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Texas Journal of Literacy Education (TJLE) is the official journal of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE), the Texas affiliate of the International Literacy Association. TJLE is a peer-reviewed journal published twice each year, in the Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer. We seek original research and practitioner articles related to language and literacy practices, from early childhood through adult, inside and outside of the classroom. We welcome all voices from literacy researchers, classroom teachers, and graduate students.

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TEXAS JOURNAL OF LITERACY EDUCATION
A Peer-Reviewed Publication of the Texas Association for Literacy Education

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Dear Readers,

This issue commences our team's tenure as the editors of the Texas Journal of Literacy Education (TJLE). We come to you from Schreiner University in Kerrville, Texas. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue the great work of this important journal. We want to thank the previous editorial team for their guidance and commitment during this transition period.

For this first issue, we have a mix of crucial topics in literacy education, including strategies for standardized testing, generative AI, and the refugee status of parents for emergent bilinguals. We are excited to share this critical research with literacy educators across Texas and the United States.

We were pleased by the response of our authors, peer reviewers, and all team members who make this journal possible. We ask for your continued support by sharing the journal at your institutions and through social media. We hope that we can continue to spark conversation and circulate strategies and resources for educators as a leading journal in literacy education. We look forward to forging new relationships and nurturing established ones among the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE) and TJLE communities.

Sincerely,

The TJLE Editorial Team

TEXAS JOURNAL OF LITERACY EDUCATION

A Peer-Reviewed Publication of the Texas Association for Literacy Education

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Chapter 1

Engagement as Intervention: Improving English I STAAR Scores Through Guided Literacy Practice

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Abstract

High schools may rely on tutorial periods to support students who have previously failed the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam. However, these tutorials often rely on lecture, passive practice, or isolated worksheet completion, which are approaches that rarely promote active literacy engagement. This quantitative, quasi-experimental pretest–posttest study examines the impact of implementing guided practice and engaged learning routines in a high school English I tutorial course serving STAAR retesters. Using classroom observations, behavior documentation, attendance patterns, and pre-post assessment data, the study analyzes how instructional shifts relate to performance on the December STAAR retest. Findings suggest that tutorials grounded in modeling, scaffolded practice, opportunities to respond, and collaborative literacy tasks are associated with higher engagement, fewer disruptive behaviors, and stronger assessment performance. Implications for English Language Arts teachers and literacy leaders are discussed, particularly in the design of tutorials that prioritize interaction and meaningful reading and writing practice.

Keywords: state assessment; literacy; guided practice; tutorials; English Language Arts

High school tutorial programs are essential for supporting students who have not met proficiency on state assessments; however, these spaces are often characterized by low engagement and instructional routines that lack meaningful literacy interaction (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Many English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retesters enter tutorial classes with a history of academic frustration and negative associations with reading and writing tasks. When tutorials rely heavily on lecture or independent packet completion, students frequently disengage, exhibit off-task behaviors, or fail to demonstrate progress on required assessments (Cooper, 2014; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Teachers are managing full instructional schedules and large class sizes, and they often lack the time or support necessary to create more interactive and responsive tutorial environments (Shernoff et al., 2016; Wang & Hofkens, 2020). This results in instructional mismatch and contributes to persistent gaps in literacy performance, particularly among students who need the most targeted support (Cooper, 2014).

In Texas, meeting proficiency on the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam is a graduation requirement (Texas Education Agency, 2019), making tutorial programming a central component of secondary literacy intervention. Since the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam measures reading comprehension, textual analysis, and extended writing, it requires students to actively process and analyze the texts, make inferences, and produce evidence-based responses on the written portion. Instructional approaches that position students as passive recipients of information rarely foster the deep engagement necessary for such complex literacy tasks (Moore, 2016; Rosenshine, 2012). Research has long emphasized that adolescents, particularly those with a history of academic difficulty, benefit from instruction that includes explicit modeling of strategic reading,

scaffolded practice with complex tasks, structured discussion and cognitive rehearsal, and frequent opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of what is being taught (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Rosenshine, 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Guided practice and engaged learning routines have been associated with student gains in reading comprehension and in showing more sustained academic engagement as well as with improvements in student performance on formal assessments (Rosenshine, 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

Despite this evidence, tutorial periods often remain underleveraged as instructional spaces. Many districts structure tutorials as flexible scheduling periods with large groups of students where teachers have minimal planning time and limited resources for literacy interventions to help students be successful (Shernoff et al., 2016; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Wang & Hofkens, 2020). These conditions can unintentionally reinforce teacher-centered approaches, even when teachers recognize the need for more interactive methods. At the same time, students who repeatedly fail the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam frequently experience diminished self-efficacy, avoidance behaviors, and patterns of disengagement (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; McDonald, 1998; Weimer, 2007), and yet, they continue to be placed in the tutorial environments. Without intentional design, tutorials can become extensions of classroom routines that did not work the first time (hence, the repeat testers) rather than opportunities for targeted, responsive intervention to support students in being successful on formal assessments (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on a high school tutorial context where students (N=15) exhibited persistent behavioral challenges, chronic absenteeism, and difficulty engaging with literacy tasks independently. Recognizing that lecture and packet-based approaches were insufficient in

supporting success on the English I in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment, the teacher-researcher redesigned tutorials around guided practice and engaged learning routines. These included modeling cognitive processes during reading and writing, chunking tasks into manageable steps, facilitating small-group collaboration, embedding discussion prompts, incorporating literacy-focused games, and increasing opportunities for students to respond orally and in writing. These instructional activities were grounded in established models of explicit instruction, gradual release of responsibility, and engaged learning. The intervention included modeling cognitive processes during reading and writing (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), chunking complex tasks into manageable steps (Rosenshine, 2012), facilitating small-group collaboration (Moore, 2016; Weimer, 2007), embedding structured discussion prompts (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), incorporating literacy-focused games to promote engagement (Moore, 2016; Weimer, 2007), and increasing opportunities for students to respond orally and in writing to strengthen participation and comprehension (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Rosenshine, 2012). Overall, the shift to use these strategies aimed to increase student participation, reduce behavior disruptions across all participants, and foster a stronger sense of competence and agency among the retesters.

There are several factors that shaped the need for this redesign. First, the large class sizes and limited administrative support constrained the teacher's ability to provide individualized feedback and adapt lessons for students with varying literacy needs (Dean & Wright, 2016; Rosenshine, 2012). Second, many students had developed externalizing behaviors such as talking during instruction, leaving their seats, or refusing to do the work that appeared directly related to task difficulty or lack of clarity about expectations (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; McDonald, 1998; Weimer, 2007). Third, existing tutorial curriculum materials, which included a packet of a past

exam, lacked the scaffolds necessary for students navigating complex State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading passages or writing prompts (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Texas Education Agency, 2019). These factors collectively created an instructional context where neither the students nor the teacher felt successful in the tutorial class. The redesigned tutorials approach sought to address these barriers through planning and the use of evidence-based literacy routines grounded in explicit instruction, gradual release of responsibility, and engaged learning frameworks (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Moore, 2016; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rosenshine, 2012).

This study's theoretical foundation also draws on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and the concept of the zone of proximal development, which states that students learn most effectively when supported by a more knowledgeable other within their zone of proximal development. This is the space between what they can do independently and what they can accomplish with assistance. As a whole, this framework informed the tutorial redesign by emphasizing teacher modeling, peer collaboration, and scaffolded support tailored to students' current literacy levels.

While guided practice and engaged learning have strong empirical support in elementary literacy contexts through experimental, quasi-experimental, and instructional framework research, little is known about their implementation specifically within secondary or English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tutorials (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rosenshine, 2012). Even fewer studies examine the relationship between tutorial instructional design, student behavior patterns, and assessment outcomes (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by investigating how instructional changes in a real school setting influenced student

engagement and improved performance among English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retesters. The findings offer insight into how secondary English Language Arts teachers can structure tutorial periods to support struggling students more effectively, particularly in high-stakes assessment environments, to help students be successful on formal assessments.

Research Questions

The study addresses three core research questions:

1. How does the use of guided practice and engaged learning in tutorials relate to changes in students' English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores?
2. How do class size and attendance patterns relate to students' performance in an intervention setting?
3. How do behavior patterns during tutorials relate to student outcomes on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a social constructivist framework, which positions learning as a process that develops through interaction, scaffolding, and guided participation (Vygotsky, 1978), and believes that knowledge is constructed as learners engage with tasks, peers, and instructors in structured learning environments. For struggling readers, instructional supports that make thinking visible and provide graduated assistance are particularly critical. Guided practice aligns closely with the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) as it emphasizes movement from teacher modeling ("I do") to shared practice ("We do") and ultimately to independent application ("You do"). In literacy instruction, this model has been widely associated with improvements in student comprehension and student confidence,

particularly for learners performing below grade level (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Engaged learning reflects constructivist views of instruction by emphasizing students' active role in constructing their understanding through interaction with the instructional tasks and with one another rather than through passive reception of information (Moore, 2016; Weimer, 2007). Through structured opportunities to participate, learners are supported in developing meaning as part of the learning process, which is a feature that is central to constructivist and engagement-based instruction (Weimer, 2007). For students who have experienced repeated academic failure, this type of engagement has been associated with greater persistence during learning tasks and stronger awareness of strategy use, both of which may support improved academic performance (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Together, social constructivism and the gradual release of responsibility provide a theoretical foundation for examining how guided practice and engagement during instruction influence literacy understanding, student behavior, and participation in high-stakes tutorial settings.

Review of the Literature

Effective tutorial instruction requires more than extended time or repeated exposure to test-preparation material (Rosenshine, 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). For high school students who have repeatedly failed the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam, effective tutorials must emphasize sustained student engagement with literacy tasks and provide structured support for developing strategic reading and writing skills (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Moore, 2016; Rosenshine, 2012). This literature review synthesizes research on (a) the role of engagement in literacy learning, (b) guided practice and modeling as evidence-based instructional routines, (c) independent practice for struggling learners, (d) the influence of class

size, and (e) the impact of challenging behavior. Collectively, these strands provide a foundation for understanding the conditions that support effective intervention in secondary English language arts settings.

The Role of Engagement in Literacy Learning

Engaged learning frameworks emphasize students' active involvement with academic content and with one another through purposeful problem-solving tasks (Moore, 2016; Weimer, 2007). Scholars have argued that learning environments designed to promote structured discussion and collaborative inquiry tend to support deeper cognitive processing and sustained motivation (Moore, 2016; Weimer, 2007). Moore (2016) describes engaged learning as *high-impact* in that tasks require students to apply knowledge, reflect, and interact with others in ways that build ownership and agency. For students in remediation (many of whom may have experienced repeated academic failure), opportunities to participate actively may help rebuild confidence and counter disengagement (Weimer, 2007). Weimer (2007) further suggests that engagement is tied to increased attention and task persistence, which are conditions that are difficult to achieve in silent, worksheet-driven environments. Although the research base specific to engaged learning in high-school English tutorials is limited, broader studies on secondary student engagement offer insights. Dean and Wright (2016) reported an increase in student participation and engagement in large-enrollment lecture courses when collaborative and interactive instructional structures were embedded within instruction. Their findings indicate that engagement-oriented strategies can be implemented effectively even in high-enrollment settings.

Guided Practice as an Evidence-Based Instructional Routine

Lecture remains a common default in classrooms with large enrollments or limited instructional time; however, research suggests that passive listening may be less effective than

more active forms of instruction (Bajak, 2017; Rosenshine, 2012). Bajak (2017) summarizes findings from STEM meta-analyses and notes that student performance tends to improve when learners participate actively rather than listen passively. Although lectures can introduce content efficiently, their utility appears to depend on how much structure and interaction accompany them. Guided practice provides a structured instructional context as it allows teachers to model skills by gradually releasing responsibility to the students throughout the lesson, which may support students' development of reading comprehension and writing strategies; and it scaffolds student attempts to guide them to mastery (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rosenshine, 2012). McDonald (1997) compares guided practice to independent practice by showing that students often report preferring scaffolded instructional formats and demonstrate greater accuracy when learning new skills under guided conditions. These findings, while not specific to literacy tutorials, offer a rationale for integrating guided modeling into English I remediation environments.

Independent Practice for Struggling Learners

Independent practice remains important for reinforcing skills; however, its effectiveness depends on students' prior understanding of the material (McDonald, 1997; Rosenshine, 2012). McDonald (1997) found that independent practice was as effective as guided instruction only when students had already developed sufficient confidence and foundational knowledge. In literacy tutorials, students often enter with repeated failures on reading comprehension and writing tasks, making unsupported independent practice less likely to result in growth (Fletcher & Frey, 2014; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). For students who have not yet mastered concepts on the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam, such as inference, point of view, tone, or revising/editing conventions, practice passages (Texas

Education Agency, 2019) may highlight misconceptions rather than support improvement. These findings imply that, for students below grade level, independent practice alone may not produce the gains necessary to pass high-stakes assessments (Rosenshine, 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

The Influence of Class Size

Although class size research typically focuses on elementary classrooms or collegiate lecture courses, some findings may extend to secondary tutorials. For example, Dean and Wright (2016) argue that large classes require different pedagogical structures and often lead instructors to rely more heavily on lecture. In tutorial environments where students are ideally provided targeted, individualized support, larger class sizes may reduce opportunities for teachers to support students and provide individualized feedback, adjust the instruction, or scaffold learning (Dean & Wright, 2016; Rosenshine, 2012). While smaller tutorial classes are recommended, many high schools face staffing limitations that result in higher tutorial enrollments (Dean & Wright, 2016; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). The literature suggests that instructional shifts where teachers are using structured groups with assigned tasks, implementing or leading guided discussion, and using teacher-led modeling may help mitigate the constraints of larger tutorial groups or classrooms (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Rosenshine, 2012); although, more research is needed to examine these strategies specifically within literacy remediation contexts (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

The Impact of Challenging Behavior

Students placed in remediation often exhibit behavior concerns, which may stem from academic frustration, disengagement, or prior negative school experiences (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; McDonald, 1998; Weimer, 2007). Adamson and Lewis (2017) provide evidence that

increasing opportunities for students to respond during instruction can lead to improvements in both academic engagement and behavior. Their findings indicate that when learners participate actively through structured prompts, questions, or collaborative tasks, behavioral disruptions tend to decrease. This relationship suggests that behavior may not simply be an instructional barrier but also a reflection of how well instructional structures support student engagement. For tutorial students who frequently report feeling defeated by repeated State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) failures, instruction that incorporates guided practice and interactive activities (Adamson & Lewis, 2017) may increase participation and reduce off-task behavior.

Across the literature, several themes emerge: passive learning environments may limit opportunities for struggling readers to develop necessary skills (Bajak, 2017; Rosenshine, 2012); guided practice and engaged learning structures frequently support higher levels of participation and reading comprehension (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983); large classes pose structural challenges yet may still benefit from engagement-based instructional approaches (Dean & Wright, 2016; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012); and student behavior appears closely intertwined with instructional design and opportunities for active participation (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; McDonald, 1998; Weimer, 2007). Collectively, these findings suggest that adopting guided practice and engaged learning strategies may be a promising avenue for supporting secondary students who repeatedly fail the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), though additional research is needed to understand these relationships within tutorial settings specifically.

Methodology

This study examined whether shifts from lecture-based tutorial practices toward guided practice and engaged learning were associated with changes in English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) performance among high school students who had previously failed the assessment. A quantitative, quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design was selected because the research questions centered on identifying relationships between instructional approaches, student behavior, and assessment outcomes. Quantitative designs allow researchers to test theoretical assumptions by examining patterns among variables (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design using historical comparison data that compared students' previous State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores that were earned under lecture-and-packet instruction and with scores earned after a semester of guided practice and engagement-focused instruction. This design aligns with Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) description of experiments that examine whether exposure to specific instructional conditions is associated with differences in participant outcomes. The instructional shift included increased modeling, structured guided practice, collaborative literacy tasks, and interactive review activities. Prior tutorials for students relied heavily on lecture and independent practice packets from previous English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR; Texas Education Agency, 2019), a structure commonly associated with passive learning environments (Bajak, 2017; Waymouth, 2018). The intervention allowed for a comparison between two instructional conditions for the same students, strengthening internal consistency.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through convenience sampling, a method appropriate when the researcher works with an existing group that possesses the characteristics needed for the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The sample included 15 high school students enrolled in an English I tutorial course during Fall 2019 at a suburban local high school in Texas. All students had previously failed the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) at least once and were placed in the tutorial based on their prior assessment data. The class represented a typical tutorial group in the district with varied reading levels. Several students were also identified as Limited English Proficient and had diverse behavioral histories. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the tutorial cohort by highlighting the gender distribution and racial/ethnic composition of participating students. This information provides important context for understanding the diverse backgrounds represented in the tutorial setting. The state policy requires remediation opportunities for students who do not meet passing standards (Texas Education Agency, 2019); therefore, the group was representative of the population served in secondary literacy interventions. Table 2 outlines the frequency of students' past tutorial placements. This information helps contextualize the disengagement patterns observed in the study, as repeated failure may shape students' perceptions of tutorials and affect their participation.

Table 1

Demographics by Race/Ethnicity of Tutorial Students

Variable	Label	N	%
Gender	Male	7	50
	Female	7	50
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian/White	1	6
	African American/Black	10	67
	Hispanic/Latino	4	27

Note. Table 1 presents the demographics of the tutorial students by gender and race/ethnicity. The frequencies (N) represent the number of students in each category, and the percentages (%) reflect the proportion of the total sample (N = 15).

Table 2

Demographics by Individual Student for Number of Times in a Tutorial Class

Variable	Label	N
Tutorial Placement Count	Student #1	1
	Student #2	1
	Student #3	5
	Student #4	3
	Student #5	-
	Student #6	1
	Student #7	1
	Student #8	-
	Student #9	-
	Student #10	2
	Student #11	1
	Student #12	-
	Student #13	-
	Student #14	1
	Student #15	-

Note. Table 2 presents the number of times each student had been previously placed in a tutorial class (N) before the current intervention. The frequencies (N) represent the total number of tutorial placements recorded for each student. A dash (-) indicates that no prior tutorial placement data were available or that the student had no documented prior tutorial placements.

Context

The study occurred in a large public high school serving approximately 1,173 students. The campus offered daily 30-minute tutorials for students retaking high-stakes assessments. Prior to this study, English I tutorials relied primarily on lecture-based explanations of English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) passages and questions (Texas Education Agency, 2019), along with packet completion by the end of the semester tutorial course. Research suggests that such structures may limit engagement for students who have struggled academically (Dean & Wright, 2016; Moore, 2016). The revised tutorial model integrated guided practice and activities that were designed to increase opportunities to respond, which is an approach associated with reductions in off-task behaviors presented in the research by Adamson & Lewis (2017).

Instruments

Data was collected using two primary instruments designed to capture instructional behaviors and student outcomes: (1) a Tutorial Behavior Observation Checklist and (2) a Student Performance Tracking Log.

Tutorial Behavior Observation Checklist

Behavioral engagement was recorded through a researcher-designed checklist aligned with categories commonly used in observational research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Items included: talking out of turn, refusing work, sleeping in class, using a cell phone, leaving class without permission, and other offenses, which allow the teacher to record notes. Although this is not a formal behavioral inventory, the checklist functioned as a way to consistently measure observable engagement patterns of the tutorial student, and research supports the use of

systematic observation to document student behavior in instructional contexts (Adamson & Lewis, 2017). A sample of the observation checklist is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Tutorial Behavior Observation Checklist

Student	Talking Out of Turn	Refusing to Do Work	Sleeping in Class	Using Cell Phone	Leaving Class Without Permission	Other	Notes
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Note: This checklist was used to record observable student behaviors during tutorial sessions. Each behavior category represents low-inference indicators of behavioral engagement and disengagement. Observations were recorded by the researcher during instructional activities to document patterns of student participation and off-task behavior.

Student Performance Tracking Log

Student performance was documented through daily logs of assignment completion and student participation in guided practice activities. Since guided practice requires scaffolded attempts and teacher-to-student interaction, a completion-based log offers insight into each student's willingness to engage with the material. Therefore, performance logs served as an informal measurement of learner engagement, which is consistent with studies that track task participation as an indicator of cognitive involvement (Weimer, 2007).

Variables

The primary independent variable in this study was the instructional condition, specifically the shift from lecture and packet-based tutorials to guided practice and engagement-based learning. The dependent variable was students' performance on the December 2019 English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retest and served as the key outcome measure. Supplemental variables included behavioral engagement indicators and assignment completion rates, both of which provided additional context for understanding how students participated in the revised instructional model. Each student's prior English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) score functioned as the control variable and offered a baseline for comparison. This aligned with recommended practices in quantitative educational research that rely on historical performance data to support meaningful interpretation of change (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Procedures

Following Institutional Review Board approval at the district level, parental consent and student consent were obtained. Students were assigned identification numbers, and all data were stored on a password-protected district device to maintain confidentiality. The intervention spanned August–December 2019. During this period, tutorials incorporated guided practice, modeled reading strategies, collaborative discussions, literacy games, and structured response opportunities. During tutorials, guided practice routines followed a consistent instructional cycle.

The first was modeling. The teacher modeled comprehension strategies such as annotating, identifying main ideas, eliminating distractors, and constructing short-answer responses using State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)-aligned passages displayed on a projector (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Next was a shared practice where

students answered selected questions collaboratively and verbalized their reasoning by referencing textual evidence. The teacher provided corrective feedback as necessary. Third, students worked in pairs or small groups of three to analyze short State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) passages, completing sentence stems, and revising constructed responses or the essay portion. This is a guided small-group practice where the teacher is providing scaffolds. Lastly, engagement activities included literacy games such as inferencing challenges, vocabulary matching, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) style multiple choice competitions, and peer-editing rotations for the essay focused on revising introductions and thesis statements (Texas Education Agency, 2019). These strategies were grounded in research from Adamson & Lewis (2017) and Moore (2016), who suggest that active participation and frequent opportunities to respond can support student engagement and academic outcomes.

Following the instructional period for tutorials, students took the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retest in December. Assessment results were later compared with their previous State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) attempts to determine whether changes in performance corresponded with the instructional shift.

Results and Findings

Data analysis looked at two forms of validity evidence: (1) evidence based on test content to consider the alignment between classroom instructional experiences and the literacy skills assessed on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and (2) evidence based on relations to other variables to examine how changes in test scores corresponded with behavioral and participation patterns (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As a result, the study utilized historical control data and focused on descriptive comparisons of pre-and posttest

intervention performance. Instead, patterns in students' assessment scores, attendance in tutorials, behavior logs, and assignment completion were reviewed to identify relationships that might suggest how the guided practice and engagement-oriented instruction related to students' performance on the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retest that December.

Pre-intervention State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scale scores and post-intervention December 2019 retest scores were compiled for each participant. Descriptive statistics (means, ranges, and individual score changes) were calculated to examine patterns of improvement following the instructional shift. Individual gain scores were computed by subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores. Attendance percentages, behavioral incident counts, and assignment completion rates were calculated for each student and examined in relation to test score changes. Due to the small sample size and lack of random assignment, inferential statistics were not conducted. Instead, the analysis focused on descriptive comparisons to identify patterns between engagement indicators and assessment outcomes.

Missing Data

Some students had incomplete behavioral or participation data due to the number of absences, their placement in in-school suspension (ISS), or alternative programs. And consistent with recommendations from quantitative research guidelines, these cases were noted but not imputed as their limited participation would have prevented reliable interpretation of the data in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Test Score Patterns

Looking at Table 3, across the sample of 15 students, 9 students (60%) demonstrated an increase in their English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scale

scores from their most recent prior attempt to the December 2019 retest. Gain scores ranged from +2 to +21 points (M = 9.4, SD = 6.8). Four students (27%) demonstrated no meaningful change (±2 points), and two students (13%) showed score decreases of more than five points. Therefore, students who regularly participated in class activities, completed assignments, and maintained consistent attendance showed the strongest patterns of score improvement. This trend aligns with research suggesting that increased opportunities for active engagement may support academic performance, particularly for learners with histories of low achievement on the state assessment (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Weimer, 2007). While not all students achieved passing scores, the descriptive data suggest that participation in guided and interactive lessons corresponded with more positive testing outcomes than previous lecture-based tutorials. As shown in Table 3, students entered the intervention with a wide range of previous State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores and testing histories, which provided a meaningful baseline for comparison. Figure 2 illustrates that most students had attempted the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) at least once (N=15) while a smaller subset had tested three or more times (N=4).

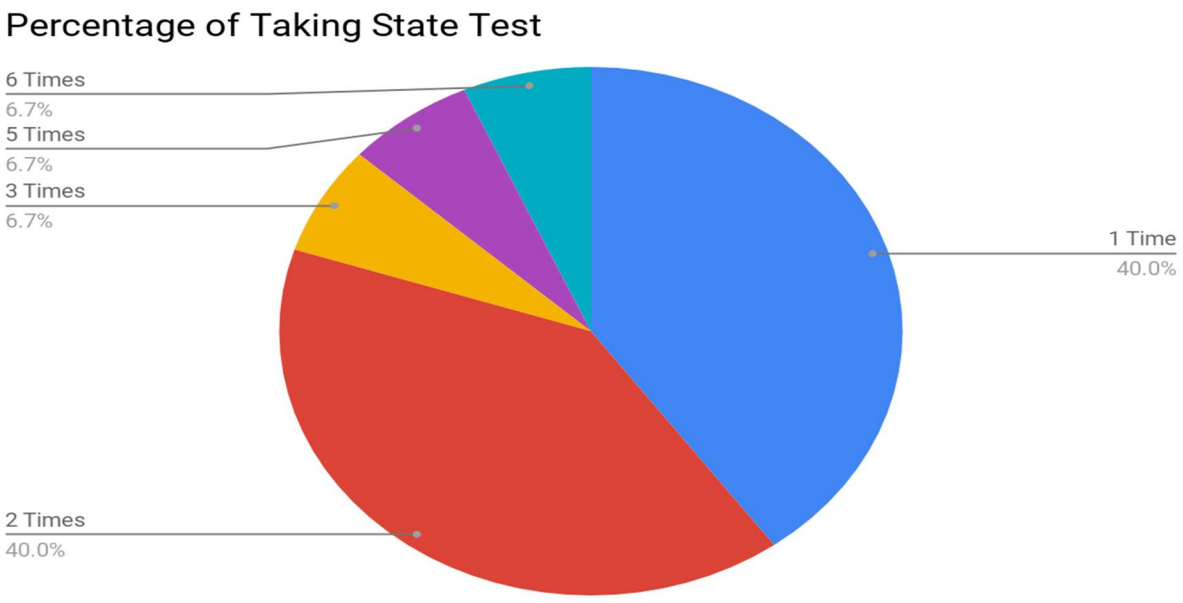
Table 3

Demographics by Individual Student for Number of Times Taken State Test

Variable	Label	Grade	N	% High	% Low
Times Taken	Student #1	10	2	44	38
	Student #2	9*	2	32	29
	Student #3	12	6	46	24
	Student #4	12	5	32	16
	Student #5	9*	1	25	-
	Student #6	10	2	50	50
	Student #7	10	2	47	46
	Student #8	11	3	41	31
	Student #9	9	1	31	-
	Student #10	11	3	56	35
	Student #11	9	2	38	29
	Student #12	10	1	53	-
	Student #13	10	1	26	-
	Student #14	10*	2	44	43
	Student #15	10	1	51	-

*Note***.** Table 3 presents each student's grade level, the number of times they previously attempted the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment (N), and the percentage of their highest and lowest scores on the assessment. A dash (–) indicates that no score was reported in the corresponding performance category. An asterisk (*) denotes students enrolled in Grade 9 at the time of data collection who are repeating the grade.

Figure 2



Note: Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of times each student has taken the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment.

Attendance and Access to Instruction

Attendance emerged as a significant contextual factor. As seen in Table 4, students with attendance rates above 80% demonstrated a mean gain of 12.3 points on their English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores compared to a mean gain of 2.1 points among students with attendance below 50%. Similarly, students who completed more than 50% of assigned guided practice activities demonstrated a mean gain of 14.6 points compared to a mean gain of 1.8 points among students who completed fewer than 50% of activities. These students had limited exposure to the instructional model due to the guided practice and engaged learning that are dependent on active participation. Also shown in Table 4, 11 of the 15 students

experienced frequent absences, placement in In-School Suspension or Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs, or removal from tutorials for other school-related activities.

Table 4

Student Individual Performance in Tutorials

Variable	Label	N	%
Present in Class	Student #1	17	53
	Student #2	-	-
	Student #3	26	81
	Student #4	29	91
	Student #5	25	78
	Student #6	31	97
	Student #7	30	94
	Student #8	31	97
	Student #9	1	3
	Student #10	24	75
	Student #11	11	34
	Student #12	32	100
	Student #13	26	81
	Student #14	25	78
	Student #15	6	19

Note. Table 4 reports individual student attendance across tutorial sessions during the intervention period. The frequencies (N) represent the number of sessions attended, and the percentages (%) represent the proportion of the total scheduled tutorial sessions in which each student was present. A dash (–) indicates that attendance data were not available for that student.

Behavioral Engagement

Student behavior and engagement were documented using the Tutorial Behavior Observation Checklist (Figure 1) across tutorial sessions. The observed behaviors included

talking out of turn, refusing assigned work, sleeping in class, leaving the classroom without permission, and inappropriate cell phone use. As shown in Table 5, the frequencies (N) of these behaviors varied substantially across students, with some participants exhibiting minimal off-task behavior and others demonstrating repeated disengagement across sessions. Students with lower frequencies of observed disruptive or disengaged behaviors completed a greater proportion of assigned instructional activities and were more likely to demonstrate score gains on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retest. In particular, the four students with minimal recorded behavior incidents (0–3 incidents across sessions) completed between 67% and 100% of assigned classwork activities and participated regularly in guided practice. On the other hand, students who exhibited higher frequencies of off-task behaviors, such as repeated talking out of turn, refusing assigned work, or inappropriate cell phone use, ranging from 9 to 13 incidents, completed fewer than 50% of assigned activities and participated inconsistently across sessions. Students in this group were also less likely to demonstrate meaningful increases in State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scale scores.

Assignment Completion

Assignment completion rates varied substantially across students (see Table 5). Of the 15 participants, four students (Students #4, #7, #12, and #13) completed at least 50% of the guided practice and engagement-based activities, with completion rates ranging from 67% to 100%. These students also demonstrated the most consistent positive movement in their State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores. The remaining 11 students completed less than half of the assigned activities, with several completing fewer than 25%. Students with completion rates below 50%, particularly those who were frequently absent or placed in In-School Suspension (ISS)/Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP), generally showed

little or no change from prior assessment attempts. These patterns of behavior suggest that assignment completion was a key indicator of students' exposure to guided practice routines and their opportunity to benefit from the redesigned instruction, and aligns with prior findings linking participation in scaffolded tasks to improved learning outcomes (Moore, 2016; McDonald, 1997). Even though not all students achieved passing scores, those with higher levels of instructional participation demonstrated greater positive movement in test performance during the intervention period.

Table 5

Student Individual Progress in Tutorials

Variable	Label	N	%
Behavior Issue/Distraction	Student #1	10	59
	Student #2	-	-
	Student #3	10	38
	Student #4	-	-
	Student #5	4	16
	Student #6	12	39
	Student #7	-	-
	Student #8	9	29
	Student #9	1	13
	Student #10	3	100
	Student #11	5	45
	Student #12	-	-
	Student #13	6	23
	Student #14	13	52
	Student #15	3	50
Class Work	Student #1	7	41
	Student #2	-	-
	Student #3	9	34
	Student #4	29	100
	Student #5	3	12
	Student #6	10	32
	Student #7	20	67
	Student #8	15	48
	Student #9	9	38
	Student #10	-	-

Student #11	-	-
Student #12	32	100
Student #13	20	77
Student #14	3	12
Student #15	3	50

Note: Table 5 reports individual student frequencies (N) and percentages (%) for recorded behavior issues/distractions and completed classwork during tutorial sessions. The behavior percentages reflect the proportion of observation sessions in which off-task behaviors were documented. The classwork percentages reflect the proportion of assigned instructional activities completed during the intervention period. A dash (–) indicates that no incidents or assignments were recorded for that student in the corresponding category.

Discussion

For students' attendance and access to instruction, they experienced a reduced exposure to the guided practice and engagement-based instruction occurring in the classroom. These students completed fewer than 50% of the assigned activities and participated in a limited number of instructional sessions. In contrast, the four students with consistent attendance completed between 67% and 100% of assigned activities and participated regularly across tutorial sessions. Their performance patterns appeared largely unchanged from previous attempts, and this is consistent with other research noting that access and participation are critical components of engaged learning (Dean & Wright, 2016). For the behavioral engagement, the data indicate a connection between lower rates of disruptive behavior and higher assignment completion and higher formal test performance. This data pattern is consistent with prior findings that link opportunities to respond and active participation with reductions in off-task behavior (Adamson & Lewis, 2017).

Summary of the Findings by Research Question

The three research questions addressed complementary aspects of students' performance and participation within the redesigned tutorial model specific to the English I State of Texas

Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Research Question 1 examined the relationship between guided practice and changes in State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) performance. The results indicated that students who participated more consistently in guided practice and completed a greater proportion of assigned activities demonstrated the strongest positive gain scores following the instructional shift. Research Question 2 focused on the influence of class size and attendance. Student attendance emerged as a factor, as students who attended more than 80% of tutorial sessions demonstrated higher mean gains than peers with inconsistent participation. This suggests that sustained exposure to instruction was closely associated with performance outcomes. Research Question 3 examined behavioral patterns and engagement. Students with fewer documented behavioral incidents completed more assignments and demonstrated higher mean score gains on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which showed that behavioral engagement and instructional participation were closely related to literacy outcomes within the tutorial setting.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain the interpretation and generalizability of this study. The sample size was small (N = 15) and drawn from a single tutorial class at a high school in Texas, which limits the external validity. The absence of a random assignment and inferential statistical testing restricts causal claims regarding the effectiveness of guided practice. Additionally, behavioral and participation measures were researcher-designed and not validated instruments, which may affect reliability. Lastly, student attendance variability reduced exposure to the intervention for several students. These limitations suggest that findings should be interpreted as exploratory.

Implications for Literacy Instruction in Tutorials

The findings from this study suggest several instructional implications for educators responsible for supporting students who repeatedly fail literacy assessments. Guided practice may provide a more supportive structure for teaching complex reading and writing skills than extended lecture or independent packet work. Implementing engagement-based activities, such as literacy games, collaborative discussions, and modeled strategy practice, may support both academic progress and reductions in disruptive behavior. Monitoring student participation and behavior over a longer period of time may help teachers identify patterns that influence literacy outcomes and adjust instruction accordingly. Attendance and access require planning. Inconsistent participation can limit the effectiveness of otherwise robust instructional practices. Tutorial structures may benefit from incorporating varied engagement strategies, especially for students who have experienced repeated assessment failure and may hold negative perceptions of remediation.

Implications for Future Research

The patterns observed in this study point to several areas for further investigation. Larger-scale studies could explore how different forms of guided practice influence specific literacy skills assessed on the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Also, this study will need a statistical analysis to strengthen the design and to support the conclusions derived. Therefore, additional work could also examine how behavioral supports, classroom structures, or attendance interventions interact with engaged learning approaches in remediation settings. Given the limited research on tutorial classes and retesting populations, this study adds to an emerging area of inquiry that warrants deeper exploration.

Conclusion

Overall, this study examined whether shifting from lecture-based tutorials to a guided practice and engaged learning model corresponded with changes in English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) outcomes among high school retesters. By examining their test performance with tutorial assignment completion, observed student behavior, student attendance, and past progress on the English I State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), this study provides insight into how instructional structure may shape literacy outcomes for students with persistent academic difficulties. Students who participated consistently in guided practice and engagement-based activities during tutorial demonstrated higher score trends on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) retest in December and completed a greater number of assigned instructional tasks through guided practice and support. These students also exhibited fewer behavioral disruptions and more consistent participation across the number of tutorial sessions. Looking at all of the data together, the findings suggest that instructional approaches focused on teacher modeling and scaffolded practice may create more supportive learning conditions than lecture-and-packet formats for struggling secondary readers.

The study also views important implementation challenges. Students with frequent absences or disciplinary placements had limited exposure to the tutorial intervention and demonstrated minimal progress. In the end, this indicated that access to instruction remains a critical factor shaping outcomes. The students' behavioral disengagement further reduced opportunities for some students to benefit from guided instruction. And although passing rates remained limited, the observed patterns suggest that tutorials that emphasize student interaction and provide structured practice may provide more meaningful learning opportunities for students

who have previously struggled with high-stakes literacy assessments. Overall, the findings point to the value of redesigning high school tutorials to prioritize guided practice and sustained student engagement in high-stakes testing contexts.

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Chapter 2

Teaching Reading and Writing with Reading Progress, Diffit, and Padlet

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are reshaping literacy teaching by personalizing practice, streamlining feedback, and expanding opportunities for collaborative reading and writing. This is a practitioner-oriented article that is a synthesis of existing literature and examples of classroom practice. The use of three applications, Microsoft Reading Progress (with Immersive Reader), Diffit, and Padlet, is described, used in oral reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, written response, and multimodal composition instruction. Microsoft Reading Progress can lower performance anxiety and reduce assessment time, while Diffit enables text adaptation and question generation for diverse readers. Although Padlet is not an AI tool, it complements AI-informed analytics by providing a shared space for visible thinking, peer response, and formative assessment. The discussion situates these practices within a humanizing pedagogy that amplifies student voice and encourages critical literacy, while also addressing equity concerns that include device access, data privacy, teacher preparation, and algorithmic bias. Practical guidance for teachers and school leaders focuses on job-embedded professional learning, clear ethical frameworks, and infrastructure planning. Conclusions based on classroom practices are that the purposeful use of AI can support literacy growth when paired with teacher judgment, equitable access, and strong pedagogical design.

Keywords: literacy instruction, Microsoft Reading Progress Immersive Reader, Diffit, Padlet, Artificial Intelligence

Literacy remains a foundational requirement for academic success, civic participation, and long-term economic opportunity. At the same time, teachers are navigating rapid advances in digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), that are reshaping how reading and writing are taught in K-12 classrooms. A 2023 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) guide describes AI as technologies that enable machines to perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as learning, pattern recognition, and decision making (ISTE, 2023). In this article, AI in education is used more narrowly to refer to instructional tools that analyze learner data or generate content to support literacy instruction. AI-driven tools now listen as students read aloud, generate leveled passages, and provide immediate feedback that might once have required extensive teacher time (Ray, 2021; Diliberti et al., 2024). When these tools are integrated thoughtfully, they can personalize literacy instruction, may reduce anxiety for some struggling readers, and can open space for deeper human connection in the classroom (Jose, 2025; Hidayat, 2024). This practitioner-oriented article provides a conceptual synthesis and classroom practices, but does not report original empirical findings. It can serve as a foundation for future research and provide practical information for teachers.

AI in education, in the context of this study, refers to digital tools that use algorithms to analyze learner data or generate content in response to user input to support instruction (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2022; Ng et al., 2021). Examples include tools that adjust text complexity, detect miscues in oral reading, or create practice items aligned with a particular standard. In literacy teaching, AI is less about robots or fully automated classrooms and more about software that helps teachers tailor practice, monitor progress, and design texts or tasks aligned with

students' needs. These tools can be paired with more familiar platforms, such as digital bulletin boards, to invite students into collaborative reading and writing communities.

Three applications form the focus of this article, and many teachers may already have them or can adopt them with minimal cost: Microsoft Reading Progress (with Immersive Reader), Diffit, and Padlet. Together, these tools illustrate how AI can support key literacy goals, including oral reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, written response, and multimodal composition, while also aligning with humanizing pedagogy that values students' identities and experiences. Although Padlet is not an AI tool, it complements AI-informed analytics by providing a shared space for visible thinking, peer response, and formative assessment. A holistic approach is used, meaning the discussion integrates skill development with relationships, identities, and classroom conditions that shape students' opportunities to learn.

Nevertheless, leveraging AI for literacy involves critical considerations such as data privacy, device access, and teacher preparation for AI-related digital competencies (Ng et al., 2021; Diliberti et al., 2024). A growing body of research indicates that successful technology adoption requires robust professional development, well-articulated ethical guidelines, and collaboration among educators, administrators, and developers (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2022; Hidayat, 2024; Ng et al., 2021). These conditions are especially important when AI tools are used to make decisions about reading levels, progress, and instructional next steps for historically marginalized students because unequal access and biased interpretation of performance can reinforce existing opportunity gaps (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018).

The Power of AI in Literacy Instruction

Personalized Learning and Reduced Anxiety

One major benefit of AI-enabled literacy tools is the ability to tailor tasks to each student's needs (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2022; Diliberti et al., 2024). Microsoft Reading Progress

(with Immersive Reader) exemplifies this capacity by letting students record themselves reading aloud while receiving immediate feedback on skipped words, mispronunciations, and fluency metrics. Many learners find reading to a camera less anxiety-inducing than performing in front of peers or a teacher marking errors in real time, because Ray (2021), a practitioner-facing report, should be interpreted as classroom-based evidence rather than a peer-reviewed causal finding. Jose (2025) described a fifth-grade student in a Texas elementary school who initially hesitated to participate in oral reading but gained confidence after using Reading Progress for several weeks; the self-paced recordings allowed her to practice repeatedly until she felt ready to share aloud. Hidayat (2024) also reported that students using personalized AI reading platforms demonstrated higher motivation and improved comprehension compared with peers in traditional reading groups, suggesting that well-designed AI supports can strengthen reading outcomes.

Time Savings and Data-Driven Insights

Traditional one-on-one reading assessments, such as listening to individual students read aloud and marking miscues while tracking fluency and comprehension, can be time-intensive. By automating error detection, AI tools can free teachers to focus on targeted instruction. Ray (2021) reported that a first-grade teacher concluded Reading Progress significantly reduced weekly assessment time, allowing her to have more opportunities for small-group coaching and conferring with individual readers. Such time-saving benefits are echoed in research emphasizing that automation can redirect teacher effort toward higher-order instructional planning and feedback because routine tasks are reduced (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2022) surmised automating routine administrative tasks support a more student-centered focus, while Diliberti et al. (2024) observed that teachers who integrate AI-based platforms spend more time on planning, data analysis, and formative feedback than on clerical duties.

Equity and Access Considerations

Despite the promise of AI, equitable implementation remains a pressing concern (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Some students lack consistent internet access or reliable devices, which can deepen existing disparities if schools adopt new tools without careful planning. In addition, teachers need opportunities to develop sufficient AI digital competencies to interpret data responsibly, question algorithmic output, and integrate platforms in ways that fit their students' strengths and needs (Ng et al., 2021).

To ensure AI use narrows rather than widens opportunity gaps, districts may benefit from having more coherent implementation models. These models typically combine school-or district-wide device initiatives, robust professional development focused on pedagogy and ethics, and ongoing technical and instructional support (Diliberti et al., 2024). Schools may also need creative funding strategies and community partnerships to provide devices, connectivity, and shared spaces where students can engage with AI-supported literacy tools. Without such systemic supports, even well-designed AI tools are most likely to benefit students who already have the greatest access to resources (Diliberti et al., 2024; ISTE, 2023).

Diffit: Adaptive Reading Materials and Data Analytics

Diffit (2024) serves as a customizable platform for adaptive reading materials. Educators can upload their own texts or draw from online sources, then adjust complexity and generate connected activities to address the needs of both emergent and advanced readers. The features described below are drawn from the tool's published description rather than peer-reviewed evaluation studies. The key literacy features include:

- Personalized content: Teachers can create multiple versions of the same passage at

different reading levels by altering vocabulary load, sentence structure, and text length while keeping the core ideas constant. This allows all students to work with the same topic or standard, even if they are reading at different levels.

- Interactive comprehension and writing tasks: Diffit automatically generates text-dependent questions, including multiple-choice and short-answer items, as well as prompts for short constructed responses, summaries, and vocabulary activities. These tasks require students to reread, identify key details, and explain their thinking in writing rather than simply clicking through.
- Analytics tools: Teachers receive organized sets of questions and responses that can be used for quick checks of understanding, small-group discussion, or written exit tickets. When combined with classroom observation, these data can guide small-group instruction or targeted interventions.

When teachers use leveled passages, text-dependent questions, and short written responses in this way, they enact the kind of personalized reading instruction Hidayat (2024) describes, where AI-supported platforms maintain engagement and improve comprehension across a range of abilities. Emerging work on AI-generated text simplification also suggests that large language models can adjust readability while preserving key ideas (Agrawal & Carpuat, 2024), which further supports the potential of tools like Diffit to scaffold access to complex texts for diverse learners.

Padlet: Collaborative Literacy Engagement

Padlet is not an AI tool, but it is included because it provides a collaborative literacy space where students use, discuss, and reflect on work generated or supported by AI-enabled technologies, making learning visible and supporting peer response and formative assessment.

Teachers can embed digital texts, prompts, images, and videos on a Padlet board and invite students to respond (Waltemeyer et al., 2021). In literacy lessons, this supports several specific practices.

It provides opportunities for enhanced student engagement and writing practice. Students post short written responses, questions, and connections to a common text. They can revise their posts, add details, and comment on peers' ideas. Studies with elementary and secondary learners have found that Padlet-based tasks can increase writing quantity and quality, as well as students' confidence in their writing skills (Rashid et al., 2019; Ramadhani et al., 2023). Padlet offers streamlined communication and text access. A single virtual board can hold the anchor text, vocabulary supports, discussion questions, and student responses in one place. This makes it easier for teachers to organize shared reading, small-group literature circles, and whole-class discussions while keeping prior posts visible for review.

Also, important is Padlet's formative assessment of reading and writing. As students post and comment, teachers can quickly scan for comprehension, identify misconceptions about the text, and note which students are using evidence or elaborating their ideas in writing. These insights can guide follow-up mini-lessons on inference, summarizing, or supporting claims with textual evidence. Research on Padlet as a collaborative writing tool shows that such environments can improve writing accuracy and support peer feedback when teachers provide clear expectations and criteria (Rashid et al., 2019; Ramadhani et al., 2023). More broadly, Waltemeyer et al. (2021) describe Padlet as a versatile Web 2.0 platform that supports interactive, multimodal participation across a range of classroom activities.

When paired with AI-based analytics from tools such as Reading Progress or Diffit, Padlet can extend collaboration beyond individual reading practice. For example, a teacher

might use fluency and comprehension data to identify a small set of focus questions, then ask students to respond on Padlet and reply to at least two classmates. In this way, AI-generated analytics can help teachers identify which students may need additional support and which concepts may require reteaching (Ray, 2021; Diffit, 2024).

Amplifying Student Voice

Bartolomé (1994), Carter Andrews et al. (2018), and Reyes (2006) emphasize literacy as a conduit for student expression and social justice work. Humanizing pedagogy invites students to read and write in ways that name their experiences, question inequities, and communicate with real audiences.

AI-based feedback tools, such as Reading Progress for oral reading or writing assistants that flag unclear sentences, can help students refine technical skills in reading fluency, accuracy, and written clarity. On their own, these tools primarily provide automated feedback and suggestions, and research on automated writing evaluation emphasizes that instructional benefits depend on how the feedback is taught and supported with teacher guidance (Liu, 2024; Wilson et al., 2024). AI can support planning. Its student-centered component is evident when teachers use AI outputs as a starting point for authentic, student-driven literacy work.

For example, after using Reading Progress data to identify words or phrases that disrupt fluency, a group of students might rehearse a poem and record a spoken-word performance for a class podcast or draft a blog post or digital letter, use AI-supported writing feedback to improve organization and conventions, and revise again based on teacher and peer feedback before publishing for families or community members. AI can support planning, rehearsal, and revision, while the purpose of the work is to share students' perspectives with an audience that matters to them.

These extensions connect AI-supported skill development to the critical literacy goals described by Carter Andrews et al. (2018) and Reyes (2006): students learn to use reading and writing to tell their stories, challenge deficit narratives, and participate in public dialogue. The humanizing pedagogy described by Bartolomé (1994) is relevant here and can balance some of the effects of digital learning. Teachers mediate the process by interpreting AI-generated feedback with students, helping them decide which suggestions to accept, and ensuring that digital tools serve, rather than replace, relational feedback and classroom discussion (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology [OET], 2023).

Differentiation and Critical Consciousness

Educators need "political clarity" (Bartolomé, 1994) to recognize and challenge inequitable practices. AI tools can help teachers differentiate literacy tasks for multilingual learners and students with disabilities by adjusting text complexity, adding language supports, or offering alternative ways for students to demonstrate comprehension (Hidayat, 2024; Ng et al., 2021).

However, teachers must be alert to potential algorithmic bias and limitations in the data on which these tools are built. For example, speech-recognition models used in oral reading tools are often trained on standardized varieties of English and may misclassify regional dialects or emergent bilingual pronunciations as errors, which can make some students appear less proficient than they are (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018). Readability algorithms may also treat culturally specific vocabulary as "too difficult," even when those words are familiar to students in their communities. Teachers, therefore, need to treat AI-generated scores as one data source among many, compare them with classroom observations and student self-assessments, and talk with students about times when the technology seems to misrepresent their abilities.

Moreover, reading analytics can become an entry point for critical literacy (Freire, 1970;

Janks, 2010). Teachers can share selected charts or error reports with students, invite them to notice patterns, and then ask who might be disadvantaged by the way the tool defines "errors" or "complex" vocabulary. In content-area classes such as science and social studies, teachers might pair AI-supported reading of digital articles with lessons in which students examine whose perspectives are centered, whose are missing, and how different groups are represented. Short digital passages or search results can be analyzed for bias, then compared with sources located through other means. In this way, AI-based skill building is blended with critical literacy discussions of real-world contexts, supporting both differentiated instruction and the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010; Bartolomé, 1994).

Implementation Strategies for Teachers

These implementation strategies are evidence-informed and align with broader research and guidance on technology integration and responsible AI use in schools, which emphasize gradual adoption, clear routines, accessibility planning, and reflective use of learner data (Diliberti et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, OET, 2023; ISTE, 2023). One recommendation is to "start small". By incorporating a single AI tool (for example, Reading Progress) into weekly reading sessions, students can become familiar with the routines and expectations. Similarly, creating collaborative spaces is beneficial for students. The use of platforms such as Padlet can extend reading practice into dialogue by having students post short reflections, questions, or reading goals connected to shared texts. The guidance also emphasizes connecting learning to real-life applications. This includes using AI tools to generate or adapt texts, prioritize topics tied to current events, local issues, or student interests, so that literacy work feels relevant and personal.

The research also provides guidelines for planning for accessibility, integrating reflection into instructional practices, and using professional learning communities (Diliberti et al., 2024;

Ng et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, OET, 2023; ISTE, 2023). For accessibility, educators should begin by assessing device availability, internet reliability, and needed accommodations. AI tools can still support planning even when students do not have one-to-one devices. For example, a teacher might use Diffit or another AI platform to create leveled passages and comprehension questions, then print those materials so students can read and respond on paper while a smaller group uses the devices. In this way, digital resources are converted into practical print formats, and no student is excluded because of limited technology access. Structured reflection involves planning class time for students to review their reading analytics or written feedback, set personal goals, and identify strategies that helped them improve. This reinforces ownership of learning rather than treating AI output as a private teacher tool. Lastly, professional learning communities have benefits for teachers and students. Grade-level or content-area teams can share AI use cases, discuss data insights, and troubleshoot challenges. Collaborative planning helps teachers align AI use with curriculum goals, ethical guidelines, and school priorities rather than experimenting in isolation.

Considerations for School Leaders and Policymakers

Teacher Training and Ongoing Support

Schools need to allocate dedicated time and resources for professional learning if AI tools are going to move beyond novelty use. One-time workshops are rarely sufficient (Diliberti et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2021). More effective approaches include job-embedded sessions that model real classroom literacy scenarios, offer hands-on practice with reading data and AI interfaces, and build teachers' capacity to interpret analytics in relation to their own observations and curriculum goals. When principals schedule collaborative planning time for teachers to analyze AI-generated reading reports together, compare them with student work, and design follow-up instruction, AI is more likely to support humanizing, data-informed

literacy practices rather than stand alone as an add-on.

Ethical and Privacy Frameworks

Collecting audio and video recordings for reading assessments requires robust data protection. District leaders, legal counsel, and technology specialists should work together to draft clear guidelines that address consent, data storage, data sharing, and retention periods, as well as compliance with privacy laws such as FERPA and COPPA (U.S. Department of Education, OET, 2023). Policies should clarify who can access recordings, how long they are stored, and how families can review or request deletion of their child's data. Chaudhry and Kazim (2022) also note the risk of algorithmic bias in AI systems, underscoring the need for oversight committees or review processes that routinely examine how AI-generated scores are used in placement, progress monitoring, and intervention decisions.

Sustaining an Equitable Vision

Schools in under-resourced communities may require grants, state or federal funding, or local partnerships to secure devices, internet hotspots, and ongoing training. Districts can pilot AI platforms in a limited number of classrooms, gather feedback from teachers, students, and families to refine their approach before scaling more widely. This allows leaders to identify unintended inequities, such as schools with less reliable connectivity or students who are consistently mis-scored by speech-recognition tools. Teachers can then share successful strategies and highlight areas where additional support is needed. When leaders pair AI adoption with sustained investment in infrastructure, professional learning, and community engagement, they are better positioned to ensure that AI-supported literacy initiatives expand, rather than restrict, students' opportunities to learn, as district safeguards and data governance policies continue to evolve alongside new AI capabilities (U.S. Department of Education, OET, 2023; ISTE, 2023).

Future Research

Although AI-driven literacy instruction holds promise, the empirical evidence base is still emerging, particularly for long-term and humanizing uses. Most existing empirical studies are small-scale pilots or short-term implementations rather than multi-year investigations (Diliberti et al., 2024; Hidayat, 2024). This matters because short-term pilots may overestimate benefits or miss longer-term effects related to sustainability, teacher workload, and equity. Longer-term studies are also needed to examine whether implementation routines and safeguards remain effective after initial novelty fades (Diliberti et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2021). Conceptual reviews of AI literacy, such as Ng et al. (2021), also underline that the research base remains limited. Building on themes in the literature (Ng et al., 2021; Hidayat, 2024), future research should address several gaps in the literature.

Longitudinal research is especially needed**.** Future studies should track cohorts of students over multiple years to examine how sustained use of AI-supported literacy tools influences reading fluency, comprehension, writing development, and motivation, with explicit attention to subgroup patterns for emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities (Diliberti et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2021). Comparative and mixed-method designs would strengthen the evidence base. Future studies should compare AI-supported literacy interventions with more traditional approaches, using both quantitative outcomes and qualitative classroom data. Such studies could investigate how teacher beliefs, AI competencies, and local context shape the effectiveness of AI-enhanced reading and writing instruction (Ng et al., 2021).

Finally, research should examine humanizing pedagogy in practice in classroom settings. Document classroom cases where AI tools are deliberately integrated with culturally relevant texts, critical literacy discussions, and community-engaged projects. Research in this area could

explore how students experience identity affirmation, agency, and voice when AI is used to support, rather than replace, relational aspects of literacy teaching (Bartolomé, 1994; Reyes, 2006).

These research agendas can clarify how digital tools shape students' skills, identities, and motivation, and can identify practices that harness the strengths of AI without losing the personal, relational aspects of good teaching.

Conclusion

In an era when digital technologies touch nearly every facet of life, AI-enhanced platforms such as Microsoft Reading Progress, Diffit, and Padlet can change how students learn to read and write. These tools can support oral reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary development, and written response by personalizing practice and making reading and writing more visible. Yet technology by itself cannot humanize education (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970). Meaningful pedagogy still depends on teachers' professional judgment, sustained professional development, and a clear commitment to equity.

When AI tools are used with teacher guidance to support feedback and revision while centering students' lived experiences and language resources, they can help connect classroom literacy tasks to students' identities and communities (Bartolomé, 1994; Janks, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, OET, 2023). The examples and strategies in this article illustrate how adaptive technology, grounded in humanizing pedagogy, can help teachers create collaborative literacy spaces, differentiate for diverse learners, and invite critical discussions about texts and data. If educators and school leaders attend to access, privacy, and bias while centering relationships and student agency, AI-supported literacy instruction can foster genuine reading and writing growth and prepare students for a lifetime of empowered learning.

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Chapter 3

From Phonetic to Proficient: Advancing Refugee Parents' Literacy to Foster Educational Involvement

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Abstract

This study investigates how Emergent Bilinguals shape refugee parents' engagement in their children's education. In 2024, 48 adult refugee parents participated in 13-week English as a Second Language (ESL) classes provided by Catholic Charities in a Midwestern state. Using classroom instruction, home visits, interviews, and language assessments, the study examined participants' English proficiency, literacy development, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Limited English skills were found to create significant barriers to school involvement; however, when instruction was individualized, culturally responsive, and supported by multimodal tools and technology, parents demonstrated measurable progress and increased confidence. The findings underscore that personalized, scaffolded literacy instruction enhances both language development and learner self-efficacy. Multimodal strategies effectively improve oral and written proficiency while connecting learning to real-life tasks and strengthening parental involvement in their children's education. Overall, integrating Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) practices with family-focused goals fosters learner autonomy, linguistic competence, and active participation in both school and home contexts. These results

suggest that community-based ESL programs can serve as a critical bridge, empowering refugee parents to become active partners in their children's academic success.

Keywords: refugee parents, ESL instruction, literacy development, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), culturally responsive teaching

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting students' academic achievement, motivation, and school engagement (Auerbach, 2007). A substantial body of research demonstrates that when parents actively participate in their children's education through communication with teachers, support for learning at home, and engagement with school activities, students experience stronger academic outcomes and improved attendance (Fan & Chen, 2001). However, refugee parents often encounter significant structural and linguistic barriers that limit their ability to engage fully in their children's schooling (McBrien, 2005). Among the most pressing challenges is limited English proficiency, which constrains communication with school personnel and reduces parents' capacity to assist with homework, interpret school policies, and advocate effectively for their children (Wiese, 2019).

In addition, many refugee parents arrive in the United States with interrupted or limited formal educational experiences due to displacement, conflict, or prolonged stays in refugee camps (WIDA, 2024). The immediate demands of resettlement, including securing employment, housing, and access to essential services, often take precedence over adult education opportunities, even though parental education and language acquisition are closely associated with long-term family stability and children's academic success (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). As their children enter and adapt to the U.S. school system, refugee parents frequently express strong aspirations for educational success but may lack familiarity with school norms, expectations, and communication practices (Warriner, 2007). Consequently, while the desire for

involvement is often present, limited linguistic resources and cultural capital can constrain meaningful participation in their children's education.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how adult refugee parents develop English proficiency within a community-based ESL program and investigates their perceptions of language learning alongside the instructional practices that most effectively build their linguistic confidence and competence. By focusing on the intersection of language acquisition and parental engagement, the study identifies culturally responsive strategies that strengthen parents' capacity to participate more fully in their children's education. Drawing on interviews, classroom observations, and writing samples collected over 13 weeks, the study explores the challenges parents encounter, the supports that enhance their learning, and the approaches that foster their roles as active educational partners. Situated within established family literacy frameworks, the study contributes new insights into how adult ESL instruction can empower refugee families and promote meaningful home–school connections. The research questions were:

1) How do refugee parents perceive their own English language proficiency, and how does this affect their ability to support their children's academic development?
2) How effective are instructional strategies in improving adult refugee learners' Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)?
3) Which instructional strategies are most effective in helping refugee parents at the transitional writing stage build linguistic confidence and writing competence?
4) How do improvements in English proficiency and writing ability influence refugee parents' involvement in their children's academic experiences?

Literature Review

This study is grounded in a socio-cognitive theory of second language acquisition, drawing primarily on Stephen Krashen's second language acquisition theory (2003) and Jim Cummins's (2008) language proficiency and academic language development theory. Krashen proposed that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input language that is slightly above their current proficiency level but made understandable through context, visuals, and prior knowledge. Central to Krashen's model is the affective filter hypothesis, which posits that emotional variables such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence can either facilitate or impede language acquisition. Extending this perspective, Cummins distinguished between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the conversational language used in everyday social interactions and typically develops within one to two years. In contrast, CALP involves the academic language required for schooling, including abstract reasoning, academic vocabulary, and discipline-specific discourse, and often requires five to seven years to develop.

These theories underscore the importance of supportive learning environments that address both linguistic input and affective factors, particularly for linguistically diverse learners. Foundational research has repeatedly demonstrated a strong relationship between parental involvement and positive student outcomes, including academic achievement, school readiness, and social-emotional development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001). Despite these benefits, immigrant and refugee families often experience systemic barriers that limit their engagement. These challenges include not only language barriers but also unfamiliarity with

school systems, limited access to resources, trauma resulting from displacement, and culturally different perceptions of parental roles in education (McBrien, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

More recently, researchers have emphasized the impact of trauma on refugee parents' capacity to engage in schooling, noting that prior experiences of conflict, forced migration, or loss can affect attention, motivation, and confidence in educational settings (Tomren & Opaas, 2024; Gherardi, Flinn, & Jaure, 2020). In response, trauma-informed ESL programs that acknowledge and adapt to these experiences have been shown to improve engagement, reduce anxiety, and foster resilience while supporting language development (Park & Katsiaficas, 2019).

Building on this broader understanding of barriers, Shiffman (2019) reported that many communities are experiencing rapid demographic shifts, which in turn reshape communication patterns between schools and families. Additionally, although parents deeply valued home–school communication, language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to critical information often hindered meaningful exchanges. She argued that ESL teachers, bilingual staff, and family liaisons should serve as facilitators who help bridge these linguistic and cultural gaps.

Language proficiency emerges as a critical factor in mediating parental engagement. Studies show that when parents develop even basic English literacy, their confidence in communicating with schools and supporting their children increases significantly (Auerbach, 2007). Correspondingly, adult ESL programs that integrate practical, family-focused content have been shown to enhance both language acquisition and parenting efficacy (Warriner, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Drawing on Auerbach's (2007) family literacy model, such programs position parents' linguistic growth as inseparable from their ability to participate in school-based activities, reinforcing the idea that family literacy is co-constructed across home, community, and school settings. Likewise, the "funds of knowledge" framework (Moll et al., 1992) shows

how refugee parents' cultural and experiential assets can be leveraged to support children's learning when ESL instruction validates and builds on those strengths.

Expanding this line of inquiry, Wiese (2019) asserted that parents' language skills directly influence children's educational outcomes, as reflected in the relationship between students' academic performance and factors such as parental English proficiency and home educational support. Drawing on data from immigrant communities, the study identified patterns in achievement gaps and demonstrated how family language resources can either widen or help close them. These findings reinforce the importance of instructional practices that respect families' languages and cultures.

In terms of instructional approaches, research indicates that guided writing, the use of sentence frames, and the incorporation of learners' cultural backgrounds can promote meaningful progress for adult learners in transitional writing stages (Perry, 2008; Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). More recent scholarship extends this connection by showing that adult ESL literacy gains have measurable impacts on children's K–12 achievement—including improved homework support, increased school attendance, and stronger parent–teacher communication (Cun, 2022; Boettcher, 2022). Collectively, these studies suggest that adult literacy development is a key mechanism shaping students' long-term academic trajectories.

Despite growing interest in the intersection of refugee resettlement and adult education, limited research focuses specifically on refugee parents in ESL programs and how literacy development translates into educational involvement. Addressing this gap, the present study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how early-stage English writing development among refugee parents both aligns with and expands current family literacy and parent-engagement frameworks. The intended audience for this work includes teachers of adult refugees

seeking practical literacy strategies, literacy researchers examining adult-to-child literacy transfer, and family-engagement coordinators designing culturally responsive programming.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of adult refugee parents' English literacy development and learning experiences.

Quantitative Elements

The quantitative component consisted of descriptive statistical data derived from participant demographics and formal end-of-study assessments. Participant background data included age, gender, country of origin, length of residence in the United States, household size, educational background, English proficiency levels, and major English-related challenges. These data were summarized using percentages to describe the sample characteristics. In addition, formal end-of-study assessments measured participants' pronunciation, sentence structure, reading, writing, and study skills.

Qualitative Elements

The qualitative component included observational data and reflective responses collected from research assistants (RAs). First, RAs maintained daily observational journals throughout the study, documenting classroom interactions, instructional practices, and student behaviors. These journals captured non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, smiling, nodding, body language), levels of engagement, and observable English proficiency across listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the ability to follow instructions. Behavioral patterns such as active participation, quiet engagement, peer support, and classroom disruptions were also recorded.

Second, RAs completed a post-study exit survey at the conclusion of the project. The survey included open-ended questions on the most significant instructional challenges, resources, and supports that were most helpful, factors that facilitated or hindered student progress, culturally responsive teaching practices, effective instructional strategies, skills and insights gained through participation, and practical recommendations for supporting refugee parents' English learning.

Participants

Forty-eight refugee parents enrolled voluntarily in ESL classes offered by Catholic Charities; all provided informed consent under Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The informed consent forms outlined the purpose of the study, expectations for participation, the voluntary nature of involvement, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. For parents who were not yet comfortable with English, translators provided by the school district assisted in the consent process.

The participants in this study represented a diverse range of ages, with nearly half (46%) in their 30s, while 17% were in their 20s and another 17% in their 40s. Approximately 13% were in their 50s, and 8% were unsure of their exact age. Most participants were female (62.5%), with males comprising 37.5% of the sample. Detailed information on participants' countries of origin, initial arrival in the United States, household size, highest level of education, English proficiency, and major English-related challenges is presented in the interview analysis section of this study.

Two undergraduate research assistants (RAs) from a university Education Preparation Program were recruited to support data collection and classroom instruction. One RA was assigned to beginner-level sessions held on Mondays and Wednesdays. The other RA worked

with a Friday focus group consisting primarily of Cuban students who worked full-time Monday–Thursday and could only attend class on Fridays. Additionally, one of these RAs conducted home visits accompanied by a translator and caseworker, allowing for more personal interaction, insights into parents' experiences, and assessment of their English proficiency.

Setting

The study took place in the ESL classes at Catholic Charities in a Midwestern state. The principal researcher initially contacted the agency to explore possible collaboration. After receiving approval, the research team, including the principal investigator and two RAs, met with the center's director and ESL coordinator to discuss study logistics. Before beginning data collection, the principal researcher and both RAs completed a full day of training at Catholic Charities. This training familiarized the team with the refugee resettlement process, the structure of the ESL program, and the expectations for partnering with the center.

Procedures

After the IRB application was approved, the principal researcher convened planning meetings with the RAs to review procedures, develop activity plans, and create a detailed research timeline. The ESL coordinator recruited participants by contacting students individually to determine their interest in joining the study. Instruction and data collection occurred over 13 weeks. The RAs used center-provided materials to guide instruction and assessment (Intercambio Uniting Communities 1L, 2019 & Intercambio Uniting Communities 3R, 2019). They implemented a multi-tiered instructional approach, combining:

- Tier 1: Whole-class lectures introducing key concepts
- Tier 2: Small-group activities supporting collaboration and engagement
- Tier 3: Individualized instruction tailored to each participant's English proficiency

Throughout the study, RAs modeled fluent reading, facilitated vocabulary-building activities (including card games and hands-on tasks), and emphasized pronunciation and sentence structure. Although the original plan included the use of traditional ESL methods, grammar books, and refugee-themed storybooks, early assessments revealed that students struggled to comprehend the storybook texts. As a result, the team adjusted instruction to focus more heavily on direct teaching of pronunciation and simple sentence structures.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study. All participant data were anonymized using coded identifiers, which were used consistently in transcripts and documents. No names were linked to data beyond participants' roles as students. All records were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

Data Collection

Instruments

Data were collected using multiple instruments aligned with the research questions:

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The interview questions were designed to gather demographic information, prior educational experiences, self-perceived English proficiency, and parental engagement practices.

English Language Assessments

Informal assessments measuring listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency during classroom instruction and interviews.

Formal End of the Study Assessments

Formal assessments measuring pronunciation, sentence structure, reading, writing, and study skills were also used.

Writing Samples and Rubric

Writing samples were evaluated using WriteReader's (2019) five-stage writing development framework (Emergent, Phonetic/Transitional, Conventional, Expanding, Proficient/Academic).

Classroom Observation Protocol and Research Assistants' Journals

Structured field notes documenting instructional strategies, student engagement, and responses to scaffolding techniques were also used in the data collection and analysis.

Exit Survey

A brief survey was used to document perceived areas of improvement and instructional effectiveness.

Data were collected through multiple sources aligned with research questions. Semi-structured interviews gathered participants' self-perceptions of English proficiency, prior educational experiences, and family literacy practices. Some interviews were conducted at the Center while others took place in participants' homes based on their preferences. The Center actively supported the process by providing translators. Depending on language preference, some participants responded in English, whereas others answered in their native language; translators subsequently assisted in translating responses into English.

Classroom observations focused on documenting instructional strategies, levels of learner engagement, and students' responses to various scaffolding techniques implemented during instruction. In addition, research assistants maintained daily journals in which they recorded detailed notes on student behaviors, patterns of classroom participation, and peer interactions observed during whole-class and small-group discussions.

Writing samples were collected throughout the 13-week program and analyzed using WriteReader's (2019) five-stage writing development framework, with rubric descriptors that included accuracy of letter formation, sentence construction, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary usage. Assessments used were based on the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Examples included the following:

- Listening: Following verbal instructions during the interview process and classroom activities.
- Speaking: Using target vocabulary in brief conversational prompts as well as during interview responses and classroom discussions.
- Reading: Recognizing high-frequency words and reading sentences aloud.
- Writing: Completing sentence starters and short passages on familiar topics, in addition to maintaining a reading journal completed during each class period.

Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on participants' development in the four core language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Assessment data, writing samples, and field observations were carefully reviewed to identify patterns of proficiency, areas of difficulty, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Writing samples were analyzed using the five stages of writing development outlined by WriteReader (2019): Emergent, Phonetic/Transitional, Conventional, Expanding, and Proficient/Academic. This framework enabled researchers to track learners' progress from basic letter recognition to more conventional sentence construction and narrative fluency.

Qualitative Data Analysis Approach

A descriptive qualitative analysis informed by thematic analysis was used to analyze the reading-related qualitative data. The analysis followed a systematic, multi-step procedure. For the initial coding procedure, the RAs' observational journal entries related to reading were reviewed and coded using open coding. Codes captured recurring behaviors and instructional conditions, such as *listening before reading*, *finger-pointing*, *difficulty with word endings*, *verbatim modeling*, *slow pacing*, and *inability to read independently*. Categories were generated when related codes were grouped into broader analytic categories, including *reading dependency on oral input*, *decoding challenges*, *instructional scaffolding*, and *emerging reading behaviors*. These categories allowed the researchers to compare reading behaviors across learners and instructional contexts.

The categories were further refined into overarching themes that described patterns of reading development, such as reliance on auditory modeling before reading, difficulty processing morphological markers, and the need for slowed instructional pacing. These themes were compared against assessment results to ensure consistency between observed behaviors and measured performance.

Cross-checking and validation involved discussing analytic interpretations during RA–principal researcher conferences to confirm coding accuracy and reduce individual bias. Quantitative assessment results were used to triangulate qualitative findings, strengthening the credibility of the analysis.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Quantitative data served as the primary strand, establishing participants' literacy levels and learning outcomes through demographic summaries and assessment results. Qualitative data

were embedded to contextualize and explain these findings by illuminating how learners engaged with instruction, responded to teaching strategies, and navigated cultural and linguistic challenges in the classroom. The qualitative observations and reflections were used to interpret and deepen understanding of the quantitative results rather than to test them sequentially.

Interview Analysis

Through in-person interviews, the research assistants collected background information on the students' resettlement experiences and evaluated their English proficiency based on their responses. Figure 1 presents the interview questions used in the study.

Figure 1

Refugee Parent Interview Questions

Refugee Parent Interview Questions

Secret code for confidentiality, instead of name: _____

Age: _____ Today's Date: _____

Male/Female: _____ Ethnic Heritage: _____

1. Which country are you originally from?
2. When did you first arrive in the US?
3. Which city did you arrive in first? (city & state)
4. How long have you lived in Amarillo?
5. How many family members are living with you? List them.
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed in your country?
    a. Never went to school
    b. Graduated from (elementary, middle, or high school)
    c. Some college
    d. Graduated from college
7. How long have you been in the ESL class? If not, do you want to enroll in the ESL class in the future?
8. How do you rate your own English proficiency level? (very beginning, intermediate, advanced, highly advanced)
9. What is your biggest issue with your English? (Speaking, following instructions, making friends, talking to your kids' teachers, asking for help with calling someone, reading, writing, etc.) Choose the top three from these choices.
10. How do you help your children learn even though you have trouble with the language?

The data was tabulated using the categories from the research question and the percentages generated.

Listening and Speaking Proficiency

Cummins (2008) identified four developmental stages of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS): *Pre-Production* (silent or receptive stage), *Early Production*, *Speech Emergence*, and *Intermediate Fluency*. In *the Pre-Production stage*, learners exhibit minimal verbal output while actively developing listening comprehension. Communication is largely nonverbal and supported through gestures, facial expressions, pointing, and other visual cues. Although learners may understand basic classroom routines and common social expressions, they are typically not yet comfortable producing spoken language. During the *Early Production* stage (Cummins, 2008), learners begin to use short utterances and memorized phrases to communicate basic needs and engage in simple social interactions. While grammatical errors are common at this stage, learners are generally able to convey meaning. In the *Speech Emergence* stage, learners participate in simple conversations and express ideas using short sentences. Listening comprehension improves substantially, enabling learners to engage more confidently in everyday classroom and peer interactions. At the Intermediate Fluency stage, learners demonstrate near-native conversational fluency in social contexts. The participants' results were recorded using the percentages for the different competencies.

Writing Proficiency

Through the triangulation of interviews, assessments, writing samples, and classroom observations, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of participants' writing development. This multi-source approach also allowed researchers to examine how

instructional strategies supported learners' progression from emergent and phonetic writing toward more conventional and contextually appropriate literacy skills.

A more detailed analysis was conducted to identify specific difficulties and inform instructional planning. Writing proficiency is a critical component of English language development as it directly affects learners' ability to complete forms, communicate with schools, support their children's education, and participate meaningfully in community and educational settings. By examining spelling, sentence construction, punctuation, and overall coherence, the study sought to identify both foundational gaps and emerging strengths in learners' written English. This additional analysis was conducted using the WriteReader (2019) rubric.

Writing samples were analyzed using the five stages of writing development outlined by WriteReader (2019): *Emergent, Phonetic/Transitional, Conventional, Expanding,* and *Proficient/Academic Writing*. *The Emergent Writing Stage* is characterized by copied text, random letters, or isolated symbols, with minimal understanding of phoneme–grapheme correspondence. This stage is common among adults with little or no formal schooling, particularly those from oral language traditions. The Phonetic/Transitional Writing Stage involves attempts to spell words based on sound. Although spellings are often non-standard (e.g., *sed* for *said*), they are phonetically plausible and reflect developing phonics knowledge.

In the *Conventional Writing Stage*, learners demonstrate basic sentence fluency, recognizable structures, and mostly correct spelling of high-frequency words. Errors persist, particularly with verb tense and word order, but learners are generally able to express simple ideas in writing. The *Expanding Writing Stage* is marked by longer, more organized texts such as narratives or descriptions. Learners show increasing awareness of audience and purpose, though

grammatical accuracy and cohesion continue to develop. *The Proficient/Academic Writing Stage* reflects advanced control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization, typically seen among learners preparing for higher education or professional contexts.

RA Observational Journal

Throughout the study, research assistants (RAs) maintained daily reflective journals based on systematic classroom observations. These journals documented instructional interactions, participation patterns, and non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, head nodding, and body language. Observations also included indicators of English language proficiency—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the ability to follow instructions—as well as behavioral engagement, including active participation, quiet engagement, peer assistance, classroom disruptions, and other notable behaviors.

Research Assistants' Exit Survey

At the conclusion of the study, RAs completed an exit survey consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed reflections on their instructional experiences. The survey prompted RAs to describe the most significant challenges encountered, resources and supports that were most helpful, factors that facilitated or hindered student progress, and ways in which the experience shaped their understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds. RAs also reflected on specific skills and insights gained, identified effective teaching strategies, offered suggestions for program improvement, discussed challenges learners face in developing English proficiency, and provided practical recommendations for supporting refugee parents' language learning.

Results

The study explored the experiences of adult refugee parents, focusing on how their English proficiency and literacy skills influenced both personal growth and engagement in their

children's education. This claim is supported by multiple data sources, including participant demographic interviews (covering background, schooling, and resettlement), self-reported English proficiency levels, RA observational journals documenting classroom engagement and instructional responses, and RA exit surveys capturing perceived impacts on parents and families. Evidence of engagement in children's education was specifically observed in interview responses and RA reflections, such as parents' communication with teachers and involvement in school-related literacy tasks.

All percentages reported in the Results section represent baseline descriptive data rather than inferential statistical findings. These figures are based on demographic surveys and end-of-study assessments summarized descriptively.

Participants came from diverse national backgrounds, with the largest groups originating from Cuba and Afghanistan, followed by Somalia, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Venezuela. Most had arrived in the United States recently, with over half resettling in 2024. The majority initially settled in Amarillo, Texas, and more than half had lived in the community for less than one year at the time of data collection.

Household structures were frequently multigenerational, with some families including up to nine members, as indicated by interview data. Educational backgrounds varied widely: over one-quarter reported no formal schooling, slightly more than half had completed high school, a smaller proportion had limited elementary education, and a minority held college degrees.

Participants' self-assessed English proficiency indicated that most identified as emergent beginners, with smaller percentages reporting beginner or advanced levels. When asked about specific language challenges, speaking—particularly communicating with their children's

teachers—was most frequently cited, followed by writing, reading comprehension, and listening. Figure 2 provides a detailed summary of participants' demographic characteristics.

To support their children's learning, parents reported using both English and their native languages, relying on online translation tools, and emphasizing the importance of school attendance as a pathway to their children's academic success. They also viewed improving their own English skills as essential for long-term settlement and achieving family aspirations. Interview data further revealed that parents strongly believed their children could achieve better lives through education and that developing their own English proficiency was a critical step toward realizing a brighter future.

Figure 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 48)

Category	Subcategory	n (%)
Country of Origin	Cuba	28%
	Afghanistan	26%
	Somalia	14%
	Myanmar	8%
	South Sudan	4%
	Venezuela	4%
Year of Arrival in U.S.	2024	58.7%
	2021	17.4%
	2022	6.5%
Initial Resettlement Location	Amarillo, TX	76%
	Houston/Dallas/San Antonio	10.9%
Length of Residence in Amarillo	Less than 1 year	55%
Household Characteristics	Three family members living together	22%
	Four family members living together	22%
	Seven family members living together	12%
	Nine family members living together	12%
	Five family members living together	10%
Educational Background	High school graduate	53%
	No formal schooling	27%
	College degree	11%
	Left after 4th or 6th grade	4.5%

Self-Reported English Proficiency	Emergent Beginner	68%
	Beginner	17%
	Advanced	7%
Reported English Skill Challenges	Speaking (e.g., teacher communication)	52.3%
	Writing	20%
	Reading comprehension	16%
	Listening	1.8%

Listening and Speaking Proficiency

In this study, 23% of participants were at the *Pre-Production* stage, 29% were in the *Early Production* stage, and 48% were at the *Speech Emergence* stage; no participants demonstrated *Intermediate Fluency*. Findings from the RA exit survey further indicated that listening and speaking skills were the areas of greatest improvement. Both research assistants reported that several learners were strong listeners; however, clear teacher speech, explicit modeling, and the use of gestures or visual cues were essential for comprehension. While many participants struggled with oral production, they were able to repeat sentences successfully after multiple opportunities for guided practice.

Reading Proficiency

Reading data were drawn from three primary sources: (a) end-of-study reading assessments, (b) research assistant (RA) observational journals, and (c) RA–principal researcher analytic conferences. Together, these data sources captured both learners' demonstrated reading performance and instructional conditions that supported or constrained reading development.

Results indicated that reading posed a significant challenge: 55% of participants were unable to read independently, relying on finger-pointing and verbal repetition to recognize individual words, while 35% struggled with grammatical endings such as *–ed*, *–ing*, and *–s*, requiring direct instruction to comprehend written text. Only 10% demonstrated the ability to

read full sentences or a range of words independently. The quantitative reading data consisted of end-of-study assessment results in which participants were asked to read written questions aloud and provide responses. Performance indicators included the ability to recognize high-frequency words, read sentences independently, and accurately interpret grammatical endings such as *–ed*, *–ing*, and *–s*. These data were summarized using descriptive statistics to identify patterns of reading proficiency across participants.

The qualitative reading data were derived from RA daily observational journals. In these reflections, RAs documented students' reading behaviors, instructional supports required, pacing, and observable strategies such as finger-pointing, verbal repetition, and listening before reading. RAs also recorded verbatim comments reflecting instructional challenges, such as students' dependence on modeled language or difficulty decoding grammatical endings. To enhance analytic rigor, RAs met regularly with the principal researcher to discuss emerging patterns and clarify observational interpretations.

Writing Proficiency

Findings from interviews, writing samples, and classroom observations indicated that writing was the most challenging language domain for refugee parent learners in this study. Overall, 83% of participants demonstrated minimal writing proficiency, with production largely limited to copying uppercase letters or writing exclusively in their native language. Only 17% were able to produce individual English words, and even at this level, sentence construction remained inconsistent and difficult.

Classroom observations revealed distinct patterns across proficiency levels. Learners at the low-beginning level frequently reversed letters (e.g., *y*), showed inconsistent capitalization, and required extensive modeling to produce written forms. High-beginning learners generated

longer written responses but continued to experience difficulty with sentence organization, punctuation, and textual cohesion. These challenges limited learners' ability to communicate ideas clearly in written English.

Analysis using the WriteReader (2019) rubric indicated that the majority of participants (83%) were functioning at the Emergent Writing stage, characterized by limited sound–letter correspondence and reliance on copied or symbolic text. The remaining 17% demonstrated features of the Phonetic/Transitional Writing stage, including phonetically plausible spellings alongside weak sentence structure. No participants demonstrated writing behaviors consistent with conventional or advanced stages of writing development.

Additional factors contributing to limited writing development included inconsistent letter formation, restricted English vocabulary, and minimal opportunities for sustained writing practice in meaningful contexts. Collectively, these findings suggest that refugee parent learners in this study were primarily operating at early stages of writing development and required targeted instructional support in phonemic awareness, letter formation, sentence construction, and grammatical accuracy.

Research Question 1

How do refugee parents perceive their own English language proficiency, and how does this affect their ability to support their children's academic development?

The majority of participants perceived their English proficiency as limited, particularly in speaking and writing. These perceived limitations directly affected their confidence and ability to assist with homework, communicate with teachers, and understand school expectations. Several participants expressed hesitation in initiating school-related interactions due to fear of miscommunication.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation to improve their English skills. Many maintained vocabulary journals, practiced English with their children at home, and actively sought feedback from instructors.

Research Question 2

How effective are instructional strategies in improving adult refugee learners' basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)?

Participants' language proficiency levels were distributed as follows: 23% at the Pre-Production stage, 29% at the Early Production stage, and 48% at the Speech Emergence stage. No learners reached Intermediate Fluency during the study period.

RA exit survey data indicated that listening and speaking were the areas of greatest improvement. Observational data showed that learners benefitted significantly from clear teacher speech, explicit modeling, repetition, gestures, and visual supports. Although many participants initially struggled with oral production, repeated guided practice enabled them to produce accurate sentence-level responses.

Instructional strategies such as pronunciation drills, sentence modeling, visual scaffolds, and multimodal teaching approaches supported measurable growth in functional communication skills. Learners demonstrated increased willingness to participate in structured speaking activities by the end of the study.

Research Question 3

Which instructional strategies are most effective in helping refugee parents at the transitional writing stage build linguistic confidence and writing competence?

Analysis of writing samples indicated that sentence frames, guided writing exercises, contextual vocabulary instruction, and structured revision opportunities were particularly

effective for transitional-stage learners. These scaffolds reduced writing anxiety and supported the production of grammatically accurate, contextually appropriate sentences.

Over time, participants demonstrated greater independence in composing short paragraphs related to familiar topics such as family routines, school communication, and daily responsibilities. Structured feedback cycles contributed to noticeable gains in organization, sentence clarity, and confidence.

Research Question 4

How do improvements in English proficiency and writing ability influence refugee parents' involvement in their children's academic experiences?

Improvements in English proficiency were associated with increased parental engagement in school-related activities. Participants reported greater confidence in initiating communication with teachers, assisting with homework, reading school notices, and attending school events.

Several parents indicated that enhanced language skills reduced anxiety and empowered them to advocate more effectively for their children. Observational data and survey responses suggested a clear connection between language development and expanded educational involvement.

Discussion

The findings highlight the central role of perceived language proficiency in shaping refugee parents' educational engagement as reflected in interview responses and RA observations. Consistent with Auerbach (2007), limited English proficiency constrained parents' confidence and participation in school contexts. While parents possessed valuable cultural and

experiential knowledge, limited literacy skills sometimes restricted their ability to translate that knowledge into active school involvement.

At the same time, participants' strong intrinsic motivation aligns with recent research on adult refugee literacy development, as shown in the interviews and RA surveys. Their use of vocabulary journals and home-based practice reflects goal-oriented learning tied to authentic family responsibilities, as in the observational and survey evidence. These findings suggest that ESL instruction should incorporate personalized strategies, scaffolded tasks, and culturally relevant materials that connect directly to parents' lived experiences.

With respect to BICS development, the data reinforce the importance of structured, multimodal, and repetitive instructional approaches. The observed progression from limited oral production to increased sentence-level participation underscores the effectiveness of modeling, visual supports, and guided practice. These outcomes align with trauma-informed ESL practices that emphasize clarity, predictability, and supportive scaffolding (Bowerman, 2024; WIDA, 2024). For practitioners, this suggests prioritizing contextualized vocabulary, role-playing, conversation circles, and real-life communication simulations.

The reading results suggest that learners' phonics and decoding skills were underdeveloped, consistent with limited exposure to written English both at home and in the classroom. Implementing targeted strategies—such as decodable texts, high-frequency word lists, and guided reading activities—may help learners progressively build independent reading skills while reinforcing their oral language development.

Writing development findings further support scaffolded instruction grounded in learners' experiences. Sentence frames and guided revision opportunities reduced anxiety and promoted gradual independence. These results resonate with family literacy frameworks (Auerbach, 2007)

and culturally sustaining pedagogies that build upon learners' lived experiences (Moll et al., 1992). Designing writing tasks around familiar themes—such as family, migration, and school communication—can foster both competence and ownership.

Strengthening foundational writing skills is essential not only for learners' English development but also for empowering refugee parents to navigate educational systems, support their children's learning, and engage more fully in their communities. While many learners demonstrate emerging strengths such as the ability to sequence events and use functional vocabulary, limited formal schooling and reduced exposure to written English constrain their progress.

Finally, improvements in English proficiency were closely aligned with increased parental involvement, echoing findings from Cun (2022) and Boettcher (2022) that adult literacy growth positively influences children's academic engagement. By explicitly linking language instruction to family engagement goals—such as simulating parent–teacher conferences or interpreting school documents—educators can strengthen the reciprocal relationship between language development and educational participation.

Overall, the study demonstrates that targeted, culturally responsive, and multimodal ESL instruction not only strengthens refugee parents' linguistic competence but also enhances their efficacy as educational partners. Integrating practical English use, structured writing scaffolds, and authentic family engagement tasks can create a mutually reinforcing cycle of language growth and home–school connection, ultimately supporting the long-term academic success of refugee families.

Implications for Literacy Pedagogy

The findings of this study have important implications for literacy instruction for adult refugee learners and underscore the value of culturally relevant instructional procedures embedded throughout the learning process. Results indicate that limited English proficiency—particularly in speaking, reading, and writing—can substantially affect learners' confidence and their ability to support their children's academic development. Literacy instruction for adult refugee parents should therefore be personalized, scaffolded, and culturally responsive, intentionally drawing on learners' lived experiences, linguistic resources, and prior knowledge to make instruction meaningful and accessible (Auerbach, 2007; Moll et al., 1992).

Consistent with the culturally relevant procedures used in this study, instruction that prioritizes oral language, modeling, repetition, and functional literacy tasks is especially effective for learners from oral language traditions or with interrupted formal schooling. The use of community- and family-centered materials—such as those aligned with the *Intercambio* approach—demonstrates how culturally responsive curricula can build confidence while addressing immediate communication needs related to parenting, schooling, and community participation. Tools such as vocabulary journals, contextualized writing tasks, and goal-oriented activities empower learners to engage in self-directed learning while reinforcing practical language use.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of targeted, multimodal strategies for developing basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Techniques such as pronunciation drills, sentence modeling, visual scaffolds, role-playing, conversation circles, and technology-supported exercises were particularly effective when delivered through culturally responsive procedures that validated learners' experiences and emphasized relational learning. When

integrated within trauma-informed ESL practices, these approaches supported learners' emotional safety, increased participation, and fostered sustained engagement (Bowerman, 2024; WIDA, 2024).

For learners at early and transitional stages of writing development, findings suggest that instructional strategies that reduce anxiety and provide clear structure—such as sentence frames, guided writing, contextual vocabulary instruction, and scaffolded revision—are essential. Designing writing tasks around culturally familiar and meaningful themes (e.g., family roles, migration experiences, daily routines) reflects learners' funds of knowledge and enables them to produce authentic written texts while strengthening linguistic accuracy and confidence (Moll et al., 1992; Auerbach, 2007). Ongoing modeling and feedback further support learners' ownership of written language.

Finally, the study demonstrates that improvements in English proficiency and writing ability can directly enhance parental engagement in children's education. Literacy instruction grounded in culturally relevant procedures and linked to real-life tasks—such as communicating with teachers, supporting homework, or navigating school systems—positions parents as active partners in their children's academic success (Cun, 2022; Boettcher, 2022). By integrating functional literacy, culturally responsive instruction, and family engagement goals, educators can create a reinforcing cycle in which language development strengthens parental efficacy and, in turn, supports children's educational outcomes.

Limitations of the Current Study

While this study provides important insights into the English learning experiences of refugee parents and their perceived roles in their children's education, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size and setting limit the generalizability of the findings. The

study involved only 48 participants from a single resettlement program in one Midwestern state. The demographic composition and educational support systems available in this community may not reflect those in other regions with different refugee populations or access to services. For instance, refugee parents in urban areas with more extensive language resources may experience different outcomes compared to those in rural or underserved communities.

Second, the voluntary nature of participation likely introduced a selection bias. Parents who enrolled in ESL classes and agreed to participate in interviews or assessments were likely more motivated or had fewer external constraints (e.g., work schedules, transportation, childcare). As such, the study may not fully capture the experiences of more isolated or less engaged refugee parents who may face even greater barriers to educational involvement.

Third, language barriers during data collection posed challenges. Although interviews were conducted with the aid of RAs and interpreters when needed, some participants struggled to express complex thoughts, emotions, or experiences in English or their native language. As a result, nuances may have been lost, and some data may lack depth or clarity.

Finally, the assessment design had limitations in measuring authentic language gains. Because of students' anxiety, trauma history, or unfamiliarity with formal testing, several participants declined to complete assessments, and those who did participate showed inconsistent performance. For example, some struggled not due to lack of knowledge but due to unfamiliarity with test formats or fear of failure. This limits the ability to draw strong conclusions about the efficacy of instructional strategies solely from quantitative results.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide a valuable foundation for future, more expansive studies. They also underscore the need for more inclusive, trauma-informed, and

family-centered approaches to refugee education that extend beyond the classroom and into the lived experiences of families.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the pivotal role of English language proficiency in shaping refugee parents' ability to support their children's education. Although several participants had strong educational backgrounds, limited English skills presented significant barriers. However, when instruction was individualized, culturally responsive, and supported by multimodal tools and technology, participants made measurable progress and demonstrated increased confidence.

As a result of improved literacy skills, refugee parents were not only able to engage more actively in their children's academic lives but also emerged as stronger advocates and role models. Specifically, instructional strategies such as guided writing with sentence frames, phonics-based activities, journal writing, and collaborative peer exercises proved especially effective. These methods helped parents at the transitional writing stage move from phonetic spelling to more conventional and intelligible written forms.

To build speaking proficiency, the study recommends practical strategies such as practicing English during daily routines, joining ESL conversation groups, using technology for speaking practice, recording and listening to oneself, and celebrating incremental progress.

Future research should consider the potential of parent-child paired learning in after-school programs where refugee parents and their children engage together in meaningful literacy activities. Moreover, incorporating accessible digital tools such as Vocaroo.com may further enhance parents' English language development by offering teacher-recorded guidance, pronunciation practice, and opportunities for parents to record and reflect on their own spoken language.

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