



# The Philosophy of ESL: A Literature Analysis on the State of English as a Foreign Language

Shawn A. Lee

School of Public Health and Education, Capella University, Minneapolis, USA

Email: slee215@capellauniversity.edu

**How to cite this paper:** Lee, S.A. (2022) The Philosophy of ESL: A Literature Analysis on the State of English as a Foreign Language. *Open Access Library Journal*, 9: e9350. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1109350>

**Received:** September 20, 2022

**Accepted:** October 24, 2022

**Published:** October 27, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

English language learners (ELLs) are individuals who are learning English as a second language. The main goal of ESL learning is to encourage children to speak English as quickly and as competently as possible. This paper reviews the current state of the art in the field of English language learning and discusses how teachers can effectively assess these ELLs.

## Subject Areas

Language Education, Teacher Education, Linguistics

## Keywords

EFL Learners, Advantages, Limitations, Suggestions, Summative Assessments, Formative Assessment, Feedback

---

## 1. Introduction

A person who is learning English as a second language is referred to as an English language learner (ELL). English language learners are among the fastest-growing student groups, according to the National Education Association. The English language proficiency rate is expected to reach nearly one-fourth of all students attending public schools by 2025. Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese, Somali, Russian, Haitian Creole, and Hmong appear to be the most prevalent languages among ELL students. It may be the case that some students have a basic understanding of English; however, they require additional academic instruction in this language. In addition to guiding instruction and providing information about instruction, the standards-based assessment includes a range of assessment methods. Meaningful assessment of student learning objectives has a number of attributes, including serving a clear and appropriate purpose, reflecting

valued learning objectives, and producing accurate results. To succeed at a high level in higher education institutions, it is imperative that ELL students' progress beyond elementary and secondary education, and teachers should improve grading and assessment criteria.

A student's English language learning objective may vary depending on the type of institution or country in which he or she is studying. However, the main goal of English language learning is to encourage children to speak English as quickly and as competently as possible. It is imperative that students not only do well academically but also participate in extracurricular activities and communicate effectively with their classmates and teachers (Tavares, 2019) [1]. The goal of this paper is to explore various forms of assessments and strategies that will improve the quality of teaching for the teacher and the learning for the student. By investigating the roles of teacher and learner, the variety of assessments that measure progress, and the development and implementation of strategies; a foundation can be built to help guide future researchers and teachers to creating new methods that would positively impact Second Language Acquisition.

## **2. Purpose, Goals, and Objectives**

### **2.1. Purpose**

English proficiency is required by the majority of schools. It is generally true that the admission standards at the University of the People are lower than those at most other institutions. One of the two prerequisites is English proficiency since all online courses are taught in English. If students are able to speak English from a young age, they will be better prepared to succeed in school and in the workplace (Gottlieb, 2016) [2]. An integral component of English Language Learner education is the acquisition of proficiency in an additional language and the preservation of cultural heritage.

### **2.2. Goals**

This course aims to foster a greater understanding between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This course aims to help students develop the communication skills necessary for further language learning, as well as for further study, work, and leisure scenarios in authentic situations and for a wide variety of audiences. As a result, the wide range of learning resources available to the student, including multimedia, in the various communication channels, promotes and enables the development of multi-literacy skills in the student. Students are expected to become familiar with a variety of content and nonliterary texts, as well as be able to analyze and make sense of them critically.

### **2.3. Outcomes**

For the purpose of enabling the students to figure out how to use language to think, reflect, express themselves, and learn in other courses, as well as improve their literacy skills, the course objectives are to equip students with a deep un-

derstanding of the meaning of language and the process of language acquisition, which incorporates linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics. Among the primary objectives of the project is to provide information about the cultural characteristics of the communities where the language is spoken (Huang & Flores, 2018) [3]. In the end, the objective is to enhance people's ability to understand and appreciate perspectives from their own cultures and from other cultures, thereby increasing participation and action within their own and other communities. Throughout the program, ELL teachers seek to foster curiosity, inquiry, and a lifelong appreciation of language study.

### **3. Role and Goals of ELL Instructors and Learners**

#### **3.1. Role of the ELL Instructor**

Language development depends on the support of teachers. However, even if teachers do not have specific training or experience in special education, they play an important role in identifying and responding to the needs of English language learners (ELLs), especially those that are certified as ESL experts. Their familiarity with students and understanding of language acquisition may enable them to contribute valuable ideas to a student review (Motamedi *et al.*, 2019) [4]. In addition to teaching children how to read, schools must also ensure that they are able to assist them with learning and utilizing linguistic characteristics that are consistent with the standards of their respective academic disciplines.

In order for students to effectively communicate across the curriculum, educators need to assist them in developing a deeper understanding of how language functions. Educators should possess sufficient knowledge of the mechanics of language to choose instructional materials that will expand their students' linguistic horizons and design activities that will allow them to use the new forms and methods of communication they are being introduced to (Brown, 2003) [5]. Teachers should be familiar with how to develop the classroom language environment so that language and literacy acquisition can take place and linguistic barriers to learning content areas can be eliminated.

#### **3.2. Goals of ELL Learners**

College students and most professionals are expected to be able to write clearly and effectively. In order to increase their communication skills, students will need several opportunities to develop their writing abilities. English language learners will find this particularly important (Zwahlen, 2018) [6]. There may be challenges associated with writing for students depending on their proficiency in their native language and command of English. Students are required to complete a variety of writing assignments in order to develop an understanding of various writing styles as well as to identify their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

The importance of analyzing originality and word choice is also an important aspect of writing apart from the aspects of writing. It is common for ELLs to fo-

cus on grammar errors rather than their writing strengths. As a consequence of evaluating the writing, they begin to analyze not only the thoughts and the speech but also the writing. Discussing literature can help students gain an understanding of their own language development and allow them to see their own ideas and words from another's perspective. The recent technological advances in communication have made it imperative for students to acquire the ability to express themselves clearly and accurately in writing. They also need to understand the difference between sending a text message to friends and sending a business email.

#### **4. Various Forms of Assessments**

A variety of forms of assessment can be used by students and ELL instructors in order to monitor progress toward learning objectives. This is an instrument for identifying misconceptions, difficulties, and learning gaps along the way and evaluating how to close them. There are powerful tools in this solution that can reshape learning and promote the ability of students to take responsibility for their own learning, provided that they comprehend that the objective is to enhance learning rather than award grades. The students may evaluate themselves, their peers, and even the instructor using writing, tests, dialogue, and other methods.

##### **4.1. Formative Assessment**

Most frequently, formative assessment is conducted during a course or class and aims to improve student achievement of learning objectives by adapting assessment techniques to the particular needs of each student (Mendoza, 2019) [7]. On the other hand, summative evaluations assess student learning, knowledge, skills, and achievements at the conclusion of a unit, course, or program. A summative assessment is almost always evaluated formally and is frequently evaluated significantly (even when it is not mandatory to grade it).

Using both summative and formative assessments can be extremely effective, and educators can implement various strategies to do so. The use of formative evaluation facilitates teaching and enhances learning in the long run (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018) [8]. Teachers who provide students with clear instructions and feedback and actively encourage them to self-assess their abilities and retain information can help students develop as learners. Based on the course objectives, students can be asked to evaluate their own work or that of a classmate and to identify what type of feedback they find most helpful. Advantages that come from this include analysis of data during the assessments. This allows educators to examine and adjust their instructional methods to ensure they're consistently creating a desired result with their students through personalized learning experience. This is especially helpful with larger class sizes since what works for some students won't work for others. On the other hand, certain disadvantages include sacrifice of time from the teacher's side and are resource intensive. With uneven or time management, the quality of the formative assessments can po-

tentially deteriorate if not regulated.

## 4.2. Discussions and Feedbacks

Also, professors may ask students to describe the characteristics of their best work by writing or participating in public discussions. Feedback should be explicit and actionable for students. Instructors may provide specific feedback related to pre-determined criteria that will allow students to modify or apply the feedback before submitting the final product. It is also possible to offer remedial or prospective feedback, in addition to evaluative feedback.

An example of this type of feedback could be a comment on several drafts, objective discussions during a one-on-one meeting, and regular online tests. Due to the substantial implications summative evaluations have, it is particularly important that the assessment be aligned with the instructional objectives and expected outcomes. Advantages of this style of assessment are that, as a communication skill, it gives students a way to self-evaluate their progressing in learning. From a cognitive standpoint, students understood the mistakes that they made such as in using grammar and punctuation, and creating sentence building clearly. A disadvantage of this style would include how student are judged on their work by social criticism, dissatisfaction or distrust from these feedback could cause demotivation in the student.

## 4.3. Summative Assessments

Teachers should establish a table of criteria or specifications—Instructors should develop rubrics that summarize the specific requirements for each grade (Paolicelli *et al.*, n.d.) [9]. The rubrics will outline the ideal assignment and summarize what will be expected of students at the beginning of the term. Students will be provided with a sense of accomplishment and a path toward success through this program. The ability to write effective essay questions enables teachers to ensure that the questions reflect the students' understanding in a way that demonstrates how they gained, developed, or mastered their knowledge. There are some excellent strategies for designing multiple-choice questions that educators can implement. Advantages of summative assessments include using data to identify weak areas in students. Accelerate individuals who already mastered the material. Disadvantages include the biased agenda that comes with these assessments. Examples of this are standardized test in which all ELLs from all levels are measured the same and as a result, results are not accurate.

## 5. Classifying Criteria and Final Grades

Grading further provides guidance to students on their own learning by providing them with information about what they understand, what they do not understand, and where they may need additional assistance. Along with providing feedback on students' performance, grading can also provide instructors with insight into future instructional strategies (Paolicelli *et al.*, n.d.) [9]. Due to the

fact that scores are sometimes used to assess students' work, it is essential that grades accurately reflect the quality of school projects and that student work is evaluated fairly.

Grading accurately and fairly requires a significant amount of time, which is often unavailable to college instructors. Students who are dissatisfied with their grades may protest in a manner that causes instructors distress (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018) [8]. Moreover, some teachers feel that the emphasis they place on providing grades to student work impedes their ability to teach effectively. Grades represent and encompass a great deal of information, so it is not surprising they are a source of concern for students and a source of stress for teachers.

During the course, the students will be required to complete a variety of different types of work. Exams, quizzes, lab reports, essays, participation in class, and oral presentations may be included in the curriculum (Paolicelli *et al.*, n.d.) [9]. It is the responsibility of the teachers to decide which aspects of the work they are undertaking are most important and/or which aspects will be most significant. The grading should be based on assessing the abilities of students, such as Is it clear? Originality? Reliability? Affordability? Accuracy? Knowledgeable demonstration? and Critical inquiry? ELL teachers may wish to consider creating grading criteria for the work most meaningful to them based on the characteristics they identified, separating excellent work (A-level) from very good (B-level), fair to good (C-level), poor (D-level), and unacceptable work.

## 6. Learning Outcomes

The curriculum of a teacher education program should include instruction on the creation of lesson plans, starting with a discussion of the instructional objectives and learning outcomes (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018) [8]. Research indicates that students who are aware of the objectives of the lesson plan perform better. Therefore, it is a good idea to share lesson plans with them. Teachers should have some suggestions for communicating lesson objectives to students (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018) [8]. They have to ensure that the objectives are broad enough to include all topics covered in the lesson. In some instances, providing students with too narrow a set of objectives may lead them to ignore or devalue other important aspects of a lesson.

As a result of the broad objectives, the teacher is also able to adapt instruction as necessary once the lesson has begun. In order to achieve the goals, according to my perspective, teachers must communicate them in a way that students understand what the outcomes of their learning will be—what they will know and be able to do, as well as how they will use their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Throughout the lesson, it is advisable to repeat objectives both orally and in writing to remind students why they are learning.

In my view, students are often given verbal or written summaries or outlines of objectives by their teachers. It is also beneficial to demonstrate or model

learning products or outcomes. Using an example of a student's work, an ELL teacher may demonstrate how the use of perspective is used, enabling students to see what they will be able to accomplish themselves, or a language teacher may demonstrate a problem student may not have been able to solve at the beginning of a series of lessons but will be able to solve at the end.

Teachers should utilize questioning techniques to encourage students to state their own objectives or outcomes. The feedback they provide is likely to influence the lesson plan. Research indicates that students who are actively involved in the lesson plan and have a sense of control over their learning are more likely to be motivated to learn. The teacher may ask students to suggest how to meet objectives or demonstrate outcomes. As a statement, it explains the knowledge or skills the students are expected to possess upon completion of an assignment, class, course, or program, along with a description of why this knowledge and these skills will benefit them.

## 7. Strategies for Improving Assessment

As well as focusing on the context and application of knowledge and skills, they also assist students in connecting learning to a variety of contexts and guide assessment. Learning outcomes should emphasize the application and integration of knowledge. Learning outcomes demonstrate how students can utilize the material within the course context and in a broader context, as opposed to concentrating only on the coverage of material. Students are better able to engage in their learning and with the material in a course by emphasizing the application of knowledge and skills learned in a course and the integration of those skills with aspects of their lives.

When focusing on integration and generalizable skills, students are able to draw connections between topics and between, coursework and a variety of other types of knowledge. It is clear to students what the conditions and objectives of their assessments are. During the process of reflecting on the content of the course in light of its potential applications, learning outcomes are developed. Developing learning outcomes ensures that the context of learning is always prioritized, and the course content emphasizes the skills and knowledge that are most useful to students now and in the future.

The use of assessment methods that are based on learning outcomes is beneficial. Course outcomes allow instructors to determine the standards by which a course's success will be measured. If the instructor wishes to determine what is essential for students to learn, they must take into account future coursework as well as the curriculum as a whole. It is thus possible to develop a coherent curriculum within a decentralized institution while preserving the autonomy of instructors, and this contributes to preparing students for their future careers. As emphasized by learning outcomes, the practical application of learning reflects and supports the contemporary nature and priorities of the university while encouraging student engagement, providing opportunities for interdisciplinary



---

study, and providing guidance and support to students with a range of academic and professional backgrounds.

## 8. Plan of Development

According to the United States Department of Education, the number of English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States has increased by more than one million since 2010. This student population has unique needs which should be considered when creating and administering assessments. It has been reported that tests developed for native English speakers are less reliable for English language learners (ELLs). Numerous factors can limit the effectiveness of standardized tests, including linguistic complexity unrelated to the content assessed, test anxiety, and limited vocabulary. On standardized tests, the emphasis is more on written skills as opposed to oral skills.

It is important to monitor the progress of ELL students through presentations. Anxiety is a common reaction to standardized testing among English language learners. Depending on the content and skills being assessed, performance assessments may consist of a wide variety of tasks. Several ways to assess performance include role-playing, interviewing, creating oral reports, summarizing texts, retelling stories, brainstorming, and participating in dialogues. Performance assessment may also be used as a form of learning since students who work cooperatively are encouraged to learn from each other's mistakes and successes.

Another method is gamification, as today's classrooms are increasingly incorporating the concept of gamification. Games are gamified when they are used outside of a gaming context, such as in a classroom. Despite the fact that many suggestions for using video games in an ESL classroom focus on gamified learning, some studies suggest that they can also serve as assessment tools, particularly if the video game includes tools that display student progress through low-stakes settings such as leaderboards. The process of gamifying assessment is not limited to the digital medium. Charades, scavenger hunts, or Pictionary-style competitions can all be used as simple games. This type of game can also be used to assess math skills in addition to assessing concepts and vocabulary.

Students can take advantage of student conferences to share what they have learned. Educators can also use videoconferencing to provide authentic, real-time feedback that addresses students' concerns. Education consultants guide that when teachers are working with students who are learning a new language and developing reading skills, they should confer with them more frequently than usual. It is beneficial for ELLs to spend as much time as possible with their teacher, whether it is in small groups or one-on-one. If they decide to use rubrics for either formal or informal assessment, they will be an effective way to establish criteria for grading and providing feedback. The use of rubrics is particularly useful for non-native English speakers since they enable educators to focus solely on the relevant learning objectives and ignore irrelevant factors. Additionally, rubrics can be used by teachers to provide feedback to students, as well as students to evaluate



---

their own work in order to take responsibility for their own learning.

## 9. Limitations of Research

The present research involved only data collected until 2019 and does not consider the broader range of ELLs in America. Out of the 4.8 million English Language Learners, the vast majority was of Latino descent (US Department of Education, 2022) [10]. Therefore, there is a particular bias in data based on this group of learners. Creating strategies that would fit any learner, no matter their cultural, economic, or social background, must be considered. Such issues can only be discussed with the other groups of ELLs even though there is still little research about them because of the abundant research on Latino ELLs in America. Another limitation that requires interpretation is the sample size which was limited to K-12 grade learners because it is at this stage where most integration of English learners is most beneficial to the learner. The researchers wished they could have analyzed strategies that incorporated adult learners. However, it seemed not to affect the results of this research.

Further research might prove a different outcome. The limited allotted time did not provide for a deep investigation of the adult side of English Language Learners. However, in future research, an investigation into that side could likely modify the established strategies and give the EFL teacher a broader range of use.

## 10. Conclusions

Assessments and teaching strategies are designed to identify students' abilities and guide them to reach new proficiency levels. Anything ELL teachers can do to make them more efficient and effective is worthwhile. An increasing number of students are studying English in addition to their standard core curriculum. The ability of teachers to accurately assess these ELL students becomes increasingly important. Therefore, new assessments that measure students' progress will be the preferred method. Based on the result of these assessments, strategies must be calculated and modified so that every kind of learner's needs is met.

For effective teaching, tests must be administered to measure abilities, and accurate results must be obtained. Despite the fact that this might seem obvious, conducting a thorough assessment requires it. Assessments can become very confusing quickly without a clear definition of what is being evaluated. When a test has no clear purpose, it may be difficult for a teacher to develop a test that measures something other than English proficiency.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] Tavares, V. (2019) A Review of Peer Interaction and Second Language Learning for ELL Students in Academic Contexts. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Educa-*

- 
- tion/Revue Canadienne Des Jeunes Chercheurs et Chercheurs En Éducation*, **10**, 117.
- [2] Gottlieb, M. (2016) *Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges to Educational Equity: Connecting Academic Language Proficiency to Student Achievement*. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- [3] Huang, B.H. and Flores, B.B. (2018) The English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21). *Language Assessment Quarterly*, **15**, 433-442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2018.1549241>
- [4] Motamedi, J.G., Vazquez, M., Gandhi, E. and Holmgren, M. (2019) *English Language Development Minutes, Models, and Outcomes*. Education Northwest, Portland, OR.
- [5] Brown, H.D. (2003) *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. Pearson Education, New York.
- [6] Zwahlen, C. (2018) Authentic Learning: Boosting ELL Language and Academic Proficiency Development. *The International Schools Journal*, **37**, 85-91.
- [7] Mendoza, C. (2019) Language Development Policies and Practices Impacting the College and Career Readiness of Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) in Secondary Schools. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, **30**, 14-34.
- [8] Ferlazzo, L. and Sypniewski, K.H. (2018) *The ELL Teacher's Toolbox: Hundreds of Practical Ideas to Support Your Students*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119428701>
- [9] Paolicelli, A.M., Kelsch, K. and McGoey, K. (n.d.) *Early Childhood Education for English Language Learners: Development, Strategies, and Services*.
- [10] US Department of Education (2022) *Our Nation's English Learners*. Ed.gov. <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-characteristics/index.html>