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A CURRICULUM RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS OF LOW-LEVEL ADULT
ENGLISH LEARNERS:
INCORPORATING DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	5
Personal Journey to Research.....	7
Background.....	12
Adult Basic Education Standards.....	13
Context and Rationale.....	14
Summary.....	16
Chapters Overview.....	16
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	18
Introduction.....	18
Adult Basic Education.....	19
A Numbers Game: ABE Statistics in Minnesota Funding.....	20
Funding.....	21
Testing in ABE and the National Reporting System.....	21
What are the Levels in ABE?.....	22
Motivation for Enrollment.....	24
SLIFE Learners.....	25
Second Language Acquisition (SLA).....	27
Digital Literacy.....	30
Technology Standards.....	32
Advantages and Disadvantages.....	33

Implementing Digital Literacy.....	34
Planning for Technology in the Classroom.....	35
Challenges to Implementing Technology.....	36
Digital Divide.....	36
Access to internet/devices.....	37
Experience.....	38
Age and Attitudes.....	39
Strategies.....	40
Differentiated Learning.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
CHAPTER THREE: Project Description.....	44
Introduction.....	44
Research.....	44
Instruction for Adult Basic Education.....	45
Second Language Acquisition.....	45
Adult ELs and Digital Literacy.....	46
Setting.....	47
Intended Audience.....	48
Goals for Curriculum and Instruction.....	49
Vocabulary Instruction.....	50
Unit Length.....	50
Easing the Fear.....	51
Curriculum Description.....	51
Assessment within the Curriculum.....	52

Evaluation of the Curriculum.....	52
Timeline.....	53
Summary.....	53
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion.....	54
Introduction.....	54
Reflection of Literature.....	55
What I Learned and Reflection.....	57
Implications of the Project.....	58
Limitations of the Project.....	59
Reccommendations for Future Use and Work.....	60
Benefit to the Profession.....	60
Conclusion.....	61
REFERENCES.....	62

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Technology gives us power, but it does not and cannot tell us how to use that power. Thanks to technology, we can instantly communicate across the world, but it still doesn't help us know what to say (Rose, 2015).

Notebook...check, pen/pencil...check, textbooks...check, a digital device...what? A digital device? Do I need one of those, too? I don't know what it is. I am here to learn English with a teacher in a classroom. Not on a digital device somewhere. You also want us to learn about WHAT??? I need to take a computer class, too? I am not here to learn about computers or take classes via such a device. Well, this has been my experience with some of my beginning-level and low-intermediate English learner (EL) adult basic education (ABE) students. It makes me ponder the question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?*

Digital literacy is not something that most associate with a program to learn English. Students register for classes with the intent that their goals of learning to listen, converse, read, and write in English will be met with the teacher using strategies to help them best learn. Students either register for the morning two and a half-hour block, the afternoon two-hour block, or have the option of staying all day. Most choose one or the other. There are only a few students who decide to stay all day due to work or other commitments. However, what they don't expect when registering is to have a class on digital literacy. When I first tell students they will be having a computer class, several look at me with a blank stare. For some, what I have just said may not be understood due

to vocabulary knowledge, but for others, it was the “scary” thought of having to use some type of digital device. It’s the fear of the unknown that sets in. I do have some students who are continually absent on the one day a week that digital literacy is taught. They tell me on Wednesday before they leave, they will be absent on Thursday. I don’t question their absence as we don’t require our students to bring in an excuse slip from a doctor, a dentist, or whatever type of appointment they had.

What students don’t realize is that technology could actually be an everyday useful tool. Technology is beneficial both inside and outside the classroom. Students can pay their bills online or make appointments. For those that have children in school, they could help the child(ren) with their online homework or possibly both parent/caregiver and child(ren) could learn together. How can I make my students understand those benefits and make them excited to learn about technology use?

When it comes to technology that my learners have and/or know how to use, many currently have a smartphone. In my classes, most of my students only have knowledge of making and receiving calls. They tell me they don’t really use it for anything else. The reason some students have a cell phone is, well, a family member either suggested it or has gifted it to them. It is used as a way to get a hold of one another in case of an emergency.

On the other hand, there are students who have a smartphone and use it daily for things such as making or receiving calls, texting, taking photos, social media use, and as a translator. For the students that know how to use their smartphones, this is the only piece of technology they feel they need. After all, they can communicate, check their

bank account, take photos, and watch videos. What other reason do I need technology? I explain to them that it is necessary for school and work.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my personal and professional knowledge. There is also a preview of the background that was used to lead me to my research question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* A context and rationale are provided to give a framework for my project. This chapter ends with a summary and an explanation of the chapters that follow.

Personal Journey to Research

I come from a household where the predominant language is English. I never experienced learning a second language until third grade and that was only for a summer. The first time that I formally started learning a language was in high school. I took three and a half years of Spanish. I decided on this language as I liked the way it sounded when it rolled off the tongue. My Spanish teacher also helped to instill in me a passion for language and culture. Language is a part of the culture. In my EL classes, I don't just talk about the culture of the United States. I also incorporate the cultures that are represented in my classroom with various lessons. We do this by having discussions, if they are willing to share, about food and various events in their culture.

Due to having such a wonderful second language experience in high school, I continued learning Spanish while pursuing my undergraduate degree. With the background knowledge of Spanish, I went on to learn Portuguese. While learning both languages, I also learned about the culture by traveling to several Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries. To this day, I still keep up with learning languages, not only the two I learned in high school and college, but also those that I have represented

in my classroom. I feel that it is important for teachers and students to learn a few phrases in each other's primary language. It creates a sense of community and that is one thing that learners of all ages desire.

I have heard that learning a language at a young age is easier than as an adult. I believe it depends on the individual. From experience, I know some adults who have gone from starting at a very beginning level of English to progressing to an advanced level class. It has been a joy to be able to be a part of the learners' educational journey. They do their best to make it to class everyday as they feel that coming to school is an important part of their life. Many of our learners are employed and work third (night) shift. They may finish work at 7:00 AM, eat and get ready to be to class by 8:30 in the morning. However, many learners also find time to study outside of class.

Growing up in a middle-class household, I don't remember when my family had our first "home" computer. I remember going to the computer store to preview what might be coming to our home. My father was reluctant as it was something very new. However, that quickly changed as a new computer made its way to our home office area relatively quickly after seeing an ad in the newspaper. Since purchasing that first computer, my family has strongly believed in having devices (computers, laptops, tablets, printers, and smartphones) that would be of benefit for both educational and professional use. However, technological devices are expensive and, in my findings, a smartphone is what many use as their piece of technology, including my students.

Technology can make people either happy or cringe. To me, I enjoy using technology as it makes doing tasks such as banking, schoolwork, and connecting with individuals much easier. There are a multitude of creative ways to use it. Nowadays,

some people use computers to design projects which are connected to a laser cutter. I know that some of my students use their phones as a study tool or as entertainment. One of my goals is to open their minds to other ways that their smartphones can be used to assist them in both an educational and personal business manner. They will be made aware of various apps as a way to practice English at their leisure. Students will also learn how, if they choose, to do their online banking, schedule appointments, and pay their bills.

I grew up with technology of some kind either at home or at school and always seemed to embrace the devices. However, I know that not everyone feels that way and have realized that teaching in my current position. Technology is a new term and tool for a majority of my students. For some of them, this is the first time they have seen a Chromebook, a laptop, or a smartphone. I do know that I will not change the minds of all my students to buy into liking the use of technology, but if I can help ease the fear of using it, that will be a step forward.

I have taught adult English learners (ELs) for a few years. When I first started, I worked with learners who were at the advanced level of language acquisition, which means that they were at a level where they could have a continual English conversation and the next step might be a pre-General Education Diploma (GED) class. In these upper-level classes, I wasn't faced with the same challenges I face in today's classroom. Then, I switched to the beginning levels of English. Currently, I teach pre-literacy to low-intermediate level adult students. They are from Mexico, Myanmar, Puerto Rico, South Sudan, and Thailand.

Students come to our Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program with the expectation of learning English, obtaining their General Education Diploma (GED), or studying for their naturalization test to become a United States citizen. Many do not come to our program with the intent of learning about computers. However, students do discover that computers are another avenue to learn English as well as a tool to apply for a job. During that time, I was also teaching in a preschool setting. By day, I was teaching preschool and by night, I was teaching adult EL. Then the night classes ended and I went to teaching preschool three days a week and two daytime EL classes a week. Then it was EL full time.

Throughout my time in adult education, I taught EL classes at our adult detention center for four years. Then, COVID hit and it put a stop to in-person classes. Every year, I usually teach a citizenship class or two for individuals wanting to obtain their United States citizenship. Digital literacy was not incorporated into the civics class. It was more of a lecture-question style format. I have also taught individuals interested in becoming a paraeducator strategies for working with K-12 students in a special education setting as well as strategies to pass the ParaPro test. The Para Pro test is an assessment that measures one's general knowledge. This exam is a requirement for many states for those seeking employment as a paraprofessional in a school district. Each state has a set score one must obtain to pass. Minnesota's cut score is 460. There are three components to the test which are reading, writing, and math (ParaPro, 2022).

I was also asked to teach a healthcare academy to give our learners a "taste" of the healthcare track at the local community college. In both the para pro class and healthcare academy, it was expected that I would implement digital literacy into the

curriculum. With these two courses, there was a prerequisite score in order to be eligible to register as the content of the course material was written at a minimum of a fifth-grade reading level.

In both of these classes, students seemed to enjoy learning about computers. When I say learning about computers, they all started with the first module which was on learning the basics of computers. In this module, students learned about parts of a computer, how to use a mouse and its different shapes, and how to turn both the monitor and system unit off. Another skill learned in this module was demonstrating how to customize their device to best fit their needs. There were other skills embedded into this module as well. They were eager to learn more and excited to practice the new knowledge they had gained. With some of the students, it was almost a mini competition. I say this because, with Northstar Digital Literacy, there are fourteen modules and there is a quiz at the end of each module. A passing score of 85% is necessary to get a certificate for that module. 85% is a lofty number when you think about how many of the students in our program are coming to school for the first time and/or learning about computers for the first time. If students did not receive a passing score, they could decide to study on their own and try again at a later time. Students were set up with an online account via Northstar Online Learning which offers reinforcement videos to go with each question missed. Some students took advantage of this opportunity which they said was very helpful in studying at home. Once students passed a given module with a score of 85% or higher, they would then proceed on to the next module, which would be Internet Basics. Students would continue in this matter until they had finished all fourteen modules. Most of the students were able to

complete and pass all fourteen modules and during both of these different classes. At the end of both courses, each participant was given a certificate indicating which modules they had passed. Students seem to delight in receiving this certificate as it was a great accomplishment and something that could be shown to a current and/or future employer. If this is the 85 percentage students need to pass one module, is it possible for beginning-level to intermediate-level ELs to do so, and what best practices should be implemented to help facilitate that goal?

Student Background

Many of our students in ABE who are immigrants or refugees come to the United States to seek a better life than what they left. For some, it was a difficult decision and others it was more of a natural progression. During our open-ended *Question of the Day* time, students have shared many stories about what both home and school life were about. They share about how many learners were in a given space. They share what subjects were being taught. The one thing they don't mention being taught is technology. The reason is that many of my students come from what they refer to as "the jungle." This would translate to the country of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Some students do still use the name Burma.

On top of coming to a new country and experiencing new norms, some will be learning English for the first time as an adult. This can be a daunting task. As true with learning something new, it is easier for some than others. One reason for this may be the fact that many of the newcomers have had little to no formal education. There are some students who have attended school in their birth country, but may not have finished due to political unrest or lack of educational opportunities. Many of my students have had

limited or interrupted formal education. The term **SLIFE** is used to describe learners who have had little to know formal education or it could have been interrupted for one reason or another. Many of these learners face other challenges as they are attending school for the first time in their lives as adults (WIDA, 2015). They not only have to learn to read and write in a language that is new, but also learn to manipulate a digital device as well as basic computer vocabulary. For some, the manipulation of a digital device such as a Chromebook or laptop is challenging because it's a new tool that is not something the learners regularly use - if at all.

Adult Basic Education Standards

In adult education, we have standards that have been embedded into the ABE curriculum. There are three components to these standards. The first component is the College and Career Readiness Standards, or CCRS. These are similar to the Common Core Standards that are used by K-12. These standards are broken into reading, writing, speaking, listening, language and math standards. The integration of CCR standards into adult education programs is intended to provide all adult students with the opportunity to be prepared for postsecondary training without needing remediation (Pimental, 2013).

Transitions Integrated Framework (TIF) which focuses on soft and professional skills to make the transition to employment. According to the ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System (ATLAS) website, the Transitions Integration Framework (TIF) was designed to guide adult basic education (ABE) programs and instructors on the effective integration of transitions skills into instruction at all levels of ABE. The TIF defines the academic, career, and employability skills essential for adult learners to successfully transition to postsecondary education, career training, the workplace, and to

enrich community involvement (ATLAS, 2016). The last one is Northstar Digital Literacy Standards which are focused on technology that provides students with the digital literacy skills necessary to transition to employment.

The Northstar Digital Literacy Standards define the digital literacy skills necessary to transition to employment or post-secondary education or training. These include skills such as using email, navigating the internet, and basic proficiency with Microsoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint (Minnesota ABE, 2018). With the technology standards being a necessary component to the ABE curriculum, I chose my deciding question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* With the ever-changing world of technology and the growth of the internet as a source of information and communication for both personal and professional use, it is important that our learners have skills that will help them navigate the online world. In ABE, much of the curriculum is based on life skills. You could say that digital literacy is a life skill. After all, in many cases, it is necessary when applying for a job.

Context and Rationale

This project stemmed from challenges that I faced (and currently do) in my classroom with aligning the curriculum to the standards. Some of the challenges I face are the terminologies. Computer terminology is a language all itself. It is not vocabulary that is used on a daily basis in many of my students' lives. Yes, the language of technology is difficult. When something is difficult, some people tend to put up a wall with the feeling of "I'm not going to do this." "I will never use this information again. I don't need to learn this." With the *negative* mindset, it is difficult to learn something new. There is this notion of *Growth Mindset*. I have given my

students talk about growth mindset. However, many feel so strongly against learning about computers, they will not change. I tell them that, when people say to themselves, “I don’t need this or I can’t do this. It is too hard,” all that new information a person is learning doesn’t transfer to the long-term memory. It is almost as if a wall is built up. It just (basically) goes in one ear and out the other. In other words, it isn’t retained.

Another challenge is just getting the students to see the benefits of using digital literacy as there is so much more than just Facebook, TikTok, and texting. Technology can be used to help you apply for a job, pay your bills online, and help create documents. While students may not be creating a document every day now, these skills could be carried with them into the future should they decide to pursue higher education or into the workplace.

With both of these challenges, I even wrote an email to the committee that created Northstar Digital Literacy asking them if they had created a curriculum for beginning levels of ESL. Their response was that they had not and they probably wouldn’t anytime soon. After some thought, I decided that I needed to create a way to help my students be able to understand and manipulate the technological devices like the Chromebooks that were present in the classroom.

Many learners at the lower levels struggle with dates, times, counting money, and the list could go on. My students also have a variety of other needs including cognitive and mobility. When thinking about the needs of my learners, they need to have a curriculum that is more conducive to their learning styles which doesn’t always match what the textbooks present. It is my hope that as I conduct further research to support my project, I will produce a curriculum that includes activities and vocabulary

instruction at a beginning to low-intermediate level of understanding while aligning it to the Northstar Digital Literacy standards.

Summary

Some would argue that technology isn't necessary to study and some would argue the opposite. However, it is a part of the adult ed curriculum and ABE teachers need to find ways to implement it to help their students be successful at gaining digital literacy skills. In the following chapters, I describe research that has been conducted on the meaning of digital literacy in both beginning and intermediate levels of EL instruction. Digital literacy is a life skill that is becoming increasingly necessary for personal use, school and in many cases those seeking employment.

Chapters Overview

In Chapter One, I discussed how I came to my guiding question of helping adult ELs to become digitally literate. In Chapter Two, I will provide an overview of adult education as well as determining the levels of instruction. I will also conduct a literature review where I will talk about my findings of digital literacy, in which readers will be provided with a definition and what it looks like in an educational setting. I will also describe the challenges of implementing digital literacy in the ABE curriculum. The end of the chapter will look at best practices of implementing strategies for teaching digital literacy in the beginning level EL curriculum. In Chapter Three, I will provide a description of my project which will be a technology curriculum designed to help beginning levels of English learners (ELs) to be more independent in their use of technology. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the process of this project, revisit the literature

which was used to help guide this curriculum. The limitations will be discussed along with suggestions for future work and use.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

When you hear the words Adult Basic Education (ABE), you might think of General Educational Development (GED), adult diploma, citizenship, or learning English. However, do you automatically think of digital literacy? You might think of it now, given the times we live in currently. Many of our learners and ABE learners in general, think of the topics previously mentioned. The most common learning outcomes are to learn English or obtain a GED. What they don't think of is digital literacy. In this chapter, the literature on the beginning levels of adult ELs becoming digitally literate is discussed. This literature will provide a context and grounding for my research question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* The chapter starts with an overview of the concept of Adult Basic Education and how EL levels are determined in ABE. The second part will discuss theories related to second language acquisition for adults. The third section will provide an overview of digital literacy with regard to the beginning levels of adult ELs as well as its impact. The fourth part will discuss some of the barriers as well as the challenges of implementing digital literacy in the classroom. The fifth part will be discussing overcoming some of the challenges of digital literacy. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary and a brief explanation of Chapter Three and its components.

Adult Basic Education

What exactly is Adult Basic Education (ABE)? According to the Minnesota Department of Education, the premise of ABE is to provide adults with educational opportunities where they can acquire and improve the literacy skills necessary to become self-sufficient and to participate effectively as productive workers, family members, and citizens (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). When a learner registers for classes at an ABE site in Minnesota, they can choose from programs such as:

- *GED and Adult Diploma Classes* - These classes help prepare the students to pass the GED or Adult Diploma. The four tests one must pass to obtain their GED or Adult Diploma are: math, reasoning through language arts, science, and social studies;
- *English Language Acquisition Classes* - These classes are for learners whose first language is something other than English to be able to read, write, listen, and speak;
- *College and Postsecondary Education Preparation* - These classes help learners prepare to pass college entrance exams which are usually those required for a community college setting;
- *Adult Career Pathways* - These classes help learners to prepare for various pre-employment programs. Some examples of classes are Para Pro, Healthcare Academy, and Welding to name a few. Learners are also provided with basic skills for workforce prep for occupational programs should they decide to go the postsecondary route;

- *Family Literacy and Parenting Instruction* - These classes are for adults and their preschool-aged children. Instruction is geared mostly towards adults in literacy, math, and possible ELL. These classes could also include different topics in parenting and how to deal with them, as well as educational services for children;
- *Citizenship/Civics Education* - In these classes, instruction is given about United States civics. Students also learn about the history of the United States and study the 100 questions which is one requirement for obtaining US citizenship;
- *Basic Skills Enhancement* - In these classes, basic skills are taught at an elementary or secondary level. Types of skills could include, but are not limited to: work-related math, literacy, as well as other reading and writing help as needed; and/or;
- *Digital Literacy* - In these classes, learners have an opportunity to receive a digital literacy certificate. There are also options to improve reading, writing, math, employability, and computer skills (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019; Literacy Action Network, 2022).

A Numbers Game: ABE Statistics in Minnesota

There were 20,469 learners enrolled in various adult education programs across the state of Minnesota in the 2020-21 school year. Of that number, a vast majority of the participants were enrolled in programs in the metro area of Minnesota (Minnesota ABE, 2020). However, during the 2017-2018 school year, there were 61,822 enrollees (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). According to the Minnesota ABE Consortia Report Card (2020), an enrollee is defined as any learner who enrolls in the program no matter the number of hours attended. There were also thirty-nine consortia in the state of

Minnesota in the 2020-2021 school year. In this case, a consortia is a group of adult basic education centers that work together, often having joint meetings to discuss current, relevant topics in ABE (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020).

Funding

How is Adult Basic Education funded? ABE receives both state and federal money. The Minnesota Department of Education (2019) states that there is a specific method used to determine how much money a consortium will receive for a given year. This is the method of how funding is determined as it is first based on a school district's population, Limited English Proficient (LEP) counts, census, no-diploma data, and prior-year contact hours of the learners. How is the federal money distributed? Unlike the state funds with the several factors formula, the federal funds are based on the prior year's contact hours for learners at a given site (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Federal funds are provided under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA (National Archives and Records Administration, 2022).

Testing in ABE and the National Reporting System

Adult Basic Education, as mentioned previously, has a yearly report card. How is the data on the report card determined? When a student enrolls in a program, they fill out registration papers as well as take a test. This test is to find out what they already know. The results from the test are used to determine their level and/or class (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Some of the placement tests that are given could include Tests of Adult Basic Education, TABE (2022) or Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems, CASAS (2022).

Once the test is scored, they are recorded in a database that is known as SID. SID stands for Student Information Database (Minnesota ABE, n.d.). One other part of the yearly report card is the Measurable Skills Gains (MSGs) (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). According to the Minnesota Department of Education's Minnesota Adult Performance Targets page (2020), an MSG is defined as a period of participation where the learner has passed an educational functioning level (via NRS-approved pre-and post-test) or also by leaving Adult Education and entering into a postsecondary education setting or by obtaining a diploma/GED. This year's goal is 44 percent (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020). According to Eyring (2014), The National Reporting System (NRS) was founded in 1998 as a means to track the progress of adult learning programs at a national level by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, or OVAE.

What are the Levels in ABE?

In Adult Basic Education, there are six levels:

- *ABE Level 1: Beginning Literacy* - In this level, learners have a grade level of 0-1 on a TABE test or receive a 203 or below on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. Decoding words, finding the main idea, and be able to use illustrations in a text for an important idea before exiting this level;
- *ABE Level 2: Beginning Basic* - In this level, learners have a grade level of 2-3 on a TABE test or receive between 204-216 on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. Knowing the most common prefixes and suffixes, as well as their meanings, is one skill a learner must possess to exit this level;
- *ABE Level 3: Low Intermediate* - In this level, learners have a grade level

of 4-5 on a TABE test or receive between 217-227 on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. Being able to explain events in academic contexts is one skill a learner must possess to exit this level;

- *ABE Level 4: High Intermediate* - In this level, learners have a grade level of 6-8 on a TABE test or receive between 228-238 on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. One skill learners must possess to exit this level is being able to write an informative text;
- *ABE Level 5: Low Adult Secondary Education* - In this level, learners have a grade level of 9-10 on a TABE test or receive between 239-248 on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. One skill a learner must possess to exit this level is being able to read fluently at a secondary level;
- *ABE Level 6: High Adult Secondary Education* - In this level, learners have a grade level of 11-12 on a TABE test or receive a 249 or above on a CASAS Reading GOALS test. To exit this level, learners are usually able to read and understand college-level texts. (National Reporting System, 2021)

There are also six levels of adult ESL:

- *ESL Level 1: Beginning ESL Literacy* - In this level, learners score below a 180 on the CASAS Life & Work test. Learners in this level usually have minimal reading and writing skills;
- *ESL Level 2: Low Beginning ESL* - In this level, learners score between 181-190 on the CASAS Life & Work test. Skills learners have in this level are the ability to read letters, numbers, and some basic sight words;

- *ESL Level 3: High Beginning ESL* - In this level, learners score between 191-200 on the CASAS Life & Work test. At this level, learners are able to read and write simple sentences;
- *ESL Level 4: Low Intermediate ESL* - In this level, learners score between 201-210 on the CASAS Life & Work test. Learners in this level are able to read simple texts on themes that are familiar to them;
- *ESL Level 5: High Intermediate ESL* - In this level, learners score between 211-220 on the CASAS Life & Work test. Learners in this level are able to write a simple paragraph with a main idea;
- *ESL Level 6: Advanced ESL* - In this level, learners score between 221-235 on the CASAS Life & Work test. Learners in this level are able to make predictions as well as compare and contrast information in a text.

(National Reporting System, 2021)

With the test scores, the student is then placed in the appropriate level class (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

Motivation for Enrollment

On a given day, Adult English learners (ELs) make their way to classrooms for various reasons and they also bring a variety of backgrounds (Parrish, 2019). For some adult learners, it can take a long time to decide to enroll in a program. They want to see how the class (or classes) could be of benefit to them as well as needing to feel welcome in a safe environment (Stone et al., 2020). According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2022), the definition of motivation is the reason why somebody does something or behaves in a particular way. In what ways are adults motivated to return to learning in the

classroom? Dornyei (2001) says that motivation is forever changing. It won't stay the same as motivation may be different from one day to the next or even one activity to the next.

Adults have various motivating factors for enrolling in an Adult Basic Education program. For example, there is integrative motivation, which is the willingness to learn a new language to become part of a particular speaking community (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Eyring, 2014). Students want to be able to be independent enough in their language skills to go to the store and be able to convey what they need, go to the doctor and describe their ailments, or even make an appointment. There are also many parents who want to learn English so that they can be able to help their children with their homework (Eyring, 2014). There is an instrumental motivation. This is being willing to learn a new language to accomplish immediate goals and needs (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Another reason for coming to school is to learn English to obtain a better job (Merriam et al., 2007) or to pursue higher education (Eyring, 2014).

While learners enroll in adult education programs with varying motives, it is also one of the roles of the teacher to discover what a learner's motivation is for coming to class. Learners are more likely to continue attending class if the teacher can make a connection to their real lives (Schwarzer, 2009). Teachers can help to facilitate learners motivation by finding out what their students want to learn. This information is then used to help them design their lessons (Dornyei, 2002).

SLIFE Learners

Many learners in ABE programs across the country have had little formal education or have had interruptions in their education. Some learners are refugees who

have had to flee their birth country due to violence or have lived long term in a refugee camp (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2010). The term given to this group of learners is SLIFE. SLIFE means Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (WIDA Consortium, 2015). Burt et. al (2008) feel that not a lot is known about how adults with limited literacy skills in their first language who also have limited formal education are able to gain skills, especially that of literacy in English.

There are even some learners who come from cultures where the oral language is more common than the written (Bigelow and Vinogradov, 2010). Oral culture is where there is no written language (Oxford Reference, 2022). Some adults who do not have print literacy skills can face challenges with literacy (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). Oftentimes, these students learn best when a firm connection is made between what the student is learning and their daily lives or experiences (Condelli, et al., 2002; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Schwarzer, 2009).

Students are more likely to want to continue attending class by making the investment it takes to learn another language and use those skills outside of class in language-learning situations (Frank & Castek, 2017; Schwarzer, 2009). According to Weinstein (as stated in Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010), ELL classrooms should be places where adult learners are given opportunities to develop their language and literacy skills while working alongside their peers and also making changes to their lives.

Gunderson et al. (2014) argue that adult learners who have had no literacy experiences and lack proficiency in English are quite often the most challenging to teach for they do not connect print with language. “There isn’t enough time to develop English proficiency to the level where these students can be placed into reading programs” (p.

205). Another challenge for educators with SLIFE learners is taking the learners' strengths and knowledge to build on their different means of learning that would be most beneficial in the education system of the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

In summary, Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a program to provide adults with various educational opportunities to improve their academic, digital literacy, life, social, and workforce skills in a variety of contexts. Not all learners come with the same educational experiences. With that in mind, learners are placed in groups of learners who are at the same testing level. In these groups, students are given material and opportunities to practice the skills they are learning. There are also many learners in ABE who fall in the category of SLIFE learners who may have had little to no formal education. All of these students make up an ABE program and have different motivations for learning. However, there is a gap when it comes to learning about digital literacy. To help bridge this gap, I have posed the question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* The next section explains second language acquisition theories.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

It has been debated that learning a language and acquiring a language are not the same (Gunderson et al., 2014). Language acquisition usually happens naturally, and for many at home (Gunderson et al., 2014 & Parrish, 2019). Adults can acquire other parts of learning a language such as vocabulary and grammar quicker than children. For many years, language teachers have considered how an individual becomes proficient in a given language. There may never be an answer to this question since many SLA theories exist as to how one learns a new language (Parrish, 2019). Behaviorism is one such

theory. Skinner, a behaviorist, believed that language was developed through influences in one's environment (Lemetyinen, 2012).

John Dewey, a philosopher and educator, is considered to be a pioneer in adult education in the United States (Spalding, 2014). He believed that students should be provided with experiences (Spalding, 2014; Eyring, 2014) rather than with rote learning. Examples of experiences students may have in Adult ELL classes could include: renting an apartment, purchasing or renting a house, buying items at a store, or making an appointment (Eyring, 2014). Dewey believed that the primary goal of education was to make students more open to continuing to learn (Spalding, 2014).

Also, when it comes to other research regarding second language acquisition, Rivera (1999) and Tranza & Sunderland (2009) agree that if an individual has strong literacy skills in their first language, it will be easier for them to learn a second language. Condelli, et al. (2002) concluded that learners who had more educational background started with a higher basic reading skill level and had more knowledge of phonics and word recognition. This meant they were able to learn faster than students who came with less educational background. Burt, et al. (2008) studied how one's literacy skills in their first language affects the acquisition of reading in a second language, specifically English. Gombert (as cited in Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010) found that students who have limited literacy in their first language lack important skills such as sound-symbol correspondence as well as skills needed to decode new words. It is important to note that explicit instruction is crucial in helping students to acquire such literacy skills (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). Also, it is important to note that what learners can produce in English isn't necessarily an indicator of their knowledge

of the language (Schwarzer, 2009).

Another theory for second language acquisition is the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm or MALP (MALP, 2014). With this method, teachers help learners transition from a style of learning that they're more familiar with or that is more preferred to a style which is more common in Western formal education (MALP, 2014). With this method, teachers will have to change and adapt to learners' needs (Marshall & DeCapua, 2011; MALP, 2014), too, by implementing important elements of formal education. However, there are some students who do not want to adapt to a new culture or a new education system (Schwarzer, 2009). Some may also go through an adjusting period to their new educational situation or may even experience culture shock. Since one is having to navigate many new ways of doing their day-to-day activities in a new country, culture shock can create stress and anxiety (Saylag, 2014).

There have been some shifts when it comes to thinking about literacy. Street (2009, as cited in Tour, 2020), feels that literacy is a social practice that can change from one context to another. This means that literacy is comparable to what people do and how they go about doing it in a particular situation (Tour, 2020). The second shift when thinking about literacy studies is the digital turn, which would be related to digital technologies (Knobel & Kalman, 2016, as cited in Tour, 2020). Digital technologies mold how individuals construct, create, and divulge meaning via language as well as other means which leads to the development of digital literacies (Tour, 2020). Learners want to learn a language because they want to be able to communicate with others that speak the same language (Ellis, 1999).

In summary, there are several notable language acquisition theories.

Researchers stated that there is a correlation between those who had more educational background coming into another educational setting learned faster than those that did not Condelli, et al. (2002). Many teachers argue that students need to be given real-life opportunities to practice their skills (Spalding, 2014). These different theories can help answer the question; *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* In the next section, readers are provided with a definition of digital literacy and thoughts of digital literacy in the adult beginning-level ELL classroom.

Digital Literacy

Stone et al.(2020) believe that “digital skills and English language skills are key to inclusion in society. Gaining these skills, along with the confidence and motivation to use them in real life, can help people to have better lives” (p. 9). In order to be able to function with societal norms in the United States, one must be taught digital literacy (Vanek 2017).

What exactly is digital literacy? There are some misunderstandings when it comes to the term as people think it only means using a computer (Mantiri et al., 2019). To Harris (n.d.), when an individual has basic digital literacy skills, it means they are able to use a digital device, they can also make files on their computer, and make decisions on what applications they want to use for a given purpose. White (2015) also believes that digital literacy includes the knowledge to be able to develop skills to use digital technologies.

With the passing of time, also comes changes to the world in which we live as well as teach. One of these happens to be technology. “Technology has changed the

appearance and operation of modern society” (McCoog, 2007). The integration of technology is also becoming more and more of an everyday occurrence in much of the public education system in the United States, which no longer finds it a questionable issue in the classroom (Lynch, 2013). The world we live in is becoming digital, and with that change, so too are classrooms which means teachers are finding ways to implement digital instruction into their curriculum. (McCoog, 2007). Torralba (2014) states that for about the past 20 years, information technology tools such as the Internet and computers, have taken more of a forefront than before in the areas of education and labor.

Cherewka (2020) feels that the internet is an important piece in today’s world. Given all the technology that is present in everyday life, within the context of learning, and also the workplace it is important for individuals to have a variety of digital literacy skills (Tour, 2020). Students need such skills to be able to use social networking platforms, other modes of digital communication, and mobile internet, as well as a variety of other digital literacy-related topics (Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2017). Some people might think these skills are easy, but for Adult English language learners, it can be more difficult as they’re not only learning a new language but also practicing (for many) the concept of learning new technologies (Batalova & Fix, 2015). However, it has been widely acknowledged that learners of English as an additional or second language need to create a toolkit of backgrounds for digital literacies to be able to read, write, and communicate in digital spaces in English (Tour, 2020). Also, in order to be able to navigate the areas of living, learning, and working sufficiently, they must implement digital literacy in their life (White, 2015; Yuan et al., 2019).

Many have said that digital literacies should be an important part of language

programs (Godwin-Jones, 2015). Tour (2020) states that the teaching of digital literacies doesn't go beyond the basic operational skills of how to make technology function. Godwin-Jones (2015), believes that digital literacies are not just about having the capability to use a machine, but rather a means to creatively take part in different types of social uses. Harris (n.d.) also believes that:

What has become perhaps the most important about being digitally literate is having the mindset to expect change, to be open to learning new ways of knowing and doing, to be willing to try and see, and to expect to make mistakes and to learn from them. (p. 3)

Jenkins (2015) states that digital literacy is more than just being able to gain basic computer skills. It also includes what individuals do with that technology knowledge, solve problems, as well as communicate effectively. Like print-based literacy, there is also not one general type of digital literacy (Tour, 2020). There are various literacies for different digital literacy contexts. Communicating via email differs from communicating via text. One is more formal and the other less formal. When teachers are presenting material, they need to make sure students understand the difference and when to use them correctly. (Dudeney et al., 2013, as cited in Tour, 2020).

Technology Standards

In ABE, there are also a set of standards for digital literacy. They are called Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. These focus on skills that are deemed necessary to make the transition to employment, post-secondary education, or training of the like. Technology skills include everything from being able to navigate the internet, using email, and having the skills necessary to operate different platforms within the Microsoft Suite being just a few (Minnesota ABE, 2018). There were eleven standards listed on the

site. These standards correlate with the Northstar Digital Online Learning platform where students are provided with activities to practice skills in the modules (Northstar, 2022).

Advantages and Disadvantages

According to Alhamed (2021), the use of technology helps make a significant improvement in the lives of people. It helps make work trouble-free and quicker, which would require an individual to use fewer skills or effort when completing their work. When educators expand their English learners' (ELs) technology skill set, they can in turn help support one's motivation to learn English (McClanahan, 2014). A multitude of teachers, as well as students, indicate that technology in the classroom is helping (Jenkins, 2015).

Jenkins (2015) states, "it is important to note that technology in the classroom can be used with great success to enhance instruction, but this alone doesn't provide opportunities for students to develop digital literacy skills" (p.3). Even students with a lower level of English proficiency can reap the benefits of computer-assisted instruction in the classroom (Eyring, 2014). Harris (n.d.) believes that with technology being implemented in the beginning levels of Adult EL, it can help the learners at a quicker pace to gain knowledge and proficiency in other areas of academics.

In conclusion, digital literacy is all around us. People either like it or they don't. It is also forever changing. Some students may have previous experience with technology, either in their birth country or other places around the world. Many researchers feel that digital literacy is a necessary skill (Bayer, 2018; Cherewka, 2020; Eyring, 2014; Jenkins, 2015), not just for academic settings, but also in the workplace. There is even a set of technology standards. With there being an importance placed on digital literacy in the adult education classroom, it helps to answer the question: *how*

can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?

In the next section, examples are given of ways that other instructors have implemented digital literacy into their classrooms as well as strategies to keep in mind when going about the planning process.

Implementing Digital Literacy

Given the fact that we are in a society with rapidly changing technology, ELs also need the skills necessary to help them develop digital literacies which would prepare them for the future of technology (Harris, n.d.; McCoog, 2007; Yuan et al., 2019). It is important to integrate not only language skills but also technological skills due to the demand for skillful workers, in which English is used as the primary operating system (Alhamed, 2021; Harris, n.d., Kobrin et al., 2021; and Rosen, 2020). By implementing technology, there are benefits such as the number of tools readily available for learning a language (Moore, 2009). Implementing technology into adult learning gives learners a means to take what they've learned in the classroom home with them (Alfaleh, 2015). According to Alhamed (2021), "the goal of integrating technology is to not only improve English language skills but also to create a population that is both educated and skilled" (p. 2). Teachers need to teach learners how to learn (Guldbaek et al., 2011). "How do teachers of ELL students make them become cultural, cognitive, constructive, communicative, confident, creative, critical, and civic leaders" (Mantiri et al., 2019, p. 1302)? This question was posed as they feel those are the eight essential elements of digital literacies.

One solution they came up with was to make learning more game-like. They offered the suggestion of Duolingo, as the learners are able to gain knowledge as well as have a choice in what they are learning. When learners have a choice in what they are

learning, there tends to be more of an investment (Mantiri et al., 2019).

Planning for Technology in the Classroom

There are a few strategies that instructors need to remember when implementing digital literacy lessons. According to Jenkins (2015), it is important that when a student wants help with a technology question teachers act as a guide instead of a doer.

Oftentimes, teachers want to jump in and do the activity or fix the problem themselves which is due in part to the amount of time it could take for the learner to complete the task. The student should be given time to think through the activity as well as finish it (Jenkins, 2015). Harris (n.d.) believes that students should be given opportunities where digital literacy skills are taught along with language learning so they are embedded into units of study in the adult EL classroom. These would allow students to practice these skills in class, but also take them into the real world.

The following is an example of how one educator has implemented technology in their classroom. Charlie Heil, a teacher at HIAS in Pennsylvania, observed the students to find out about their technology needs (Kobrin et al., 2021). The conclusion was that almost half of the students had difficulty using their phones when it came to being able to read and send a text message. The next step was to incorporate a digital literacy lesson on how to send and receive a text message. Heil felt that this lesson could benefit all the students in the class no matter their language level (Kobrin et al., 2021). Another example of how teachers could implement technology into the classroom, Harris (n.d.) came up with the idea of EL learners doing some research on banking practices and they would have to create a file and later explain it to their peers. When an instructor decides to implement technology into their beginning levels of Adult EL classes, both Harris (n.d.) and Jenkins (2015) say that scaffolding, as well as teacher demonstration to make

sure students understand, is important.

In conclusion, with the implementation of technology skills into the adult education classroom, students are expanding their English vocabulary and learning skills which could be used for academic, personal, or workforce purposes. This section mentioned ways that other teachers have used technology in their classrooms as well as their role in helping students learn these new skills and adds to the question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* The next section discussed challenges to technology implementation.

Challenges to Implementing Technology

In this section, various topics are discussed regarding challenges to implementing technology. “The truth is that while many of us enjoy the benefits of technology and internet access, there are plenty of people who still lack the resources and skills necessary to use these tools effectively”(Bayer, 2018, p.1). When implementing digital literacies into the adult EL classroom it can be difficult to find appropriate strategies, because oftentimes digital literacies focus on the technical side rather than catering to students’ sociocultural and literacy needs and learners also come with varying abilities (Jenkins, 2015; Tour, 2019).

Digital Divide

The term *digital divide* was coined to demonstrate the most obvious obstacle which focuses on large inequalities when it comes to access to computer technology as well as internet-type activities among individuals from different ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds (Irving, 1999; Morrell & Rowsell, in press, as cited in Gallagher et al., 2019). It is a divide between those that have and those that don’t (Gunderson, 2000, as cited in Gunderson et al., 2014). For whatever reason, there are many ELs who do not

have internet or access to a digital device at home. The absence of fluency in English has also been found to be a challenge with technology (Robertson, 2019), due to the overwhelming amount of English in many of the technology tools and platforms the students may use. When it comes to the term digital divide, there are three issues of tiers. These include, on the first tier, access to devices, skills, and patterns on the second and their tiers (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). They identified the following barriers:

Lack of mental access, material access, and skills access. Mental access refers to barriers for people who do not have the ability to understand and think through digital domains. Materials access refers to the ability to own or use technologies. Skills access refers to skills and fluency with digital practices ranging from consuming (more passive) to consuming and producing. (p.315-316)

There are some other challenges that EL teachers face who would like to have their students become better versed in using technology (Mantiri et al., 2019). Robertson (2009) feels that one of the biggest challenges is that computers are a language by themselves. Students are learning English at the same time they are learning computer verbiage.

Access to internet/devices

According to the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies or PIAAC (2015), native-born United States adults had a higher level of proficiency in solving problems in a digital context than adults whose first language was other than English. The proficiency rate for native-born United States adults was 36 percent and 12 for foreign-born. On the other hand, as part of the findings, PIAAC (2015) concluded that twenty-one percent of immigrants who spoke a language other than

English at home had no computer experience, compared to five percent of native English speakers.

If access is an issue, Jenkins (2015); Gallagher et al. (2019), and Mantiri et al. (2019) state that both instructors and students could access pieces of technology such as computers and the internet via public libraries, computer labs, or even adult learning centers. Teachers can also teach their students who have a smartphone how to use their mobile hotspot as a way to be connected online.

Experience

Jenkins (2015) feels that since students come to the classroom with a wide variety of skills and experiences, it can be a challenge when teachers are to plan activities for the lesson. When you think of challenges in technology, it's not just the students that face challenges, teachers can as well. For example, Gallagher et al. (2019) and Jenkins (2015) posed a few challenges that teachers may face. First, the teacher knows that digital literacy is important, but on the flip side feels time shouldn't be taken away from their core curriculum; second, the teacher may have limited technology skills. Lastly, there is a push from the school administration to implement digital literacy into the curriculum, but the teacher isn't sure how to go about that (Jenkins, 2015).

According to Prensky (2001), several learners and educators alike in adult education could be classified as what are called "*digital immigrants and not digital natives*" (p.1-2). What does this mean? A digital immigrant as defined by Prensky (2001), is an individual who did not grow up with the same technology that is present in today's technical world (Mantiri et al., 2019). Prensky (2001) feels that many older teachers have a learning curve and lack some of the verbiage and skills to teach technology to students.

Age and Attitudes

Another challenge is that there are some students who have no desire to learn about technology (Jenkins, 2015). Teachers need to motivate students to learn and prepare them well for using technology. Jenkins (2015) states that in doing so, it will help the learners to be more willing to be active participants in the lesson.

Some students have what is called computer anxiety or *technophobia*, a term that includes the negative emotions associated when an individual has to use a computer (Dos Santos & Santana, 2018, as cited in Katsarou, 2021). There are some adult learners who have no interest whatsoever in learning how to use technology for whatever reason (Jenkins, 2015). Some emotions elicited when hearing the word or having to interact with it include frustration, confusion, anger, and anxiety which have limitations on a person's learning and overall well-being (Saadé et al., 2017).

Included in the other barriers section, is the belief that stems from the fact that there are some EL instructors and managers who believe that their learners are too old to learn when it comes to technology (Gamble, personal interview, 2013, as cited in McClanahan, 2014). Lightbown & Spada (2013), feel that older learners are more methodical than their younger counterparts. One must also not forget that many adult ESL learners may indeed have the skills needed to be successful in their classroom (McClanahan, 2014).

Another barrier to learning might include an individual's level of confidence in learning something new. Learners may feel uneasy about not knowing how to manipulate a device to use the internet or being able to speak English. Some might even be worried about breaking the device (Stone et al., 2020).

In conclusion, different barriers have been discussed in this section. Some or all of these barriers may have been experienced by adult learners and/or adult educators. Even though there are barriers, technology is still a requirement of the adult education classroom. Teachers can find ways to overcome these challenges to provide insight into the question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* In the next section, strategies for helping the adult learner succeed when technology lessons are implemented in the classroom are discussed.

Strategies

When teachers are planning to implement technology into their classrooms, here are some strategies to consider. Teachers could pair students with a peer who has more technology skills. They could also have students walk around the room helping those who need help. Teachers should always model the activity for the class and then have the students demonstrate their understanding by doing the same activity (Jenkins, 2015). Thinking about the adult learner as a whole, teachers should create a classroom that builds community making their learners feel welcome. Teachers can also ask their learners what they would like to learn as this is another way to build community (Schwarzer, 2009).

It is crucial for students to be given opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned within the classroom which will then lead to their ability to function in the digital world (Bayer, 2018; Frank & Castek, 2017; Harris, n.d.; Jenkins, 2015). In classrooms that are student-centered (Mantiri et al., 2019), learners are not just taught in context but are also taught how to be able to manipulate in their new surroundings. These

could include making a purchase either online or in a store, looking for employment, or making an appointment of sorts (Savignon, 1983, as cited in Jenkins, 2015).

Teachers also need to make sure that their learners understand the new vocabulary (Stone et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2015) before proceeding with any teacher-led demonstrations or students doing hands-on activities (Robertson, 2019). Vanek (2017) states that:

It might not be effective to simply show learners how to use technology and then give them scenarios where they need to use it; rather, teachers must provide some amount of direct instruction in the process by which they plan, select, and employ technology use. (p. 5)

There is yet another strategy that teachers could implement into their classroom and this is differentiated learning. In the next section, there is mention of how differentiated learning could look in an Adult beginning-level EL classroom which could be used to help answer the question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?*

Differentiated Learning

It is known by many teachers that not all students learn in the same way or in the same time frame (Mantiri et al., 2019). *How can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* Differentiated learning is another strategy to combat this (Jenkins, 2015; Mantiri et al., 2019; McCoog, 2007). According to McCoog (2007), it is the only way.

Each learner comes to the EL classroom with a set of strengths and one way that a teacher could incorporate differentiation in their classroom is by finding out each of their

learners' strengths as well as their intelligence (McKay & Tom, 1999). This is known as the Multiple Intelligence Theory (Marandino-Irish, 2009).

McCoog (2007) suggests that teachers “should assess and teach to their students’ strengths” (p. 25). He goes on to state how teaching to each student’s strengths takes time and some inventiveness on the part of the teacher as there could be many different activities needed for the same lesson to meet the needs of all learners in the class (McCoog, 2007). Marandino-Irish (2009), a classroom ESOL teacher, found that their students were more motivated and attentive to learning once Multiple Intelligences were embedded in their curriculum. Given this, recommendations from adult education literature strategies have been discussed to answer this project’s question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?*

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the reader to Adult Basic Education with background on classes and statistics. Second, SLIFE learners' characteristics and SLA theories were discussed as they pertain to English learners. Third, an overview of digital literacy was provided to give background on the subject along with its impact on learning. Finally, this chapter highlighted important research on challenges both for students as well as teachers as well as for strategies for implementing digital literacy.

Next, Chapter Three describes the curriculum project. This chapter will revisit the research discussed in Chapter Two as well as discuss the intended audience and setting for the project. It will also identify goals for the project. The next part will discuss the plan of the curriculum as well as the assessment tools used to measure student

achievement. Finally, Chapter Three will finish with a timeline of the project and an overview of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe my curriculum project. I also restate the research which was important for the development of this project as well as the setting in which the curriculum will be tested and continue to be tested. I will make reference to the intended audience for this project and also the goals of instruction. I also discuss in the chapter how student learning will be measured including how the curriculum's overall effect will be measured. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with a timeline of the project and an overview of Chapter Four.

The chapter begins with research that was relevant to my question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?* To inquire more about this question, I turn to the Career and College Readiness Standards (CCRS) and the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. Both of these are state-mandated and federally funded standards for adult basic education (ABE).

Research

For this project, I will look to the theories of second language acquisition to help better understand how beginning-level to low-intermediate adult English learners (ELs) learn. I will rely on the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards and research-based instructional strategies that teachers of adult ELs have embedded into their classrooms. All of these will be summarized in the next section.

Instruction for Adult Basic Education

Students are more likely to want to continue attending class by making the investment it takes to learn another language and use those skills outside of class in language-learning situations (Frank & Castek, 2017; Schwarzer, 2009). According to Weinstein (1999, as stated in Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010), EL classrooms should be places where adult learners are given opportunities to develop their language and literacy skills while working alongside their peers and also making changes to their lives.

John Dewey, a philosopher and an educator, is considered to be a pioneer in adult education in the United States (Spalding, 2014). He believed that students should be provided with experiences (Schwarzer, 2009; Spalding, 2014; Eyring, 2014) rather than rote learning (Spalding, 2014). Examples of experiences students may have in Adult EL classes could include: renting an apartment, purchasing or renting a house, buying items at a store, or making an appointment (Eyring, 2014). Dewey believed that the primary goal of education was to make students more open to continuing to learn (Spalding, 2014). Another important aspect to keep in mind when teaching adult learners, no matter their level, is to incorporate activities that represent both the in-class and out-of-class cultural context. This way they are not only learning about the culture of the United States but that of their peers (Schwarzer, 2009).

Second Language Acquisition

Research regarding second language acquisition (Rivera, 1999; Tranza & Sunderland, 2009) indicates that if an individual has strong literacy skills in their first language, it will be easier for them to learn a second language. Condelli et al. (2002) concluded that learners who had more educational background started with a higher basic

reading skill level and had more knowledge of phonics and word recognition. This meant they were able to learn faster than students who came with less educational background. Gombert (1994, as cited in Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010) found that students who have limited literacy in their first language lack important skills such as sound-symbol correspondence as well as skills needed to decode new words. To decode words means that the individual takes one's knowledge of letters to their sounds and uses it to pronounce words that are written (Reading Rockets, 2022). It is important to note that explicit instruction is crucial in helping students to acquire such literacy skills (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). Learners want to learn a language because they want to be able to communicate with others that speak the same language (Ellis, 1999).

Adult ELs and Digital Literacy

In Adult Basic Education (ABE), there is also a set of standards for digital literacy. They are called Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. These focus on skills that are deemed necessary to make the transition to employment, post-secondary education, or training of the like (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). According to the Minnesota ABE website (2018), technology skills include everything from being able to navigate the internet, using email, and having the skills necessary to operate different platforms within the Microsoft Suite. There are a few strategies that instructors need to remember when implementing digital literacy lessons. According to Jenkins (2015), it is important that when a student wants help with a technology question teachers act as a guide instead of a doer. Oftentimes, teachers want to jump in and do the activity or fix the problem themselves which is due in part to the amount of time it could take for the learner to complete the task. The student should be given time to think through the

activity and finish it (Jenkins, 2015). Harris (n.d.) believes that students should be given opportunities where digital literacy skills are taught along with language learning so they are embedded into units of study in the adult EL classroom. These would allow students to practice these skills in class, but also take them into the real world.

When an instructor decides to implement technology into their beginning levels of Adult EL classes, both Harris (n.d.) and Jenkins (2015) say that scaffolding, along with teacher demonstration to make sure students understand, is important. As students are working on the technology lessons in class, if a student is struggling with the assignment, the teacher could pair them with a student who has more technology skills. They would act as the teacher and guide the other student(s) in explaining the task. This helps the student who is teaching their peers to show what they know (Schwarzer, 2009).

Some students have what is called computer anxiety, or technophobia, a term that includes the negative emotions associated when an individual has to use a computer (Dos Santos & Santana, 2018, as cited in Katsarou, 2021). There are some adult learners who have no interest whatsoever in learning how to use technology for whatever reason (Jenkins, 2015).

The research was provided to give a background into the direction of this project along with the reasoning. In the next section, I will discuss the setting and the intended audience for this project.

Setting

The project will take place in an Adult Education program in southern MN. Our classes run Monday-Thursday with some enrichment classes on Fridays. Students can either attend for the morning session (8:30-11:00), the afternoon (11:30-1:30), or stay all

day. Most pick one session or the other. It is a rarity that students attend all day. Our program operates with an open enrollment system which means that students can register for classes and begin studying on any given day whenever it is best for their schedule. Since our program is a choice, attendance can vary greatly from one month to the next. This year classes could have anywhere from two to eight students at a given time. This is in part due to illness, weather, or employment obligations.

Currently, there are two teachers and one educational assistant in addition to office support and childcare providers onsite. There is an instructor who teaches both the advanced levels of adult EL and the General Educational Development (GED). The second educator provides instruction to adult ELs at the very beginning to low intermediate levels. The educational assistant works with one of the groups by reinforcing skills through practice activities in their workbooks.

Intended Audience

The learners that this project is intended for are at a beginning level of English. What does this mean? This level is similar to the K-2 levels in a K-12 education system. The difference is that the learners are adults and even though they are at a K-2 level academically, the material needs to be presented in an age-appropriate manner. I currently have a roster of 18 students. On any given day, that number could be anywhere from eight to 18. In the fall, it usually starts out higher, but as the temperatures get colder and illnesses set in, students tend to put school on the back burner. Attendance can also drop in the spring as learners are venturing out to find employment. Every year is different with enrollment and attendance.

Given my current enrollment of 18, the following is a breakdown of language groups represented in the classroom: 33% identify S'gaw Karen as their home language; 28% identify Spanish as their home language; 17% identify Poe Karen as their home language; 11% identify Burmese as their home language, and both Nuer and Thai have 1% (or one student) as their home language.

There are many students in this category who have had some formal education either in their birth country or here in the US, but it has been limited due to the political climate or other factors which prevented them from completing their education in a "K-12" setting. Then, there are students in this category who have never been to school. They have oracy, meaning they have verbal skills, but they do not have literacy meaning they can't read or write in their first language (Bigelow and Vinogradov, 2010). When they enroll in an adult education program, it might be the first time they are setting foot in an educational setting.

In this section, the setting and the intended audience were presented. In it, I also discussed where the curriculum would be taught and provided a breakdown of students who would be using this curriculum. In the next section, I will explain the goals for the curriculum.

Goals for Curriculum and Instruction

When thinking about this curriculum, I have a few goals for this project. First, I want to deliver vocabulary instruction that students will be able to understand. Second, I want to lengthen the amount of time spent on a technology unit of study. Finally, I want to provide students with hands-on learning opportunities to help ease their fear when it comes to technology.

Vocabulary Instruction

Each week, students will be provided with three to five vocabulary words. Students will learn how to sound out the word, repeat it, hear it in an example sentence, and engage in vocabulary activities that correspond to the words for the week. These could include matching a picture to a word or a word to a definition. Students would either be given pictures and words to pair together or have the words written on notecards with a definition/icon to match. Either one of these vocabulary word sets would be kept by students as a way to provide additional out-of-class practice on their own. As another possible activity, students would engage in quiz-quiz-trade. In this activity, student A would quiz student B and vice versa on what the picture or definition of the word is on their card. Once both students have done the quizzing, then they trade cards and move on to the next person to ask.

Unit Length

One of my goals is to expand the amount of time practicing vocabulary and computer content. I will take the first standard of the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards entitled *Basic Computer Skills* to create this curriculum. Students at advanced levels of English would be able to complete this unit in about a week. However, students at the beginning levels need more time to process and comprehend the vocabulary needed to perform tasks in these lessons. With that in mind, this curriculum will be expanded to a six-week time frame. Vocabulary will be reviewed throughout the unit which is important for beginning-level students. Throughout the unit, the teacher will model the activities to help students understand their assignments. Students will also be given opportunities to show what they know by practicing the activities or teaching a peer.

Easing the Fear

As I learned in my research, students come in with great fear when it comes to technology. Many have not had experiences with it other than on their smartphones or tablets. There are also some who have never used a computer or a smartphone. They don't want to learn how to use computers as they feel they already know everything they need to know since they have a smartphone. Some students have a smartphone, but it was gifted to them and it is only used for emergency phone calls. In this curriculum, students will be provided with hands-on opportunities to use the newly acquired vocabulary with relevant real-life activities that they can use outside the classroom. By having multiple hands-on opportunities to practice these skills in class, it is my hope with the creation of this curriculum that both learners and educators alike in the beginning levels of EL will find the implementation of technology lessons less challenging and more beneficial.

In this section, I discussed the goals for the curriculum. It is important to have goals in mind when creating a curriculum for learners. I provided three goals as I felt these were important in curriculum development for this project. In the next section, I discuss a description of the curriculum, what the assessment will look like, an evaluation of the curriculum, and conclude with a timeline of the length of time it took to create and implement in the classroom.

Curriculum Description

For this curriculum, I plan on doing a pre and post-assessment to see what they know and what they have learned. I will also take what I learned from the write out UbD and start with my goal of beginning-level adult ELs becoming digitally literate. I will

then provide strategies that teachers could implement when doing the lessons to help their learners to better help understand the content being presented.

In each lesson, an overview will be provided to help guide the future instructor. This will be in a table format and will include such items as a clearly defined objective, the standard which will be taught, necessary vocabulary, and a basic order to complete the lesson. I will also create tasks via Google forms and possibly a Google classroom that would house the activities that coincide with the lessons.

Assessment within the Curriculum

Assessment in any curriculum is important as it measures the progress students have made from start to finish. It also identifies where there are gaps that might need to be revisited. For this curriculum, students will be given a pre-assessment to find out what they know about a given set of vocabulary words. They will also be provided opportunities to teach their peers as a way to measure if they understand the task at hand. At the end of the unit, they will be given a post-assessment to measure what they have learned. These units will tie to the Northstar Digital Literacy standards.

Evaluation of Curriculum

Once the curriculum has been taught, I plan to work with a colleague to evaluate the curriculum together. Items that will be discussed include: what worked well, what areas need to be improved, and any other information that would be beneficial to help proceed with the curriculum. Learners will be asked if their same feelings about technology are still present at the end of the unit or if they have changed and how. I will take the feedback and make necessary changes to the curriculum.

Timeline

After completing GED 8400 during the spring term, I will continue to GED 8490 during the summer term to finish the project and Chapter Four. I will do a further dive into the technology standards which will guide me into the start of the curriculum. I will use the Basic Computer Skills standard and modify that to fit the needs of the intended learners. I will then make a list of strands in the standard that I will use. From there I will identify vocabulary words necessary to understand the lessons as well as create hands-on activities to go practice each strand. Upon completion of this project, I plan to implement it in the classroom next year.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I revisited the research that supports this project. I described the setting where this curriculum will be implemented. I provided an overview of the goals for the curriculum. At the end of the chapter, I outlined how the curriculum will measure student learning. I also gave a timeline for the project.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on what I have learned during this capstone project journey. This will be done by revisiting the literature review, discussing what I found out during the project as well as any limitations that I came across.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This project was created as a way to help beginning levels of adult English learners (ELs) feel more comfortable using technology in various forms. There are many students who come into the Adult Education program for a variety of reasons, learning English and obtaining a General Education Development (or GED) are probably the most common. Little do learners know that whether they enroll in an EL or GED class, they will be faced with some type of technology instruction. However, there are some learners who cringe at the very sound of the word.

Technology is very much a part of many people's lives either in work, personal, or both. It is also becoming increasingly used in the educational sector and not just K-12 or higher education, but also community adult education programs. In adult ed, just like K-12 education, there are competency standards. There is a specific set for technology. These need to be implemented into the adult ed classroom no matter the level. It can be difficult to embed these standards when many students have never used a technological device. A device learners may have or have not used would be their cell phone, most are specifically a smartphone. If these standards are to be implemented into the beginning level EL classes, I am left pondering the following question: *how can teachers of beginning-level EL adults help their learners become digitally literate?*

This chapter continues with a review of the literature which was used as a basis to help guide this project. Next, a reflection is provided about the process of creating the curriculum along with the implications and limitations. A synopsis of future use and work

is also provided. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a reflection of the capstone project process.

Reflection of the Literature

Students want to learn a language because they want to be able to communicate with others that speak the same language (Ellis, 1999). However, do students want to learn how to use the computer or other technological device to help them speak the same language or apply for a future job? The answer to this question varies for each learner that sets foot in the adult education program setting.

Taking a look back at the literature that was used to come to the decision of this project, it started with theories as a basis for the initial ideas. Some of the more prominent theories which were used to support this project were; Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm or MALP (MALP, 2014). With this method, teachers help learners transition from a style of learning that they're more familiar with or that is more preferred to a style which is more common in Western formal education (MALP, 2014). Teachers will have to change and adapt to learners' needs (Marshall & DeCapua, 2011; MALP, 2014), too, by implementing important elements of formal education. However, there are some students who do not want to adapt to a new culture or a new education system (Schwarzer, 2009).

When teaching adults, they need to be given many real life hands-on opportunities to practice what they are learning in the classroom to be able to take it with them in the *real world* (Spalding, 2014). Harris (n.d.) believes that students should be given opportunities where digital literacy skills are taught along with language learning so they are embedded into units of study in the adult EL classroom.

When the decision is made to implement technology into the beginning levels of Adult EL classes, both Harris (n.d.) and Jenkins (2015) say that scaffolding, as well as teacher demonstration to make sure students understand, is important. According to Jenkins (2015), it is important that when a student wants help with a technology question teachers act as a guide instead of a doer. The student should be given time to think through the activity as well as finish it (Jenkins, 2015).

When it comes to planning for technology in the classroom, teachers need to keep in mind the following strategies for their adult learners. Teachers could pair students up with those that have more technology skills so that they could help their peers. They could also have students walk around the room helping those who need help. Teachers should always model the activity for the class and then have the students demonstrate their understanding by doing the same activity (Jenkins, 2015).

It is so important for students to be given opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned within the classroom that will then lead to their ability to function in the digital world (Bayer, 2018; Frank, 2017; Harris, n.d.; Jenkins, 2015). Mantri et al. (2019) states that classrooms should be student-centered where learners are not just taught in context but are also taught how to be able to manipulate in their new surroundings. What might this look like? These could include making a purchase either online or in a store, looking for employment, or making an appointment of sorts (Savignon, 1983, as cited in Jenkins, 2015).

According to (Alhamed, 2021; Harris, n.d., Kobrin et.al, 2021; Rosen, 2020), it is important to integrate not only language skills but also technological skills due to the demand for skillful workers, in which English is used as the primary operating system.

Alhamed (2021), also states that “the goal of integrating technology is to not only improve English language skills but also to create a population that is both educated and skilled” (p. 2). Students with a lower level of English proficiency can reap the benefits of computer-assisted instruction in the classroom (Eyring, 2014).

In this section, major points from the literature were used to help form the base for this project. As we have seen from these past few years, technology is here to stay. One question that remains is a few years from now, in what ways will technology continue to further one’s education and will learners be open to it - especially those in adult education. I guess time will tell. In the next section, limitations and implications are discussed.

What I Learned and Reflection

Stone et al.(2020) believe that “digital skills and English language skills are key to inclusion in society. Gaining these skills, along with the confidence and motivation to use them in real life, can help people to have better lives” (p. 9). In order to be able to function with societal norms in the United States, one must be taught digital literacy (Vanek 2017). White (2015) also believes that digital literacy includes the knowledge to be able to develop skills to use digital technologies.

It has been widely acknowledged that learners of English as an additional or second language need to create a toolkit of backgrounds for digital literacies to be able to read, write, and communicate in digital spaces in English (Tour, 2020). Also, in order to be able to navigate the areas of living, learning, and working sufficiently, they must implement digital literacy in their life (White, 2015; Yuan et al., 2019).

Godwin-Jones (2015), believes that digital literacies are not just about having the capability to use a machine, but rather a means to creatively take part in different types

of social uses. According to the Minnesota ABE website (n.d.), technology skills include everything from being able to navigate the internet, using email, and having the skills necessary to operate different platforms within the Microsoft Suite being just a few. There were eleven standards listed on the site (Minnesota ABE, n.d.).

Learners need to be given learning opportunities which are based on real life scenarios. This allows them to practice in the school setting and take what they have learned and be able to apply it in the real world. It helps build their confidence and foster independence. Being able to navigate a technological device whether it is a learner's cell phone, computer, laptop, or tablet is necessary in today's world given the use of technology both in and out of the classroom. In this section, theories were discussed which helped to guide this project.

Implications of the Project

There are some implications that I see for this project. First, is increasing the level of comfort students have with technology. During the time of distance learning, EL students that I worked with had difficulty navigating the platform we were using for class as well as being able to login to their device. Many had family members help with this process to limit frustration. The student may have been able to understand the academic content at hand, but the technology piece was a hindering factor. By providing students with several opportunities with technology as a learning tool, the more comfortable they become. Students' general knowledge of how to operate technology increases; thus they can take what they learned and use it to navigate a device out in the real world.

Also, as the use of technology has greatly increased both for in-person classes as well as online learning, students have access to digital devices depending on their district's funding. Also, more and more classrooms are becoming equipped with the latest

in large format technological devices such as a SMARTboard or something similar. Given the past few years, with the increase in online learning both synchronously and asynchronously, technology use will also greatly increase.

Limitations of the Project

When implementing digital literacies into the adult ELL classroom it can be difficult to find appropriate strategies, because oftentimes digital literacies focus on the technical side rather than catering to students' sociocultural and literacy needs and learners also come with varying abilities (Jenkins, 2015; Tour, 2019). Other limitations include a term known as *The Digital Divide*. This term refers to large inequalities when it comes to access to computer technology as well as internet-type activities among individuals from different ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds (Irving, 1999; Morrell & Rowsell, in press, as cited in Gallagher et al., 2019). In our program, many students have internet at home. However, some do not have access to it. In that case, there are hotspots that are available for students to check-out. There is no time limit to return them as long as they are back by the end of the school year. There are also some learners who just don't want to do any studying via the use of technology nor the internet. It is almost as if a mental block goes up when the word computer (or technology) is mentioned (Dos Santos & Santana, 2018, as cited in Katsarou, 2021; Jenkins, 2015).

In this section, implications and limitations of the project were discussed. The use of increased technology was mentioned with examples of its use as well as possible limitations such as the internet. Another limitation which was mentioned was access to devices outside of school.

Recommendations for Future Use and Work

This project could go on to expand into other aspects of technology. For example, students could be taught how to use their smartphones. Many of my students have a smartphone, but they don't really know how to use it since some of their family members set it up for them. Another aspect that could be explored would be online learning. There are several platforms available for learning, but many learners are unaware of them as well as their use. Tutorials could also be created in languages which are represented in a given program to help learners.

I would also be curious to see how students comprehend this curriculum when it is written at a more basic level and is slower-paced. This curriculum was vocabulary based with simple hands-on learning experiences. As it stands now, the curriculum available for digital literacy use English learner (EL) classrooms is written at a very high level. According to Literacy Minnesota's website (n.d.) on distance learning platforms, Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment is written at a Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) scaled score of 211 or higher. This means that someone would have to have a more than basic understanding of the English language.

Benefit to the Profession

My hope is that this project can better help adult English learners (ELs) at the beginning levels understand technology. Another hope is that with this creation, it will ease some of the fears and frustrations that might have been present when learners first started this curriculum. Current technology programs are written where students need to have a minimum CASAS score of 211 (Literacy Minnesota, n.d.). This is much, much higher than that of beginning levels of English learners in an adult education program.

With job applications to making appointments to checking bank accounts, having these technology skills learned in this curriculum will hopefully help learners become more independent when using technological devices outside of the classroom setting.

Conclusion

Chapter Four provided an overall reflection of the capstone process. First, the chapter provided a reflection of the learning that took place during this process. Next, it revisited the literature that was most prominent and that led to the completion of this project. Then, it examined the limitations and recommendations for the future possibilities of this project. Last, it discussed how the project would be beneficial to the profession.

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