Carringbush Adult Education's EAL programs for adult beginner learners

Teaching and learning English and digital skills online during the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria

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Contents

FIGURES

5. DISCUSSION: THE CARRINGBUSH RESPONSE TO LEARNING AND TEACHING ADULT BEGINNER ENGLISH ONLINE: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES 40

ABBREVIATIONS

ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
ACFE BOARD	Adult, Community and Further Education Board
ACU	Australian Catholic University
ACTA	Australian Council of TESOL Associations
CARRINGBUSH	Carringbush Adult Education
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
EAL	English as an Additional Language
LLND	Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital
LMS	Learning management system
VIC EAL FRAMEWORK	Victorian English as an Additional Language Framework

Executive summary

Melbourne-based adult community education provider Carringbush Adult Education (Carringbush) delivers an English as an Additional Language (EAL) program tailored to the needs of long-term unemployed adult learners with little to no formal schooling, low literacy and low digital literacy. The majority of Carringbush learners come from refugee and low socio-economic migrant backgrounds, and many have little to no formal schooling and are non-text-literate in their first language. Carringbush learners experience numerous barriers to learning compared with other learners.

With the arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020, the requirement to adapt their EAL programs for online delivery brought new and existing challenges to the fore, for both their learners and teachers. Carringbush needed to navigate additional levels of complexity related to teaching low-literacy adult beginner learners, including how to teach learners English in an online format, given the barriers they already face (including not being able to properly read in their own native language and having low digital literacy), how to engage with learners effectively and keep the classroom community together, when learners couldn't see their teachers or each other, and how to adapt teaching to suit smartphones. The teachers were also less experienced and confident in teaching online and needed to quickly develop their own and their learners' digital skills.

Carringbush management and staff recognised these challenges and addressed them by piloting a 'Flipped Learning Approach' to teaching, where teachers trialled a range of pre-class digital learning tasks, introducing the online learning management system (LMS) Moodle, providing Carringbush learners with access to both devices and the internet to ensure digital access and equity, supporting learners to transition to online platforms via a bespoke digital mentoring program and creating the position of a Digital Capacity Coordinator to support teachers to adapt their teaching to an online format and further develop their own digital literacy skills.

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

When classes were able to return to an in-person format, Carringbush management and teachers decided to adapt their delivery model to offer hybrid classes, consisting of both in-person and online sessions, which they deemed was important in continuing learners' familiarity with and development of the digital skills gained.

The challenges encountered, together with the scarcity of research into developing better teaching practices for adult beginner EAL learners with complex needs, led Carringbush to approach Australian Catholic University (ACU) in 2021 to undertake a project to address this gap. In response, Carringbush and ACU co-designed the present study to address key aims for the organisation's leadership and teachers.

Through this study, Carringbush aimed to identify ways in which they could improve how they teach English to adult beginner learners, considering the new reality of online learning brought about by COVID-19, and the need for learners to develop robust digital skills. Carringbush sought to understand the teaching practices and digital learning resources that would promote strong learner engagement and independent learning and build teachers' skills and knowledge in integrating digital learning resources into their lessons to enhance learner engagement and skills development.

We invited the EAL learners in the first and third levels of classes taught at Carringbush, the Course in Initial EAL (pre-literate or 'beginner') and the subsequent Certificate 1 in EAL, to participate in the study, together with the teachers who work with them. Using a mixed-method approach, we collected qualitative and quantitative data from learners via two class-based surveys with follow-up focus groups, at two discrete time periods, in 2022 and 2023. We collected qualitative and quantitative data from teachers via two online surveys and one focus group held after the second survey, at the same two time points as learners. We asked them to reflect on their experiences of online teaching and learning, both retrospectively during the pandemic-induced changes in 2020, and later in 2022 and 2023, after face-to-face classes had resumed. Across both time periods, 40 learners completed surveys and 33 learners participated in the focus groups. In total, 14 teachers completed the surveys and six staff participated in the focus group.

We analysed the qualitative responses from the learner and teacher data sets using thematic analysis, reviewing responses to identify and develop key patterns and themes. Our approach was to capture meaningful, rich information that would help us to understand the learners' and teachers' experiences, perceptions and practices over time as their knowledge and experience grew, rather than to compare the differences in participant responses at the start and end of the study in a strict 'pre' and 'post' sense.

While the sample size is small and therefore cannot be said to represent the experiences of other Carringbush learners and teachers, Carringbush learners represent a diverse cohort of individuals, each with different backgrounds, needs and confidence levels, and this diversity is preserved in the findings.

This report documents the approach we took to speaking with learners and teachers in this study, presents the key findings we identified based on what learners and teachers told us about their experiences of learning and teaching online, discusses the key themes we identified based on the key findings and makes numerous recommendations based on these findings. These recommendations are also listed separately in chapter 6 of this report.

Key findings

- The importance of establishing and maintaining positive relationships between learners, teachers and peers in creating a safe and positive learning environment is essential for effective EAL teaching and learning, and a core theme identified from both learner and teacher feedback.
- Learners' responses suggest that the face-to-face learning modality provides greater opportunities to engage meaningfully with both the didactic and social elements of language learning: The majority of Carringbush learners reported that they preferred face-to-face learning in a classroom with others more than online learning, because it provides or promotes the ability for questions and answers in 'real time' and in an embodied way, both structured and unstructured opportunities for learning and socialisation with peers – including informal peer teaching in digital literacy – and the opportunity to focus on learning without the distractions of the home environment.
- The social aspect of learning is important. It is difficult to achieve the same degree of social interaction in an online learning environment and the lack of incidental contact characteristic of online classrooms diminished teacher-learner-peer relationships. Learners felt they were less likely to work with other people in the online classroom, while their learning in the face-to-face classroom was made meaningful through interactions with their teacher and peers.
- At the same time, learners valued the flexibility afforded by online learning related to family and work, and the ability to review content as often as needed, when it suited them.
- When learning moved online at Carringbush due to the pandemic, many learners initially encountered numerous barriers to effectively using digital technologies, including having a low level of digital literacy skills, lacking the confidence to learn how to use digital technologies, lack of prior educational experiences in 'learning how to learn' digital technologies, and needing a level of English to navigate the apps that they had not yet learnt.
- Teachers felt they were doing a 'balancing act', managing individuals' learning preferences and the challenges inherent in the cohorts and resources available to both themselves and the learners, while ensuring that learners didn't lose the digital literacy they had developed during the period of fully online classes.
- Creating and then mastering teaching tools and resources required a lot of time and a familiarity with the area, neither of which most teachers possessed.
- Effective online teaching requires a different pedagogy. Online classes changed the class structure and introduced new barriers to teaching and learning English, including learners' absence of classroom etiquette, learners' lack of preparation for online classes, difficulties seeking and providing individual help in the online classroom, and learners' lack of digital or online etiquette, all of which contributed to extended lesson planning, class disruptions, more time and effort required by teachers to guide learners, and being able to cover less content in class.
- Despite the barriers learners and teachers encountered, after two years of online classes, overall teachers noticed increased confidence and satisfaction among their learners and themselves in their ability to teach and learn online, and in their use of technology, including learners' ability to troubleshoot problems more readily.
- Both teachers and learners agreed that online learning should be part of the future at Carringbush and expressed a preference for a blended learning experience, where online classes and digital resources extend and support – but do not take the place of – the face-to-face classroom.
- Teachers see teaching and learning digital literacy skills as providing learners with valuable life skills that can foster greater independence and empowerment.
- Separate to the online format, an interplay of complex factors including health factors, educational background and socio-cultural expectations shape the unique learning needs of this cohort.
- Carringbush learners value learning English because it provides a pathway to independence and connection in everyday life, allowing them to undertake essential daily tasks and connect with native English speakers.
- Learners expressed a desire for more community-based opportunities to practice their English.
- Learners identified that Carringbush teachers, family members and peers play an important role in helping them learn English and engage in online learning. Learners expressed affection and respect for their Carringbush teachers.
- Several factors were pivotal in supporting teachers to effectively navigate online teaching and teach their learners digital skills:

1. The introduction of the 'digital mentor' was highly effective in reducing teacher anxiety and promoting confidence in using the technology effectively.
2. Support from the organisation made teachers feel valued and heard, and was greatly appreciated.
3. Peers sharing problems and solutions in collaboration enhanced the consolidation of skills and techniques as well as teacher self-confidence.

Recommendations

1. PROVISION OF ONGOING DIGITAL LEARNING SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS:

a. Continuing to implement an organisation-wide focus on teacher learning and professional development related to online lesson design and delivery for EAL adult beginner learners with low literacy and additional barriers to learning.

b. Prioritising training and professional development for teachers related to the design of *blended* learning that uses paper-and-pencil, face-to-face and online resources.

c. Designing a paper notebook with links to online and digital learning resources: this was created in 2024 and is now in use.

2. PROVISION OF ONGOING DIGITAL MENTORING FOR LEARNERS:

a. Maintaining and/or increasing access to digital mentoring in learners' first language.

b. Exploring ways to replicate learners' preferred elements of face-to-face learning in the online classroom; for example, using breakout rooms with individuals to offer learners the opportunity to ask questions in a safe and supported way; and providing opportunities for learners to work collaboratively and increase their social interactions with their peers, potentially with the training of class volunteers as teacher's aides to support this.

3. PROVISION OF ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNER AND TEACHER LEARNING:

a. Providing devices where needed so all learners have access to online learning.

b. Providing more community-based opportunities for learning English.

c. Building in 'signposting' to learners' pre-class work, including consolidation of what was learnt in the previous week, what will be taught next week and what will help learners prepare, to reduce learner anxiety and build confidence in and ownership over their learning, and to help reduce the time the teacher needs to spend 'catching up' some of the class.

d. Trialling effective digital resources, tools or software, and maintaining these and other digital design and teaching resources in a central repository or guide for all teachers and support staff to utilise.

e. Prioritising software and lesson design for use on phones.

f. Providing ongoing digital technology support ('troubleshooting').

4. ENSURING DISSEMINATION OF LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE WITHIN CARRINGBUSH AND THE SECTOR:

a. Exploring and establishing forums for informal collaboration, sharing of resources and professional development amongst Carringbush teachers, for example, reflective practice sessions alongside formal professional development sessions.

b. Exploring ways to share learning and tools specific to EAL learners and to delivering online language teaching, for example, establishing or joining existing local and online communities of practice within the sector.

c. Provision of formal or informal teacher training in the skills needed to support low-literacy adult second-language learners within the organisation and/or the sector, for example, awareness of the socio-cultural contexts in which these learners undertake their studies, and providing guidance for learners in classroom skills and how to be a learner.

1. Introduction: Teaching English and digital skills online to low-literacy adult beginner learners in the time of COVID-19

1.1 Background to the study: Adult beginner learners of English with low literacy and complex needs: What are their learning needs and their challenges?

Victoria has been recognised as having the largest, most diverse adult community education sector in Australia. The adult community education sector helps a significant proportion of the community develop core foundation skills that open pathways to further education and employment, and to engage meaningfully with their community. As with Carringbush learners, the sector engages people who otherwise might be excluded from the education system, including adults with low levels of education, unemployed people, low skilled workers and people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Department of Education and Training, 2019, pp. 3, 5). The Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE Board), which guides the direction of the sector in Victoria, intends for the sector to provide core skills not only for further education and employment pathways, but also for social and mental wellbeing and increased civic participation for these adult learners who are facing complex barriers to educational attainment. The ACFE Board recognises the complex needs of this cohort of learners:

> *Adults who are still developing core skills often face a range of other challenges in their lives, such as in physical or mental health, disability, cultural differences, homelessness or housing instability, experience of violence or discrimination, and long-term or generational unemployment. (State Government of Victoria, 2020, p. 4)*

Given the important role the adult community education sector plays in developing core skills to enable full participation in education, employment and the community by adults with low literacy and complex needs, providers need access to up-to-date and relevant best practice guidelines that address the challenges faced by these learners and those who teach them.

Adult beginner learners of English with low or no literacy face numerous additional challenges compared with other adult learners. These include having little or no literacy in their first language, needing to learn English before and at the same time as they are acquiring literacy skills, needing to quickly learn classroom etiquette (previously lacking given their lack of prior education) at the same time as learning a new language, and barriers to learning online and to acquiring digital literacy skills. These challenges are explored in more detail below.

Adult beginner learners of English are often faced with the challenge of needing to learn literacy and English at the same time. In their submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult literacy and its importance in 2021, the

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) argues that programs to teach migrant-background learners of EAL must distinguish between those with well-established literacy and related skills gained through formal schooling in a language other than English (i.e. those who already have a level of literacy) and those with minimal or no previous schooling or literacy in any language (2021, pp. 26–29). Carringbush adult EAL learners include migrants with either low or no literacy in their first (or native) language and some with histories of no to little formal schooling or education (who are understood as pre-literate). As ACTA point out, it is well established in the literature that previous education (and thus existing levels of literacy) is the most important factor in determining a learner's ability to learn another language (2021, p. 28).

The same points have been observed by researchers and practitioners within the field. Williams (2010) notes that the needs of low-literacy EAL learners diverge from those of their high literacy peers in several important ways. For example, low-literacy EAL learners do not possess the first-language literacy skills that are generally used as a foundation for teaching a second language (e.g. the capacity to use existing written language as a mnemonic device for sounding out pronunciation). Williams further notes that low-literacy EAL learners are also in the position of having to develop English language literacy before developing first-language literacy, which is the reverse of what occurs as children proceed through the educational system. Williams and other researchers examining this issue (Benseman, 2013; Choi & Ziegler, 2015) report that low-literacy second-language learners are also required to become rapidly familiar with the norms and practices associated with formal classroom instruction at the same time as learning the new language. Appendix 6 provides a more detailed background of the literature on the unique needs of adult learners of English with low levels of literacy or prior schooling and the digital literacy challenges encountered by these learners.

Given these challenges, teaching a second language to adult learners with minimal previous literacy and schooling requires an additional set of awarenesses and skills on the part of educators, to ensure successful language acquisition and facility. For example, many of those with low first-language literacy presently learning a second language come from cultural backgrounds with rich oral traditions which can be used in constructing classroom exercises that minimise the need for first-language literacy. As such, learners' first language can be used to explain concepts and tasks (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Grimaud et al., 2019). Further, the literature consistently points out that effective development of these learners' literacy skills needs to be based on oral English that stems from concrete real-world experiences (e.g. excursions, undertaking common activities) and learning that is strongly supported by visual and other practical experiences. Strategies that support these needs would include using oral instructions rather than relying only on writing instructions, planning 'hands-on' activities that learners can put into practice, and using content from the lives of their learners to ensure relevance, promote motivation for engagement and enhance the practicality of what is taught and acquired in the classroom (ACTA, 2021, p. 29; Grimaud et al., 2019).

Images provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

In addition to these pedagogical strategies, educators must also be aware of the broader social, historical and affective contexts in which low-literacy adult second-language learners undertake their studies. For example, adopting a trauma-informed approach to language education, and addressing learners' cultural as well as linguistic needs is likely to provide them with a level of emotional awareness and security that can enhance conditions for second-language learning (Achren et al., 2012; Palanac, 2022). Palanac provides a number of such strategies that are related not only to learning in class (such as creating content that is related to important concerns such as interacting with migration authorities) but also to meta-pedagogical matters such as classroom expectations (e.g. reassuring learners about the teacher's understanding that they may need to take urgent phone calls during class) and even the physical layout of the classroom (such as ensuring that there is plenty of natural light in the classroom and readily accessible bathroom facilities).

Further, given the lack of pre-existing classroom knowledge for learners with low literacy and little or no previous education, providing guidance in classroom skills may be needed. For these learners, 'Strategies may need to be developed to raise learner awareness of the importance of time-keeping and regular attendance in training courses' (Achren et al., 2012). These learners need to be guided to develop their basic formal educational knowledge and skills on how to be a learner or student (e.g. organising learning resources, being punctual) (ACTA, 2021, p. 29).

In addition to the challenges of learning literacy, English and classroom etiquette at the same time, adult beginner learners of English face unique challenges, both in learning online and in acquiring digital literacy. Teaching digital skills to adult EAL learners has been likened to teaching another new language (technology) within an English language class, to learners with mixed literacy levels and educational backgrounds, many of whom are 'digital immigrants' who did not grow up within the digital age (Adhyaru, 2019).

Development of digital literacy skills, together with building the capacity of teachers and providers to deliver those skills to adult learners, is a current priority of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) sector, as is providing professional development for the adult community and further education workforce to enhance their capacity to teach these core skills (State Government of Victoria, 2020, p. 5). ACTA maintain that digital literacy 'should be promoted as a normal and integral part of learning literacy and English' rather than being 'quarantined or decontextualized from other learning' (2021, p. 41).

While related, online learning and digital literacy require different pedagogical approaches and resources. Whereas online learning refers to teaching and learning EAL in the virtual environment, digital literacy refers to the skills required to navigate technology both in and outside of the classroom. Though distinct, digital literacy skills are an essential component of learning within an online environment. Lack of digital literacy skills can profoundly affect learners' ability to engage in online learning, and likewise, teachers may struggle to cultivate an engaging online learning space.

Most definitions of digital literacy centre on a person's awareness of, ability in and attitude towards the use of both digital devices and digital sources of information to achieve useful ends (such as communication) (García-Sánchez, 2021; Peng & Yu, 2022). Tour makes the point that digital literacy is not a single concept but encompasses multiple literacies – such as literacy for text messaging versus literacy for online interaction – directed to multiple audiences, for example, online interaction amongst family versus the same modality for online learning (2020).

Prior to the pandemic, greater integration of technological and digital skills for EAL learners had been called for in the second-language learning sector. The development of technological and digital skills was understood as an essential part of attaining literacy for adult English language learners (TESOL International Association, 2001, p. 5). This was coupled with the recognition that teachers needed better support and training to utilise digital technologies in their teaching and to be able to teach digital skills to their EAL learners (TESOL International Association, 2001, pp. 8–9; Adhyaru, 2019). Prior to the pandemic, however, the field of research examining second-language teachers' experience with and attitudes towards online language teaching was limited. There was exploration of similar themes to those noted during and following the COVID-19 pandemic – for example, on the importance of ensuring that technology thoughtfully reflects particular pedagogical approaches to language learning, the capacity for online learning to support the acquisition of some language skills (e.g. listening) better than others (e.g. writing), and the convenience and accessibility of online second-language learning (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Kotula, 2016; Milojković, 2018). The move to online learning that was necessitated by the pandemic brought the online learning and digital literacy needs of adult beginner EAL learners and their teachers to the fore, demonstrating the urgency of the need to provide tailored guidance for teachers and providers.

1.2 The experiences of adult beginner EAL learners and teachers during COVID-19 and the shift to virtual learning: New and existing challenges are brought to the fore

As is now well known, the arrival of COVID-19 necessitated a hasty shift to online learning across the education sector, including the adult community education sector. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to maintain physical distancing pushed millions of people online to continue their personal and professional lives. One of the most visible forms of this mass move into an online environment was in the sphere of education, with learners and their teachers around the world being suddenly propelled into the use of digital technologies to continue with their studies. There was a need to adapt quickly from the traditional face-to-face format for delivering learning to an entirely online format, with teachers and educational institutions globally scrambling to try and make this work for students as quickly and effectively as possible. The shift to online learning forced teachers to re-imagine their pedagogical approach, quickly develop new resources, and re-think how to best engage their students whilst working online.

This move to online learning thus created additional challenges and barriers for both learners and teachers. Online teaching created additional communication barriers for learners and teachers, and the need for greater teacher training in online learning strategies became more evident and urgent.

The existing barriers to learning for these cohorts included lack of access to adequate equipment to facilitate online learning and challenges adapting to this mode of learning: these were further compounded by the pandemic-necessitated change to fully online delivery. AMES Australia's Response to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training on Adult literacy and its importance in 2021 notes that:

> *As a direct outcome of COVID-19 online learning and digital access has resulted in a multi modal approach to delivery of LLND [Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital] to recent arrivals; and a radical and unprecedented reliance on digital technology. Access to digital technology is a key factor that moderates the effectiveness of remote learning. The transition to online learning is a particular struggle for those without proper technology and access to devices…The effectiveness of online learning – particularly for teaching LLND – varies, and challenges have been identified for different cohorts in using technology as a learning tool. (2021, p. 7)*

The source of digital literacy challenges in teaching to some second-language learners experiencing vulnerability occurs at several levels, ranging from issues related to skills in the use of hardware and software on phones and computers through to socio-economic and cultural factors around access to resources and stigma associated with learning and education for particular sub-populations such as women or those with a disability (Bui 2022; Zholdoshalieva et al., 2022).

Whilst the rapid adaptation from face-to-face to fully online teaching during the pandemic was a challenge for both teachers and learners at all levels of education, it was quickly recognised that there were specific challenges associated with this move for the language learning community. Some of these included the impact of online learning on social engagement between learners and teachers (Charalambous–Philippides, 2023; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2023) and the technical aspects of language acquisition (Kyriakidou & Taxitari, 2023). In an early thematic review of the literature on the topic during the pandemic, Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) noted that the major change was in the move to synchronous (live) teaching via the use of video conferencing software and that, in general, teachers described being very under-prepared for this shift. The authors variously

described these barriers as technological (including limited access to technology or teachers' lack of familiarity with the software), pedagogical (such as teachers' inability to employ activities involving physical interactivity amongst learners) and social (including teacher observation of reduced learner interaction).

As well as the impact on learners, the requirement for increased teacher training and professional development in teaching strategies was highlighted by the need for almost all synchronous learning to take place online. In a submission to an Inquiry on the disruption to education systems caused by the pandemic, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) reported that a national survey of over 10,000 Australian teachers conducted during April 2020 found that 'only 30 per cent of teachers had been trained to deliver remote learning prior to the pandemic, and the majority (80 per cent) felt unprepared for the transition, particularly in non-metropolitan areas' (DESE, 2020, p. 12). DESE summarised the issue:

> *For teachers, effective remote learning and use of online mechanisms requires more than simply knowing how to use technology or transferring existing materials to an online platform. It requires new or adapted pedagogies, management and organisation of content, institutional support and new or adapted ways of engaging and interacting with students. (2020, p. 12)*

The barriers encountered while teaching online during the pandemic were highlighted in ACTA's 2020 survey on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-school sector. One teacher who completed the survey said:

> *The most serious problem was trying to teach very low level students when they cannot adequately see gestures, facial expressions, mouth movements and written examples over the phone. It is a very ineffective form of teaching and made communication/explanation exceptionally difficult. (ACTA, 2021, p. 39)*

Respondents to this survey frequently reported adult migrants using their phones to access classes and submit assignments (ACTA, 2021, p. 39). Thus, the online environment itself created an additional barrier to effective communication, and particularly for those learning English with already low literacy (see Appendix 6 for a deeper exploration of the additional challenges that learners and teachers encountered in second-language learning with the move to remote learning during COVID-19).

In light of these challenges, ACTA recommended that:

- 'Learners with minimal/no previous schooling and those lacking digital experience require face-to-face induction into using digital resources'.
- 'Low proficiency English language learners require at least some face-to-face teaching in order to develop basic English listening and speaking competence'.
- 'Support for extending digital literacy skills should focus on improving student access and upskilling teachers through teacher development' (2021, p. 41).

As noted above, there were few guidelines within the sector prior to 2020 for online teaching of adult beginner learners of English with complex needs (this is explored more in Appendix 6). This report describes how Carringbush identified the diverse learner and teacher needs, in both online learning and teaching and in developing effective digital skills, that became evident during the pandemic and how they adapted their learning programs and teaching in response.

1.3 The move to online learning and teaching at Carringbush during the pandemic

The communication, access and pedagogical challenges faced by learners and teachers globally were mirrored at Carringbush as, in March 2020 and in common with all Australian educational institutions in response to COVID-19, their EAL programs were adapted for online (virtual) delivery. Carringbush's transition to online learning had extra levels of complexity related to both the known and the soon-to-be discovered factors influencing how their learner cohort accessed education and services.

WHAT LEARNING NEEDS WERE IDENTIFIED AND WHAT CHALLENGES AROSE WHEN CARRINGBUSH ADAPTED TO DELIVERY OF TEACHING ONLINE DUE TO THE PANDEMIC? HOW DID CARRINGBUSH ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES?

The pandemic lockdowns required teachers to adapt quickly, both to online teaching per se and to navigating the online teaching of beginner English to their learners. The problems they identified included how to teach learners English in an online format, given the barriers they already face (such as not being able to properly read in their own native language), and how to engage with them effectively and keep the classroom community together, when learners couldn't see their teachers or each other.

While most learners possessed smartphones, these are not appropriate for quality online learning, so equity, in terms of learners' lack of access to suitable digital devices to continue learning, was a major issue for Carringbush. Other related emergent challenges included determining how teachers would get in touch with their learners, and how to help them learn on their smartphones.

A key part of creating effective engagement with learners in an online format involves developing learners' digital skills and digital access. Unsurprisingly, Carringbush's teachers were generally less experienced and confident in teaching online and required guidance and support in the choice and use of online tools to engage their classes, given Carringbush had not offered any teaching in this mode prior to the pandemic.

Carringbush management recognised these problems and responded in numerous ways. In Term 4 of 2020, Carringbush worked with researchers from Monash University to pilot a project that implemented a 'Flipped Learning Approach' to teaching, where teachers trialled a range of pre-class digital learning tasks, with the intention of investigating effective teaching practices for online teaching in this context. The online LMS Moodle was introduced to facilitate this.

Through funding from a variety sources, a device-lending library was created to address learners' digital access and inequity, where Carringbush provided its learners with access to both devices (such as iPads) and the internet, and the staff and teachers provided extensive support to transition these learners to the online platforms via a bespoke digital mentoring program. In addition, teachers worked to accelerate their learners' development of independent learning skills to enable learning from home. Recognising the need to support teachers to adapt their teaching to an online format, Carringbush management created the position of a Digital Capacity Coordinator. This role supported Carringbush staff to further develop both their own digital literacy skills and their confidence in using digital tools to teach beginner English language online. Both the digital mentoring program and the role of the Digital Capacity Coordinator are described further in the next section.

Carringbush encouraged a strengths-based approach in supporting its teachers, which involved a journey of implementation. Teachers designed activities that could be accessed on mobile phones and on the tablets provided by the organisation on a library loan basis; they also adapted their course materials and lesson plans to ensure learners had the opportunity to develop and practise their digital skills each week. Learners were able to develop these skills through activities such as practising logging onto Moodle in class time with the support of digital mentors, engaging with videos and interactive activities on Moodle, logging onto Zoom, engaging with content on WhatsApp, including videos, audio and text messages, and using e-books on their devices.

Prior to the move to online learning in 2020, both learners and teachers at Carringbush lacked confidence and experience in online learning and teaching. While basic digital competence and awareness are now considered essential 'life skills', pre-pandemic, most Carringbush learners were novice users of, and anxious about, technology, not only for learning, but also for daily activities. All learners had mobile phones, but few had access to, or experience in using, devices better suited to learning such as tablets or laptops.

In addition to enabling adult learners experiencing vulnerability to gain autonomy and ownership over their own learning journey in an increasingly digital world, the upskilling of EAL teachers helped these learners to develop the confidence and skills to connect with their broader communities. When classes were able to return to an in-person format, Carringbush management and teachers agreed to adapt their delivery model to offer hybrid classes, consisting of both in-person and online sessions. This hybrid model was important in continuing learners' familiarity with and development of digital skills, as well as providing different ways of learning English, aligning with the 'Universal Design for Learning' principles of multiple ways of engaging learners and presenting information (CAST, 2024).

1.4 An innovative response to supporting teachers and learners: The evolution of Carringbush's digital mentoring program

Digital literacy and online learning are increasingly important elements of instruction at Carringbush. The pandemic-driven changes were transformative in highlighting learners' pre-existing, if unidentified, needs, particularly those with little to no formal schooling, minimal access to or experience with technology and who are pre-literate in their first language. When Carringbush moved to virtual classes, as outlined above, demands for learners to access a digitised form of learning increased and teachers were required to integrate an unprecedented level of digital skills into their practice.

As noted, in response to this need, Carringbush introduced a flipped learning approach that incorporated asynchronous (self-paced) learning in their modes of delivery. This model continues to be used, whereby learners engage with content prior to synchronous (live) class time, allowing them to participate more actively in learning. Carringbush continues regular digital literacy work with learners, offering one day of online class per week together with the in-person classes where the practice of digital literacy skills is integrated into the class activities.

Recognising the importance of regular and ongoing support for both teachers and learners in skill development, digital mentors continue to work with classroom teachers to deliver lessons on digital skills to the whole class. These digital literacy sessions currently take place in weekly hour-long classes. To facilitate these sessions, a digital literacy guide was developed with resources and learning progressions for each platform used at Carringbush or identified as needed by their learners. The program also enables regular targeted, individualised digital mentoring to new and current learners.

The pandemic-induced changes not only shed light on the importance of digital skills for learners and the challenges they face, it also revealed the demands on teachers when integrating technology into their practice. In 2022, the role of Digital Capacity Coordinator was introduced to oversee various aspects of the program, offering professional development and support for teachers with an emphasis on the best instructional strategies for teaching digital literacy and integrating digital resilience into lessons. Recognising the socio-emotional struggles involved in teaching and learning digital skills, digital resilience aims to support learners to become empowered users of technology, promoting a flexible mindset that can troubleshoot when a problem arises. With this strengths-based model, Carringbush demonstrates that this concept of resilience is

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

key to guiding learners away from viewing every challenge they encounter as disruptive, instead empowering them to embrace change as an important element in their process of lifelong learning. Teachers continue to integrate digital resilience into their practice to model the concept to their learners.

Carringbush's journey towards a hybrid model of learning that effectively incorporates digital literacy continues to evolve and be refined, supported by strategic partnerships and leadership, with a commitment to responding and adapting to the needs of their learners.

1.5 The aims of this study

As noted above, Carringbush learners and teachers faced various challenges, both during this transition to online learning and in helping learners develop the vital digital skills to enable their learning. These concerns, together with the scarcity of research in developing better teaching practices for adult beginner EAL learners with complex needs, led Carringbush to approach ACU in 2021 to undertake a project to address this gap.

Carringbush's aim in undertaking this study was to identify ways in which they could improve how they teach English to adult beginner learners, in light of the new reality of online learning brought about by COVID-19, and the need for learners to develop robust digital skills.

In doing so, they intended to identify factors that enabled good online teaching and learning and those that were barriers to it, with a view to designing for a future where this mode of learning would become the norm.

Through this project, Carringbush sought to answer the following questions:

- What teaching practices and digital learning resources are effective in supporting English language development for adult beginner learners experiencing complex barriers to participating in online learning?
- What are the elements in the resources that make them accessible, engaging and effective in facilitating learning for learners who have low digital literacy and language skills?
- What professional development strategies and guidelines can be used to support teachers in developing these resources?
- Do any current standards or guidelines exist for teaching adult EAL learners with complex needs in an online/digital learning context?

The project aimed to enable Carringbush to understand the elements and characteristics of digital learning resources that stimulate high levels of learner engagement and enable independent learning, and to build teachers' skills and knowledge in integrating digital learning resources into their lessons to enhance learner engagement and skills development. In this way, Carringbush aimed to help their teachers meet the technological demands of current and future classrooms and workplaces.

2. Methods and methodological approach: How we engaged learners and teachers in the study

In this study, we asked teachers and learners to reflect on their experiences of online teaching and learning, both retrospectively during the pandemic-induced changes in 2020, and later in 2022 and 2023, after face-to-face classes had resumed. Both groups provided valuable feedback about their level of knowledge, experience and confidence in teaching or learning online, and the learning tools and technologies they were using during these time periods.

As it was important to Carringbush that feedback was collected from the EAL learners in different levels, learners from the level 1 Course in Initial EAL (pre-literate or 'beginner') and the level 3 Certificate 1 in EAL were invited to participate in the study, together with the teachers who worked with them.

Learners and teachers shared their experiences with the ACU project team via surveys and focus groups. For both cohorts, participant involvement and the survey and focus group questions were approved by ACU's Human Research Ethics Committee.

2.1 How learners participated in the study

Given learners in both cohorts had rudimentary English skills, and many were not text literate in their original language/s, the lead researcher and Carringbush teachers worked together to explain and undertake these activities with learners in ways that would optimise their ability to understand and participate in them. The approach we took to engaging learners in the study is detailed below.

Learner participants completed a survey with a follow-up focus group interview at two discrete time periods, the first in May 2022 and the second in April 2023. The survey activities (questions) were similar for both time periods, with minor differences in the focus of the questions (see Appendix 2 for the questions asked in surveys 1 and 2 for beginner and third level learners).

In the first surveys and focus groups, learners primarily reflected on their experiences and feelings while their learning was fully online in 2020 and provided some information about the hybrid learning approach taken across 2022 and 2023.

The second surveys and focus groups one year later focused more on learners' engagement and experiences with various learning technologies and tools, as well as their preferences for teaching modes (online, face-to-face).

The information letters and consent forms were co-designed with Carringbush teachers so that information about the

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

purpose, benefits and risks of the study, and the steps taken to ensure participant confidentiality, was understandable. These were translated orally into the various languages spoken by members of each class, and the recordings were loaded onto the relevant class's Moodle site. Native speakers were available to translate these documents for two language groups in the classroom.

The information letters and consent form explained that everyone would complete a worksheet as part of the normal class activities. After the activity, individuals could decide whether to allow us to see their answers (that is, have them included as part of the study; this was the survey) and indicate whether they would like to be invited to later join a small group conversation (the focus groups) held in their own language (see Appendix 1 for the Participant information letters provided to beginner [Initial EAL] and third level [Certificate 1] learners).[1]

To help learners understand what to expect, the teachers explained that the ACU researcher would be visiting the class in a designated week, prior to this happening. On that day the teacher explained in English the activity we would be doing together, and then learners listened to the appropriate recording in their first or native language to ensure understanding. The participant population was therefore all learners present in the classes on that day (see Figure 3).

Acknowledging that a traditional text-based survey (whether with pen and paper or online) would be neither appropriate nor accessible to learners, each survey was designed as a paper-based class learning activity so that it was useful for both teacher and learners regardless of whether individuals consented to participate in the project.

The activity elicited information about how and where the learners studied English and their confidence in and preferences for both language learning and device use in different contexts, for example, when they were at home, in everyday life, and whilst learning English. We used images with questions written in basic English to support participants to understand what was being asked and provided emojis to enable them to clearly indicate their confidence/satisfaction in relation to each question (see Figure 1 for an example).

We also asked questions about learner activities in both face-to-face and online classes and about some of the learning resources they used. The survey activities provided useful information about learner preferences and activities, and also informed the questions used in the subsequent focus groups.

A semi-structured focus group (introduced as a 'small group in my own language') was held two weeks after each survey activity, also during class time. Questions prompted learners to consider the benefits and challenges of learning both in a classroom and online, and their confidence levels in using technology for both learning and in everyday life. Learners from the same language group within a class were interviewed in small groups of up to four participants, with an interpreter present during their interactions with the lead researcher; several of the learners chose to respond in a mixture of their first language and English. Importantly,

[1] *Pseudonyms have been used in place of teachers' names in all appendices, as relevant.*

holding the groups in their preferred languages enabled learners to articulate thoughts and experiences that might otherwise have remained unheard by those who teach them. Similarly, the presence of interpreters allowed us to elicit more detail about some of the survey questions, as well as to invite free comments on any aspect of their learning (see Appendix 2 for the questions asked in learners' focus groups 1 and 2).

Across both time periods, 40 learners returned their surveys (including 31 unique participants) and 33 joined the focus groups (including 28 unique participants). Thus, nine people completed both surveys, while five participated in both of the focus groups.2 Figure 2 represents the number of learners who participated in the study according to activity (survey or focus group) and time point. Of the focus group participants, 75% were female; two participants were under 40, with the rest being 50 years of age and over.

There were over 15 different languages other than English identified as spoken at home by the learners. It was not considered appropriate to report the country of origin for survey participants as this might inadvertently identify respondents. Instead, the learner participant cohort is described in Figure 3 in terms of the main languages spoken by those who completed the survey and/or focus groups. The category 'other' is used to further preserve anonymity where there were only one or two speakers of that language. Two learners recorded speaking more than one language, so each has been included in the language grouping with the greatest number of speakers. To further preserve anonymity, learners' names have been removed when reporting on their feedback shared in the focus groups, and comments are referred to as being shared by 'a learner'. Where names appear in the quotes, a pseudonym has been used. Similarly, teacher names have been removed when reporting on their feedback, and comments from the survey and focus groups are referred to as being shared by 'a teacher'.

2.2. How teachers participated in the study

Teachers were also surveyed at the same two time points as learners (May 2022 and April 2023), with one semi-structured focus group held after the second survey, in June 2023. The surveys (delivered online) comprised both quantitative and qualitative (short answer) questions, where teachers were asked about their experiences of online teaching in comparison with face-to-face teaching, including utilising digital technologies to develop and deliver lessons, and their perception of their learners' learning (see Appendix 3 for the questions asked in surveys 1 and 2 for staff).

Five teachers completed the first survey and nine completed the second survey. As responses were anonymous, it is not possible to ascertain how many of the initial five teachers also completed the second survey. However, as there had been a sizeable change in staffing at Carringbush over that time period, it is reasonable to assume that it is fewer than five.

Six staff participated in a semi-structured focus group, which expanded upon the survey questions asked. Questions prompted teachers to reflect on changes over time in their confidence levels and experiences of online teaching, and their development and use of digital resources for teaching (see Appendix 3 for the questions asked in the teacher focus group). Midway through the study, and again prior to inviting staff to participate in the second survey and the focus group, the lead researcher presented to Carringbush teachers on the key themes related to experiences of learning and teaching online and the use of technology, based on the learners' and teachers' feedback from the first surveys completed. Sharing preliminary findings with teachers enabled them and other Carringbush staff to reflect on key findings during the course of the project, rather than only at its end. Importantly, it allowed teachers to adapt their practice in response to new knowledge about learners' preferences, strengths and challenges.

2.3 Approach to data analysis and interpretation

Given the small size of the learner sample for the surveys, consideration was given to merging both the beginner and third-level participants' responses into a single sample for analysis. Appropriate statistical methods were used to assess whether there were significant differences between the two groups in terms of their responses to the survey questions.[3] None were found, suggesting that it was possible and appropriate to combine the two groups into a single sample.

The learners' survey questions, while broadly similar across time periods, reflected the respective learning contexts. As a result of combining learner responses, some survey questions were omitted from analysis (and thus from the report) as they were not included in both the first and second surveys. However, some learners did volunteer comments on these in the focus groups, so where relevant and appropriate, these have been included.

When the learners' focus group transcripts were reviewed, similarities between the themes identified across the two time periods and between language groups became apparent, so the decision was made to combine the two data sets for the focus groups together and thematically analyse them as one set. Thematic analysis is an approach to the interpretation of qualitative data where the researchers analyse participant responses and identify key themes based on patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researchers analysed learner and teacher responses to develop the key themes and findings, explored in the following chapters, which are seen to represent both the common and diverse experiences and perceptions of the participants. Thus, analysing the two focus group

[2] While learner survey responses were anonymous, participants signed the information letter and consent form, which were attached as the front sheets of the survey. The ACU researcher separated these front sheets from the surveys before analysis, to determine whether survey 2 respondents were new participants or had also completed survey 1.

[3] Specifically, a Mann-Whitney U test (a test used to determine if responses are similar or not) indicated that it was appropriate to combine the two learner groups into a single sample for analysis, as their responses to survey questions were found to be equivalent with no significant differences between beginner and third-level learner responses. None of the variables in the responses we assessed demonstrated a statistical significance less than the standard measure (in this case, $p = <0.05$), even after correcting for multiple comparisons by using the Bonferroni correction method.

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

data sets together was considered appropriate given that our emphasis was not upon a numerical approach to the qualitative data (e.g. quantifying the difference between learner responses at the start and end of the study) but upon discerning themes that would be of value in answering the research questions. In the main, different learners attended the focus group interviews in 2022 and 2023. This reflects the understanding of qualitative research as producing a richness of response rather than a strict adherence to the measurement of quantitative differences.

Given the approach taken to analysing the data from learners' surveys and focus groups, the analysis and discussion of learner findings in this report is based on and reflects the experiences of both groups of learners, unless otherwise stated.

As with the data collected from learners, the teachers' surveys were not designed to collect responses that could be compared in a strict 'pre' and 'post' sense. Instead, they aimed to – and are understood as – capturing teachers' experiences, opinions and practices over time as their own digital knowledge and teaching practices evolved. As the surveys asked different questions, in this sense, they contribute two halves of a whole. Teachers' qualitative (written) survey responses are further explored through a thematic analysis of their focus group data.

Quotes from learners and teachers in the following chapters illustrate the key themes identified and include longer slabs of text than is customary in qualitative analysis. For learners, this reflects the nature of the exchange between the interviewer (a native English speaker), the interpreter, and the learners, for whom English constitutes an emerging language. Specifically, there were occasions where the interviewers needed to scaffold their questioning in a way that invited participants to expand little by little on their answer in manageable 'chunks'.

Some quotes or comments from learners and teachers are used more than once in this report, where they have been understood as supporting several different themes. Finally, it should be noted that where numerous quotes appear in a row to support a point, quotes that appear on a separate line have been provided by different learners and teachers.

2.4 Limitations of the study

There were several limitations to this study that meant we needed to alter our research plan from our original intentions. Most significantly, the study was commenced during the course of several lockdowns in Melbourne due to COVID-19, causing significant delays to data collection from learners and teachers. During these lockdowns, which were beyond both Carringbush's and the project team's control, Carringbush learners could not attend classes in person, and thus we could not conduct our survey activities or focus group conversations with them at the planned times.

Our initial intention was to compare any changes in experience, learning confidence and needs amongst the same group of Carringbush learners prior to and after the study's interventions had been introduced. However, unlike 'traditional' schooling, learners in EAL classes do not necessarily follow a standard progression from one year to the next, and enrolment in these classes can vary within and between one year's teaching terms. This, together with the delay in implementing the surveys and focus groups, meant it was not possible to ensure that we spoke with the same learners at both time points.

Restrictions due to COVID-19 and delays caused by lockdowns also meant that the interventions we introduced were not as structured and detailed as originally planned. For example, we initially intended to deliver a series of professional development workshops to Carringbush staff to provide them with guidance and hands-on opportunities to utilise currently used software in different ways, or to introduce new software tools that could support their teaching. We were unable to deliver this in the more formally structured way, given disruptions to teaching schedules and delays in collecting data from learners. Instead, the lead researcher worked with Carringbush teachers individually throughout the project, on a more informal basis, to provide this guidance, and explore and test existing and new technologies with teachers as the need arose.

A final limitation of this study is that there is a small sample size of learners, which means that we cannot determine whether the experiences the learner participants reported also represent the common or dominant experiences of other Carringbush learners. It should be kept in mind that Carringbush learners represent a diverse cohort, each with different needs, and we could not capture and report on all learner experiences or needs in this study. Despite this limitation, we did not design this study with the intention that the participants' experiences would represent the experiences of all other Carringbush learners. Our focus has been on capturing meaningful, rich and quality information about the core highlights, challenges, experiences and confidence levels of the Carringbush learners we heard from, which has been achieved.

The sample size is small, as is the population from which it is drawn – learners in two classes at one institution. As this research was intended as exploratory, rather than as a larger-scale design, the results of the learner survey are reported descriptively (e.g. in the form of frequency counts and percentages). As we did not intend the findings to be statistically analysed, or to make comments or predictions about the broader population of Carringbush learners, no conclusions can be drawn about whether the results are reflective of the broader Carringbush (or sector) learner sample. However, the descriptive statistics that are presented provide an excellent basis for larger inferential studies in future.

FIGURE 1.

EXAMPLE QUESTION FROM SURVEY 1 FOR BEGINNER AND THIRD LEVEL CARRINGBUSH LEARNERS: HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WERE LEARNING ENGLISH ONLINE, AT HOME?

FIGURE 2.

LEARNER PARTICIPATION

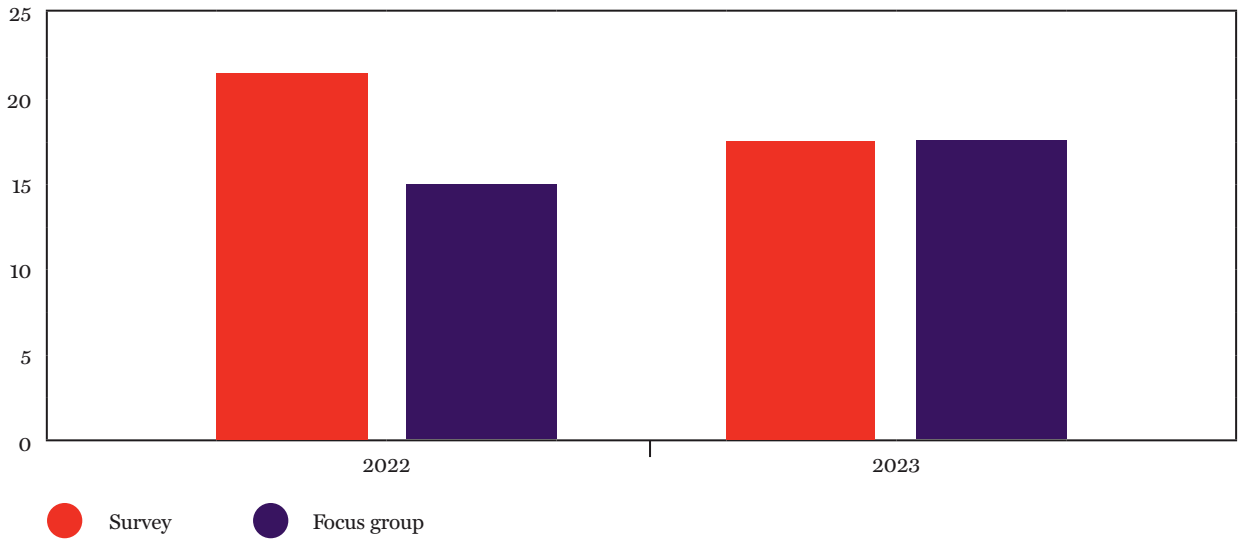
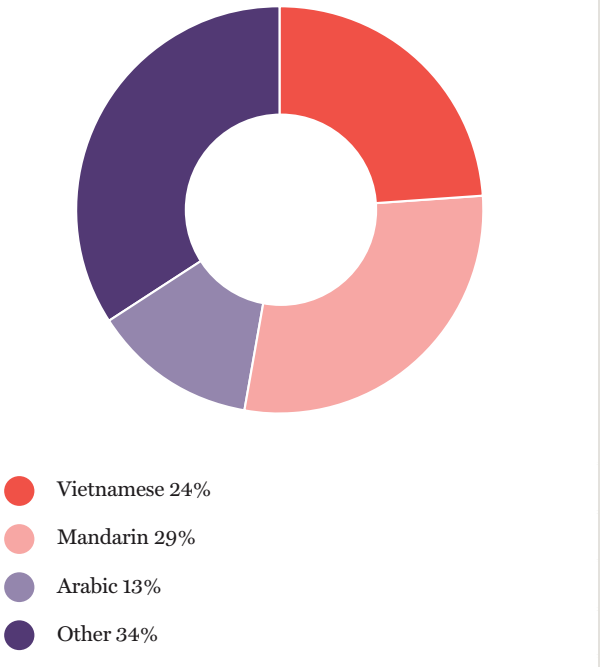


FIGURE 3.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY LEARNERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY



3. Findings: What learners told us

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from learners based on their experiences of learning at Carringbush from early 2020 to mid-2023. Key findings and themes are presented based on the common experiences and perceptions reported by learners across the two surveys and two focus groups. The key findings and themes we explore below include device use and attitudes towards online English learning, learners' preferences for face-to-face, online and blended learning options, other barriers that shape their unique learning needs, learners' level of digital literacy skills, attitudes towards English language acquisition, and the role of others in supporting them to learn.

The findings from the learners' survey and focus groups are presented separately below, while the key patterns or themes that appear in both data sets are identified.

3.1. Key findings from learners

- Most Carringbush learners use their mobile phone and/or a tablet for learning English online.
- Carringbush learners use their mobile devices for numerous different everyday activities, indicating a good level of existing digital proficiency with the devices they use.
- Most learners found the online learning materials created useful in supporting their English learning, in both online and face-to-face classes.
- When learning moved online at Carringbush due to the pandemic, many learners initially encountered numerous barriers to effectively using digital technologies, including having a low level of digital literacy skills, lacking the confidence to learn how to use digital technologies, a lack of prior educational experiences in 'learning how to learn' digital technologies, and needing a level of English to navigate the apps that they had not yet learnt. However, by the time of the second focus group (in April 2023), learners' growing confidence in and enjoyment of device use was evident.
- The social aspect of learning is important and it is difficult to achieve the same degree of social interaction in an online learning environment. Learners felt they were less likely to work with other people in the online classroom, while their learning in the face-to-face classroom was made meaningful through interactions with their teacher and peers.
- The majority of Carringbush learners reported that they preferred face-to-face learning in a classroom with others more than online learning, because it provides the ability for questions and answers in 'real time' and in an embodied way, and both structured and unstructured opportunities for learning and socialisation with peers.
- At the same time, learners valued the flexibility afforded by online learning related to family and work, and the ability to review content as often as needed, when it suited them.
- Separate to the online format, an interplay of complex factors including health factors, educational background and socio-cultural expectations shape the unique learning needs of this cohort.

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

- As opposed to online-only learning, most learners expressed a preference for a blended learning experience, in which technology extended and supported (but did not take the place of) the face-to-face classroom. Carringbush learners value learning English because it provides a pathway to independence and connection in everyday life, allowing them to undertake essential daily tasks and connect with native English speakers. Learners also expressed a desire for more community-based opportunities to practice their English.
- Learners identified that Carringbush teachers, family members and peers play an important role in helping them learn English and engage in online learning. Learners also expressed affection and respect for their Carringbush teachers.

3.2. What we found from learners' survey responses about device use and attitudes towards online English learning

Learners' survey responses provided useful information about their use of available devices, their attitudes towards learning English online, the usefulness of materials Carringbush created for online learning, and differences in activities and interactions between the face-to-face and online classroom. Key themes identified based on key findings are explored in this chapter.

3.2.1. AVAILABILITY AND USE OF DEVICES

Learners were asked about the availability of devices at home and their use of these devices for online English learning. 'Devices' included a laptop, phone, tablet or desktop PC.

All learners had access to at least one device at home (their phone) and the majority reported using both the phone and a tablet for learning English online (see Figure 4). All learners made use of pen and paper during online learning, in addition to their devices.

Understanding the ways in which Carringbush learners are already adept at using their devices is an important part of discerning their digital literacy needs. The survey asked learners to indicate which activities, from a list of images, they might use their available devices for, and whether they enjoyed using devices in these ways.

All but one learner used their available devices for communicating with people in their home country and translating words. Most learners used their devices for entertainment, including watching YouTube and movies, or listening to music or the radio, while 'playing games' and 'shopping' were the least popular reasons for use. Half of the learners surveyed used their devices for six or more reasons, suggesting an impressive level of existing digital proficiency with available devices, and over 85% indicated that they enjoyed using their devices for these different activities (see Figure 5).

3.2.2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ONLINE ENGLISH LEARNING

While the majority of learners indicated that they liked learning English online at home, there was unanimous agreement that they preferred 'learning in a classroom with other people' over 'learning at home using devices'.

3.2.3. USEFULNESS OF MATERIALS CREATED FOR ONLINE LEARNING

Prior to the move to online learning, Carringbush teachers provided learners with pre-class videos and 'homework booklets' (hard-copy worksheets). Early in the lockdown period, the worksheets were being mailed to class members and the videos sent over WhatsApp, but over time this transitioned to the worksheets also being converted to virtual format and made available on Moodle. Complementing these, additional resources that included interactive activities were uploaded to Moodle on an ad hoc basis.

Learners were overwhelmingly positive about the pre-class videos and hard-copy booklets, and most reported that the Moodle version of the homework booklet content was useful for learning English both online and in face-to-face classes.

3.2.4. DIFFERENCES IN ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS IN THE FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ONLINE CLASSROOM

As far as possible, teachers attempted to replicate in the online environment the activities they used for face-to-face teaching, despite the platforms lacking the features that might enable this. In the physical classroom, all learners liked to 'spend time with other people', 'get help from the teacher', 'ask the teacher questions' and 'work with other people in a group'. In the online classroom, however, learners felt they were less likely to work with other people. These responses would suggest that their learning in the face-to-face classroom centres around important social interactions with their teacher and peers much more than does their online learning.

3.3. What we found from learners' focus group responses

In addition to seeking further elucidation of the survey results, the semi-structured focus groups allowed us to seek learner feedback on more abstract concepts that could not easily be probed with the survey activity.

Learners' responses in the focus groups provided more detailed information about their learning experiences, perceptions and preferences, and their digital literacy skills, as well as barriers they encounter – both to language learning and to learning in general. Key themes identified based on the key findings are explored in this chapter.

3.3.1. LEARNERS PREFER FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

One of the most consistent findings from the learner focus group interviews was the decided preference for face-to-face learning. This key finding was also evident from the survey data, as noted above, and thus consistent across both forums in which learners provided their feedback. All learners interviewed stated this preference either directly or indirectly (e.g. they discussed the challenges they encountered with online learning, but rarely mentioned the challenges associated with learning face-to-face). Learners told us that face-to-face learning provides or promotes:

- the ability for questions and answers in 'real time' and in an embodied way
- both structured and unstructured opportunities for learning and socialisation with peers
- the opportunity to focus on learning without the distractions of the home environment
- a valuable range of online platforms for use.

As numerous different learners commented:

> *Because I'm beginner and new, and then also to communicate with others, the classroom is very important.*

> *So directly means you can see the person. In the Zoom you see their head, then the sounds may get distorted... Direct, face-to-face class I prefer. On the Zoom, they ask me question and I answer, but I can't appreciate it much.*

> *It's [online learning] okay. But the different or the challenging is when I struggling or I don't know any part. I have no one to ask. No teacher to ask. So sometime I got stuck. But not in the class, I can ask the teacher or someone else.*

> *Yeah. Because you know, for face-to-face, the teacher face learner, understand more. And I can talk to my friend, I can say, ask my teacher straightaway and I can use my action. In the internet, you still can but you know...*

> *I think it's [face-to-face] better. We are together and if there's something that I don't understand, or we don't understand, we can approach the teacher and we can talk more about it.*

The responses indicate the value of both non-verbal and incidental social interaction in enhancing learning and connection with others. This is another finding that is consistent with and extends upon learners' survey response explored above, namely, that learners felt that their learning in the face-to-face classroom incorporated valuable social interactions with their teacher and peers, much more than their online learning. The relative absence of opportunities for both in the online classroom (non-verbal communication and incidental connection) may also be the reason that a small number of respondents alluded to the notion that there was greater shame attached to asking questions of the teacher in this format. As two learners commented:

> *No, she would answer the questions, but every time ask her, every time I feel a bit embarrassed and that's why I prefer to be in person.*

> *I can ask but then kind of feel awkward to ask? Because of my English...bit shy.*

Online platforms can make the question-asker 'stand out' in some fashion from the rest of the group in a way that cannot be rapidly modulated or managed (as might be possible in a face-to-face format). For example, most online meeting platforms highlight the primary speaker visually with the appearance of a border around their image on screen and/or via the in-built function that silences cross-talk between participants whilst a primary speaker is speaking. While Carringbush teachers try to teach learners how to change between speaker and gallery view when using Zoom, some reminders or further emphasis on this functionality might alleviate the discomfort noted by these respondents.

Overall, there was a strong sense expressed by the learners that the face-to-face modality of language learning provides greater opportunities to engage in meaningful ways with both the didactic and social elements of language learning.

3.3.2. LEARNERS' VIEWS ON ONLINE LEARNING: ONLINE LEARNING ALLOWS FLEXIBILITY, BUT BLENDED LEARNING IS PREFERRED

In general, whilst participants appreciated the benefits of being able to complete some of their language learning online, none expressed a decided preference for online language learning in the same way that was expressed for face-to-face learning. Instead, the majority of learners expressed a preference for a blended learning experience, in which technology extended and supported (but did not take the place of) the face-to-face classroom.

While not expressed directly, this preference can be reasonably inferred from the learners' description of the ways in which they used technology (both the software used specifically by Carringbush to deliver content as well as apps in the public domain). For example, several learners indicated that they did not use Moodle outside the classroom but were happy to do so in face-to-face lessons:

> *Interviewer: Thank you, Mustafa. I want to ask you about Moodle and Zoom and things. How do you like using Moodle to learn English in the classroom?*
>
> *Interpreter: Only for the duration of the class he would like to use it.*
>
> *Interviewer: You don't use it at home?*
>
> *Interpreter: It was only the school days and during the classes.*

Another learner responded:

Interviewer: Yeah. The Moodle that you use here, do you like using Moodle, is that helpful?

Learner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah? What's helpful about -

Learner: Reading, writing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Learner: Reading, writing. I listen to like it.

Interviewer: So you listen to the videos -

Learner: Yeah.

Interviewer: ... and then you write? Is that it?

Learner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything you don't like about Moodle?

Learner: No.

Interviewer: No?

Learner: No.

Interviewer: You're a real Moodle girl, aren't you? And is Moodle easy or hard to use?

Learner: Oh, easy.

Interviewer: Easy.

Learner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, good. And the videos on Moodle, do you listen to them at home after the class?

Learner: Because class, we listen to all in class.

Interviewer: Not at home?

Learner: No.

The main positive aspects perceived by learners in relation to online learning included 1) flexibility in relation to their family and work duties and responsibilities, and 2) the ability to re-play and review content (such as pronunciation of words) at their leisure. Several learners commented on this:

The good thing about Zoom is that there is this flexibility that if your daughter is sick ... If my daughter is sick and then she's got a day off from childcare, so that's flexible that you can do online and then at the same time look after my daughter.

Goes with my health. Sometimes I can't come here just for health.

Interpreter: Through Moodle, we can also learn the pronunciation and also with the shape of the mouth, so it's quite visualised.

The flipside of the flexibility of being able to learn outside the face-to-face classroom also represents one of the main challenges associated with online learning, which is the various distractions and competing demands present when learning from home:

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

Interpreter: She says, while the internet is always available (at home), my parents very often disrupt me. They would come in and ask me to go out and do cleaning.

Kind of hard? I've got two kids...Time. Sometime no time. You're busy, but you can't.

Learners' experiences were sought in more detail in relation to their experiences of different online platforms for learning (both those offered by Carringbush and those available within the public domain), as well as in relation to their experiences of how teachers used these platforms to deliver learning and assessment content. The software/apps and platforms that were included in the discussion included Moodle, WhatsApp, Zoom and various Google applications (including Translate and Maps). Teachers used these platforms for delivering content and assessment in multiple ways, including providing learners with videos (via Moodle or WhatsApp) and an electronic version of the workbook in addition to the printed copy which most teachers still provided. They also utilised a range of other resources for both face-to-face and online learning, including interactive activities such as H5P and Wordwall, activities presented on PowerPoint slides and digitised worksheets uploaded to Moodle or sent via WhatsApp.

The response from learners interviewed in the focus groups was reservedly positive: while they valued the various online platforms that were available for use, they also experienced a number of challenges associated with learning and utilising online platforms for learning. In this analysis, limitations in digital literacies emerged as a specific barrier to learners' ability to engage more fully with online learning platforms, so this theme is covered separately in more detail below.

3.3.3. OTHER BARRIERS TO LEARNING SHAPE LEARNERS' UNIQUE LEARNING NEEDS

Although not specifically sought as part of the focus groups, many of the participants provided feedback about some of the more general barriers to learning – and language learning more specifically – that were not related to the online format. Learners cited a range of general barriers to learning including:

1. health problems
2. competing (generally familial) responsibilities
3. individual learning differences and abilities (including disability)
4. the lack of value placed on education in their country or culture of origin
5. the impact of prior educational experience on the ability to learn English (at all or at a reasonable pace)
6. the necessity of possessing some English in order to be able to learn further English.

Given the interplay of these factors in shaping participants' unique needs as learners – from practical or situational factors to their cultural and educational backgrounds – it was considered beneficial to report on these barriers.

Numerous learners shared their experiences:

Interpreter: ...she believe and see how much (the teacher) keen to teach. And that make her feel like she had been looked after value because she wasn't been looked after when she was little at school age. Oh, nothing. They, they didn't send her to school at that time. Oh, the country was not in a situation they can send children to school.

I've got back pain that physically affect my study.

It's my memory...It's hard for me to remember things.

Here it means it's a class, continuously I learn. In Zoom, just one hour so there we can't... After one hour, they want me to attend a class later but that's not... So then I may have work, I go to work...

[I] study here only half a day probably in the morning early. So I tried to finish the classwork given so that when they get back home I can spend time to help my... Because I also help my husband as a carer. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: ...And the workbooks that you take home, the word writing workbooks, are they helpful?

Learner: No, I don't. I don't take the books.

Interviewer: But there's a workbook –

Interpreter: Only the reading books, only.

Interviewer: Yeah, the reading books.

Interpreter: Only the homework, the homework they give me when I do my homework.

Interviewer: That's right.

Interpreter: Yeah. I can use them.

Interviewer: So they're helpful? Or not?

Interpreter: Yes. However, it is helpful. However, the understanding for me is tough, little bit. And then I ask others to assist here, to understand the meanings.

Whilst the barriers occur across a spectrum that ranges from micro or individual-level factors (such as the presence of health conditions or disability) to more macro or socio-cultural factors (such as the care of minors or elders, a task which in many societies still falls to women), it is important to acknowledge that these barriers have reciprocal influence. For example, one learner spoke about the way in which learning for women was not valued in her country of origin and the greater emphasis on her responsibilities for her family. She described feeling lonely when her children were not at home and the importance for her of attending face-to-face classes, in part because of the socialisation this offered (see Appendix 5 for a more detailed discussion about the role of gender in understanding language learning needs and preferences and the importance of recognising this factor in structuring the language learning needs of learners). However, the stress associated with having to engage in a learning context that at times was overwhelming had negative effects upon her physical health, which in turn reduced her ability to participate in both the online and face-to-face language lessons.

Interpreter: She will try her best to learn English from the teaching in the classroom or from the library. And as long as it's in her, in her portion. Cause sometimes when it's too much, she can't take, cannot follow... she find it difficult to follow when it's excessive. Also, she mentioned something about having blood pressure.

Interviewer Oh, okay.

Interpreter: It goes up when, when she found that the learning is excessive.

Interviewer: When she's anxious. Yeah.

Interpreter: And anxious. Yeah.

Interpreter: She said when the blood pressure go up, she doesn't leave home.

Interviewer: Oh.

Interpreter: Sometimes it's in compulsory to attend the classes, but the health prevents from attending...

Learners expressed their appreciation of Carringbush for providing them with tablets for learning, as not having to share devices with family members, in particular children at school, made learning less difficult.

3.3.4. LEARNERS' DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS ARE UNDERDEVELOPED

One area of particular interest and concern for both the teachers and learners who participated in this research was what have been termed 'digital literacies'. As described in this report's introduction, digital literacies encompass a person's awareness of, ability in and attitude towards using both digital devices and digital sources of information to achieve meaningful goals (García-Sánchez, 2021; Peng & Yu, 2022; Tour, 2020). If these qualities (awareness, ability and attitude) are combined into a continuum described as 'preparedness to engage with digital devices and sources of information', then the learner sample might be characterised as operating at a 'low level of preparedness'.

Framing learner responses in this fashion helps us to understand the mismatch between learners' enthusiasm about the possibilities of utilising technological/online platforms and apps for language learning, and some of the difficulties they reported in learning using these digital modalities. That is, learners see the potential of digital technologies in enhancing their learning but are still in the process of developing their confidence and skills in utilising these (particularly independently).

By the time of the second focus group in April 2023, learners' growing confidence in and enjoyment of device use was evident. Several participants expressed interest in learning how to use their phones (in particular) for activities beyond those of daily living, such as the creation of cooking videos for others in their communities.

Many learners described struggling initially with the rapid move to online learning, with several reporting that they relied on assistance particularly from family members and (later during the pandemic with the return to the classroom) teachers to assist with setting up and/or navigating the required software on their devices. Many learners commented on this:

Interviewer: Yeah. Was it hard for you to learn how to use technology for English? Using the phone and iPad, was it hard to learn how to use them for English?

Learner: Not very hard, but sometimes a little bit hard, but not... yeah.

Interviewer: With help, you could learn?

Learner: Yeah. If a teacher help me and can follow the steps.

It actually not too bad because my daughter is set up for me. So I just press the button that already been set.

Interviewer: Is (Moodle) easy or hard to use?

Learner: It's hard.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Learner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did it take a long time to get used to using?

Interpreter: Because Moodle is the newest technology.

Interpreter: Just recently started, yeah.

Anyway thanks to college thanks to the teacher shows how to use technology, how to copy, how to paste.

And a group of three learners commented together:

Interviewer: Was it hard to learn Zoom? How to use Zoom?

Learner: How to use Zoom?

Interpreter [speaking Mandarin]

Learner: Not very, understand some the lecture use. How use. So it was some problem.

Interviewer: Problem, yeah?

Learner: In the contact the Zoom room, you know? What is this one? But not much, you know?

Interviewer: And the others? Was it hard to learn Zoom for you?

Interpreter: [speaking Mandarin]

Learner: Now is okay, because last year... studied before last year. Now...

Interviewer: And you're going okay now?

Learner: Just hard at the start.

Learner: ... first year, very hard.

Interviewer: Very hard.

Learner: Because I don't understand computer.

The factors identified by learners in their 'digital struggles' with online language learning included:

1. limited digital literacy skills in using the technologies
2. lacking the confidence and/or believing they would be unable to learn how to use the technologies
3. the role of prior educational experiences in 'learning how to learn' digital technologies
4. needing a level of English to navigate the apps.

As several learners commented:

Quite difficult because I'm quite old already and it's quite hard to follow up.

The teachers gone through that. We know how to use it. Otherwise, sometimes it gets too hard. It gets too complicated.

It's kind of difficult because of the English. Not English, sorry...It's like the technological issue. Sometimes I go along with it. I can't come back to where it was.

If I to learn the technology itself, that's another challenge rather than using it to learn the English language. So yeah...Some things I can, some others I cannot, it depends on my ability to learn new things to me that I haven't been used to before.

Given that many learner participants of the focus groups are from backgrounds which are often characterised as having less access to socio-economic resources within Australian society, it was interesting to note that there were no reports of significant technological resource issues (such as an absence of devices, or unavailable or unstable internet). However, this may be due in large part to the digital library that Carringbush operates, which provides learners with devices (tablets or computers) and internet access as necessary, as well as mobile phones for those who cannot afford their own.

3.3.5. LEARNERS VALUE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION BECAUSE IT PROVIDES A PATHWAY TO INDEPENDENCE AND CONNECTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

External to the classroom, learners spoke about the value placed on acquiring the skills to utilise English in activities and settings that are important to their daily lives and wanting more community-based opportunities to practice their English. Below are some of the experiences that learners shared:

I dancing. I go dancing. I'm into dancing. This is the Australian people... are friendly. I talking, talking lots English.

Interpreter: She have a little bit of knowledge. When she go to the shopping, she can understand things in display and she can find the price of item or what the item is used for through the ticket or the tag attached to.

I want to learn something, today I'm interested in getting bus driving licence.

Sometimes, by using the laptop, she try to learn some English songs.

I spend all the time learning English so if I go to see a doctor, and they will try and talk me.

The most important thing for me is priority is communication. Speech... That to speak up now and then to communicate with others. And then the second priority is writing.

Here, learners appear to be referencing the ways in which English language acquisition is meaningful to them in their daily lives. This meaning appears to centre on language acquisition in support of their ability to move about freely and knowledgeably in the community, both undertaking essential tasks of daily living as well as taking advantage of opportunities to connect with native English speakers.

3.3.6. LEARNERS VALUE AND RELY ON THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS TO HELP THEM LEARN

Another theme identified that came through strongly in learners' responses was the important role played by others in their learning, both in terms of language learning as well as in terms of 'learning how to learn' in an online format. The people most often cited as being critical to learners' ability to learn language and engage with digital platforms included Carringbush teachers, family members and/or peers, as these learners indicate below:

Yeah. Sometimes with my grandchildren speak English.

...we also tried to help the other older learners.

It actually not too bad because my daughter is set up for me. So I just press the button that already been set.

A repeated theme in learners' comments was the affection for their teachers and the respect with which they were described. This was both in terms of the practical help offered by teachers to learners and the way in which learners recognised their teachers' commitment to assisting them and how this was demonstrated:

The current teacher is really, really excellent teacher. I'm very happy. How the teachers help... helping is meaning a lot to me. Yeah.

She always find ways so that everybody can understand. She's lovely.

Very nice. I think the English, sometimes Chinese I say one times. 'Teacher, open the light.' She say, 'No, no, no. Turn open... Turn the light.' Oh, oh. I know. ...This is a touch. I say, 'Open the heater".' No, no, no. On the heater' Oh. I know, I know. So, do you get the difference?

I think this Carringbush teacher, I am learning English Carringbush maybe 13 long years. I feeling this year teacher is really nice. I call her Katherine, so I go to her, I like her.

The level of what Tour and colleagues (2021) termed the 'agential power' of teachers was readily apparent in the choice of words used by some learners (or selected by interpreters) in describing the contribution of teachers. This is unsurprising, given the traditional classroom set-up that might characterise the educational systems of the countries of origin for many of these learners:

Well, I prefer to leave that to (the teacher). She's trust that she have the ability to figure out which one is best for me, for my fellow.

I don't have anything to add on because it's up to the teacher, but the one that I have is good already, that help me.

The notion of agential power is important to acknowledge as it shapes the ways in which learners engage with their teacher and with learning. It also helps to explain some of the challenges they experience with technology, such as their difficulty in troubleshooting and problem-solving independently when they encounter an issue on their devices. Similarly, it may also explain some of their suggestions for improvement, in which the teacher is expected to provide a greater amount of structure and direction in the learning process. Appendix 5 of this report includes a more in-depth consideration of how intersections between numerous social positions (gender, age and migrant/refugee status) might impact on learner responses and experiences of online language learning, adding further insight to this point.

FIGURE 4.

AVAILABILITY OF DEVICES AT HOME AND USE OF DEVICES FOR ONLINE ENGLISH LEARNING

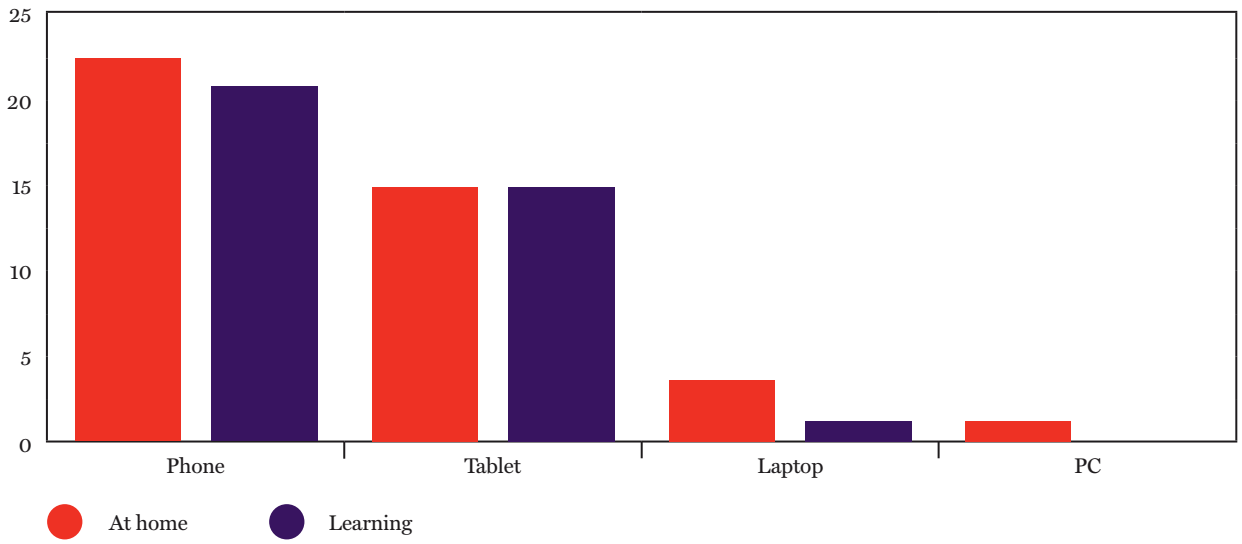
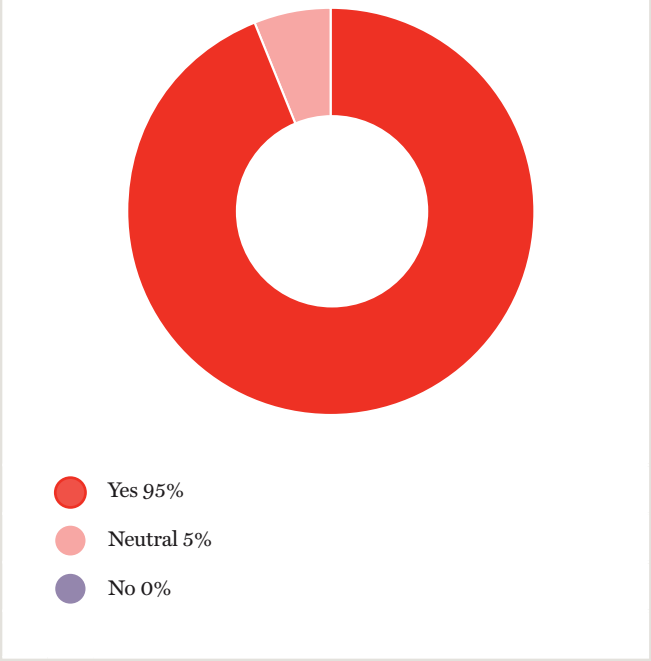


FIGURE 5.

PERCENTAGE OF LEARNERS WHO ENJOY USING THEIR DEVICES FOR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES



4. Findings: What teachers told us

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from teachers based on their experiences of teaching adult beginner EAL learners from early 2020 to mid-2023. The two surveys completed by teachers captured their experiences, opinions and current teaching practices at two points in time. The reflections teachers shared during their focus group further support and expand upon their survey responses regarding their experiences and perceptions of their digital knowledge, teaching practice and efforts to meet learners' changing needs. As a whole, the teachers' responses can be considered as representing their evolving journeys over the course of the pandemic as they were introduced to, engaged with and deployed digital lesson design and learning platforms for their learners.

Key findings and themes are presented based on an analysis of the common experiences and perceptions reported by teachers in surveys 1 and 2, and in their focus group. The key findings and themes explored below include teacher and learner experience and confidence levels in online teaching and learning, what helped and hindered online learning and teaching from teachers' perspectives, and the factors influencing experiences in online learning, including relationships and learner engagement, pre-class activities, class structure and dynamics, level of digital skills and teaching resources.

As with the analysis of learners' responses in the above chapter, findings from the teachers' survey and focus groups are presented separately below, while key patterns or themes that appear in both data sets are identified.

4.1. Key findings from teachers

- Building and maintaining relationships with their learners was essential for effective EAL teaching.
- Their own skill development was often only marginally ahead of learners.
- Teachers felt they were doing a 'balancing act', managing individuals' learning preferences, and the challenges inherent in the cohorts and resources available to both themselves and the learners, while trying to ensure that learners didn't lose the digital literacy they had developed during the period of fully online classes.
- Creating and then mastering teaching tools and resources required a lot of time and a familiarity with the area, neither of which most teachers possessed.
- Effective online teaching requires a different pedagogy. Online classes changed the class structure and introduced new barriers to teaching and learning English, including learners' absence of classroom etiquette, learners' lack of preparation for online classes, difficulties seeking and providing individual help in the online classroom, and learners' lack of digital or online etiquette, all of which contributed to extended lesson planning, class disruptions, more time and effort required by teachers to guide learners, and being able to cover less content in class. The lack of incidental contact characteristic of online classrooms also diminished teacher-learner-peer relationships.

Image provided by Pexels/ Arina Krasnikova.

- However, after two years of online classes, overall, teachers noticed increased confidence and satisfaction among their learners and themselves in their ability to teach and learn online, and in their use of technology, including learners' ability to troubleshoot problems more readily.
- The introduction of the 'digital mentor' was highly effective in reducing teacher anxiety and promoting confidence in using the technology effectively.
- Support from the organisation made teachers feel valued and heard, and was greatly appreciated.
- Peers sharing problems and solutions in collaboration enhanced the consolidation of skills and techniques as well as teacher self-confidence.
- Teachers expressed a strong preference for continuing with blended delivery, where the digital space complements, not replaces, face-to-face classes, with learning activities on Moodle reinforcing the class material.

4.2. What we found from teachers' survey responses

4.2.1. THE FOUNDATION: MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNERS AND ONGOING TEACHER SUPPORT PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE EAL TEACHING

Separate from any considerations of digital lesson design and delivery, teachers were asked in the first survey to reflect on what they considered the basic elements of successful EAL teaching. One of the common features of the responses of those surveyed was the importance of 'meaningful engagement'. This was conceptualised in a few different ways, most often in the form of the importance of teachers taking time to understand individual learning needs and motivations (e.g. making learning relevant to the everyday needs of learners), building relationships with learners, and designing and delivering lessons in ways that built on learners' existing range of skills. Respondents also highlighted the needs of teachers in relation to utilising digital platforms and particular software for EAL online teaching and assessment, including ongoing professional development and a supportive peer and organisational environment.

4.2.2. ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the first survey (2022), we asked teachers to reflect on their experiences of online teaching before the pandemic-induced changes in 2020 and compare these with how they felt at the time they completed the survey.

Prior to Carringbush moving to fully online class delivery in 2020, only one of the five teachers reported any experience in online teaching, with all expressing a lack of confidence in their ability to teach online. At that time, they felt marginally more confident with delivering live (synchronous) classes than with those where learners accessed the class at times of their own choosing (asynchronous).

At the time of the first survey (2022), after nearly two years of online classes, all teachers expressed increased confidence in their ability to teach both synchronous and asynchronous online classes (the reasons for which are explored in more detail later below). The teachers' digital journey is explored in more depth below. Figure 6 below represents this shift in confidence levels.

When the shift to online teaching occurred in 2020, teachers expected few of their learners to be confident in or enjoy this mode of learning. After two years of online classes, however, they considered that most were at least partially confident learning this way. Figure 7 shows this change as reported by teachers at the time of the first survey. As well as seeing learners' technical skills developing over time, they attributed this in large part to the 'human connection': in addition to teachers encouraging learners to join classes and to practice, for some, the Zoom class was often their only contact with other people during the lockdowns.

When teachers reflected on their own experiences of online teaching over these two years, they identified the empowerment of their learners, from developing their digital skills, managing their own learning and the creation of online learning communities, as a powerful positive outcome. Enhancing their own digital skills, and their creativity in developing and using accessible and authentic teaching resources, were also identified by teachers as further positive outcomes.

Simultaneously, however, teachers also noted a lack of learner engagement. Reasons for this were varied and unsurprisingly included technical and access problems, as well as an unawareness of 'online etiquette'. The inability to participate led to frustration and, on occasion, disruption to classes. As one teacher commented:

> *Dealing with digital devices and data can be frustrating! They are also learning digital skills as well as developing their English language skills, which might be challenging.*

Teachers also noted that online lessons were more 'teacher driven', with less collaboration and interaction than in a physical classroom, which supports the learners' feedback (noted in the previous chapter) about having less interaction with peers in online classes, compared to in-person classes. Teachers reported that, at the same time, it took more effort to design online classes, which were shorter in duration and included less content than the equivalent face-to-face class.

This sentiment remained at the time of the second survey in 2023. As teachers grew more confident in their own online teaching skills, they were also more aware of the associated technical and educational challenges:

> *I find I teach a lot less content when I'm on Zoom because it's only like I do two, one-and-a-half hour classes, so it's just less teaching time, and you have to move a lot slower anyway because it's online. You have to explain*

things a lot more, model them clearly, and if you're doing something online, you have to model how they do it online. It just takes more time to connect and all those little technical things you run into, so I find it's less content that I teach.

By the time of the first survey in 2022, each cohort (beginners and third level) had some classes taught in the classroom and some in the online environment (blended learning). We asked teachers what they felt did and did not work well for their learners and for them as teachers for those classes taught online compared with face-to-face.

While teachers found that learning occurred faster and more seamlessly in the face-to-face environment, where relationships (teacher-learner and learner-learner) were easier to establish and maintain, they saw real benefits to their learners and themselves in the blended or 'mixed-delivery' model.

Regular use of digital technology in classes produces a form of 'learning by stealth', where learners' increased confidence and skills carries over into a willingness to use various technologies in their everyday lives:

And how to make them more independent outside of the classroom, and empowered? If they're going to be using these skills, if we teach them how to use Google Translate, and then they go outside, and they use it, and it really helps them with an interaction or something, that's really invaluable for them.

Indeed, some learners participated in online classes from their workplaces.

4.2.3. WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DIDN'T

The following themes were identified based on teachers' consideration of factors that enhanced and impeded online teaching and learning, for their classes and for themselves.

Teachers' observations on their learners from the first survey (2020–2022):

This helped online learning:

- Audiovisual exercises: reading out loud and identifying sounds,
- Smaller group sizes allowing greater engagement and feedback opportunities,
- Targeted learning and repetition,
- Flexibility: overcomes distance or health barriers,
- Increased skills: confidence in use of digital tools made learning seem easier.

This hindered online learning:

- The learning environment, including sharing the space and devices with children also learning at home,
- Health concerns, in particular, eye problems and migraines which screen use can exacerbate,
- The lack of continuity between lessons, and having much content in one lesson,
- Reduced teacher contact and support compared with the face-to-face classroom,
- Limited interaction with peers, due to limited opportunity for pairs and group activities.

For themselves, over the same time period, teachers identified the following factors:

This helped online teaching:

- Understanding that shorter class times does not equate to fewer learning gains,
- Predictability and routine: following similar lesson structures for both class modes,
- Team-teaching: classes of different levels spending regular time together,
- Learners taking on more responsibility for their learning and actively participating,
- The audiovisual components, which can increase learner engagement.

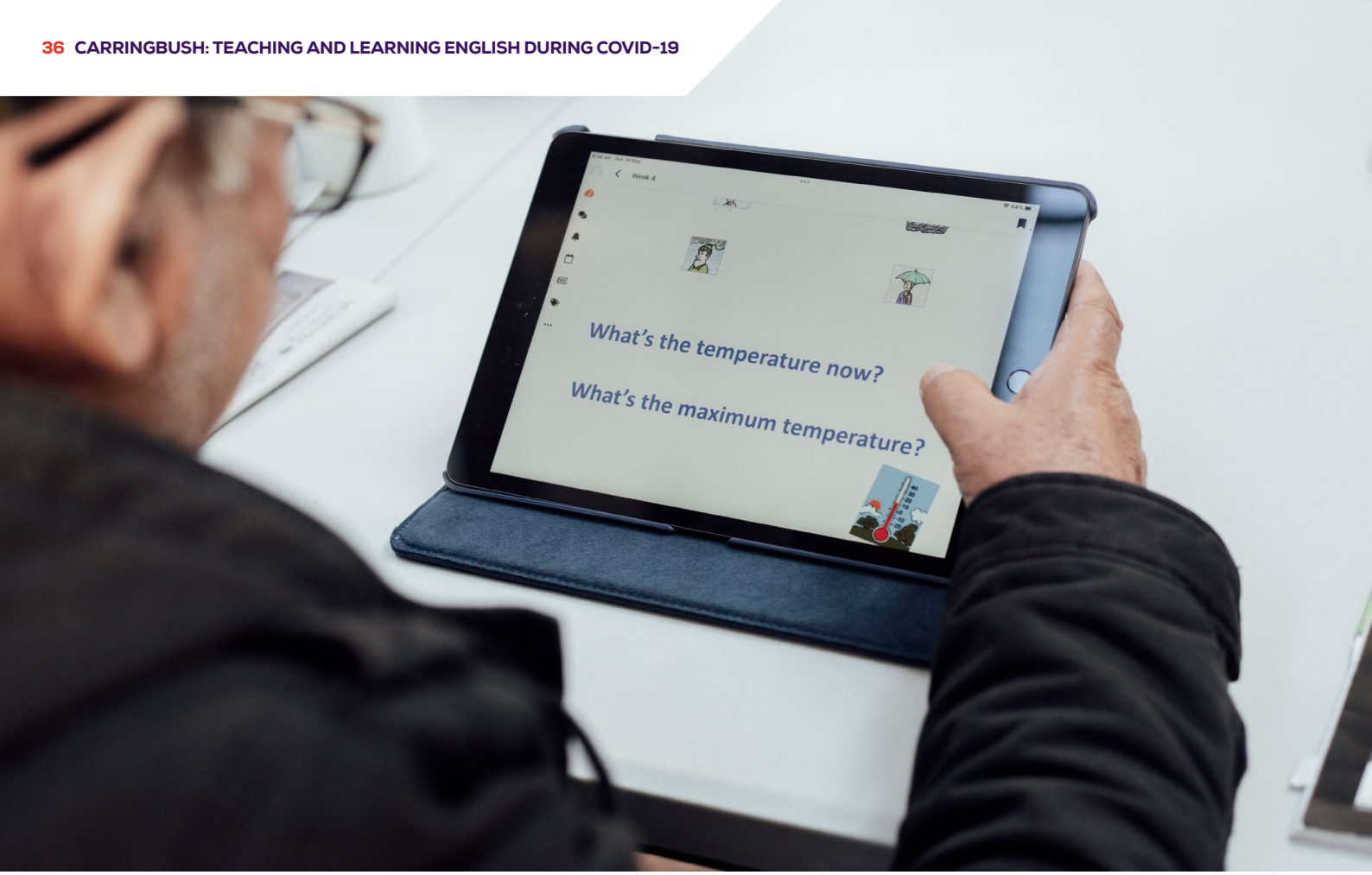
This hindered online teaching:

- Being unable to resolve learners' technical challenges online,
- Learners being unprepared for classes, in particular, not accessing pre-class activities,
- Longer preparation time despite shorter class time,
- Providing individual, written feedback is very time-consuming,
- Health and lifestyle factors, such as excessive screen time and immobility.

In the second survey in 2023, teachers reported that learners' problems with device and technology use remained as barriers to effective online teaching. Interestingly, while learners were generally more skilled and confident with device use, they were not as well advanced in 'online etiquette', as discussed below (see Appendix 4 for an extended discussion on these reflections by teachers about teaching online and how their approach, experience and confidence changed or stayed the same over time).

4.3. What teachers' responses to the focus group added to our understanding of their experiences

The open-ended survey responses provided by teachers were extended with themes discerned from the analysis of their focus group data. Teachers commented on the challenges associated with managing technical issues in trying to deliver content to their learners (particularly when trying to troubleshoot these issues for learners not physically present in the classroom) and their own sense of having to learn (and teach the same skills) 'on the fly', as 'already familiar' software threw up unexpected new challenges and new software was introduced.



Further challenges associated with online lesson delivery included the additional skill and time required for online lesson design and what might be described as the emotional 'weight' of recreating a safe and supportive atmosphere to facilitate optimal learning in an online environment.

Four overarching themes were identified in relation to teachers' experiences and perceptions of online and blended teaching:

1. Teachers felt they were doing a 'balancing act', managing individuals' learning preferences, challenges inherent in the cohorts and resources available to both themselves and the learners, while trying to ensure that learners didn't lose the digital literacy they had developed during the period of fully online classes.
2. The need for new learning did not abate once onsite teaching resumed: indeed, teachers felt that they were still learning 'on the run' and were often only a few steps ahead of their learners.
3. Related to this, teachers expressed anxiety in their ability to teach digital literacy when they felt themselves to be novices too, in an environment with frequent changes/updates in software and technologies, and where limited technical support was available.
4. In common with learners, albeit for different reasons, there was a strong preference for continuing the blended delivery, where face-to-face and online classes reinforced each other and both paper-and-pen and digital activities could be used in each mode.

4.3.1. FACTORS INFLUENCING EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE LEARNING

4.3.1.1. Relationships and learner engagement

Both teachers and learners spoke of the importance of relationships in creating a safe and positive learning environment. Teachers felt that the lack of incidental contact (learner-learner, learner-teacher, teacher-teacher) characteristic of online classrooms and the reduced opportunity for 'peer-teaching' interactions diminished these relationships; however, they acknowledged the role of online classes in maintaining existing learning communities.

Online (Zoom) classes were, in general, shorter with fewer learners per group than face-to-face ones. While this had some negative consequences as described below, teachers felt that attendance was often better as some barriers to face-to-face participation (work, travel time, family commitments, health concerns) were mitigated.

4.3.1.2. Pre-class activities

Across educational settings, the importance of learners completing *relevant* and *accessible* pre-class activities has long been recognised as integral to the effectiveness of online learning (Jang, 2008); this is, however, generally considered to be honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

Teachers used a range of pre-class learning activities to help prepare learners: some they created specifically for their classes, some were shared by colleagues and some they found by searching various internet resources.

Images provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

Tailoring these activities to individual needs enabled learners to work at their own pace and familiarise themselves with content such as new vocabulary, reducing the anxiety of seeing something for the first time in a class.

Effective engagement with these resources was patchy, and when some learners were unprepared for the class, lesson plans were disrupted and teachers felt that they were unable to use the class time effectively as they needed to 'catch up' these learners. This was discouraging for those who had done the preparatory work, and frustrating for teachers who had invested time in preparing both the lesson and the work that prepared learners for it.

4.3.1.3. Class structure and dynamics

Effective online teaching requires more planning and structure than a face-to-face setting, and teachers noted that they spent considerably longer in preparation for these sessions. They also noted that less content was actually taught, partly due to the shorter class length but also because:

> *...you have to move a lot slower anyway because it's online. You have to explain things a lot more, model them clearly, and if you're doing something online, you have to model how they do it online. It just takes more time to connect and all those little technical things you run into, so I find it's less content that I teach.*

Using videos in the online classes helped learners stay focused, and repetition – the same video used in pre-class, online class and face-to-face class settings – reinforced learning, although teachers found these time-consuming to find or create:

> *... every time I sit down to prepare my following week, I have to think, 'What online resources are there? What online resources do I need? How am I going to deliver them? How do I sequence them in terms of what I'm doing in the face-to-face..?'...So my lesson planning is ...a lot more work...It's like I have to do it twice.*

Pair and group activities are valuable in developing learners' skills and self-confidence, but these are more difficult to manage in an online classroom than face-to-face, in large part because of the teacher support required. Learners in a physical classroom can observe others in action, with or without the teacher, but this is not possible in separate breakout rooms online.

Assessment in the online environment is also challenging; it can be hard to provide other learners with appropriate tasks while the teacher is working with one individual, and also to notice whether these learners have hit an obstacle or are unsure of what to do next.

Teachers began sending WhatsApp videos that described the structure of the Zoom class (these were usually the same from week to week) and what was required of the learners. While the pre-class activities may not have been completed, the predictable routine reduced learner anxiety, thus enhancing learning.

4.3.1.4. Digital skills

It's a truism that the better one becomes at doing a task, the easier one finds it to do.

It is difficult to teach digital skills online, especially to novice users, as this requires using the very devices and platforms that one is trying to explain. The provision by Carringbush of devices to all their learners meant that learning could take place on tablets rather than the ubiquitous, yet less suitable, smartphones.

Teachers commented on how the initial lack of technical support for both learners and themselves caused frustration and often led to learner disengagement. This was compounded by a lack of experience in the digital environment ('digital etiquette') that contributed both to minor disruptions, where learners interrupted each other, and to a reticence to ask questions. Overall, however, teachers noticed increased confidence and satisfaction among their learners in their everyday use of technology over time.

Teachers were frank about their own anxieties, especially, but not exclusively, at the time of the rapid move to online teaching, as these teachers shared:

> *It was frightening. It was scary.*
>
> *I had to talk so many people off the ledge. That was really wild, wasn't it, during COVID?*
>
> *Because it was like an anxiety attack every time I had to teach online. I've still got a bit of PTSD. I'm serious.*

Reflecting on their own digital journey, teachers realised how much their own confidence and skills had also increased, and how this awareness and capacity enhances all their teaching: face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous online. This increased confidence was attributed in large part to the resources and support provide by the digital mentor:

The Digital Induction Guide is GREAT. The internal PD sessions where teachers share what they are doing e.g. videos, Wordwall – are also great to learn from each other. I am not sure what sort of support can be offered which would build my skills when these Moodle gremlins happen in class and I am on my own.

4.3.1.5. Teaching resources

With any new endeavour, especially one entered into rapidly and with limited 'corporate knowledge' as happened in 2020, there is considerable trial and error in the choice and use of tools and resources (as described in the following discussion on the Moodle LMS). There is a bewildering range of tools suitable for online teaching in general and EAL teaching more specifically, so Carringbush teachers' experiences are valuable for others considering adopting these.

Good teachers are time-poor: the more they do to help their learners, the more they can see needs doing. Creating and using teaching resources can be time-consuming, not least because of the steep learning curve that many require, as expressed by teachers in both the surveys and the focus group. The cost of some tools also precludes wider use, especially in under-resourced sectors. Teacher-Made is one such tool that held great promise and was used by some teachers; unfortunately, this initially free tool now requires payment, so is no longer part of Carringbush's toolkit:

> *I think this is a key point – teachers are having to create resources AND upload them. We need resources that are at the ready for us, with the option of being able to create them if we have the time and skills.*

Videos that demonstrate the physical making of the sounds being taught were invaluable for both teachers and learners. Teachers found the screen-recording tools such as Loom and QuickTime Player easy to use and edit, and the links are easily shared with classes via WhatsApp or Moodle. Carringbush's growing repository of such recordings allows consistency within and across classes and teaching periods, as well as saving staff time.

Tools with ready-made activities that can be (easily) edited for specific contexts were also valuable. Teachers identified EdPuzzle as one such platform, being interactive and readily accessible for learners. Other tools that allow the creation of quite sophisticated, highly individualised as well as shareable resources include H5P, which integrates well with Moodle and which Carringbush teachers made a concerted effort to explore between 2020 and 2023. While the activities can be useful for learners, teachers found that many of these took considerable time to create and could not always be easily shared.

The H5P tool was thus not as widely used as might have been expected, its use in fact decreasing over time as other, more appropriate and user-friendly tools such as Wordwall, which provides templates for ease and consistency of use, were adopted.

Teachers stressed the benefit of using a small number of agreed tools for both themselves and their learners:

> *Having a staff focus on a specific tool, e.g., Wordwall, in learning how to create activities, how to share them ...., how to edit them so they are appropriate for the specific level of the learners, the range of activities available and the relevant activities for each learner level, opportunities to troubleshoot at staff meetings, has been valuable. Teachers are working collaboratively and supporting each other in their knowledge and skill gains.*

The space to troubleshoot collaboratively and support each other in the use of digital teaching resources was valuable to teachers themselves and also had a positive flow-on effect for their learners.

FIGURE 6.

TEACHER PERCEPTION OF THEIR OWN CONFIDENCE IN TEACHING SYNCHRONOUS (LIVE) AND ASYNCHRONOUS CLASSES AT TWO TIME POINTS (ON A SCALE OF 0–5 WHERE 0 = NOT AT ALL AND 5 = EXTREMELY CONFIDENT)

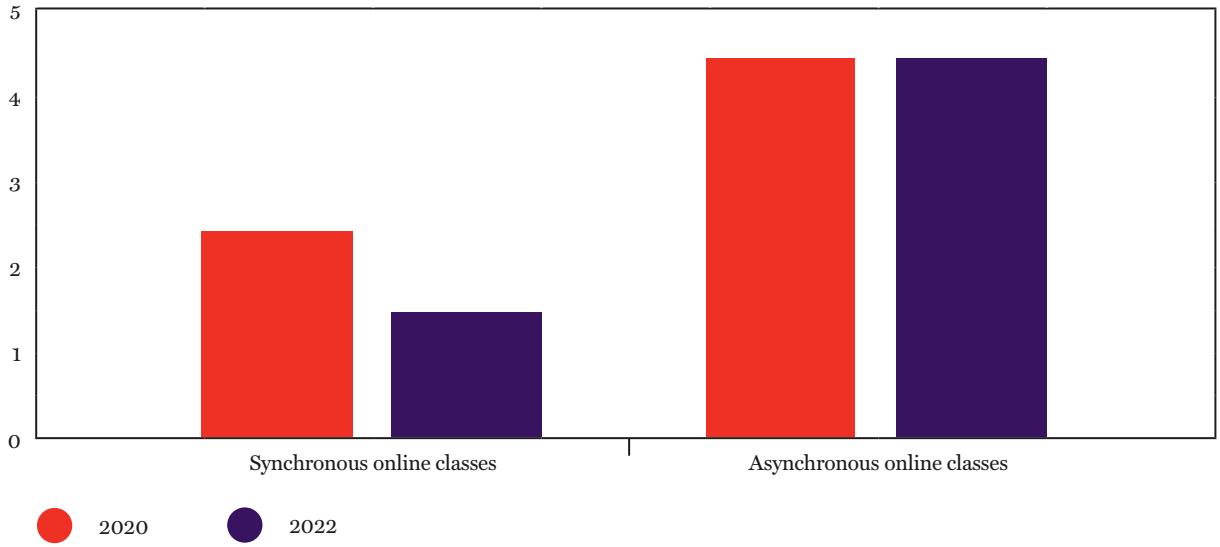
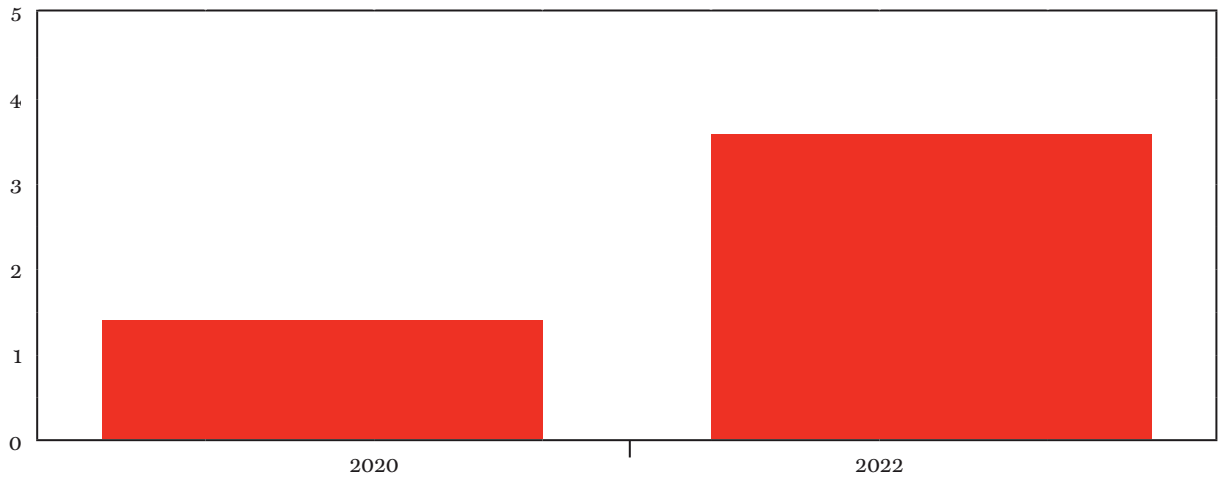


FIGURE 7.

TEACHER PERCEPTION OF LEARNER CONFIDENCE IN ONLINE LEARNING AT TWO TIME POINTS (ON A SCALE OF 0–5 WHERE 0 = NOT AT ALL AND 5 = EXTREMELY CONFIDENT)



5. Discussion: The Carringbush response to learning and teaching adult beginner English online: Challenges, opportunities and strategies

In common with most teachers across the education spectrum who were forced by circumstance to move to online learning (Sullivan et al., 2021, pp. 21–22), a key cause of frustration and anxiety for Carringbush's teachers in the new milieu concerned technology.

In some instances, this was due to the technology (in particular, the software and applications) not being able to provide what was asked of it, but more common was a lack of familiarity with the platforms and programs: teachers were often learning how to use a tool at the same time that they were trying to help their learners do so, giving rise to the feeling of 'flying the aeroplane while we're still building it'.

Perhaps helped by its small size, and despite limited resources, Carringbush management was quick to realise the impact this anxiety and uncertainty had on teachers and the flow-on effects on their learners, and instituted the digital mentoring program described in the introduction to this report. This reduced stress on teachers, and together with the decision to equip all their learners with tablet devices to enable online learning, arguably contributed to an enhanced learning experience for Carringbush's learner cohort.

This chapter discusses in more depth the key findings and themes that were identified from learners' and teachers' feedback (presented in the above two chapters), including the similarities and differences in learners' and teachers' experiences of learning and teaching at Carringbush between early 2020 and mid-2023.

Key themes in this chapter that we explore include teachers' perceptions and experiences of how they as teachers – and Carringbush as an institution – adapted their pedagogical and organisational practices to suit their learners' emerging needs during online learning, teachers' perceptions of how their learners learnt in the digital space, and the challenges and opportunities teachers encountered teaching in the digital space. We then explore points of synergy between the views of learners and teachers regarding the new reality of blended learning, and more generally, what helps and what hinders those learning EAL, and the strategies that learners suggested would be helpful for their language learning.

In the final part of this chapter, we suggest strategies that Carringbush leadership and teachers might adopt in light of the key findings we identified based on learners' and teachers' experiences and suggestions.

5.1. Adapting pedagogical and organisational practices to support learners' needs as online learners

5.1.1. SHAPING A PLATFORM TO BEST MEET LEARNERS' EVOLVING NEEDS: ESTABLISHING MOODLE AS A SINGLE SOURCE FOR LEARNING RESOURCES

In addition to introducing the digital mentoring program, Carringbush also supported teachers and learners to navigate the rapid shift to online learning by introducing the LMS Moodle. An LMS allows the housing of all the learning materials a learner may require in one accessible location

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

and enables teachers to readily share and reuse content and learning activities. The costs in setting up and maintaining a system with many 'bells and whistles' are not insubstantial, and Carringbush chose the public-source Moodle platform as offering the best value in terms of features and accessibility for the costs involved.

Moodle and other LMSs use a hierarchical 'filing' system where users click down from an overview to increasingly specific sections. On Carringbush's platform, each class has its own site, with each week allocated a separate section, and within that, subsections for the various activities (e.g. listening and speaking, reading and writing, pre-class work, digital skills).

Shaping a system or platform to best meet the users' needs is an iterative, dynamic process. As learners were not fluent in written English, in the first version of Moodle, the decision was made to use a linear structure where each week had a separate section, with icons rather than text for navigation. While the icons proved useful, it was soon evident that the logistics of the platform, often requiring several steps to move between and within weeks or sections, added a layer of complexity and anxiety that detracted from the learning. One teacher commented that:

> *Moodle is very hard to teach with. You run into a lot of barriers and it's difficult for the teacher, but also, difficult for the student. I mean, to put a positive spin on it, it's good to be able to troubleshoot and for them to be able to develop their troubleshooting skills. They can say, 'Oh, this isn't working. What can I do now?'*

The second iteration used the 'Book' module, a pre-made structure that flows sequentially and proved easier for learners to navigate, as well as for teachers to populate. Despite these 'teething problems', teachers found the LMS to be worthwhile:

> *[I]t's useful to have one place where we put all the information and put all the resources.*

Teachers appreciated Carringbush's readiness to work with them, and their learners, to adapt the system to meet the users' needs, underscoring the value of a mutually respectful and trusting relationship in achieving the best outcomes for all involved.

Carringbush continues to use Moodle in both the online and face-to-face classes, as well as for asynchronous online learning activities. Use in the face-to-face classroom enables learner familiarity with the platform to grow, while the technical problems identified and addressed in these sessions, some of which are discussed below, should make online learning more valuable and less fraught for all.

5.1.2. PROVIDING ACCESS TO DEVICES AND ADAPTING TEACHING STRATEGIES TO ACCOMMODATE LEARNERS' PREFERENCE FOR MOBILE DEVICES

All the learners had mobile phones and seemed relatively confident in using these in daily life, but while many had more learning-friendly devices such as laptops or tablets in their homes, they generally had limited access to these as children's schooling or other family members' work needs took precedence. Carringbush's recognition that access to a tablet (iPad) would increase learners' ability to participate in synchronous classes during lockdown, and their decision to provide a device (with internet access if required) on a loan basis to anyone who needed one, benefited both teachers and learners. Many online learning platforms and tools do not adapt well to mobile phone use, so with all class members having access to the same type of device, teachers could design and deliver activities in which all learners were (in theory at least) able to participate. In these ways, Carringbush's efforts to engage their learners in online learning reflected best practice strategies identified by the sector and tailored to adult EAL learners. Research on how best to support learners' online learning needs has found that teachers' strategies to integrate digital skills into literacy learning helps bridge the 'digital divide' for learners, for example, using apps that work on tablets/iPads, designing activities that can be accessed on mobile phones and that do not use much data, and providing learner access to devices or PCs (Kane, 2018; Rykovska & Treadwell, 2020).

Much has been written about how even 'tech-savvy' users can struggle with using familiar technology for formal learning, and exclusively using a smartphone for reading and 'writing' adds another level of difficulty (see, for example, Kumar, 2015). In classes, teachers projected Moodle or other tools onto the screens so learners could follow on their own devices and thus further develop their skill and confidence. Despite having had a tablet or laptop for several months, many learners chose to continue working on their phones in class, and teachers expressed frustration that this negatively affected their intended teaching plan:

> *... two people in the class ... brought in their iPad, and the rest of them were using their phones, and as you know, it's almost impossible for them to see that, and everybody ... can become frustrated and then I think, 'Forget it. I'll just deliver from the board.'*

> *...most of them were using their phones, but not very effectively, and they were still watching my screen. They were running up to my screen where I had it on the TV and taking photos or copying...*

The experience of Carringbush teachers here echoes existing findings on the barriers teachers encountered while teaching online during the pandemic (ACTA, 2021, p. 39). Many teachers reported having to adapt their teaching in response to adult learners using their phones for class activities (as mentioned in this report's introduction).

However, these are adult learners, and as one teacher noted:

> *They can do everything on their phones. They're not coming to work or at school or something. They're just using their phone, so that's something I take into account straightaway. ...what am I going to accept and how am I going to work with that technology? So I've pretty much accepted... I've given up on saying, 'Bring in your laptop.'*

Even when learners did bring their laptops/tablets, their lack of experience in using the devices often necessitated the teacher spending considerable time helping them to be ready:

> *... inevitably, it takes ages for them to get onto it. There's always an issue and by the time we get to the lesson, we've got 15 minutes left.*

5.1.3. TECHNICAL CHALLENGES TOOK UP VALUABLE CLASS TIME

Technical skill and digital literacy intersect, and it is sometimes hard to identify the cause of a learner's dilemma. Both teachers and learners experienced technical challenges in using various platforms, especially the LMS Moodle.

Many learners were comfortable using other commercial apps, and while they approached the Moodle app in the same way, it did not behave as expected. Commonly, teachers would load content or messages onto Moodle, but frequently, learners could not see these, as Moodle in the mobile phone app version (used by most learners) does not automatically cache and refresh. Learners were often unaware that new material had been loaded by teachers until they refreshed the app, something most rarely did. Sometimes even this was not sufficient, and they needed to log out completely and log back in. Teachers were unaware of this, as they worked on laptops or PCs and could not see what the learners were experiencing. Further complications arose as often students did not know that the refresh had not worked until the teacher mentioned the new material.

Discovering the reason for this took some time, due to limited technical support and experience with the platform within Carringbush. This exacerbated the stress that many teachers were experiencing:

> *A few weeks ago I was really struggling with a whole lot of technical problems. It was just driving me nuts, Moodle particularly, and just how the students were coping with it... there are no patterns to what happens... I wrote a big long list and there are no patterns, and a lot of the things aren't transferable, and... [t]hey got lost, and...it was just another thing on top of the caching. The caching is a nightmare.*

The appearance and functionality of Moodle and other platforms can vary between devices and operating systems, and learners often had iPads, Android phones and iPhones in a single classroom, as these teachers shared:

I am not exactly sure what their screen looks like, so when I do it in class, I go step-by-step. We go here and I'm thinking, 'Well, what they're seeing here is my interface.'... and so it looks different to their interface.

....and all of it's different, so you're standing up in front of the class going, 'I don't know which button to press on your device to get it to work,' and then it's in Chinese or Vietnamese, and I just go ... 'I don't know.'

Added to that, teachers reported that it was not uncommon for a process that had worked last week to not do so today, for teachers and/or learners. While this may be as simple as an unintended consequence of a software update, teachers lacked the time, and often the expertise, to discern the cause and then implement a possible solution. Valuable class time could be spent trying to troubleshoot these issues, leaving everyone frustrated.

Being in a physical classroom enabled the teacher to better see if and how learners were using the technology and to identify and work to correct systemic problems or to implement an alternative activity; this was not possible in the online environment without added technical skills.

5.2. Learning in the digital space

Effective learning in a fully online or blended environment is a product of the learner's attributes and experiences as well as the extent of their digital skills, in addition to the teacher's input.

5.2.1. TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR LEARNERS IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Learners who have developed effective and efficient learning skills in the classroom are generally better equipped to handle the move to online learning (Sullivan et al., 2021). The nature of the Carringbush cohort meant that these skills were often rudimentary at best when learners began studying English. This is consistent with the learning challenges experienced by adult beginner EAL learners with little to no existing literacy, as noted in this report's introduction.

Teachers noted that an absence of 'classroom meta-skills' such as listening to instructions and 'taking turns' to ask questions translated to a more fraught online environment:

... it's really important for them to understand all of that before you even begin a class.... I just think, as a teacher, it makes it so much easier for you to teach, 'Put up your hand. You have a question.' ...it's better for them and to mute if you've got the radio in the background.

...with very new beginners just turn taking, otherwise, there's always one who will speak over everyone else, and you have to be really specific about it's so-and-so's turn....

Seeking and providing individual help is generally more complicated in the online classroom than in a physical space. Learners reported that it was harder to ask the teacher (or a peer) a question in the online environment, especially if they were hesitant to be seen as 'holding up the class', and teachers noted the difficulty both of giving individual help or feedback, and of identifying when it was needed. It is also virtually impossible to replicate in an online setting the casual conversations that take place in a physical classroom, whereby learners practise language skills 'incidentally' and unselfconsciously. The barriers encountered in the online classroom make sense of a key finding from both learner and teacher responses that learning in the face-to-face classroom promotes better social interaction and building of relationships.

Pre-class preparation by learners is thus arguably even more important in the online classroom; however, teachers reported that this was patchy at best within their classes.

Given the challenges encountered by adult learners with minimal previous literacy and schooling, identified in the introduction to this report, and reinforced by Carringbush teachers' reflections here, teaching these learners requires an additional set of skills and techniques that are not part of teachers' standard training. These include providing guidance in classroom skills and in how to be a learner, as well as broader awareness of the socio-cultural contexts in which low-literacy adult second-language learners undertake their studies. The provision of formal training in such skills within the sector, and organisational support for teachers, would demonstrate that these skills are seen as valuable by an organisation, and would reduce the burden on teachers to do this individually.

Teachers agreed that, overall, their learners exhibited low levels of confidence in using technology per se, not only for learning, due in large part to the many barriers they face, including low literacy in their first language. Some were unable to log in without the instructions, or to navigate within Moodle, even after several weeks, while others regularly forgot their (Moodle) password and locked themselves out of the platform:

I have a handful of students who never ever remember how to log in, even with our cheat sheet, how to get to the right week, how to get to the right section...there are some students that... if they don't remember their password, when they do remember it, they type it in incorrectly, and about the fourth time they're not in, and I'll be busy doing something else, and it's because they've typed it incorrectly, and they keep saying, 'It doesn't work, teacher. It doesn't work.'

In their responses, there is what appeared to be a type of 'disconnect' between teachers' conscious acknowledgement of the challenges faced by their learners in EAL learning online and a relative absence of discussion about just how challenging learning digital skills in a second language for those with little or no first-language literacy must be. This 'disconnect' may be apparent because it is often genuinely

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

painful for anyone in a helping or service profession to acknowledge that there are some very powerful factors that are outside their control to manage or change. In these scenarios, the solution lies not in teachers being able to fix this themselves, but in being able to make this uncomfortable situation more conscious (through processes like peer reflection) and to place the responsibility for addressing this issue with the broader system – for example, through advocacy and representation to broader systems such as funders and government agencies.

5.2.2. LEARNING AND MAINTAINING DIGITAL LITERACY IS A VALUABLE LIFE SKILL

Teachers saw digital literacy for their learners as a life skill, not merely a learning aid:

> *I think it's important to remember why we're doing this … We are doing it to give them more skills for everyday life, for work, which is a really valuable thing… it's good for us to sort of support them in that way.*

Another teacher commented:

> *And how to make them more independent outside of the classroom, and empowered? If ….we teach them how to use Google Translate, and then they go outside, and they use it, and it really helps them with an interaction or something, that's really invaluable for them.*

Face-to-face classes used Moodle to access online learning activities such as Wordwall, to reinforce, practise and often troubleshoot the skills used in online (Zoom) classes. This relied on learners bringing and using their tablet devices alongside the teacher, but, as noted above, many only brought their phones, with the concomitant loss of opportunities for skill development.

Teachers agreed that mastering digital literacy requires face-to-face contact and repetition. As with any skill, informal peer teaching can be very valuable for both parties, as one teacher observed in the face-to-face classes:

> *And what's great is that a lot of the students who can do things will help the others when they speak the same language.*

The importance of repetition was also stressed; the same teacher added:

> *That's fantastic, but it's just that repetition, and …. When they're not engaging with it outside of Monday and Tuesday, … that's a lot of days they're not engaging with it.*

The decision to retain at least one online class per week even when onsite teaching returned was made in part because the gains in digital literacy had been hard won, and teachers didn't want learners to lose their digital skillset:

> *… exactly, because it took a long time to get them to there.*

Even within a face-to-face class, digital skills are rehearsed and developed, while using different modalities can engage learners and keep their attention:

> *I frame my lesson around a PowerPoint, and then they'll do writing in their books or we'll have Wordwall activities or different things on Moodle, so…. Trying to keep them the most engaged. If we just have all workbook or we just have all online, it's just too much.*

The digital mentoring program for learners was valued by teachers, with one of the mentors reporting that:

> *Some student[s], they are very low for digital skill and sometimes they didn't understand much about what the system in there, so we help them, so I can see them progress a lot now. Some student[s] I can see they are very confident to do by themselves so I'm very happy for them.*

When teachers looked back at their earlier classes, many reflected on their learners' perseverance and commitment over time, often in the face of myriad barriers:

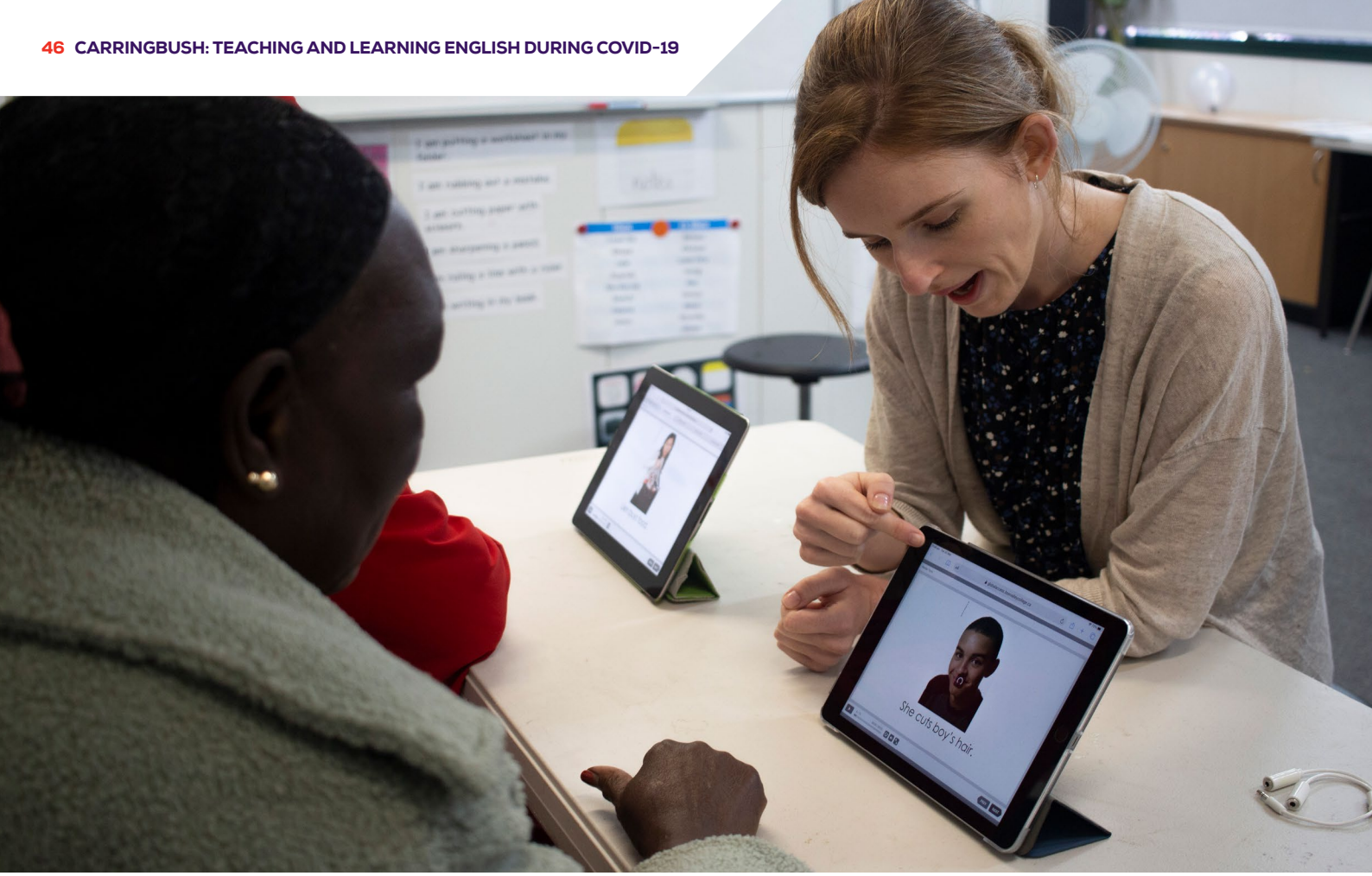
> *I cried one session at the end of the session. I actually cried. I was sitting there on Zoom crying. It was like, Oh, my God, look what you're doing.' It's just fantastic.*

5.3. Teaching in the digital space

5.3.1. CLASS PREPARATION AND DELIVERY: BEING ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE LEARNERS

While utilising similar skills, teaching online effectively is very different from doing so face-to-face, and as with learners, requires its own techniques. Teachers often found themselves just one step ahead of the learners (common across all sectors in education), and many felt that they were in effect preparing two curricula:

> *… every time I sit down to prepare my following week, I have to think, 'What online resources are there? What online resources do I need? How am I going to deliver them? How do I sequence them in terms of what I'm doing in the face-to-face … I'm going to use that activity …, but when am I going to use it, and what do I need to do beforehand, and what would I do after?' So my lesson planning …. It's a lot more work…It's like I have to do it twice.*



5.3.2. A GROWING CONFIDENCE IN USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Used judiciously, technology can markedly enhance learning and teaching, albeit requiring a steep learning curve in most instances; however, the explosion of online learning tools is a double-edged sword. The ideal tool does what one wants, is easy for both teacher and learner to use and is transferable to other contexts and concepts – this is not the reality for most teachers.

There appears to be an open question being pondered by teachers in both their survey and focus group responses about the extent to which they should be required to learn digital or technological skills to facilitate online language learning. For example, there is little argument from teachers that lesson design is part of their work – however, there was some discussion in the survey, in particular, about whether tasks such as uploading and embedding content should be part of their role:

> *[There is] a lot of skills that as teachers we have to learn for Moodle, lots of digital technical skills that aren't really in … the teacher's job description.*

> *This question is important – to what degree should teachers be expected to learn all these new digital skills? Should it be a part of their job description? It is not something that is learnt during ou[r] qualifications.*

Especially where technical support is not readily available, it is logical to use tools integrated into the LMS where possible, to minimise compatibility problems. The H5P suite of online learning activities is integrated into Moodle, and most teachers had attempted to use it to create their own resources. The consensus was that while these were good for learning, the time and expertise required to build them was not worthwhile for the gains that they provided to learners.

While teachers were happy to use resources created by their colleagues, they often experienced problems in copying them from one Moodle class site to another, and equally in trying to modify them for their own context.

Writing is a key skill that all learners, especially EAL cohorts, need to master. Most teachers used hard-copy worksheets or workbooks in conjunction with the online versions in their classes, even as online versions were introduced. Teachers viewed the digital space as complementing, not replacing, face-to-face classes, with the learning activities located on Moodle increasingly used as reinforcement of the class material. Several teachers shared their thoughts:

> *… one reinforces the other within the workbook that I use. I get them to actually go to Moodle. I give them instructions, 'Go here. Look at this particular section,' and so on, so they have to go to Moodle to complete the task. They can't do it otherwise…Again, I might use Wordwall at the end of the day to reinforce the learning of the day.*

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

> *I created a series of worksheets.... I let them work on them a little bit during the class, and then we do different activities on them in Zoom and they love it. They really love it, and it's so easy for me.*

As teachers' familiarity with and confidence in using different tools and platforms increased, they were able to create new activities and use features previously not available to them. As with their learners, repetition is key to skill development:

> *...[when] I prep that on Moodle beforehand [there] is a lot of... 'What's the sequence? What's the sequence? Should I do Kelly's video first?' And I do these perception activities as well... and just thinking, 'When will I do that? When's the logical place to put that?' And so there were more activities .... On Moodle, and we do do some of that in Zoom, so it's just layer upon layer upon layer of technology....*

Yet, as the technical skills of teachers increased in their use of digital learning media, other skill sets also came to the fore, and their suggestions about the professional development they required became more detailed. For example, teachers' comments in the initial survey were focused on simply getting the software to work; later comments were about making tweaks and improvements to the technology, such as how best to embed content or 'workarounds' for common problems.

Teachers recognised the need to project a confidence they may not have felt to help their learners and reflected that this may in fact have enabled them to become more competent:

> *So you had to be as calm as possible then because the students were quite fearful themselves, so people were like a scared rabbit, but ... yes, I have improved. There's no doubt.*

Language learning is one discipline where face-to-face classes can't easily be fully replicated online. For example, a very effective way of teaching sounds is for learners to see how the speaker's mouth and tongue move. This is very much easier to do when speaker and listeners are physically co-located:

> *... and they really liked that... because they can see your mouth moving, and then they listen, and then you can write it down so they can all see it.*

Short videos of the same teacher making these speech sounds were created and shared across all classes on Moodle. This provided consistency for learners, as the videos were reused in the following years and enabled them to view the actions as often as they needed to and at a time that suited them. It also helped class preparation, as teachers could incorporate the videos into pre-class or consolidation activities as well as in synchronous face-to-face and online classes.

> *[a learner] Sometimes my pronunciation is not good, and they will check 'a', 'e' (sounding out the letters)...yeah, it's very good.*

5.3.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Teachers' willingness to try various tools and technologies was helped immeasurably by Carringbush's recognition that they needed help to navigate and master unfamiliar territory. The digital mentoring and related support from Carringbush, including the decision to acquire and provide devices for learners, was unreservedly applauded by teachers, as noted by several of them below:

> *[T]he digital mentoring for the teachers.... particularly new teachers, but Sophie's been fantastic guiding me, which is good because I had never used Moodle before.*

'The digital mentoring and all the support that management's provided is invaluable and necessary. It can't be done otherwise. You can't do it on your own. That's my experience from my previous school that they were trying, but that didn't happen, so I think that infrastructure is really important.'

'It needs to be an organisation wide approach for it to work, and we are very lucky here that we are small enough I think to be able to do that... other teachers come to me and say, 'I'd love to be able to do that,' but it's really management that's got to make a commitment to it to trickle down.'

Despite myriad technical and other problems, the considerable goodwill and commitment from both management and teachers to making things work translated into improving the learning environment experience for classes:

> *[O]ur teachers have been quite amazing over this period. It's been just incredible to see the lengths everyone's gone to get it right and keep trying, and many centres that didn't do this.*

5.4. What did we learn from Carringbush learners and teachers? And what's next?

The overarching issue that this study investigated was *'We want to improve how we teach English to adult learners'* in the new milieu, where online learning and teaching are the norm. Successful online learning and teaching require a range of skills, which in turn rely on access to, and confidence and competence in using, various forms of technology, both hardware (devices) and software (platforms and apps).

Albeit from different viewpoints, there was considerable synergy between the views of learners and teachers regarding what helps and what hinders those learning EAL. Technology, while preeminent in people's thinking, is best viewed as a tool or enabler which allows greater flexibility and creativity, but which is not a panacea. The following discussion should be read with that caveat in mind.

5.4.1. THE NEW REALITY OF BLENDED LEARNING

One key purpose of this study was to identify factors that enabled good online teaching and learning and those that were barriers to it, with a view to designing for the future. Despite many obstacles for both learners and teachers in moving so rapidly and completely to an unfamiliar mode of learning – or perhaps because of the increase in skills and confidence that were evident in both groups – all participants agreed that online learning should be part of the future at Carringbush.

Both teachers and learners showed a distinct preference for face-to-face learning, supported and augmented by online classes and resources.

As described earlier, many of the negatives identified by learners for the online learning environment related to distraction and technology. In addition, they found being in the physical classroom better for most learning activities, such as teachers demonstrating how to make the sounds and the learners copying the actions, as well as for the ability to ask questions or seek help. Several learners commented on this:

> *[I]n the classroom you can see the person. In the Zoom you see their head, then the sounds may get distorted... Direct, face-to-face class I prefer. On the Zoom, they ask me question and I answer, but I can't appreciate it much.*

> *It's [online learning] okay. But the different or the challenging is when I struggling or I don't know any part. I have no one to ask. No teacher to ask. So sometime I got stuck. But not in the class, I can ask the teacher or someone else.*

> *Because you know, for face-to-face, the teacher face student, understand more. And I can talk to my friend, I can say, ask my teacher straightaway and I can use my action. In the internet, you still can but you know...*

I think it's [face-to-face] better. We are together and if there's something that I don't understand, or we don't understand, we can approach the teacher and we can talk more about it.

Teachers agreed with this:

Yeah, and that's good because they can see your mouth moving, and then they listen, and then you can write it down so they can all see it.

I'd rather not have the worksheet [for online class, as] they can't do the listening on Zoom.

I know my students. Their listening skills are not very good.

They further commented that it is easier to gauge an individual's or a class's understanding when they are all physically present.

Integral to Carringbush's commitment to retaining some virtual/online classes for all cohorts was their desire to help their learners maintain and develop the hard-won digital literacies that would be essential to their daily lives and personal goals.

Teachers viewed digital language learning as a valuable way for learners to achieve this confidence, as several teachers noted below:

I think it's important to remember why we're doing this because for their digital literacy. We are doing it to give them more skills for everyday life, for work, which is a really valuable thing, and it's just how the world is advancing at the moment, so it's good for us to sort of support them in that way.

From a management perspective, keeping some classes online helps to maintain and build digital skills and hopefully resilience. Learners need these skills for all aspects of their lives.

Learners also spoke of the benefit of using devices and apps for communicating, orally and in writing, with others, for learning English songs and for shopping, amongst other activities. While not explicitly stated, the increased confidence in using the apps and devices for everyday use came in large part from their regular use in English learning.

This 'learning by stealth' also aligns with the principles of andragogy, the concept of adult learning, which was developed and refined in the latter half of the 20th century by Malcolm Knowles (1980).

This teacher's comment is testament to this increased confidence:

[Learners] have been able to improve their digital resilience by reflecting on what they have learnt during online classes. They are able to troubleshoot problems more readily. [They] have come a long way since pre-COVID.

Learners also appreciated the flexibility afforded by online classes, especially related to health or travel barriers. The few learners who used Moodle out of class time (at home) reported the benefit of watching closely and repeatedly the videos which demonstrated pronunciation and mouth shape, and of practising using words to increase their vocabulary.

Distraction from family members and the need to share devices remained barriers to effective online learning in 2022, but for fewer learners than was the case in 2020.

Teachers found that preparing classes for two delivery modes, even when learning is successfully sequenced between online and face to face, requires more time than when all teaching is in one mode only. Some teachers commented:

It's a bigger jigsaw. It's like, 'Well, that's got that grammar in it, so when do I do that? Oh, now, but what could I do that's online? Or do I need to create something new or let me go forage ...' So there's my sequence. Then I go, 'Oh, no, that's not going to work.'

It's like I have to do it twice. I have to do a brainstorm, and then I'm trying to work out how to do it better and neater because my messiness is driving me nuts. I think I'm going to do it on large index cards or something to know this and that goes there because if you saw my notes, you'd go, 'How do you work with that?'

While they are more confident in designing and delivering online classes than when they began teaching in that mode in 2020, the ever-evolving nature of digital apps and tools means that teachers too are constantly learning and adapting, as several teachers noted:

..the time-consuming nature of trying to get the instructional design right with the two, with the online and the face-to-face... I don't know whether there's some guides that can be provided to facilitate that, rather than reinventing the wheel because [that's what] it is. I've taught this stuff heaps of times, but I get to Thursday and I go, 'How am I going to do it with Moodle and WhatsApp?'

[I]t's important to remember why we're doing this because it feels like such a maze sometimes, and it can be really overwhelming because that's just the nature of technology where it's just always evolving. It's always changing, so it's hard for the students, but it's also hard for us.

Carringbush teachers' mixed sentiments about using digital resources to deliver online classes reflects the tone of tempered enthusiasm that others have identified amongst language teachers during and since the pandemic (Kourieos & Evripidou, 2023). According to this research, such teachers have remained enthusiastic about the potential for digital technologies to enhance second-language teaching and assessment, while continuing to express their perceived or actual lack of digital literacy and the impact this has had on their ability to design and implement online second-language teaching.

Others have highlighted the importance of providing ongoing professional development in digital literacy for English second-language teachers (Bui, 2022). It has been noted that it is not the technology per se that should be the focus of delivering English language education online, but rather the teacher's ability to effectively utilise the technology to meet the educational needs of EAL learners (Shin & Borup, 2020). Some have called for English second-language teachers to examine their (potentially limiting) beliefs related to the use of technology in their teaching (Bui, 2022) and have suggested that professional reflection of this sort could be supported by policies at the institutional level that provide guidance and adequate resourcing towards the integration of digital skills into teaching plans (Bui, 2022; Rossner & Heyworth, 2023).

The important role of trust and collaboration recurred in the teachers' focus group and survey comments. Together with the Digital Capacity Coordinator, tasked with responding to teachers' expressed need for guidance and support, those who were adept at finding and trialling new tools willingly shared these with their peers. This informal, ongoing professional development is arguably as effective as planned formal sessions, as it follows the 'just-in-time, just-for-me' model that many teachers also adopted with their learners:

> *The Digital Induction Guide is GREAT. The internal PD sessions where teachers share what they are doing e.g. videos, Wordwall – are also great to learn from each other. I am not sure what sort of support can be offered which would build my skills when these Moodle gremlins happen in class and I am on my own.*

The creation by the Digital Capacity Coordinator of shared guides, reflected in the suggestion below and reinforced by others in the focus group, would be a logical step in further enabling Carringbush's teachers to troubleshoot 'in the moment', and model that behaviour to their learners:

> *Continued professional learning and opportunities for teachers to share their skills and knowledge regarding Wordwall [and other apps used in class] and building resources that can be shared and adapted for different levels [are helpful].*

What helps and what hinders learning in their specific classes and contexts is important information for teachers. The focus groups provided valuable information for Carringbush, further reinforcing the value of hearing from learners in their own languages.

Whilst not directly sought, many learners offered ideas about strategies that they believed would be helpful for their language learning. These were either offered as direct suggestions to the interviewer or as comments about what learners had found particularly helpful in their language learning.

Ideas ranged from more concrete suggestions about practices that could be enacted in the classroom to comments about ways to continue this learning outside the classroom. Neither group of comments was specific to a particular learning modality (face-to-face or online). More experienced learners, those in the third-level or intermediate classroom level, had further suggestions, some of which are more appropriate and manageable than others.

FOCUS ON PRE-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Very few classes anywhere are so homogeneous that 'one size fits all'. Determining the amount and complexity of material for each class is always a trade-off: some learners may be struggling while others become bored.

One key strength of the flipped model of teaching, where the pre-class, in-class and post-class activities form a learning sequence, is that learners do the pre-class work at their own pace so that everyone comes to the class at the same level of preparedness and can participate in the same activities. Theoretically, no learner should be left behind in these activities, and those with advanced knowledge or skill can be encouraged to work (with appropriate guidance and structure) with their classmates, either face to face or in breakout rooms.

Not only can this reduce the time the teacher needs to spend catching up some of the class (a concern raised by several teachers), it may also have considerable benefits for the individual's confidence and self-esteem, both of which correlate with successful learning. Consolidation work after the class is again done at each individual's own pace.

The physical aspect of language is vital to effective learning, and unsurprisingly, most learners found the close visualisation of the mouth when making sounds very valuable, whether the demonstration was live or recorded. Activities that incorporated these actions helped their learning and confidence, and they suggested that these should be used more in classes, regardless of mode.

The value of the learning sequence described above lies in the fact that each stage is related to and requires participation in those before and after it: the learners in our study at that time reported minimal engagement with the 'out-of-class' components. Using pre-recorded videos of sounds as a basis for creating these activities, which are then reinforced in face-to-face and virtual classes, may encourage greater learner participation in and benefit from the combination of asynchronous activities and resources, and live class time.

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

Learners said that using the whiteboard to reinforce previously seen digital items (on Moodle or WhatsApp) made their learning more effective, suggesting that explicit linking of the 'at home' preliminary work with in-class activities would enhance learning:

> *Mostly, I used to hear the voice and then the voice recorded technology, but more... The action one on the board, like writing or picturing, drawing or anything that makes more better to understand. And then when I come to the class only when, what I heard before, when I see practically on the board, I can understand easily.*

'SIGNPOST' THE NEXT WEEK'S CONTENT AND REPEAT THE PREVIOUS WEEK'S MATERIAL IN THE CURRENT LESSON

Several learners spoke of the value of 'signposting' what would be done in the following week as a way of reducing their anxiety, guiding them in rehearsing past content and seeking new examples to increase their vocabulary. Such signposting could be done via Moodle (as a way of reinforcing use of the platform) both in the lesson and available after class, and also as a message sent by WhatsApp:

> *And also she believes if teach[er] can repeat what they taught the previous week in the next week, that would be better... And she wishes that can be a bit slowed down.*

Repetition is key to deep learning, and this is particularly so when learning another language. In any class, there is tension between what may be perceived as 'going over old ground' and the necessary reminder and revision of what was taught previously, so its implementation is context dependent and depends on each teacher's awareness of their own class.

Teachers also spoke (independently) of the benefit for their learners in consolidating previous face-to-face classes. One approach might thus involve framing the pre-class work as 'this is what we did last week, this is what we will do next week, and this is what will help you prepare'. This may have the desired effect of more learners attempting this work, and, if it is interactive, providing the teacher with a real-time snapshot of areas where their classes may be struggling or where more time could be effectively spent.

In a similar vein, one learner expressed the desire for a textbook that could be followed in a pre-determined manner, as a way of reducing the anxiety about what to expect:

> *They appreciates having a set textbook. That's how they were learning English in Afghanistan, so they knew the trajectory and where they are heading. Here, every week a different material is provided from different resources.*

Teachers, while understanding the rationale, do not support this suggestion for Carringbush, due to the nature of their cohorts: limited text literacy in their original language is common, especially in the beginner classes. Even if a textbook were to be adopted, the diversity of language backgrounds would render this logistically complex and expensive, as a text in English would not be useful for those currently learning the basics of the written language.

Carringbush's teachers use a range of teaching resources, including videos and interactive tools that are suited to that cohort at that time, affording a flexibility that a set text cannot. One benefit of using Moodle is the 'Book' feature mentioned above. Teachers can create a virtual book that incorporates these various media in addition to text. This can be downloaded and printed as well as being 'read' within the LMS and has the advantage of being easily updated and amended.

The 'signposting' described above can inform the layout of the Moodle Book, and the structure and purpose of the activities planned for before, during and after the class explained by the teachers to learners, both in live class time and via WhatsApp (or other) messages. This approach aligns with Knowles' principles of teaching adult learners (1980), key amongst which are 'why do I need to know this?' and 'how can I relate this to what I already know?'

5.5. Making it happen: Strategies for Carringbush leadership and teachers

5.5.1. THE VALUE OF AN INITIAL DIGITAL MENTORING SESSION FOR LEARNERS

Indirectly, learners' comments about the challenges of learning a language online suggest some of the strategies that might be useful in mitigating these difficulties. For example, comments about struggling to set up software on their phones or laptops suggest the value of an initial set-up or preparation period prior to commencing language lessons online. Learners explained that they had required practical assistance in getting software onto their devices as well as assistance from the teachers and others in learning how to use the software.

As noted in the introduction to this report, Carringbush now provides a digital mentoring session for new learners, where their device is set up with all the necessary technology and accounts, and they are introduced to all digital platforms used. As this initiative was introduced post-pandemic, it is possible that some of the learners interviewed in the focus groups missed out on this if they started at Carringbush during the pandemic. Alternatively, it may be that their comments about the challenges of learning a language online point to the need for more assistance than was being provided at the time.

5.5.2. REPLICATING LEARNERS' PREFERRED ELEMENTS OF FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Learners clearly feel more comfortable asking questions in a face-to-face classroom setting than online, so attempting to replicate, in the online format, some of the non-verbal elements that might be involved in a face-to-face question-answer exchange may potentially help learners. For example, the teacher might use a breakout room with each individual learner in turn during the lesson, to check their understanding of the content and offer learners an opportunity to ask questions in a safe and supported way, which mimics the way teachers spend time with individual learners in the physical classroom.

To more closely replicate the physical classroom and maximise learning, the other class participants should be able to work collaboratively and/or converse with each other during these times. Teachers already use breakout rooms in their online classes, with varying degrees of satisfaction. The provision of structured activities with appropriate explanation before entering breakout rooms, together with nominating or asking for a volunteer to report back to the whole class, worked well for some classes.

This of course adds extra work to the teacher's preparation and may require 'training' of class participants in working together, virtually, with no in-person guide. The presence of a 'teacher's aide' would be invaluable here, and this may be one way in which class volunteers could be effectively utilised. Indeed, the ability to assist with classes online may increase the availability of some volunteers.

5.5.3. SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO USE DIGITAL LEARNING RESOURCES IN THEIR TEACHING

Appropriate, accessible, quality resources that are easy to find or create, use and share reduce teacher stress considerably and should contribute to a better learning environment.

Investigating the functionalities of the bewildering and ever-increasing array of tools and resources takes time, as does learning how and where best to use them and how to make them available for learners. The time this requires reduces that available for the fundamental work of lesson planning.

Teachers who trialled new tools shared their learning with their peers who, as has been mentioned, valued opportunities for this collaboration. This informal professional development between teachers could continue, alongside planned formal sessions.

There may also be value in management and teaching leaders investing time or personnel into identifying, testing and sharing effective digital resources and tools in a central repository or guide for all teachers to utilise. As well as enabling teachers to choose tools that they feel comfortable using, this might help them to troubleshoot technology issues more efficiently during class time and minimise disruptions to their teaching.

In addition, establishing or joining existing local and online communities of practice can provide other platforms for both learning and sharing resources, and is a suggested strategy to support teachers to deliver online language teaching (Choi & Chung, 2021; Rossner & Heyworth, 2023).

5.5.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH

Both teachers and learners referenced the importance of an institution-wide approach, led and supported by management. Learners spoke of this indirectly, appreciating the provision of devices to all learners and in discussions of how they used the shared platform Moodle for their learning. Both initiatives were implemented in consultation with teachers and those involved in supporting learners, which is undoubtedly a large factor in their success. It bears repeating that Carringbush management's commitment and support of teachers in adapting their teaching plans and tools for an online format, including the digital mentoring provided, stood out as invaluable for teachers in helping them support their learners.

As was highlighted by DESE based on their national teacher survey conducted in 2020 – noted in this report's introduction – effective online teaching and use of digital tools to support learning requires new or adapted pedagogies, institutional support, and new or adapted ways of engaging and interacting with learners. The rapid adaptation teachers needed to make during the pandemic required more than just knowing how to use technology or transferring existing materials to an online platform; the initiative of teachers at the coalface, and the support Carringbush provided to teachers, was fundamental in enabling them to adapt their teaching to meet these new needs (DESE, 2020).

Continuing to implement an organisation-wide approach to the provision of digital learning and teaching support would be fundamental to ensuring teachers and learners continue to feel support and guidance in their teaching and learning.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Carringbush and ACU partnered together and co-designed the present study to understand the teaching practices and digital resources that would promote strong engagement and independent learning in Carringbush's EAL learners – adult beginner learners with complex needs, little to no formal schooling, low literacy and low digital literacy. Carringbush also sought to build teachers' skills, knowledge and confidence in designing for online and blended teaching, with the new reality of online learning brought about by COVID-19, and the need for learners to develop robust digital skills.

In this study, we invited Carringbush's Initial and Certificate 1 EAL learners and their teachers to share their experiences, via surveys and focus groups, of online teaching and learning both retrospectively during the pandemic-induced changes in 2020, and later in 2022 and 2023, after face-to-face classes had resumed. As a result, we gathered rich information that shed light on learners' and teachers' experiences, perceptions, practices and confidence levels throughout this period.

Below we make a series of recommendations that are supported by the key findings and themes we identified based on learners' and teachers' experiences and suggestions, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Recommendations

1. PROVISION OF ONGOING DIGITAL LEARNING SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS:

a. Continuing to implement an organisation-wide focus on teacher learning and professional development related to online lesson design and delivery for EAL adult beginner learners with low literacy and additional barriers to learning.

b. Prioritising training and professional development for teachers related to the design of blended learning that uses paper-and-pencil, face-to-face and online resources.

c. Designing a paper notebook with links to online and digital learning resources: this was created in 2024 and is now in use.

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

2. PROVISION OF ONGOING DIGITAL MENTORING FOR LEARNERS:

a. Maintaining and/or increasing access to digital mentoring in learners' first language.

b. Exploring ways to replicate learners' preferred elements of face-to-face learning in the online classroom; for example, using breakout rooms with individuals to offer learners the opportunity to ask questions in a safe and supported way; and providing opportunities for learners to work collaboratively and increase their social interactions with their peers, potentially with the training of class volunteers as teacher's aides to support this.

3. PROVISION OF ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNER AND TEACHER LEARNING:

a. Providing devices where needed so all learners have access to online learning.

b. Providing more community-based opportunities for learning English.

c. Building in 'signposting' to learners' pre-class work, including consolidation of what was learnt in the previous week, what will be taught next week and what will help learners prepare, to reduce learner anxiety and build confidence in and ownership over their learning, and to help reduce the time the teacher needs to spend catching up some of the class.

d. Trialling effective digital resources, tools or software, and maintaining these and other digital design and teaching resources in a central repository or guide for all teachers and support staff to utilise.

e. Prioritising software and lesson design for use on phones.

f. Providing ongoing digital technology support ('troubleshooting').

4. ENSURING DISSEMINATION OF LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE WITHIN CARRINGBUSH AND THE SECTOR:

a. Exploring and establishing forums for informal collaboration, sharing of resources and professional development amongst Carringbush teachers, for example, reflective practice sessions alongside formal professional development sessions.

b. Exploring ways to share learning and tools specific to EAL learners and to delivering online language teaching, for example, establishing or joining existing local and online communities of practice within the sector.

c. Provision of formal or informal teacher training in the skills needed to support low-literacy adult second-language learners within the organisation and/or the sector, for example, awareness of the socio-cultural contexts in which these learners undertake their studies, and providing guidance for learners in classroom skills and how to be a learner.

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Appendix 1.
Participant information letters and consent forms for beginner (Initial EAL) and third level (Certificate 1) learners

Participant information letter and consent forms for surveys 1 and 2

CARRINGBUSH INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT SHEET

We want to improve how we teach English to adult learners

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT?

We want to know what you like and what you don't like about learning English. We want to know what you think about learning English with technology.

We want to know about your experiences learning on Zoom and online, so we can improve our teaching and make more interesting and helpful lessons for learners like you.

This study will help us to improve how we teach adult learners like you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?

1. Everyone will do a worksheet as part of the class. This will take about 30 minutes. If you want to help us do our project, you can let us see your answers afterwards, so we can know what you think. Your name will not be on your answers, so nobody at Carringbush will know who showed us their answers. If you don't want us to see your answers, that is fine too. Later on, there will be another worksheet in the class and you can let us see your answers if you want.
2. We will have small group discussions at another time so you can tell us more about what you think. These groups will take about an hour, and we will have these groups in your own language. Later on, there will be another group discussion that you can join.

WHO WILL KNOW ABOUT WHAT I DID IN THE STUDY?

Only the researchers in the study. We won't tell anyone else about your answers. We keep this information safe. What you tell us may be shown to staff at Carringbush and published in reports or presentations or other ways, but we won't use your name or contact details. Nobody will know if you were part of our study, or what you told us.

CAN I DECIDE IF I WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY?

After you have done the activity in your class, you can decide if you want us to see what you think. If you don't want to be part of this study that is OK. No one will be disappointed or upset and it will not change the way your teacher or anyone at Carringbush works with you.

You can change your mind about showing us your answers for two weeks after the class. If you decide you don't want us to use your answers, we will remove them.

If you tell us you want to join a small group but change your mind before the group meets, that will be fine too.

If you aren't sure about anything you can ask Cathy or your teacher to explain the study to you as they have got an information sheet too. They will know who to talk to if you have questions. If you feel uncomfortable doing the worksheet or talking with us in the small group later, you can talk to Cathy at any time, or you can talk to people at BeyondBlue on 1300 22 4636.

I WANT TO TAKE PART! HOW DO I SIGN UP?

After you have finished the worksheet, you can decide if you want to be part of the study by telling us on the next page. We will not keep this page with your answers.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can ask Cathy to help you to talk to the people at the university who are in charge of the project. This is how to contact them. It will be confidential and they will make sure that someone helps to fix the problem and tells you what they have done.

[university details]

[Original document included a visual aid for the two options below: close-up image of a hand holding a pen, writing on lined notepaper.]

Yes, I would like you to see what I think

No, I do not want you to see what I think

[Original document included a visual aid for the two options below: an image showing a group of people in an office or educational setting. Six individuals are seated around a large table, talking and taking notes. A seventh person is writing on a whiteboard.]

Yes, I would like to be invited to join a small group discussion in my own language

No, I do not want to be invited to join a small group discussion

Your name:

_____

The language you speak at home:

_____

Your email address or phone number, so we can let you know the date and time of the small group discussion:

_____

Thank you!

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number XXXX).

Signature of the principal investigator:

_____

Date:

_____

(Third level (Certificate 1) learners)

I would like you to see what I think about learning English

I would like to be invited to join a small group discussion in my own language

Your name:

_____

The language you speak at home:

_____

Your email address or phone number, so we can let you know the date and time of the small group discussion:

_____

Thank you!

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number XXXX).

Signature of the principal investigator:

_____

Date:

_____

Consent form for focus groups 1 and 2

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS TO SPEAK WITH [THE RESEARCHER]

Title of project: What helps beginner level English adult learners with online learning?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number XXXX).

Project team:

_____

Your name:

_____

Tick ✓ if you agree:

- ☐ I understand the information in the Information Letter and, if I had questions, they were answered well.
- ☐ I agree to talk with [the researcher] and other students about my learning for about 30-45 minutes at school or on Zoom.
- ☐ I know someone who speaks my language may be there to help me understand the questions.
- ☐ If I speak with [the researcher] at school, I agree to my voice being taped. If I speak with [the researcher] on Zoom, I agree to my picture and voice being taped. The tapes will be used by another organisation to write down what was said.
- ☐ I know I can change my mind before, during or 2 weeks after speaking with [the researcher] and my information will be deleted. If it is after, I know I can't be removed from the tape, but the tape will be deleted once what everyone said is written down.
- ☐ I agree that what I say during the talk may be published in reports, presentations and other public documents or given to other researchers. I understand that my name or other contact details will not be included in these reports so no one will know that I was part of the project or what I said.

Signature:

_____

Date:

_____

Signature of the principal investigator:

_____

Date:

_____

Appendix 2.
Surveys 1 and 2 and focus groups 1 and 2 for beginner (Initial EAL) and third level (Certificate 1) learners

Survey 1

1. **At home, do you have any of these devices?**
[Original document included four images as options below: a laptop, a smartphone, a tablet, and a desktop computer.]

2. **What do you use your devices for?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Shopping
[accompanying image is a screen-grab of the Amazon website]

Playing games
[accompanying image shows two hands holding a game controller. A football pitch can be seen on a television screen in the background]

Listening to music or the radio
[accompanying image shows three figures listening, enjoying and responding to music using headphones, smartphones and other hand-held electronic devices]

Watching movies or television
[accompanying image is in first-person perspective. Two disembodied hands hold a tablet device, showing the opening credits of a Paramount movie, The device rests on someone's stomach, in a reclining pose]

Watching YouTube
[accompanying image is an over the shoulder view of two hands holding a tablet device. The YouTube logo is displayed on screen]

Talking or texting your family in your home country
[accompanying image shows the WhatsApp widget icon on a smartphone screen. A second image shows two humanoid figures on either side of planet earth, connected by phone cords and receivers like those on vintage rotary phones. One figure is speaking into the mouthpiece and the other is listening]

Talking or texting with other people
[accompanying image shows a woman holding a smartphone. The screen reveals a text message thread]

Helping children with homework
[accompanying image shows a child and parent sitting at a desk in a study scenario. A small pile of books and a tin of pens sits beside them. Their attention is on a desktop computer screen, which faces away from the viewer]

Translating words
[accompanying image is the Google Translate app.]

3 **Do you like using your devices to do these things?**

4 **When you are learning English at home, how many of these do you use?**
[Original document included five images as options below: a laptop, a smartphone, a tablet, a desktop computer and a lined notebook and pen.]

5 **How did you feel when you were learning English online, at home?**

6 **Put a cross (X) on all the places you sat when you were learning English at home.**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Bedroom
[accompanying image shows a person sitting at a desk, facing a desktop computer. To the other side of the room is a bed]

Living room
[accompanying image shows a family in a living room. They sit on a couch, with their backs to the viewer, facing a wide-screen television]

Kitchen
[accompanying image shows a family gathered around a kitchen bench, littered with mixing bowls and baking ingredients]

Back yard/ balcony
[accompanying image shows a small balcony with many potted and hanging plants. In the centre, two chairs sit either side of a small wooden table. A second image shows a back yard. Small trees ring a grassy central area, and beyond this, a tall fence]

Spaces in a library or shopping centre
[accompanying image shows a youth sitting at a table. Their attention is on a laptop in front of them. Behind this figure are library shelves full of books. A second image shows two levels of storefronts and an escalator at a shopping centre]

Somebody else's home
[accompanying image shows a figure opening a door. Three other figures stand on the threshold, greeting their host]

Common area such as public parks
[accompanying image shows a park bench in the middle of a grassy expanse. In the middle ground, a line of evergreens, and in the distant background, a city skyline.]

7 **When you're learning English, which do you like best?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Learning in a classroom with other people
[accompanying image shows a presentation scenario. The viewer is positioned in the audience, seated around and facing a figure at the front of the room. They are standing by a screen, pointing at a series of graphs]

Learning at home using your devices
[accompanying image shows a person sat in a domestic environment. They are using both a tablet device and a laptop. Lined paper and pens also sit on the desk next to the figure.]

8 **What do you like to do when you learn English in the classroom?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Spend time with other people
[accompanying image shows a classroom scene. Tertiary students sit at and on tables conversing animatedly in pairs or small groups]

Get help from the teacher
[accompanying image shows a two figures sat at a desk, facing a laptop. A third figure leans over their shoulder, listening and also looking at the laptop]

Ask the teacher questions
[accompanying image shows a classroom scenario. The viewer is positioned at the back of the room, with back views of figures seated at desks. They face a whiteboard, where a teacher figure stands, gesturing animatedly. The figure nearest the viewer has their hand raised]

Work with other people in a group
[accompanying image shows a group work scenario. Five people are arranged in a semicircle around a table. They are each absorbed in writing notes or reading the textbooks or laptop in front of them.]

9 **What do you do when you learn English at home with Zoom or WhatsApp?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]
Spend time with other people
[accompanying image shows a classroom scene. Tertiary students sit at and on tables conversing animatedly in pairs or small groups]
Get help from the teacher
[accompanying image shows a two figures sat at a desk, facing a laptop. A third figure leans over their shoulder, listening and also looking at the laptop]
Ask the teacher questions
[accompanying image shows a classroom scenario. The viwer is positioned at the back of the room, with back views of figures seated at desks. They face a whiteboard, where a teacher figure stands, gesturing animatedly. The figure nearest the viewer has their hand raised]
Work with other people in a group
[accompanying image shows a group work scenario. People sit around a table littered with pens and open textbooks.]

10 **What do you use when you learn English online at home?**
[Original document included five images as options below: a laptop, a smartphone, a tablet, a desktop computer and a lined notebook and pen.]

11 **Do you like to use technology for learning English?**

12 **Do you like the homework booklet?**
[Original document included a screengrab of the booklet above the icons below.]

13 **Do you like the pre-class videos?**
[Original document included a screengrab of the video title card above the icons below.]

Focus group 1

Questions focus on learners' use of technology for learning at home, and their experiences and confidence in using it, and what they think about using Moodle: how it is set up, how easy it is to know what to do, and so forth.

1. What do you like about learning in a classroom?
2. What do you like about learning at home using Zoom (or WhatsApp)?
3. What do you not like about learning at home using Zoom (or WhatsApp)?
4. Was it hard to get used to learning at home on Zoom (or WhatsApp)?
5. What do you like about using Moodle?
6. What do you not like about using Moodle?
7. Do you think Moodle helps you learn, at home and in the classroom?
8. How easy is it for you to access the technology and internet at home?
9. What makes it hard for you to learn at home?
10. What would make it easier for you to learn at home?
11. What could your teachers do to make it easier for you to learn English?
12. Outside of class what would help you to learn English? [eg: Moodle, videos, workbooks, Zoom drop-in sessions]
13. Do you feel confident in using technology (both the device and what you do on it, such as Zoom and WhatsApp and Moodle)?
14. What sort of technology skills would you like to learn?

Survey 2

1. **At home, do you have any of these devices?**
[Original document included four images as options below: a laptop, a smartphone, a tablet, and a desktop computer.]

2. **What do you use your devices for?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Shopping
[accompanying image is a screengrab of the Amazon website]

Playing games
[accompanying image shows two hands holding a game controller. A football pitch can be seen on a television screen in the background]

Listening to music or the radio
[accompanying image shows three figures listening, enjoying and responding to music using headphones, smartphones and other hand-held electronic devices]

Watching movies or television
[accompanying image is in first-person perspective. Two disembodied hands hold a tablet device, showing the opening credits of a Paramount movie, The device rests on someone's stomach, in a reclining pose]

Talking or texting your family in your home country
[accompanying image shows the WhatsApp widget icon on a smartphone screen.

Talking or texting with other people
[accompanying image shows a woman holding a smartphone. The screen reveals a text message thread]

Helping children with homework
[accompanying image shows a child and parent sitting at a desk in a study scenario. A small pile of books and a tin of pens sits beside them. Their attention is on a desktop computer screen, which faces away from the viewer]

Translating words
[accompanying image is the Google Translate app.]

Using Google Maps to find places
[accompanying image is the Google Maps app.]

3. **Do you like using your devices to do these things?**

4. **When you are learning English at home, how many of these do you use?**
[Original document included five images as options below: a laptop, a smartphone, a tablet, a desktop computer and a lined notebook and pen.]

5. **How did you feel when you were learning English online, at home?**
[Original document included image of a figure sitting on a beanbag with a laptop in their lap. A Zoom gallery view is projected on the wall behind them.]

6. **When you're learning English, which do you like best?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Learning in a classroom with other people
[accompanying image shows a presentation scenario. The viewer is positioned in the audience, seated around and facing a figure standing by a screen, pointing at a series of graphs]

Learning at home using your devices
[accompanying image shows a person sat in a domestic environment. They are using both a tablet device and a laptop. Lined paper and pens also sit on the desk next to the person.]

7. **What do you like to do when you learn English in the classroom?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]

Spend time with other people
[accompanying image shows a classroom scene. Tertiary students sit at and on tables conversing animatedly in pairs or small groups]

Get help from the teacher
[accompanying image shows a two figures sat at a desk, facing a laptop. A third figure leans over their shoulder, listening and also looking at the laptop]

Ask the teacher questions
[accompanying image shows a classroom scenario. The viewer is positioned at the back of the room, with back views of figures seated at desks. They face a whiteboard, where a teacher figure stands, gesturing animatedly. The figure nearest the viewer has their hand raised]

Work with other people in a group
[accompanying image shows a group work scenario. Five people are arranged in a semicircle around a table. They are each absorbed in writing notes or reading the textbooks or laptop in front of them.]

8 **What do you do when you learn English at home with Zoom or WhatsApp?**
[Original document included images next to each of the options below:]
Spend time with other people
[accompanying image shows a classroom scene. Tertiary students sit at and on tables conversing animatedly in pairs or small groups]
Get help from the teacher
[accompanying image shows a two figures sat at a desk, facing a laptop. A third figure leans over their shoulder, listening and also looking at the laptop]
Ask the teacher questions
[accompanying image shows a classroom scenario. The viewer is positioned at the back of the room, with back views of figures seated at desks. They face a whiteboard, where a teacher figure stands, gesturing animatedly. The figure nearest the viewer has their hand raised]
Work with other people in a group
[accompanying image shows a group work scenario. People sit around a table littered with pens and open textbooks.]

9 **You log on to Moodle to do some of your learning. Did Moodle help you to learn English in the classroom?**
[Original document included a screengrab of the Carringbush Moodle login page.]

10 **Did Moodle help you to learn English at home?**

11 **Do you like the pre-class videos?**
[Original document included a screen-grab of video title cards.]

Focus group 2

Questions focus on learners' use of technology for learning, at home and in class (especially how they use Moodle), and their experiences and confidence in using it.

1. What do you like about learning at home using Zoom or WhatsApp (or equivalent)?
2. What do you ***not*** like about learning at home using Zoom or WhatsApp (or equivalent)?
3. What makes it hard for you to learn at home?
4. What could your teachers do to make it easier for you?
5. Does being able to do some of the work at home, at a different time to the class, make it easier for you to learn English? How did this help?
6. What do you think about using Moodle for learning English, ***in class?***
7. What do you think about using Moodle (or learning English, ***at home?***
8. Which activities on Moodle (such as: videos, memory games, matching, dictation) did you like?
9. Are there any activities on Moodle (such as: videos, memory games, matching, dictation) that you think make it hard to learn? Why?
10. What do you like about learning in a classroom?
11. Do you feel confident in using technology (both the device and what you do on it, such as Zoom and WhatsApp and Moodle)?
12. What sort of technology skills would you like to learn?

Appendix 3.
Surveys 1 and 2 and focus group questions for staff

Both surveys were delivered online via Qualtrics and consisted of a mix of choice (Likert scale, multiple choice questions) and short-answer, text-based questions.

Survey 1

CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Before Carringbush moved to online teaching in 2020, how much experience had you had of online synchronous (live classes) teaching?
- Before Carringbush moved to online teaching in 2020, how much experience had you had of online asynchronous teaching?
- Before Carringbush moved to online teaching in 2020, how confident did you feel about teaching online synchronous (live classes)?
- Before Carringbush moved to online teaching in 2020, how confident did you feel about teaching online asynchronous teaching?
- How confident do you feel ***at present*** about online teaching in live (synchronous) classes?
- How confident do you feel ***at present*** about online teaching in asynchronous classes, where students access the content in their own time?
- How confident do you think your students felt about online learning when they began online learning at Carringbush (this may be 2020 or 2021)?
- How much do you think your students like online learning ***at present?***
- From a list of digital resources/tools, staff were asked to select which they were aware of and which they had used, or were currently using, in their teaching.
- For each item they had used or were using, they were asked to select whether or not it was useful and whether or not they felt confident in using it for teaching.

TEXT-BASED QUESTIONS

- Please tell us what you see as the key components for successful EAL teaching and learning.
- What are some positive experiences that you have had in online teaching?
- What are some negative experiences that you have had in online teaching?
- What do you think worked well for you as a teacher when your Carringbush classes were taught online, and why?
- What do you think did NOT go well for you as a teacher when your Carringbush classes were taught online, and why?
- What do you think worked well for your students when your Carringbush classes were taught online? Why do you think this was the case?
- What do you think did NOT work well for your students when your Carringbush classes were taught online? Why do you think this was the case?

- If you would like to tell us more about your experience of some of these resources, please do so here.
- For you personally, what are the main problems you experienced in teaching online? (Either dot points or longer explanations are fine).
- Looking back on your experience, what do you think would have helped you to feel more confident about online teaching?
- What do you think would have helped your students to feel more confident about online learning?
- What sort of support would help you as individual teachers and teams to co-create digital resources for your teaching?
- Looking forward, what sort of support would help you as individual teachers and teams to build your skills and confidence in online teaching?

Survey 2

CHOICE QUESTIONS

- How confident do you feel now about teaching online synchronous (live) classes?
- How confident do you feel now about teaching online asynchronous classes?
- How well do you think your students have managed/are managing ***synchronous*** online learning?
- From a list of ***H5P digital resources/tools,*** staff were asked to select which, if any, they had used since the project's commencement, and whether this was for synchronous and/or asynchronous classes.
- For each item they had used, they were asked to select whether or not it was useful, whether or not they felt confident in using it for teaching and how well they thought their students had engaged with it.
- From a list of ***other digital resources/tools,*** staff were asked to select which, if any, they had used since the project's commencement, and whether this was for synchronous and/or asynchronous classes.
- For each item they had used, they were asked to select whether or not it was useful, whether or not they felt confident in using it for teaching and how well they thought their students had engaged with it.

TEXT-BASED QUESTIONS

- What are some ***positive*** experiences that you have had in online teaching in the past 12-15 months? How did these affect your teaching, if at all?
- What are some ***negative*** experiences that you have had in online teaching in the past 12-15 months? How did these affect your teaching, if at all?
- What was it about the digital tools or resources you used [see the relevant choice question] that you think worked well?

Staff focus group questions

Guided semi-structured questions included the following questions:

1. What can you do online that you can't do, or can't do as well, in the classroom?
2. Between 2019 and 2023, how has your lesson preparation changed? For better or worse?
3. How has Moodle affected what and how you teach, both in class and online?
4. How did your experience of ***synchronous*** online teaching change over the period of the project?
5. How did your experience of ***asynchronous*** online teaching change over the period of the project?
6. Do you feel more confident about teaching online? Why or why not?
7. What sort of (digital) changes to your teaching did you incorporate to make learning easier for your students? Do you think it worked?
8. Which of the resources you use do you think help your students' learning?
9. Are there any resources you think we should not use again? Why?
10. Do you think your students have become more digitally resilient? How have you been able to help them do that?
11. Have you become more digitally resilient? Has that helped you help students?
12. How has the concept of digital resilience helped you in your practice when teaching digital resilience?
13. Do you feel confident in developing and using new digital resources?
14. How would you prefer to participate in professional development for online teaching and/or the development and use of digital resources?
15. What advice would you give to other EAL teachers (with similar students and/or circumstances) about teaching online?

Appendix 4.
Extended discussion of teacher findings: Early and mid-pandemic reflections on teaching online

1. TEACHING ONLINE: EARLY PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

In the first survey, teachers were asked a series of questions designed to evoke reflections on their experience of the benefits and pitfalls of teaching online, as well as their thoughts about what learners appeared to be experiencing as they grappled with English as an Additional Language (EAL) learning online.

In 2020, prior to Carringbush moving to fully online class delivery, only one of the teachers had had any experience in online teaching, and all of them expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to teach online. They were marginally more confident with live (synchronous) classes than with those where learners accessed the class at times of their own choosing (asynchronous).

In these earlier reflections, two features of online learning that teachers felt were assisting in engaging learners included using 'breakout rooms' to move learners into small groups for particular exercises and the 'engagement factor' of making a variety of audio-visual resources available for learners to use both during and between lessons. Building on this latter point, teachers also highlighted the importance of structuring these audio-visual and other digital resources for particular learner cohorts and retaining these digitally for future reference and sharing (e.g. videos sounding out particular words).

A hint about a possible source of these challenges is provided indirectly in teachers' responses in their comments about the loss of incidental physical/social contact in online formats, with teachers commenting on such issues as the difficulties of:

1. solving technological issues for learners when the learner is not physically present
2. providing individualised feedback in online learning sessions
3. learners not completing online pre-class tasks before scheduled lessons.

Both directly and indirectly in these early comments, teachers were already advocating for the continuance of a blended model of language learning that combined elements of both face-to-face and online learning opportunities in ways that were complementary and continued to engage learners in developing their digital literacy.

2. MID-PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS – WHAT CHANGED, WHAT STAYED THE SAME

Compared with the first survey, teachers responding in the second survey noted that learners not only continued to engage with digital technologies and online learning platforms in their language learning, but also that their skills in doing this appeared to be improving. Respondents to the second survey also observed that being able to employ a variety of digital resources appeared to keep learners more engaged than they might otherwise be in a traditional face-

to-face setting (e.g. being able to switch between traditional didactic instruction, PowerPoint and digital whiteboards, and the ability to exchange items such as written works or photos quickly and in a format that could be saved for future reference).

A number of teachers responding in the second survey also noted that their own confidence and skills in utilising digital technologies to develop and deliver lessons had improved. Teachers reflected on their use of a range of software and learning packages, with some areas of improvement noted (such as more skillful use of online meeting platforms like Skype and Zoom) as well as ongoing areas of challenge. In particular, Moodle was criticised for a range of technical issues that hampered both the teachers' and learners' ability to effectively utilise what were seen as otherwise potentially valuable features of this platform. Some respondents also mentioned issues associated with the sharing and uploading of content (rather than issues with the creation of lessons), and others noted that having ready-to-go resources might assist with offsetting the time and skill required in creating original content.

Some issues appeared to remain relatively stable in comparing the results of the earlier and later surveys. For example, issues in relation to the importance of establishing a routine or structure to assist learners in becoming familiar with the online classroom environment and activities were noted as important by teachers in both surveys. Factors outside of direct language learning, such as challenges associated with online classroom etiquette (e.g. learners engaging in personal activities during online class times) were also recorded as ongoing challenges in teaching at both survey points. Teachers also continued to emphasise the importance of ongoing professional development opportunities in relation to digital lesson planning and delivery, as well as the importance of opportunities to regularly share this learning with other teachers. A feature of the responses about professional development and ongoing learning noted in the second survey was that teachers' suggestions became more detailed, in that they were focused on 1) particular pieces of software, 2) more specific points in the online resource development and teaching process (e.g. a more specific focus on learning related to online lesson design), and/or 3) learning specific to the digital learning needs of the teacher (e.g. positive feedback was provided about the Digital Induction Guide for teachers unfamiliar with online lesson design and delivery).

Amongst the biggest challenges that appeared unchanged across the two surveys were the 'tech gremlins' associated with online lesson planning and delivery at several levels. These included internet connection, individual device problems, difficulties with particular pieces of software and problems troubleshooting some or all of these from a digital distance. Another area that appeared to remain the same across the two surveys was teachers' felt sense of the 'weight' associated with creating the conditions for effective non-verbal engagement in online platforms. For example, whilst there was some endorsement of the usefulness of breakout rooms for encouraging learner interaction in the first survey, in the second survey, some of the respondents indicated that new learners in particular required teacher support to work effectively in small group breakout activities.

Teachers' direct and indirect comments continued to reflect a preference for blended learning, with respondents differing on whether online learning might be best used to consolidate face-to-face learning (rather than being used to deliver entirely new content) and/or deliver entirely original lesson content.

3. COMPARISON OF TEACHER SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP DATA

The qualitative responses provided by teachers were compared to the themes discerned in the analysis of the focus group data. Broadly speaking, there was convergence between the two data sets, with teachers commenting on the challenges associated with managing technical issues in trying to deliver content to their learner population (particularly when trying to troubleshoot these issues for learners not physically present in the classroom) and their own sense of having to learn (and teach the same skills to learners) 'on the fly' as already familiar software threw up unexpected new challenges and new software was introduced. The additional challenges associated with online lesson delivery were also themes common across the survey and focus group data; this was particularly in the form of the additional skill and time required for online lesson design and what might be described as the emotional 'weight' of recreating a safe and supportive atmosphere to facilitate optimal learning in an online environment. A strong theme crossing both forms of data collection was the extent to which teachers saw digital language learning as a valuable way for learners to continue to develop the sorts of digital literacy skills that would be essential to their daily lives and personal goals.

Appendix 5.
Applying critical theory to make further sense of learner responses and experiences

1. In (broader) perspective: Considering the role of social position and power in learner responses

Thematic analysis of qualitative data, which has been utilised to analyse the findings of this study, can further be undertaken using different lenses or 'epistemological stances'; these different stances offer different ways to glean meaning from the text under analysis. Terry and colleagues (2017) make a distinction between 'experiential' and 'critical' orientations to qualitative research, describing the former as analysis which assumes that what participants say reflects a universal or personal reality and the latter as analysis which understands language as constructive of reality.

According to this distinction, the thematic analysis we have applied to analyse learner and teacher data in this study, can be described as experiential, in that it assumes that respondents 'say what they mean and mean what they say'. However, when the population under consideration experiences disadvantage or marginalisation in some fashion, a critical stance that raises questions about the role of power and broader societal structures in understanding the data is also important. In this sort of analysis, language use is viewed as both constitutive and revealing of the way power works and impacts on participants (and researchers). A critical analysis of the text is also an important way to highlight forms of meaning emerging from the text that are less reliant on detailed attention to words and word use, which is an important consideration for research with a population for whom English is a second language. Given the benefits of adopting this critical approach, we performed a critical analysis of the key findings identified in our study, based on learner and teacher responses.

Theoretically, the critical analysis was undertaken using the theory of *intersectionality*, which can be defined as follows:

> *Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., 'race'/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created. (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2)*

Using a theory of intersectionality allows us to appreciate the cumulative or intersecting points of marginalisation for participants occupying multiple social positions. In relation to the research questions, a critical analysis of this sort gives us the ability to consider how intersected social positions of disadvantage might impact on such issues as effective teaching strategies and elements for online language learning and the role of complex barriers to online language

learning for this population, which can in turn inform the development of professional development guidelines for teachers developing these resources. Methodologically, this critical re-reading employs narrative analysis, which understands participants' accounts of their experience as a form of storytelling in which the position of the speaker and 'audience' becomes significant (Riessman, 2005). This form of analysis is useful in intersectional analyses because '(it has) the potential to situate stories within broader "master narratives"…socio-cultural discourses and everyday relations of power as embodied in the lives of individual selves' (Chadwick, 2017, p. 9).

A re-reviewing of the data from this critical perspective suggested the usefulness of employing a primary lens of gender as a kind of 'first level' entry point into understanding the impact of social positioning/discourses on learners' experience of online language learning. At the 'second level', other social positionings appeared to interact with gender to produce intersectional positions that help us to understand both learners' preference for face-to-face learning and qualified endorsement of blended learning.

2. The role of gender in language learning needs and preferences

As the majority of the Carringbush learner respondents in the focus groups were women, considering the role gender plays in language learning needs can help us make sense of some of the experiences, learning preferences and barriers to learning that many participants mention. Many of their responses reference roles and responsibilities associated with what in many cultures to this day is considered 'women's work'. Several learners shared:

> *Interpreter: when you write on the whiteboard and that's the better, the interesting thing that she found it, something she can learn from you because she believe and see how much you keen to teach. And that make her feel like she had been looked after value because she wasn't been looked after when she was little at school age. Oh, nothing. They, they didn't send her to school at that time. Oh, the country was not in a situation...*

> *The good thing about Zoom is that there is this flexibility that if your daughter is sick ... If my daughter is sick and then she's got a day off from childcare, so that's flexible that you can do online and then at the same time look after my daughter.*

> *I tried to finish the classwork given so that when they get back home I can spend time to help my... Because I also help my husband as a carer.*

> *Kind of hard? I've got two kids...Time. Sometime no time. You're busy, but you can't.*

Gender is important, for example, in understanding the appearance of family responsibilities as a prominent barrier to learning in the previous experiential analysis. It is also important in contextualising responses indicative of a preference for blended learning: in the context of primary responsibility for childcare and care of elderly or disabled family members, the flexibility to attend classes from home is an important way for female learners to maintain their connection to the physical classroom and continue their learning. Similarly, when several participants nominate 'shopping' as an important reason to learn English, we can understand this as related to the division of labour that is found in the traditional household structure for many of the learner respondents. Given the importance of ensuring that learning activities are meaningfully related to the lived experience of adult learners, recognising the prominence of gender in structuring the language learning needs of learners (whether face to face or online) becomes imperative.

3. Intersections between gender and other social positions

The data revealed intersections between gender and other social positionings that contributed to understanding the impact of societal structures and associated power imbalances on learners' experiences in engaging in online language learning. The most relevant of these appeared to be migrant/refugee status and age. The quote below from a learner is an example of the former:

> *Interpreter: when you write on the whiteboard and that's the better, the interesting thing that she found it, something she can learn from you because she believe and see how much you keen to teach. And that make her feel like she had been looked after value because she wasn't been looked after when she was little at school age. Oh, nothing. They, they didn't send her to school at that time. Oh, the country was not in a situation... They can send children to school. Oh. And when she got to shops and things, now she can understand what to do, what to say if she need to communicate with people.*

A reading of this learner's responses suggests that, for her, her social positioning as a woman intersects with that of migrant/refugee. Given the small size of the data set, the country of origin of this learner is not reported here in order to protect her privacy; however, the researchers are aware that, politically and religiously, experiences for women from this background are likely to have been traumatising and exclusionary across the whole of society, including as this relates to women's participation in education.

For several other learners, the intersection of most relevance in understanding the barriers to online learning is that between gender and age, as several learners commented:

For me, it's my family. I have two elderly parents at home and they're opposed to me studying. So, when I want to study, they tell me, '[00:10:30] Go out'. The excuses they use is that, 'At your age, what's the use of studying? You're not going to uni after this. You're not going to do a master's degree after this'. They'd rather that I do housework.

Quite difficult because I'm quite old already and it's quite hard to follow up.

Because in my age in the China not learning English, learning Russian, so the language and the grammar is very hard.

These quotes suggest that the age-related expectations of learners in relation to education are gendered: the older the female learner is, the less likely that her role as learner will be supported in society more broadly and/or within the family (which in many ways would echo these broader societal structures). Looking in more detail at the response of the learner above who comments that it's difficult to follow up due to being old, she mentions challenges in learning to use technology, her preference for being in class so she can ask the teacher about these issues, and her concern that she is not as advanced in technology use as some of her friends *(Yeah, I have, I think Google map or something, because some of my friend in the class they already learn for two years and I just start learning this year, so I have to kind of... lot of catching up)*. This suggests that, in addition to the stigma/pressure associated with attempting to engage in education as a woman beyond a certain age, this intersection of social positions places a learner at risk of 'falling behind' others. Whilst this was not explored in greater detail with the respondent, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the learner is here referring to something like the idea of the kinds of information and learning that are needed or desired in order to flourish (or, at least, survive) in her new country.

Proponents of intersectionality are at pains to stress that the marginalisation that results from occupying particular social positions is not a simple process of summation (Hankivsky, 2014). A core tenet of intersectional theory is that 'social categories (interact with and co-constitute) one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place' (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 9). The intersection between the three social positions outlined above (gender, age and migrant/refugee status) appears particularly salient for the learner who shared her preference (quoted above) about the teacher writing on the whiteboard. This learner references the absence of education in her early years because of the political situation in her country of origin. For her, the act of coming to a physical classroom appears meaningful in ways beyond the simple act of language learning: she speaks of feeling lonely at home when her daughters are not there, of leaving the home and going out into community spaces to redress this loneliness, and the symbolic value she places on seeing the enthusiasm of the teacher imparting knowledge to her learners. These experiences, named by the learner herself, take on a particular significance when the question of her (potential) marginalisation as an older woman from a migrant/refugee background is recognised. It also makes her expression of deference to the teacher's authority in the classroom more poignant *(Well, I prefer to leave that to her. She's trust that she have the ability to figure out which one is best for me, for my fellow)*, a comment we discuss in the learner findings chapter of this report. This highlights the role of those in relative positions of power to her as a new English learner with convergent social dimensions of vulnerability.

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Appendix 6.
A review of the needs of teachers and low-literacy adult learners of English in the move to online learning

1. Introduction

Carringbush Adult Education (Carringbush) delivers an English as an Additional Language (EAL) program tailored to the needs of long-term unemployed adult learners with low literacy, low digital literacy and little to no formal schooling. The majority of Carringbush learners come from refugee and low socio-economic migrant backgrounds, and many are non-text literate in their first language. Most Carringbush learners are female and are middle-aged or older.

With the arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020, the requirement to adapt their EAL programs for online delivery brought new and existing challenges to the fore. Carringbush learners and teachers faced various challenges, both during this transition to online learning and in equipping learners with vital digital skills to enable their learning. These challenges, together with the scarcity of research in developing better teaching practices for adult beginner EAL learners with complex needs, led Carringbush to approach ACU in 2021 to undertake a project to address this gap.

Carringbush's aim in undertaking this study was to identify ways in which they could improve how they teach English to adult beginner learners, in light of the new reality of online learning brought about by COVID-19, and the need for learners to develop robust digital skills.

In doing so, they intended to identify factors that enabled good online teaching and learning and those that were barriers to it, with a view to designing for a future where this mode of learning would become the norm.

Through this project, Carringbush sought to answer the following questions, which have also guided this literature review:

- What teaching practices and digital learning resources are effective in supporting English language development for adult beginner learners experiencing complex barriers to participating in online learning?
- What are the elements in the resources that make them accessible, engaging and effective in facilitating learning for learners who have low digital literacy and language skills?
- What professional development strategies and guidelines can be used to support teachers in developing these resources?
- Do any current standards or guidelines exist for teaching adult EAL learners with complex needs in an online/digital learning context?

The project aimed to enable Carringbush to understand the elements and characteristics of digital learning resources that stimulate high levels of learner engagement and enable independent learning, and to build teachers' skills and knowledge in integrating digital learning resources into their lessons to enhance learner engagement and skills development. In this way, Carringbush aimed to help their teachers meet the technological demands of current and future classrooms and workplaces.

1.1. APPROACH TO UNDERTAKING THIS REVIEW

As part of this project, Carringbush were interested in mapping established best practice in the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) sector and in identifying existing guidelines for teaching adult EAL learners with complex needs in an online learning context, as noted above. Thus, the project team agreed that a review of the existing literature was warranted to support the new data that were collected on Carringbush learner and teacher experiences. We conducted extensive online searches to identify peak bodies and organisations in the sector, and relevant grey literature from sector bodies and similar English language providers, that would most effectively identify relevant organisational reports on best practice in the sector. We also undertook searches in key journals in the field to identify relevant academic literature. These approaches identified numerous peak bodies and associations in the sector, and the resources, conferences and publications they issue, as well as academic publications in the areas of teaching adult beginner EAL learners online and teaching these learners digital literacy skills. The relevant resources we identified have been included in this review below.

Given the specific and complex needs of Carringbush's adult EAL learner cohorts, and the specific context of this evaluation – teaching English and digital skills online to low-literacy adult beginner learners during COVID-19 – several areas of research were consulted in identifying relevant resources to support this review. This included work focusing on supporting refugees and migrants as EAL learners with complex needs (although the focus of this literature is not always on adult learners), the learning needs of adult EAL learners, particularly beginners or those with low literacy, teaching digital literacy to adult EAL learners, and the challenges of teaching online and the use of technologies in teaching and learning. A small area of work was identified where these foci overlap (teaching digital skills and online teaching of adult beginner EAL learners with low literacy and complex needs) and these resources have been discussed in this review. However, in many cases we needed to review, compare and adapt the findings from work across these multiple areas – on the needs of adult learners, the needs of refugee learners, the needs of EAL learners, and digital teaching pedagogies – to the specific needs of Carringbush's EAL cohorts. Attention was given both to learner needs and challenges as well as to teacher needs and pedagogic strategies, with the emphasis more on the latter, given the desire of Carringbush to support their staff in this respect.

2. Background to the adult community education sector: Sector norms and the needs of adult beginner EAL learners with low levels of literacy or prior schooling

2.1. CURRENT PRIORITIES OF THE ACFE SECTOR IN VICTORIA: DEVELOPMENT OF FOUNDATION, EMPLOYABILITY AND DIGITAL SKILLS AND INVESTMENT IN WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Victoria has been recognised as having the largest, most diverse adult community education sector in Australia. The adult community education sector helps a significant proportion of the community develop core foundation skills that open pathways to further education and employment, and to engage meaningfully with their community. As with Carringbush learners, the sector engages people who otherwise might be excluded from the education system, including adults with low levels of education, unemployed people, low-skilled workers and people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Department of Education and Training, 2019, pp. 3, 5).

The Ministerial Statement on the Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020-25, released in 2019, establishes the agenda for adult education in Victoria from 2020 to 2025, and is implemented by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE Board). The ACFE Board Strategy 2020-25, designed to implement the Ministerial Statement, recognises that:

> *Adults who are still developing core skills often face a range of other challenges in their lives, such as in physical or mental health, disability, cultural differences, homelessness or housing instability, experience of violence or discrimination, and long-term or generational unemployment. (State Government of Victoria, 2020, p. 4)*

The ACFE Board aims to develop the sector to provide core skills that provide not only further education and employment pathways, but also social and mental wellbeing and increased civic participation for adult learners who face complex barriers to educational attainment. The value of the adult community education sector for both individuals and the community is thus clear.

The development of digital literacy skills, together with building the capacity of teachers and providers to deliver those skills to adult learners, is a current priority of the ACFE sector. In implementing the Ministerial Statement, two of the Board's priority areas are to focus on the development of core skills in literacy, numeracy, English language, employability and digital skills in the sector, and to invest in up-to-date, best practice curricula, learning resources, and non-exam/test-based assessment tools, developed with experts in the Learn Local sector. Providing

professional development for the adult community and further education workforce to enhance their capacity to teach these skills is also a priority (State Government of Victoria, 2020, pp. 5, 12).

Given the important role the adult community education sector plays in developing core skills to enable full participation in education, employment and the community by adults with low literacy and complex needs, providers need access to up-to-date and relevant best practice guidelines that address the challenges faced by these learners and those who teach them.

2.2. ACCOMMODATING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH WITH LOW LEVELS OF LITERACY OR PRIOR SCHOOLING: THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNING LITERACY AND ENGLISH AT THE SAME TIME

Adult beginner learners of English with low or no literacy face numerous additional challenges compared with other adult learners. These include having little or no literacy in their first language, needing to learn English before and at the same time as they are acquiring literacy skills, needing to quickly learn classroom etiquette (previously lacking given their lack of prior education) at the same time as learning a new language, and barriers to learning online and to acquiring digital literacy skills. These challenges are explored in more detail in this and the following sections below.

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations' (ACTA) submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult literacy and its importance in 2021 highlights the unique learning needs of adult learners, particularly those with additional challenges such as low literacy or little to no former schooling. In their submission, ACTA calls for government to recognise and embed within any proposed national literacy strategy different learner starting points in course curricula based on the learner's specific cohort, and defined pathways towards desired learning outcomes based on these. ACTA points out that learners' starting points and learning pathways and needs will be very different, for example, for migrant background learners of English as a second/additional language or dialect, and for adults for whom English is their only or dominant language but who have low literacy (ACTA, 2021, pp. 5–6). Likewise, teachers' pedagogic strategies need to be tailored to unique learning starting points to be effective. It criticises the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) for providing 'invalid and unreliable assessments of English language learning, because it is predicated on learning literacy by a mother tongue English speaker' (ACTA, 2021, p. 6). Thus, it does not account for the diverse different learner starting points for adults, particularly those who have both low literacy and are learning EAL.

In their submission, ACTA also argue that programs to teach migrant background learners of EAL must distinguish between those with well-established literacy and related skills gained through formal schooling in a language other than English (i.e. those who already have a level of literacy) and those with minimal or no previous schooling or literacy in any language (2021, pp. 26–29).

Carringbush adult EAL learners include migrants with either low or no literacy in their first (or native) language and some with histories of no to little formal schooling or education (who are understood as pre-literate). As ACTA point out, it is well established in the literature that previous education (and thus existing levels of literacy) is the most important factor in determining a learner's ability to learn another language (2021, p. 28).

ACTA note that adult learners with minimal previous literacy and schooling in a language other than English will require 'slower paced teaching and in- and out-of-class activities that allow for extended practice, constructive and focused feedback, and specifically targeted literacy and other foundation skills' (2021, p. 29). They also need to develop their basic formal educational knowledge and skills on how to be a learner or student (e.g. organising learning resources, being punctual). For those in this group who are beginners in English, development of literacy skills must be based on oral English that stems from concrete real-world experiences (e.g. excursions, doing common activities) and learning that is strongly supported by visual and other practical experiences (ACTA, 2021, p. 29).

The same points have been noted by researchers and practitioners within the field. Williams (2010) notes that the needs of low-literacy EAL learners diverge from those of their high-literacy peers in several important ways. For example, low-literacy EAL learners do not possess the first-language literacy skills that are generally used as a foundation for teaching a second language (e.g. the capacity to use existing written language as a mnemonic device for sounding out pronunciation). Williams further notes that low-literacy EAL learners are also in the position of having to develop English language literacy before developing first-language literacy, which is the reverse of what occurs as children proceed through the educational system. Williams and other researchers examining this issue have noted that low-literacy second-language learners are also required to become rapidly familiar with the norms and practices associated with formal classroom instruction at the same time as learning a new language (Benseman 2013; Choi & Ziegler, 2015).

Given these challenges, teaching a second language to adult learners experiencing challenges with literacy requires an additional set of awarenesses and skills on the part of educators to ensure successful language acquisition and facility. For example, many of those with low first-language literacy presently learning a second language come from cultural backgrounds with rich oral traditions which can be used in constructing classroom exercises that minimise the need for first-language literacy. As such, learners' first language can be used to explain concepts and tasks (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Grimaud et al., 2019). Another important strategy is for educators to use content from the lives of their learners to ensure relevance, promote motivation for engagement and enhance the practicality of what is taught and acquired in the classroom.

In addition to these pedagogical strategies, educators must also be aware of the broader social, historical and affective contexts in which low-literacy adult second-

language learners undertake their studies. For example, adopting a trauma-informed approach to language education with these groups is likely to provide a level of emotional awareness and security for learners that can enhance conditions for second-language learning (Achren et al., 2012; Palanac, 2022). Palanac provides a number of such strategies that are related not only to learning in class (for example, creating content that is related to important concerns such as interacting with migration authorities), but also to meta-pedagogical matters, including classroom expectations (e.g. reassuring learners about the teacher's understanding that learners may need to take urgent phone calls during class) and even the physical layout of the classroom (e.g. ensuring that there is plenty of natural light in the classroom and readily accessible bathroom facilities) (2022). Other strategies to engage adult EAL learners outlined in the literature and in practice examples include using learners' first language to explain concepts and tasks (e.g. translating instructions into the language learners have literacy in), using oral instructions rather than relying only on writing instructions, and planning 'hands on' activities that learners can put into practice (Grimaud et al., 2019).

Further, given the lack of pre-existing classroom knowledge for learners with low literacy and little or no previous education, it has been identified that providing guidance in classroom skills may be needed. A guide to best practice support for CALD adult learners in the adult education sector produced by the ACFE Board also suggests addressing cultural as well as linguistic needs and team teaching to better support CALD learners. The guide states:

> *Particular difficulties face those with little or no formal education. Strategies may need to be developed to raise learner awareness of the importance of time-keeping and regular attendance in training courses. Abstract graphics such as maps and charts may be unfamiliar to some learners—some learning support materials may, in fact, confuse learners. (Achren et al., 2012)*

2.3. USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR ADULT BEGINNER ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS PRE-COVID: DIGITAL SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL TO LITERACY

What was usual teaching practice in the sector regarding online learning and teaching for adult beginner English learners prior to COVID-19? What was usual practice regarding the teaching of digital literacy skills to these learners?

While there are particular challenges facing adult beginner English language learners, outlined above, these are compounded somewhat with the additional considerations of teaching these learners online, as well as teaching them digital literacy. The difference between online learning and digital literacy is important to foreground. While related, online learning and digital literacy require different pedagogical approaches and resources. Whereas online learning refers to teaching and learning EAL in the virtual environment, digital literacy refers to the skills required to navigate technology both in and outside of the classroom. Though distinct, digital literacy skills are an essential component of learning within an online environment. A lack of digital literacy skills can profoundly affect learners' ability to engage in online learning, and likewise, teachers may struggle to cultivate an engaging online learning space.

Digital literacy has been defined in various ways but most definitions centre on a person's awareness of, ability in and attitude towards the use of both digital devices and digital sources of information in order to achieve useful ends (such as communication) (García-Sánchez, 2021; Peng & Yu, 2022). Katerina Tour's work on digital literacy amongst second-language learners is particularly valuable, in part because her research has been conducted in the same geographic region as Carringbush with a focus on the same learner population. Tour makes the point that digital literacy is not a single concept but encompasses multiple literacies – such as literacy for text messaging versus literacy for online interaction – directed to multiple audiences, for example, online interaction amongst family versus the same modality for online learning (Tour, 2020).

The central role of robust technological and digital skills in sound literacy was well established in the sector before the necessity of online or remote learning brought on by COVID-19. In their 2001 position statement on the characteristics and needs of adults learning English as a second language, TESOL International Association stated that conceptions of literacy tailored to adult English language learners must recognise that:

> *literacy involves more than the ability to communicate effectively; it includes as well the ability to advocate on behalf of ourselves, our families, and our communities and to use technology effectively for education and work, in whatever languages are appropriate for the task and the purpose. (2001, p. 5)*

Thus, greater integration of technological and digital skills for EAL learners has long been called for in the second-language learning sector as an essential part of literacy. For example, there has been work on integrating digital literacy into the teaching of literacy skills for adult EAL learners using iPads and numerous apps (Kane, 2018). This work includes the recognition that teachers need better support to be able to teach their EAL learners digital skills (TESOL International Association 2001, pp. 8, 9). It has been noted that technology is a language that teachers themselves first need to be fluent in, and thus there is a need for teachers to receive adequate training in utilising digital technologies in their teaching (Adhyaru, 2019).

As well as recognition of the importance of teaching digital literacy to adult EAL learners, efforts to engage low-literacy or beginner-level EAL adult learners in online learning pre-COVID were tailored to overcome the barriers faced by this cohort of learners. In a presentation in 2020, Tanja Rykovska and Luke Treadwell from AMES outlined strategies teachers can use to plan and design lessons

Image provided by Carringbush Adult Education.

to maximise engagement and use different digital tools to support learning. They also outlined strategies to help bridge the 'digital divide' for learners, such as designing activities that can be accessed on mobile phones and that do not use much data, providing learners' with access to devices or PCs, and doing advocacy work to fund laptops and internet access for learners experiencing disadvantage (Rykovska & Treadwell, 2020).

It is clear that whilst there have been some efforts to embed digital skills into adult EAL classes, this cohort of learners faces unique challenges both to learning online and to acquiring digital literacy. For adult EAL learners, teaching digital skills has been likened to teaching another new language (technology) within an English language class, to learners with mixed literacy levels and educational backgrounds, many of whom are 'digital immigrants' who did not grow up within the digital age (Adhyaru, 2019).

ACTA note that the main barrier to improving adult learners' digital literacy skills has been a lack of access. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's 2020 Inquiry on Education in Remote and Complex Environments stated that:

> *While Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has the potential to enhance learning for students, bridge gaps in access and increase opportunities for teacher training, there remains a 'digital divide' between Australians who have access to the internet, computers and other devices, and those who do not. This gap in access is particularly acute for Australians on low incomes and those living in geographically isolated locations. (House of Representatives, 2020, p. 32)*

Thus, ensuring adequate access to quality technology to enable remote or online learning was already identified as an issue pre-COVID for certain cohorts. EAL learners' lack of access to digital devices such as iPads has also been established elsewhere (Kane, 2018). This was brought to the fore for many other learner cohorts in the face of COVID-19. (ACTA, 2021, p. 39)

3. COVID-19 and the move to remote learning online: The experiences of teachers and learners in second-language learning online

As is now well known, the arrival of COVID-19 necessitated a hasty shift to online learning across the teaching sectors. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to maintain physical distancing pushed millions of people online to continue their personal and professional lives. One of the most visible forms of this mass move into an online environment was in the sphere of education, with learners and their teachers around the world being suddenly propelled into the use of digital technologies to continue with their studies. There was a need to adapt quickly from the traditional face-to-face format for delivering learning to an entirely online format, with teachers and educational institutions globally scrambling to try and make this work for learners as quickly and effectively as possible. The shift to online learning forced teachers to re-imagine their pedagogical approach, quickly develop new resources, and re-think how to best engage their learners whilst working online.

In Australia, the jurisdiction experiencing the most severe COVID-19 based restrictions was undoubtedly Victoria, and in particular, the city of Melbourne. The population of Melbourne and greater Melbourne has a high proportion of persons born overseas and of persons whose first language in the home is not English (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Providers of English language courses to these populations – and in particular to populations with low literacy in their first language, such as refugee groups – were faced with unique challenges in transitioning to online teaching when physical distancing requirements were introduced and enforced throughout the state.

The move to online learning thus created additional challenges and barriers for both learners and teachers. Online teaching created additional communication barriers for learners and teachers, and the need for greater teacher training in online learning strategies became more evident and urgent.

The existing barriers to learning for these cohorts included lack of access to adequate equipment to facilitate online learning and challenges adapting to this mode of learning. These were further compounded by the pandemic-necessitated change to fully online delivery. AMES Australia's Response to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training on 'Adult literacy and its importance' in 2021 notes that:

> *As a direct outcome of COVID-19 online learning and digital access has resulted in a multi modal approach to delivery of LLND [Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital] to recent arrivals; and a radical and unprecedented reliance on digital technology. Access to digital technology is a key factor that moderates the effectiveness of remote learning. The transition to online learning is a particular struggle for those without proper technology and access to devices…The effectiveness of online learning – particularly for teaching LLND – varies, and challenges have been identified for different cohorts in using technology as a learning tool. (2021, p. 7)*

The source of digital literacy challenges in teaching to some second-language learners experiencing vulnerability occurs at several levels, ranging from issues related to skills in the use of hardware and software on phones and computers through to socio-economic and cultural factors around access to resources and the stigma associated with learning and education for particular sub-populations such as women or those with a disability (Bui, 2022; Zholdoshalieva et al., 2022).

Whilst the rapid adaptation from face-to-face to fully online teaching during the pandemic was a challenge for both teachers and learners at all levels of education, it was quickly recognised that there were specific challenges associated with this move for the language learning community. Some of these included the impact of online learning on social engagement between learners and teachers (Charalambous–Philippides, 2023; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2023) and the technical aspects of language acquisition (Kyriakidou & Taxitari, 2023). In an early thematic review of the literature on the topic during the pandemic, Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) noted that the major change was in the move to synchronous (live) teaching via the use of video conferencing software and that, in general, teachers described being very under-prepared for this shift. The authors variously described these barriers as technological (including limited access to technology or teachers' lack of familiarity with the software), pedagogical (such as teachers' inability to employ activities involving physical interactivity amongst learners) and social (including teacher observation of reduced learner interaction).

As well as the impact on learners, the requirement for increased teacher training and professional development in teaching strategies was highlighted by the need for almost all synchronous learning to take place online. In a submission to an inquiry on the disruption to education systems caused by the pandemic, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) reported that a national survey of over 10,000 Australian teachers conducted during April 2020 found that 'only 30 per cent of teachers had been trained to deliver remote learning prior to the pandemic, and the majority (80 per cent) felt unprepared for the transition, particularly in non-metropolitan areas' (DESE, 2020, p. 12). DESE summarised the issue:

> *For teachers, effective remote learning and use of online mechanisms requires more than simply knowing how to use technology or transferring existing materials to an online platform. It requires new or adapted pedagogies, management and organisation of content, institutional support and new or adapted ways of engaging and interacting with students. (2020, p. 12)*

The barriers encountered while teaching online during the pandemic were highlighted in ACTA's 2020 survey on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-school sector. One teacher who completed the survey said:

> *The most serious problem was trying to teach very low level students when they cannot adequately see gestures, facial expressions, mouth movements and written examples over the phone. It is a very ineffective form of teaching and made communication/explanation exceptionally difficult. (ACTA, 2021, p. 39)*

Respondents to this survey frequently reported adult migrants using their phones to access classes and submit assignments (ACTA, 2021, p. 39). Thus, the online environment itself created an additional barrier to effective communication, and particularly for those learning English with already low literacy.

In light of these challenges, ACTA recommended that:

- 'Learners with minimal/no previous schooling and those lacking digital experience require face-to-face induction into using digital resources'.
- 'Low proficiency English language learners require at least some face-to-face teaching in order to develop basic English listening and speaking competence'.
- 'Support for extending digital literacy skills should focus on improving student access and upskilling teachers through teacher development' (2021, p. 41).

As noted above, there were few guidelines within the sector prior to 2020 for the online teaching of adult beginner learners of English with complex needs. The next section of this review describes how Carringbush adapted their learning programs and teaching in response to the diverse learner and teacher needs, in both online learning and teaching, and in developing effective digital skills, that became evident during the pandemic.

4. The move to online learning and teaching at Carringbush during the pandemic

The communication, access and pedagogical challenges faced by learners and teachers globally were mirrored at Carringbush as, in March 2020 and in common with all Australian educational institutions in response to COVID-19, their EAL programs were adapted for online (virtual) delivery. Carringbush's transition to online learning had extra levels of complexity related to both the known and the soon-to-be discovered factors influencing how their learner cohort accessed education and services.

4.1. WHAT LEARNING NEEDS WERE IDENTIFIED AND WHAT CHALLENGES AROSE WHEN CARRINGBUSH ADAPTED TO THE DELIVERY OF TEACHING ONLINE DUE TO THE PANDEMIC? HOW DID CARRINGBUSH ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES?

The pandemic lockdowns required teachers to adapt quickly, both to online teaching per se and to navigating the online teaching of beginner English to their learners. The problems they identified included how to teach learners English in an online format, given the barriers they already face (such as not being able to properly read in their own native language), and how to engage with them effectively and keep the classroom community together when learners couldn't see their teachers or each other.

While most learners possessed smartphones, these are not appropriate for quality online learning, so equity, in terms of learners' lack of access to suitable digital devices to

continue learning, was a major issue for Carringbush. Other related emergent challenges included determining how teachers would get in touch with their learners, and how to help them learn on their smartphones.

A key part of creating effective engagement with learners in an online format involves developing learners' digital skills and digital access. Unsurprisingly, Carringbush's teachers were generally less experienced and confident in teaching online and required guidance and support in the choice and use of online tools to engage their classes, given Carringbush had not offered any teaching in this mode prior to the pandemic.

Carringbush management recognised these problems and responded in numerous ways. In Term 4 of 2020, Carringbush worked with researchers from Monash University to pilot a project that implemented a 'Flipped Learning Approach' to teaching, where teachers trialled a range of pre-class digital learning tasks, with the intention of investigating effective teaching practices for online teaching in this context. The online learning management system (LMS) Moodle was introduced to facilitate this.

Through funding from a variety sources, a device-lending library was created to address learners' digital access and inequity, where Carringbush provided its learners with access to both devices (such as iPads) and the internet, and the staff and teachers provided extensive support to transition these learners to the online platforms via a bespoke digital mentoring program. In addition, teachers worked to accelerate their learners' development of independent learning skills to enable learning from home. Recognising the need to support teachers to adapt their teaching to an online format, Carringbush management created the position of a Digital Capacity Coordinator. This role supported Carringbush staff to further develop both their own digital literacy skills and their confidence in using digital tools to teach beginner English language online. Both the digital mentoring program and the role of the Digital Capacity Coordinator are described further in the next section.

Carringbush encouraged a strengths-based approach in supporting its teachers, which involved a journey of implementation. Teachers designed activities that could be accessed on mobile phones, and on the tablets provided by the organisation on a library-loan basis. These practices align with suggested best practice for effectively engaging low-literacy adult learners in learning English, as noted above (see, for example, Kane, 2018; Rykovska & Treadwell, 2020). Carringbush teachers also adapted their course materials and lesson plans to ensure learners had the opportunity to develop and practice their digital skills each week. Learners were able to develop these skills through activities such as practising logging onto Moodle in class time with the support of digital mentors, engaging with videos and interactive activities on Moodle, logging onto Zoom, engaging with content on WhatsApp, including videos, audio and text messages, and using e-books on their devices.

Prior to the move to online learning in 2020, both learners and teachers at Carringbush lacked confidence and experience in online learning and teaching. While basic digital competence and awareness are now considered essential 'life skills', pre-pandemic, most Carringbush learners were novice users of, and anxious about, technology, not only for learning but for daily activities. All learners had mobile phones, but few had access to, or experience in using, devices better suited to learning such as tablets or laptops.

Carringbush aimed to provide their EAL teachers with the tools to enable the most vulnerable adult learners to have autonomy and ownership over their own learning journey in an increasingly digital world and therefore build their confidence and skills to connect with broader communities. This is not possible without a level of digital literacy, thus Carringbush recognised the need to equip Carringbush learners with digital skills as a form of essential life skills. Despite the fact that classes partially returned to an in-person format, Carringbush continued to adapt their model and offer hybrid classes, consisting of in-person and online sessions. They saw it as important to offer a hybrid or blended learning model to continue to equip their learners with digital skills, as well as provide for them another way of learning English, aligning with the 'Universal Design for Learning' principles of multiple ways of engaging learners and presenting information (CAST, 2024).

4.2. AN INNOVATIVE RESPONSE TO SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND LEARNERS: THE EVOLUTION OF CARRINGBUSH'S DIGITAL MENTORING PROGRAM

Digital literacy and online learning are increasingly important elements of instruction at Carringbush. The pandemic-driven changes were transformative in highlighting learners' pre-existing, if unidentified, needs, particularly those with little to no formal schooling, minimal access to or experience with technology and who are pre-literate in their first language. When Carringbush moved to virtual classes, as outlined above, demands for learners to access a digitised form of learning increased and teachers were required to integrate an unprecedented level of digital skills into their practice.

As noted, in response to this need, Carringbush introduced a flipped learning approach that incorporated asynchronous (self-paced) learning in their modes of delivery. This model continues to be used, whereby learners engage with content prior to synchronous (live) class time, allowing them to participate more actively in learning. Carringbush continues regular digital literacy work with learners, offering one day of online class per week together with the in-person classes where the practice of digital literacy skills is integrated into the class activities.

Recognising the importance of regular and ongoing support for both teachers and learners in skill development, digital mentors continue to work with classroom teachers to deliver lessons on digital skills to the whole class. These digital literacy sessions currently take place in weekly hour-long classes. To facilitate these sessions, a digital literacy guide was developed with

resources and learning progressions for each platform used at Carringbush or identified as needed by their learners. The program also enables regular targeted, individualised digital mentoring to new and current learners.

The pandemic-induced changes not only shed light on the importance of digital skills for learners and the challenges they face, it also revealed the demands on teachers when integrating technology into their practice. In 2022, the role of Digital Capacity Coordinator was introduced to oversee various aspects of the program, offering professional development and support for teachers with an emphasis on the best instructional strategies for teaching digital literacy and integrating digital resilience into lessons. Recognising the socio-emotional struggles involved in teaching and learning digital skills, digital resilience aims to support learners to become empowered users of technology, promoting a flexible mindset that can troubleshoot when a problem arises. With this strengths-based model, Carringbush demonstrates that this concept of resilience is key to guiding learners away from viewing every challenge they encounter as disruptive, instead empowering them to embrace change as an important element in their process of lifelong learning. Teachers continue to integrate digital resilience into their practice to model the concept to their learners.

Carringbush's journey towards a hybrid model of learning that effectively incorporates digital literacy continues to evolve and be refined, supported by strategic partnerships and leadership, with a commitment to responding and adapting to the needs of their learners.

5. Teachers' experiences and attitudes towards teaching online and teaching digital skills post-COVID

How did the experiences of Carringbush teachers in online language teaching and the use of digital technologies reflect or differ from teachers' experiences noted across the sector?

Prior to the pandemic, the field of research examining second-language teachers' experience with and attitudes towards online language teaching was limited. A brief survey of the pre-COVID literature shows similar themes to those noted throughout and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Kotula, 2016; Milojković, 2018). These include the importance of ensuring that technology thoughtfully reflects particular pedagogical approaches to language learning, the capacity for online learning to support acquisition of some language skills (e.g. listening) better than others (e.g. writing) and the convenience and accessibility of online second-language learning.

In the wake of COVID-19, however, there is now a reasonable body of research related to the attitudes and experiences of teachers (and learners) in second-language learning online and in the use of digital technologies.

Since the height of the pandemic, teachers have remained generally enthusiastic about the possibilities that digital technologies might afford to enhance second-language teaching and assessment whilst continuing to express their perceived and/or actual lack of digital literacy, and the impact this had on the ability to design, implement and moderate online second- language teaching. Kourieos and Evripidou noted this tone of tempered enthusiasm for online language teaching and assessment in their recent publication devoted specifically to language teaching and learning during the pandemic (2023). Their publication brought together the work and experience of a number of teachers and practitioners in the area and surveys a range of relevant issues, including an examination of the experiences of language teachers in using specific pieces of software (Cinganotto, 2023; Lindade, 2023), research looking specifically at what might promote or discourage social engagement between learners and teachers in an online platform (Charalambous-Philippides, 2023; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2023), and contributions examining more targeted questions around questions of assessment (Gidiotis, 2023) and the impact of online learning on the technical aspects of language acquisition (Kyriakidou & Taxitari, 2023).

Some specific examples of this research on the possibility and challenges associated with this digital shift as it occurred during the pandemic are provided below:

- Bergdahl (2022) looked at the online learning design experiences of EAL teachers in Sweden. Her study began by observing the teachers engaged in both 'real time' (synchronous), delayed (asynchronous) and blended online learning formats. By observing the teachers and seeking feedback through individual and group interviews, Bergdahl was able to identify 12 'Advancement of Learning Design' elements (such as facilitating interaction and supporting engagement beyond simply educational needs). Teachers were then asked to rate both how important these elements were and how easy or difficult they were to implement in an online learning environment. The results showed that individual teachers implemented some of the elements in their online learning design but no one teacher implemented all the elements, and that the elements implemented were not always those rated as 'most important'. The results highlighted the need for EAL teachers to be supported in acquiring 'digital competencies' that would allow them to translate the 12 elements easily and reliably into learning designs suitable for delivering online EAL teaching and assessment.
- In a webinar designed to assist English language teachers in using technology to deliver content online during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Shin and Borup (2020) made the point that it is not the technology per se that should be the focus of delivering English language education online, but rather the teacher's ability to effectively utilise the technology to meet the educational needs of EAL learners. The webinar is not targeted specifically at adult EAL low-literacy learners but does usefully introduce a matrix

in which EAL learning activities are assessed as passive, interactive or creative, as well as determining whether the new learning activity is a replacement, amplification or transformation of its original form. Shin and Borup stressed that, ideally, learning activities are specifically transformed for the online format (rather than just replaced) and technology is used to 'add something substantial to students' learning experience that couldn't or wouldn't likely occur without technology' (2020).

In 2022, UNESCO undertook a survey of the literacy and language initiatives that have made innovative use of information and communications technology to deliver educational programs to refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons (Zholdoshalieva et al., 2022). The report reviewed 21 programs from around the world, including an Australian program called 'Connected' run by the Sydney Theatre Company, which moved its process drama-based language learning program online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors noted that these innovative and successful programs share a number of key elements, including multi-stakeholder partnerships to assist with producing resources and training for educators, but limited their comments about the experience of educators to the importance of 'delivering learning content in a user-friendly and effective way' (2022, p. 12).

This research is a promising beginning in understanding the needs of both teachers and learners in what will clearly be an ongoing learning space–online second-language learning as well as the teaching of digital literacy. However, research looking more closely at the requirements for effective online teaching and learning of English as a second language, and of digital skills, to low-literacy adult populations experiencing complex barriers to learning and digital participation remains in its infancy.

6. Some promising ways forward: Existing guidelines for the delivery of online learning to second-language learners with low literacy

Despite the paucity of research in this specific area, some guidelines have been produced and recommendations made regarding the online delivery of teaching and assessment of second languages to a range of learner populations, as well as the teaching of digital literacy skills.

Following their systematic review examining the practices of and influences on digital technology integration by English second-language teachers, Bui (2022) noted the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers in digital literacy, actively linking this learning back to the practicalities of what is required in the lesson as well as pedagogical beliefs, as well calling for English second-language teachers to examine their (potentially limiting) beliefs related to the use of technology in English second-language teaching and assessment. Professional reflection of this sort should be supported by policies at the institutional level regarding the direction of digital technology integration in second-language teaching and assessment as well as adequate resourcing (Rossner & Heyworth, 2023). Local and online communities of practice provide other platforms for both learning and sharing resources (Choi & Chung, 2021; Rossner & Heyworth, 2023). With the pedagogic changes necessitated by COVID-19, more focus has been given to professional development of teachers in the provision of digital literacy skills. There are specific tools being developed for teachers to use, such as adaptation of the European Framework for Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) and SELFIE for Teachers, which is an online self-reflection tool designed for teachers to evaluate their digital literacy skills within their teaching practice and support learners' digital skills development (Rykovska, 2023).

In line with this increased emphasis on supporting teachers' delivery of digital literacy skills, Tour and colleagues developed a guide outlining 15 teaching units designed to assist EAL teachers in developing and delivering digital literacies content to EAL learners that are in line with the Victorian English as an Additional Language (VIC EAL) Framework (Tour et al., 2021). Carringbush was also involved in developing this resource, as three Carringbush teachers piloted different units from the guide and developed the relevant resources included in the guide. Examples include learning units focused on using digital maps, booking an appointment online and online banking, and the researchers provide real-life examples of how the lesson sequences developed by teachers are linked to VIC EAL units.

ACTA maintains that digital literacy 'should be promoted as a normal and integral part of learning literacy and English' rather than being 'quarantined or decontextualized from other learning' (2021, p. 41). This is an important recommendation in relation to the learning needs of learners studying a second language, particularly those experiencing vulnerability in numerous ways, such as the community of learners serviced by Carringbush. However, it is equally important for teachers who, post-COVID, continue to deliver content and assessment online to second-language learners. The need to equip second-language teachers with digital literacies suitable for designing and delivering content becomes particularly critical when we consider the unique second-language learning needs of learners from migrant, refugee and/or low-literacy backgrounds endeavouring to complete some or all of their second-language learning online.

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