For academic literacy, this means that true crime offers more than surface-level engagement. It creates opportunities for structured reasoning, evidence-based

argumentation, and the development of a stronger academic identity. By positioning students within disciplinary decision-making contexts, such tasks have the potential to support students' sense of participation in legal thinking and to frame them as emerging legal writers with an academic voice, rather than as outsiders completing mandatory writing exercises.

METHOD

This study adopts a systematic, theory-driven analysis of instructional materials, positioning the task itself as the primary data source. Furthermore, it employs a qualitative materials analysis approach rather than analyzing student data. The study focuses on the design of a true-crime-based academic literacy task to examine how its structure aligns with established theories of argumentation, academic literacies, and critical digital literacy. The task instructions were analyzed in relation to three guiding frameworks: principles of critical digital literacy (Janks, 2010), Toulmin's model of argumentation (Toulmin, 1958), and EAP and academic literacy task design theory (Hyland, 2006).

The aim of the analysis is to identify the pedagogical affordances of the task and to examine how its design aligns with the development of core academic literacy skills, including argumentation, source evaluation, and critical thinking.

ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

The following findings come from an analysis of the task itself rather than from student-generated data. They describe the academic and cognitive outcomes that the activity is theoretically designed to develop.

Support for Argumentation Development

The task requires students to take a position, formulate a thesis statement, and defend it through legal evidence. These requirements reflect Toulmin's sequence of claim, grounds, and warrant, which means that the task is structured to guide students away from summary and toward intentional reasoning and justification.

Opportunities for Critical Digital Literacy

True-crime narratives often present conflicting accounts, a mixture of media perspectives and formal legal records. Engaging with these sources encourages students to distinguish fact from interpretation, to evaluate credibility, and to recognize bias or narrative positioning. These competencies lie at the heart of critical digital literacy, which emphasizes interpretation, critique, and evidence-based judgement.

Authenticity and Disciplinary Relevance

The parole scenario introduces students to a real-world legal context and positions them as novice legal writers. This authenticity increases the perceived relevance of the task. For many first-year law students, academic writing activities feel disconnected from their disciplinary identities. A task that resembles legal communication helps students understand why the skill matters and how it relates to their degree.

Purposeful Source Use and Referencing

The requirement to locate and apply legal sources transforms referencing from a procedural expectation into a persuasive resource. Citation becomes part of the argument rather than a separate technical step. This encourages students to see referencing as an integral component of credibility and academic voice.

DISCUSSION

The analysis indicates that true-crime-based academic literacy tasks offer strong theoretical potential for supporting argumentation, critical reading, and disciplinary engagement. When task design aligns with argumentation theory, academic literacies frameworks and principles of critical digital literacy, it creates structured opportunities for students to practice the kinds of reasoning and communication valued in legal education.

These insights are consistent with research in related fields. Wood and Breach's (2021) study of the true-crime podcast *Serial* shows that true-crime narratives promote deeper engagement, closer evaluation of evidence, and sustained emotional and intellectual involvement. Their findings suggest that true crime can bridge personal interest and academic purpose, which aligns with the pedagogical affordances identified in the task analyzed here.

The implications extend to TESOL and EAP contexts internationally. Crime narratives are widely recognizable texts that invite interpretation, debate, and critical stance-taking. Because argumentation is central to academic writing across disciplines, true crime offers a versatile platform for teaching analytical reading, writing, and reasoning. These texts help students practice universal academic skills while also building confidence and a sense of relevance in their learning.

For Korean contexts, these findings are particularly relevant. Many Korean university students encounter EAP or academic English modules that feel removed from their degree programs, much like the law students in this study. The true-crime-based task demonstrates one way of designing literacy activities that are both language-focused and discipline-sensitive. Although the legal cases used here are South African, the underlying principles of task design, argumentation, and critical

digital literacy are transferable to Korean, East Asian, or other international settings where student motivation and relevance remain ongoing concerns.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited to an analysis of the task materials and does not examine student responses or learning outcomes. The findings therefore reflect the theoretical affordances of the activity rather than demonstrated student performance. Once ethical clearance has been granted, a follow up empirical study will be conducted to examine how students engage with the task in practice. Future research will include thematic analysis of student reflections, closer investigation of how argumentation develops across drafts, and comparison of writing samples to explore changes in the quality of claims, evidence use, and reasoning. These empirical insights will help determine how effectively the task supports the development of academic writing skills for first-year law students.

CONCLUSION

True crime offers more than surface-level engagement. It provides a meaningful pathway into academic argumentation because it brings together narrative complexity, evidence evaluation, and moral reasoning, all of which are central to legal thinking. The analysis presented in this paper shows that a true-crime-based academic literacy task can be structured in ways that support thesis writing, academic reasoning, critical digital literacy, and disciplinary identity formation. By positioning students as decision-makers rather than passive writers, the task helps them practice analytical and communicative skills that are central to their legal studies. Literacy tasks can often feel repetitive and procedural. Framing the activity around a legal decision disrupts this pattern by offering a fresh rhetorical purpose and a less formulaic writing experience. In this way, academic literacy becomes less of a compulsory module and more of a space where students can begin to see themselves as emerging legal thinkers capable of constructing informed, persuasive arguments.

THE AUTHOR

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Assessment and Awareness of AI Literacy Among English Language Learners

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This article describes the results of AI literacy research conducted on English for Academic Purposes students at Handong Global University. English for Academic Purposes is a course that prepares undergraduate English language learners for content courses in their prospective majors in English. Research was conducted based on a survey at the beginning of the course to assess students' AI literacy awareness based on UNESCO's framework for AI literacy for students (2024). The survey consisted of 20 questions: Thirteen questions were multiple-choice questions based on the Long and Magerko (2020) framework regarding AI literacy. Five questions were Likert-scale items about perceptions of AI based on the MAILS assessment (Carolus et al., 2023). Three questions were qualitative questions about students' ethical attitudes about AI. The results conclude that students need more education and training about general AI literacy and ethics. The research results also concluded that AI literacy research can be utilized for educational planning and policymaking concerning AI in the future.

INTRODUCTION

AI literacy, as described by Long and Magerko (2020), is “a set of competencies that allow users to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate and collaborate effectively with AI, and use AI in various settings such as at work and home” (p. 2). Additionally, AI literacy is an essential 21st-century digital literacy skill and is linked to various essential competencies such as problem-solving, collaboration, and using AI for social good (Ng & Su 2023). As an important 21st-century skill, having programming skills can be useful but not essential for AI literacy in many domains (Long & Magerko, 2020).

According to UNESCO's AI Competency Framework for Students (2024), the education sector must prepare students not only for the knowledge and skills to use AI, but also knowledge of the impact on society and the environment so that students can effectively and actively co-create with AI. Furthermore, UNESCO (2024) advocated that students must be competent in human-centered mindset, ethics of AI, AI techniques and applications, and AI system design. More specifically, Long and Magerko (2020) suggested that the framework for AI literacy should ask the following questions:

- What is AI?
- What can AI do?
- How does AI work?
- How do people perceive AI?

Ng et al. (2021) have also advised that AI literacy in education should follow Bloom's taxonomy and thus created a set of domains based on higher-order thinking: know and understand AI, use and apply AI, evaluate and create AI, and ethical use of AI. There are currently a variety of AI literacy assessments (e.g., GLAT, SNAIL, AILS, and MAILS). Additionally, Carolus et al. (2023) adapted the GLAT and AILS literacy assessments to include other domains such as AI self-efficacy, which includes AI problem-solving and learning. The test also includes AI self-competency, which measures AI persuasion literacy, and AI emotion regulation, measuring students' own perceptions about the psychological effects of AI usage. The MAILS exam, (Carolus et al., 2023) deals with attitudes about AI self-efficacy, which includes skills such as problem-solving and learning, and self-competency, which includes persuasion literacy and emotion regulation. The survey items were measured on a Likert scale. Some example items are as follows:

- I can rely on my skills in difficult situations while using AI.
- I can keep up with the latest innovations in AI applications.
- I don't let AI influence me in my everyday decisions.
- I keep control over feelings like frustration and anxiety while doing everyday things with AI.

BACKGROUND

In order to better gauge the understanding of second language learners, it is necessary to apply the test in students' native language and also to have a cultural understanding of how to ask questions to Korean students. TESOL professors who teach writing or English for academic purposes often teach skills such as research and help students with publications of academic articles. Therefore, the modified assessment in this study focused on some key issues that arise with one of the manuals of citation (APA) that the Department of Language Education at Handong Global University currently uses. For additional context, it can be useful to understand Korea's National Strategy for AI (2019). The strategy focuses on three main areas: building a strong AI foundation and to make sure the technology and skilled people exist; expand to different sectors such as schools, companies, and society; and preparing for change for new kinds of jobs and social changes caused by AI. According to the policy, universities are to change their teacher qualification criteria to include AI courses, colleges are to add AI topics to their programs, and graduate schools have been asked to create special majors for AI-in-education to train teachers better.

Korea's National Strategy for AI (2019) also advocated for more flexible teacher qualifications, so teachers can try new, future-focused ways of teaching. In the area of improving schools' technology, by 2020, at least four classrooms in every elementary and middle school had high-speed wireless. Additionally, programs were created to teach AI in more places (not just schools), to find and support talented AI students, and ensure that students in rural or disadvantaged areas also get AI learning opportunities.

METHOD

One-hundred-and-two Handong Global University undergraduate students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes were surveyed. The survey contained multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale questions about attitudes and behaviors toward AI, and faith-based questions for students in a Christian university setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the understanding, usage, and ethical considerations, students performed higher on questions regarding ethics, safety, and privacy concerns. It also appears that they have background knowledge regarding the government's policy towards AI (Government of the Republic of Korea, 2019). Student knowledge was lacking, however, in the terminology, definitions, and basic workings of generative AI (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Accuracy on Multiple-Choice AI Literacy Items

Item	Focus (Short Description)	Correct (%)
1	Definition of generative AI	63.7
2	Definition of LLM	59.8
3	Meaning of "token" in an LLM	50.5
4	Ineffective strategy when using AI for a pitch	48.5
5	Evaluating information from an LLM	76.5
6	Next step after AI summarizes a research paper	87.3
7	APA 7 guidance for using Papago (machine translation)	78.4
8	Reasons not to input private data into public AI tools	72.5
9	APA 7 requirements when AI is used in writing	89.2
10	Importance of inclusivity in AI system design/use	79.4
11	Environmental impact and energy use of AI	88.2
12	Goal of Korea's 2019 National AI Strategy	91.2
13	How Korea supports teachers in preparing for AI	83.3

Note. $N = 102$.

According to qualitative data on the question "How can your faith guide the way you use AI in your studies or future work?" student answers reflected an uncertainty

about future jobs and human-centeredness in the future, indicating some fear about preparedness for AI in the future. This is one student's response:

I'm studying visual design, and when designing a book, I was able to use AI to help me identify the most important parts of a given text. However, I believe that the ability to replace designers with AI could lead to the disappearance of the profession itself, or the relegation of design to a role that involves only inputting prompts. [Student A]

ATTITUDES AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS TOWARD AI

Results of the Likert-scale survey about attitudes and self-perceptions of AI suggest that students do not yet feel certain about using AI for academic tasks. However, they seem to have appropriate emotional regulation when using AI. On the other hand, students seemed to indicate that AI was not entirely helping their skills improve nor helping them learn more efficiently. Many students were more mixed on the topic of feeling pressured to use AI because of competition from other students, which might suggest a sense of pressure to apply AI amongst peers (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics for AI-Related Attitudes

Item (Shortened)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
14. Comfortable using AI tools for studies	2	0.87
15. Feel unsure or anxious when using AI	2	0.93
16. Believe AI helps me learn more efficiently	2	0.90
17. Worry that depending on AI could weaken my own skills	2	1.09
18. Feel pressured to use AI because other students do	3	1.13

Note. *N* = 102. The above five items, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), measured students' comfort, anxiety, perceived usefulness, concern about over-reliance, and perceived social pressure regarding AI use.

A sample answer to the qualitative question "What values or principles from your faith can help you use AI responsibly and honestly?" suggests that students recognize that they need more education and training on how to properly use AI:

Honestly, I don't know. I haven't received any specific training on how to use AI properly and honestly, such as through sex education or safety training. While I recognize the need to use AI more responsibly and honestly, I still struggle to discern wisely what's right and what's wrong. Therefore, I think I need to pray more so I can use AI more properly, in line with my religious values. [Student B]

CONCLUSION

Based on the multiple-choice survey answers, Likert-scale responses, and a sample of the qualitative data, it would appear that students are mostly aware of privacy, ethical considerations, and academic honesty while using AI. However,

students are unsure about some practical applications of AI and how to use it appropriately. They also struggled with concepts and definitions about generative AI and LLMs. Based on the Likert-scale attitudinal questions, student data suggests that students are still uncertain about using AI in their academic studies while also uncertain about job security in the future in certain fields such as design. There was a general consensus amongst students that it would be good to have more training or policies for them to understand how to use AI appropriately in their academic studies and future careers. This indicates that policymakers and stakeholders in institutions have a responsibility to ensure that students are prepared for the transition to AI in all sectors. This paper has a limitation on when students have knowingly used AI unethically, and it would be difficult for students to willingly disclose unethical usages of AI. One recommendation is for the Ministry of Education in Korea and various institutions to develop or adopt a framework for students' usage of AI and provide more recommendations for educators regarding AI policies.

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Emergency English: Transforming Crisis Language into Voice and Agency

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Emergency communication presents unique challenges for international students studying in the United States, where unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural expectations, and hazard awareness can lead to confusion and unsafe responses. Traditional English language instruction often focuses on survival vocabulary, which does not adequately prepare learners to interpret, question, and act during real emergencies. This workshop-based article proposes a shift from survival-based instruction to an agency- and voice-centered approach grounded in social cognitive theory. Through scenario-based activities, critical analysis of authentic emergency resources, and role-based communication practice, learners develop the confidence and language needed to make decisions, seek help, and support others in crisis situations. The article outlines a practical pedagogical framework and classroom applications that enable educators to integrate emergency communication into language instruction in meaningful and empowering ways.

INTRODUCTION

As international student mobility continues to grow, universities must consider how well students are prepared to navigate not only academic environments but also emergency situations. In the United States, campus emergency communication relies heavily on text alerts, sirens, and culturally specific directives such as “shelter in place” or “lockdown.” While these systems are designed for rapid response, they often assume a level of linguistic and cultural familiarity that international students may not possess.

Research has shown that international students frequently misunderstand emergency messages, rely on unofficial sources of information, or delay action due to uncertainty. These challenges are not simply linguistic; they are shaped by differences in cultural expectations, prior experience with disasters, and varying levels of preparedness. As highlighted in the conference workshop, the issue is not only whether students understand emergency vocabulary but whether they can act on it.

This article argues that traditional “survival English” approaches are insufficient for preparing students for real-world emergencies. Instead, English language instruction should emphasize agency and voice, enabling learners to interpret, question, and respond to crisis communication with confidence. This paper proposes

a practical framework for integrating emergency communication into language instruction.

THE PROBLEM: LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND PREPAREDNESS

International students face a convergence of challenges in emergency situations. First, linguistic barriers can lead to misinterpretation of key terms such as *lockdown*, *evacuate*, or *shelter in place*. Reports following incidents at institutions such as the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Michigan State University; and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have demonstrated that high-stakes alerts may not be clearly understood by all students.

Cultural perceptions of authority further complicate emergency responses. International students often prioritize peer communication over official alerts if institutional protocols differ from those in their home countries, potentially leading to dangerous delays (Abukhalaf et al., 2022; Abukhalaf & von Meding, 2021). For example, students from South Korea may ignore digital alerts due to notification fatigue, waiting instead for physical cues like sirens. In contrast, U.S. campuses rely on immediate text-based systems as the primary mode of communication.

Furthermore, many international students lack familiarity with region-specific hazards. Those studying in the Midwest or Southeastern United States, for instance, may have little prior knowledge of tornadoes, hurricanes, or severe winter storms. During two workshops with TEFL instructors, participants noted a general unpreparedness for tornado warnings, specifically regarding the vocabulary and iconography used in emergency alerts. Such gaps in understanding could prove critical in events similar to the 2011 Tuscaloosa–Birmingham tornado crisis, which affected the University of Alabama, resulting in several student deaths.

Finally, overall preparedness and self-efficacy remain low across student populations. Lovekamp and McMahon (2011) found that even domestic students often feel underprepared to respond to disasters, despite being aware of general safety guidelines. Given these baseline challenges, international students, who face additional linguistic and cultural hurdles, are likely even more vulnerable during a crisis.

WHY AGENCY AND VOICE MATTER

In emergency situations, comprehension alone is not enough. Students must be able to act quickly, make decisions, and communicate effectively under stress. This is where the concepts of agency and voice become essential. *Agency* refers to a learner's ability to make informed decisions and take appropriate action. *Voice* refers to the ability to communicate needs, ask clarifying questions, and interact with others during a crisis. As emphasized in the workshop, these elements transform students from passive recipients of information into active participants in their own safety.

This perspective aligns with social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in shaping behavior. When learners believe they are capable of responding effectively, they are more likely to act. In contrast, uncertainty or lack of confidence can lead to hesitation, even when information is available.

In the context of emergency communication, agency and voice enable students to ask clarifying questions (“Is this a drill?”), seek reliable information (“Where should we go?”), and support others (“Follow me, it’s safer this way!”). Teaching these communicative skills is therefore not an optional extension of language instruction but a critical component of preparedness.

FROM SURVIVAL TO AGENCY

Traditional emergency-related language instruction often focuses on vocabulary acquisition. Many students arrive with basic words such as “fire,” “exit,” “run,” and “help,” but this approach does not prepare them for the complexity of real-world situations. As illustrated in the workshop, while these phrases are important, they do not address the communicative demands of emergencies, where students must interpret ambiguous information, make decisions, and interact with others.

Real emergencies require more than vocabulary. They demand an agency-based approach, which expands the focus to include an understanding of context and local hazards, confidence to ask questions and clarify unclear directives, language to make safer choices when there is no one available to interpret, and voice to advocate for themselves and their peers. For example, survival English simply recognizes the words “Run, hide, fight!” Agency English allows them to ask or know: “Where is the safest place to go?” or “Is this an alarm or drill?”

This shift moves learners from passive understanding to active engagement. Thus, the distinction between survival and agency is not merely pedagogical; it reflects a broader understanding of language as a tool for action. In emergencies, language is not just descriptive; it is functional, immediate, and often life-saving.

EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS

This workshop featured several activities designed to encourage educators to reflect on the importance of teaching “Agency English” and how to implement it effectively. Most of these activities were developed to be adaptable, serving as templates or foundational frameworks that instructors can customize to meet the specific needs of their own classrooms.

Experiential Awareness

The session opens with a simulation where participants inhabit the role of a new international student at the University of Chicago. In this scenario, the student, exhausted, jet-lagged, and awaiting a late-night call to Korea, has just learned their language proficiency scores require them to take non-credit English courses. To ground the experience, participants are played an actual recording of a Chicago tornado siren. They must then identify the information gaps necessary to navigate the situation and determine appropriate responses across various contexts, such as a dormitory, library, or outdoor space. This activity vividly illustrates how limited background knowledge and misinterpreted signals create profound uncertainty for learners.

Critical Language Awareness

Participants then examine authentic materials from the Ready website ([ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)), identifying vocabulary and phrases that may be difficult for language learners. This activity encourages educators to critically evaluate the accessibility of official communication and consider how it can be adapted for classroom use with the goal of teaching both the vocabulary and the expectations for response.

Language for Agency

The following activity focused on equipping students with functional language for critical communicative tasks, such as asking for help, giving instructions, and providing reassurance. During the workshop, participants utilized these skills in group role-plays, adopting the roles of “confused newcomer,” “helper,” or “bystander.” Rather than teaching vocabulary in isolation, the session provided language frames as practical tools for navigating high-stakes scenarios, including fires and active-shooter situations. This activity also prompted educators to critically evaluate the cognitive load placed on learners, considering how many language frames a student must master to successfully reach safety. The role-based play allowed educators to experience different perspectives and develop both individual and collaborative responses.

Real-World Transfer

To extend learning beyond the classroom, educators were encouraged to extend agency through general communication practices. For example, have students engage in tasks such as researching hazards at former or “dream” universities in the US, and encourage them to create personal emergency cards with key information to keep with their student IDs. These activities promote autonomy and encourage students to connect language learning with real-life contexts.

EXTENDING LEARNING AND PREPAREDNESS

Empowering students requires more than structured activities; it involves creating opportunities for choice and independent learning. Allowing students to present their knowledge through creative formats, such as posters, videos, or resource booklets, supports engagement and ownership. Additionally, directing students to reliable resources, including government websites and campus safety pages, helps them develop the skills needed to continue learning independently. Preparedness becomes a shared responsibility, with students actively participating in their own safety.

MAKING PRACTICE REAL

One of the key insights from this approach is that students often know what to do but struggle to communicate under pressure. In high-stress situations, language must be automatic, not deliberative. Realistic, low-stakes practice helps bridge this gap. By simulating authentic scenarios and encouraging spontaneous communication, educators can help students build confidence and develop more immediate responses. Importantly, this practice prioritizes clarity and effectiveness over grammatical perfection.

When language instruction reflects real-world conditions, learners are better prepared to use their skills in meaningful ways. Emergency communication thus becomes not only a topic of instruction but a context for developing communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

Emergency communication is a critical but often overlooked component of language education. For international students, the ability to understand and respond to crisis situations can have significant implications for safety and well-being. A shift from survival-based vocabulary instruction to an approach centered on agency and voice is necessary for student safety. By incorporating experiential activities, authentic materials, and scenario-based practice, educators can equip learners with the skills needed to act confidently and communicate effectively in emergencies.

Ultimately, emergency English is not about memorizing words; it is about using language as a tool for action. When students can ask questions, make decisions, and support others, they are not only learning English; they are gaining the ability to navigate the world safely and independently.

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