

# Harnessing student voices to improve ALL practices: An action research project

Joseph Yeo and Gemma O'Donoghue

University of Technology Sydney, NSW, Australia

Email: [joseph.yeo@uts.edu.au](mailto:joseph.yeo@uts.edu.au) and [gemma.odonoghue-1@uts.edu.au](mailto:gemma.odonoghue-1@uts.edu.au)

(Received 13 November, 2024. Published online 27 September, 2025.)

Across a range of educational contexts, including academic language and learning (ALL) practice in the higher education sector, there is growing interest in harnessing student voices to improve classroom experiences. In this paper, we discuss our action research (AR) focusing on students' reflective activities in a 5-day academic language intensive programme designed to encourage students to share their learning experiences with their tutor, and to empower tutors to design and deliver a bespoke programme informed by student voices. The paper will also highlight the impact that adopting an AR approach can have on educational and research practices. Our AR suggests the inclusion of the reflective activities enabled teachers to adapt their teaching practices, foster teacher-student and student-student rapport, and create more empathetic classrooms better tailored to their students' specific learning needs. This paper may be of significance for any educators interested in implementing similar activities to encourage student voices in their classrooms to enhance teaching practices and students' learning experience, particularly ALL practitioners in comparable contexts or for programmes delivered in intensive and/or block mode. It would also be of interest to educators considering adopting an AR approach to investigate a specific issue in their educational context.

**Key Words:** student voices, academic language, academic literacy, intensive programmes, action research, classroom practices.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Context

The impact of student voices on student experience and teaching practice is a significant area of interest in educational research and practices across a range of contexts. This interest is grounded in the recognition that students' insights into their educational experiences deserve attention. In addition, students should be given opportunities to participate in their learning experiences as such participation can bring immense benefit to both students and educators (Connor, 2022; Cook-Sather, 2006). The importance of such participation rests on the understanding that education is relational, acknowledges the diversity in students' learning goals and lived experiences, and unsettles the traditional hierarchical nature of teacher-learner interactions (Cook-Sather & Mathews, 2023). It is also noted that the inclusion of student voices can highlight the voices of more marginalised student groups, thus creating more equitable and inclusive teaching practices and learning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2018). In acknowledgement of the diversity within student cohorts, we will refer to *student voices* rather than *student voice* in this paper.

It is important to note that the definition of students' voice is contested within the literature (Connor, 2022; Parr & Hawe, 2022). Some scholars have argued that the concept of student voices is best employed in situations where students are equal partners making joint decisions with their educators and their institutions regarding their educational experiences, as exemplified in Students-as-Partners (SaP) models (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Mathews & Dollinger, 2023). Other scholars have understood the concept more broadly to include a range of practices aimed at garnering student perspectives, feedback and reflections to enhance student experiences – for example, Warwick et al.'s (2019) study on using teacher observations and student interviews to develop teaching practices. Arguably, student voices may be best understood as an “umbrella term” (Manca et al., 2017, p. 1076) which covers a varying range of understandings and practices. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) suggest that student-voice-oriented activities belong on a spectrum of activities starting with students expressing opinions and providing feedback, and ending with students co-planning and co-facilitating activities in leadership roles.

Research studies have demonstrated how the inclusion of student voices have enabled academic language and learning (ALL) practitioners to design English for academic purposes (EAP) curriculum tailored to students' specific needs (Malthus & Widin, 2018), encourage oral communication (Mack, 2012) and writing practices in classrooms (Zhang, 2023), and increase student motivation (Sampson, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by sharing our experiences from a two-cycle Action Research (AR) study which aimed at exploring the impact of student voices on the teaching practice and student experience in a 5-day Language Development Intensive (LDI) programme.

In this AR project, the reflective activities to harness student voices are situated at the start of the aforementioned spectrum (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). We were interested in how the reflective activities could elevate and amplify student voices, and to what extent this would inform the LDI teaching and learning experiences. However, we note that decisions around what and how students would learn were ultimately made by the tutors and programme coordinators/designers. For this project, our focus as LDI coordinators/designers was on providing opportunities in the programme for all students, especially the underconfident and marginalised students, to share their perspectives and previous learning experiences with their tutors; and to do this within the constraints (e.g., temporal, financial, etc.) of the LDI programme.

The LDI programme is one of a suite of academic language programmes offered by the University of Technology Sydney as part of its institution-wide Embedding English Language (EEL) framework (Edwards et al., 2021), which provides academic language and literacy development to students who have been identified as requiring additional support based on their performance in the online post-enrolment language assessment (OPELA). While the majority of these programmes are delivered in traditional semester-long weekly subject-specific language development tutorials of 90 minutes, several programmes are designed in block and intensive modes. In the higher education sector, such attendance modes are increasingly common as universities aim to provide a range of attendance modes of study in order to meet operational and financial challenges, while ensuring they provide additional targeted programmes to address the diverse needs of the student population, including programmes supporting academic language and literacy development (Dixon & O’Gorman, 2020; Mitchell & Brodmerkel, 2021; Yeo & O’Donoghue, 2023). For ALL practitioners, these challenges are not uncommon as the provision of academic language support is often marginalised within higher education (Wingate, 2018), and a flexible approach to design and delivery is often required to manage institutional constraints.

Delivered online via Canvas (the university's learning management system) and Zoom over five days, the LDI is attended by approximately 100–120 students from a range of disciplines across every faculty. Students are allocated to small discipline-specific classes (of no more than 18 students) to ensure a discipline/faculty-specific approach is embedded in their academic language development. The LDI programme deliverables consist of an individual 1000-word discipline-

specific writing task, followed by a group presentation based on the written task. A scaffolded approach is taken to support students through the academic literacy skills required to complete these tasks – skills such as unpacking the question, researching, reading and note-taking skills, academic integrity, group work skills, and (group) presentation skills.

There are three key stakeholder groups in the LDI programme: the LDI coordinators/designers, the tutors, and the students. The coordinators/designers are responsible for working alongside the administration team to confirm student numbers, class allocations and tutor availability. It is also the responsibility of the LDI coordinators/designers to design and develop the LDI curriculum, online modules and resources which need to be finalised prior to the first tutors' meeting. These LDI resources include tutors' notes, discipline-specific written and presentation tasks, and learning materials to support a range of academic language and literacy skills (such as academic writing skills, academic reading skills, critical thinking, paragraph and sentence structures, developing arguments, proof reading and editing skills, and referencing), as well as materials to build classroom rapport and connection. The two LDI coordinators/designers are permanent members of the ALL team, and they both have had previous experience teaching on the LDI programme.

The LDI tutors are qualified and experienced ALL practitioners, several of whom have had experience in teaching across various ALL programmes in different institutions. For the LDI, they are issued a casual teaching contract for the number of face-to-face teaching hours, and that includes limited preparation time, as well as pre- and post-LDI meetings. LDI tutors have access to the class lists, the LDI course site on Canvas, and a wide range of teaching materials at least a week prior to the start of the programme. Since most tutors are often balancing other work and family commitments, and have limited contracted time, lesson preparation is completed independently, although tutors are encouraged to contact the LDI coordinators/designers if they have any questions or concerns. Additionally, while tutors are provided with suggested lesson plans, and are encouraged to take a student-centred approach as they support students in the completion of the written and spoken tasks, they are also encouraged to select and adapt from the teaching and learning materials provided, as well as to create their own where appropriate, and use their expertise to deliver a bespoke LDI programme that best meets their students' needs.

Lastly, the students attending the LDI have been identified via OPELA or a subject assessment as requiring additional academic language support. For most students, they have been directed to the mandatory LDI programme because they were unable to attend any of the academic language development programmes offered in the previous semesters. The majority of attendees are international students and/or English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) students who, alongside academic language challenges, may also experience marginalisation and exclusion in their degree programmes (Arkoudis et al., 2019). Our previous research indicated that for many of these students, a lack of linguistic confidence impacts on their ability to engage fully in university classroom activities (Goldsmith et al., 2022). Consequently, they may find themselves struggling to use their voices, and have their voices heard, in their classrooms. As the LDI students come from a broad range of subjects, it is likely they will not have met the other students in their allocated discipline/faculty-specific LDI class, or their tutor before the commencement of the LDI, adding to the constraints of the LDI programme.

Given the aforementioned logistical, financial, pedagogical and temporal constraints of the LDI, it is not ethically possible to involve the casual LDI tutors or students in the planning phases of the LDI; yet, as coordinators/designers we recognise the value of encouraging students' agency by providing opportunities for them to share their learning needs. Likewise, we recognise the value of providing opportunities for our tutors to draw on their expertise and experience to choose and adapt from the LDI resources provided, and to meet their students' specific needs with the most appropriate learning activities and teaching approaches.

## 1.2. Issue

Research suggests that while intensive programmes can be beneficial to student engagement, concentration, and focus, these potential benefits are contingent on the teaching quality, course and material design, as well as taking a student-centred approach (Gilde, 2023; Mitchell & Brodmerkel, 2020). While there are LDI lesson plans and set deadlines for the tasks, there is opportunity, indeed necessity, for tutors to select and adapt from the resources and activities provided to best meet the needs of their cohort of students. This requires tutors to consider what is most appropriate in terms of the discipline of their students, as well as their students' specific language and learning needs. It also relies on the programme coordinators/designers to allocate time for embedded activities that facilitate safe and supported tutor-to-student and student-to-student relationships. This would enable tutors to hear students' voices and perspectives on their previous experiences and learning needs.

As the LDI coordinators/designers, we recognised the challenges our casual tutors face in delivering a programme tailored to the specific needs of their students, and the limited opportunities for student voices to be included in their classrooms. We questioned how we could best support tutors and students to allocate time for reflection and dialogue about students' perceived learning needs whilst also meeting the task deadlines. To address the above issues, we designed two student reflection activities to be included in the LDI programme, on the first and last days respectively. The purpose of the *Day 1 Reflection* was to provide tutors access to their students' reflection on their learning experiences in the previous semester: what they had achieved, and what was still lacking in terms of their academic and language skills. The students were informed that their 'responses would be shared' with their tutor and their 'tutor may refer to your responses to tailor the LDI programme to better meet your academic needs'. The follow-up *Day 5 Reflection* prompted students to reflect if the LDI had supported them in developing these identified areas, and students were also informed that their individual responses would be shared with their tutor.

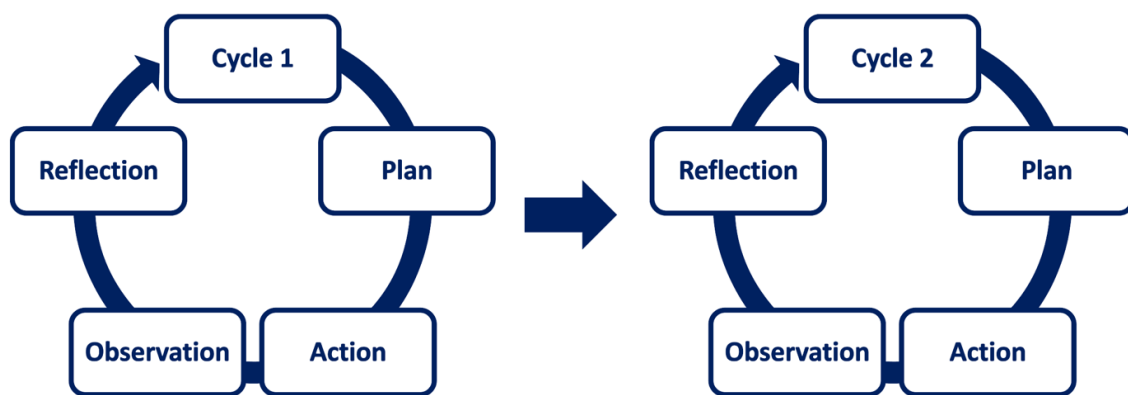
We designed these activities to encourage students to reflect on their learning experiences and to share their perspectives with their tutors and their peers, if appropriate. This is in recognition of the fact that these students are commonly viewed with a deficit lens as being deficient and passive in their subject teaching and learning activities. We hoped that this simple act of scaffolded reflective activities would help to build a safe learning environment to foster their confidence and student agency, particularly in regard to their engagement with their tutors. In turn, we hoped that access to these perspectives would support tutors to better address their students' needs. While we required tutors to include the reflective activities, they were free to use their own agency and creativity on how to implement them as appropriate for their classroom (e.g., as an individual activity, or as part of a group discussion). In fact, most of them included the *Day 1 Reflection* as a group discussion and sharing activity in their efforts to establish class rapport. We provided tutors participating in our AR with a daily journal for them to discuss if and how they had taken student voices into consideration in their daily teaching practice.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Action research

AR is a meta-practice research approach whereby a practitioner, having identified an issue in their context, simultaneously takes action while conducting research in a systematic spiral of reflection and reflexivity with the aim of making transformative changes in one's practice (Burns, 2005; Burns et al., 2022; Kemmis, 2009; Song, 2019). AR is different from basic and applied research approaches in that it is not research done by an external researcher on others, nor does it profess to focus on objectivity, control, and generalisability. Rather, its main focus is for the practitioner-researcher to investigate specific real-life, practical concerns in their localised practice and context using a systematic data collection process to arrive at findings to effect transformational changes and improvements to their practice (Burns, 2005; Burns et al., 2022).

The 'A' in AR entails the researcher-practitioner identifying a gap between the current and ideal states of practice that warrant change, followed by the planning, development and implementation of concrete interventions in response to the gap. The 'R' follows simultaneously as data is systematically collected and analysed as interventions are rolled out, then findings reflexively analysed for the next AR cycle (Burns, 2005). Such reflexivity is embedded throughout the research process to instigate a researcher to critically examine their positionality in shaping the AR, as well as the data collection and data analysis processes. Where there is more than one researcher involved, collaborative reflexivity can enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). AR can take various forms depending on the context, but all forms follow "a cycle of planning, implementing, acting, observing and reflecting" (see Figure 1), and they are "contextual, small-scale and localised ... reflective and evaluative ... participatory" as well as transformative based on the analysis and findings of the data collected in the cycle(s) (Burns et al., 2022, p. 5).



**Figure 1.** A systematic cyclical, spiral of planning, action, observation, reflection and reflexivity in AR.

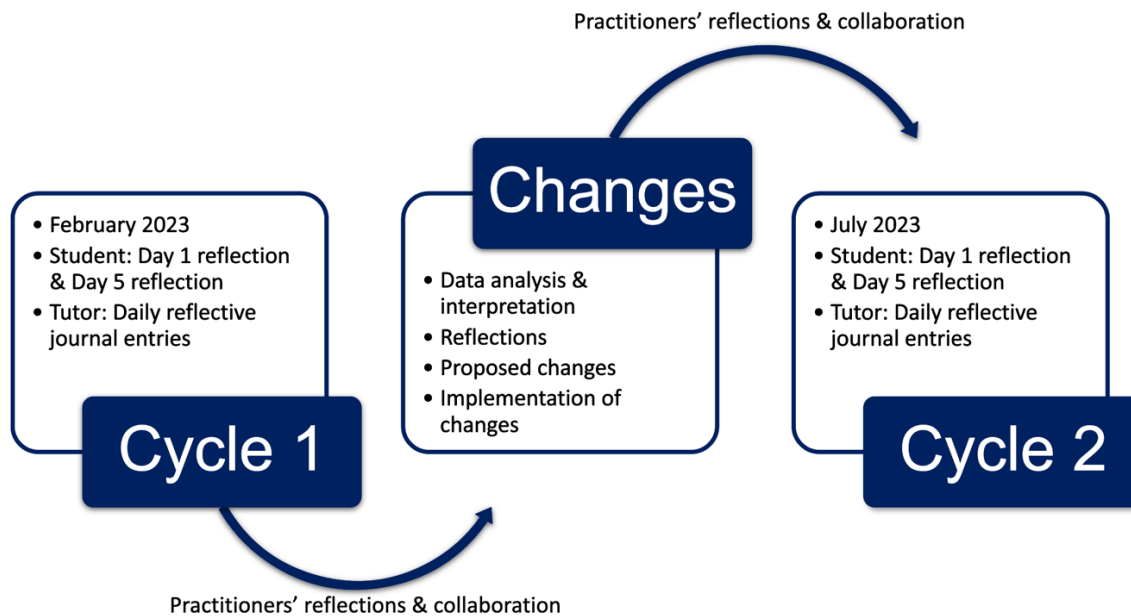
It has been argued that current teaching and learning practices often reinforce and reproduce the power and privilege of the voiced, and the silence of the voiceless (Burns et al., 2022). To counter this issue, AR can enable practitioner-researchers to transform their educational practices to give voice to the voiceless, enhance student agency in their learning process, and create a space to hear and respond to the diverse range of voices in a classroom.

## 2.2. The two cycles

With research ethics approved by our local research office, Cycle 1 was rolled out in the February 2023 iteration of the LDI to investigate the impact of student voices on student experience and teaching practices in the LDI. Cycle 2 was implemented in the July 2023 iteration. See Figure 2 for a visual overview of the two-cycle AR.

### 2.2.1. Cycle 1

At the start of Day 1, students were guided to complete a reflective task in which they were asked to reflect on the past semester noting their achievements and challenges (see [Appendix A](#)). At the end of Day 5, students were asked to refer to their Day 1 responses and comment on whether their strengths had been further developed, and their weaknesses improved over the 5-day LDI. All the student responses were made available for the tutors to access, but only data from the 10 students (out of 102 enrolments; participation rate approximately 10%) who gave their consent was included in the AR analysis.



**Figure 2.** Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

To understand if and how the LDI tutors utilised student voices in their class, tutors were asked to document their reflections on their teaching practices in an online journal. Only three tutors (out of six tutors; participation rate 50%) who consented to participate in the AR study were asked to complete the journal (see [Appendix B](#)).

At the conclusion of Cycle 1, the following data was gathered, analysed, and reflected upon to feed into Cycle 2:

- Student Day 1 responses were compared with their Day 5 responses to see if they matched, and any indication if their strengths/weaknesses were addressed during the LDI.
- Tutor data in the daily journal to see if they had accessed their students' Day 1 responses and taken them into consideration when planning and implementing teaching and learning activities throughout the LDI.

### 2.2.2. Cycle 2

The same reflective activities were implemented in Day 1 and Day 5. However, as a result of our Cycle 1 reflection, the following changes were made to the two activities:

- In the *Day 1 Reflection*, questions were rephrased to remove any ambiguities, and students were explicitly requested to list their achievements and challenges in their academic context (to mitigate the inclusion of anything irrelevant to their studies).
- Similarly, questions in the *Day 5 Reflection* were rephrased and made more explicit in relation to their academic context.
- As it was vital for students to consult their Day 1 responses when completing the *Day 5 Reflection*, their access to the Day 1 responses was made easier and more explicit.

Data from 32 students (out of 105 enrolments; participation rate approximately 30%) was included in the analysis. A threefold increase in the student participation rate could be attributed to making it much easier for students to provide their consent online in Cycle 2.

The format of the tutor journal in Cycle 2 was left intact – it was online, and participating tutors were requested to complete a brief template each day. Additional prompts were added to some questions for more guidance, and tutors were provided with explicit demonstration and instructions on how to access and complete the daily journal entries, to ensure that they felt comfortable

with the technical aspect of it, and to assure them that the daily journal entry was not too onerous and time consuming.

Similar to the student participation rate, there was a marked improvement in tutor participation in Cycle 2 – four out of five tutors, i.e., 80%. This could be attributed to improved communication with the tutors prior to the Cycle 2 implementation to ensure that tutors had a good understanding of the AR study, and to provide them with multiple platforms and opportunities for clarification before making an informed decision.

At the conclusion of Cycle 2, the same data was gathered, and reflexively analysed in consideration of Cycle 1.

### 3. Findings and implications

The following discussion comprises five thematic findings as supported by reflexive analysis of the combined data from the two AR cycles, and in particular the impact of the inclusion of student voices on teaching practices and student learning experience, as well as the implications for AR and ALL practices.

#### 3.1. Impact on teaching practices and student learning experiences

##### 3.1.1. On teaching practices

The *Day 1 Reflection* provided tutors with an opportunity to shape student learning experiences, build classroom rapport, and position the students as experts in their own learning journey. The tutors recounted in their journals how they had tailored their teaching practices and the LDI materials to meet the needs of their class; they gave examples of “*shifting the focus and timing of classes*”, and scaffolding elements of the assignment preparation process in response to their students’ concerns. One tutor noted, “*As students had outline [sic] that they encountered obstacles in planning and preparation for their assessments ... I ensured to give more detailed explanations of the processes involved, as well as asking concept-checking questions and describing how much time should typically be allocated [to] planning, research, and writing.*”

The changes made by the tutors in response to students’ reflections were often small but impactful, allowing tutors to shape their teaching practice and approaches whilst completing the LDI tasks and working within the time constraints of an intensive programme. One tutor reported on how the *Day 1 Reflection* “*activates an awareness of where a small amount of extra time could be allocated to an activity to provide more depth, or changing its structure (e.g., smaller breakout rooms, or a Mentimetre instead of a class discussion).*” Another tutor commented how they could address multiple challenges the students had identified by encouraging “*students to interact and participate actively in class and with each other (brainstorming, questioning, exchanging ideas, etc.).*” Interestingly, two tutors had shared resources and services that addressed their students’ specific challenges for the students to access in their own time, and this arose in response to students’ input in the *Day 1 Reflection*.

The student responses in the *Day 1 Reflection* also provided tutors with invaluable insights into their students’ strengths and weaknesses, as well as triumphs and challenges, thereby enabling them to calibrate their teaching practice to bring about positive impact on students’ social and emotional well-being. Our research suggests the activities adapted, modified or developed by tutors helped build student confidence, enriched classroom interactions, and encouraged a strengths-based approach to learning by acknowledging what students had already achieved and overcome, as noted by a tutor: “*I believe that their achievements highlight what the students’ values [sic] in their own learning experiences, which allows me to bring those elements into the classroom to enhance classroom experience.*” The *Day 1 Reflection* quickly established a positive learning environment as captured in this tutor’s comment: “*it also set a good tone for the beginning [of] the LDI week together – for them to stop and take stock individually and together*”.

Overall, we would argue that when given access to student voices, tutors were appreciative of them and were receptive to taking them into consideration when designing and delivering their teaching and learning activities in a more bespoke manner to address their students' needs while fulfilling the requirements of the 5-day LDI curriculum. Our research suggests these considerations had a notable impact on the students' learning experience as most students reported they had improved in at least one of their identified areas of concern. Additionally, tutors who had taught on previous iterations of the programme identified a connection between their more targeted teaching practice and the quality of the LDI written and group presentation tasks, with some of them commenting that "*the final report seem [sic] to be of a higher standard this time*" and "*the team flow was above average compared to previous years*".

### 3.1.2. On student learning experiences

The purpose of the *Day 1 Reflection* was to provide a platform for student voices to be expressed and heard, and for these student voices to inform their tutors in the design and delivery of a bespoke LDI programme. An unintended outcome was that it enabled tutors to see their students through a different lens, to better appreciate their students' triumphs and struggles on a more personal level – the student voices helped to humanise the classroom.

In an online class, students were no longer just a face within a square on their tutors' computer screen; the students were multi-dimensional beings. As one tutor expressed, having access to her students' reflections provided her with a more layered understanding of her students, as well as a better appreciation of their backgrounds and life experiences – all of which helped her to deliver a more bespoke programme to meet the students' needs:

*Reading them [Day 1 Reflection] showed me their past challenges ... Makes me appreciate where they came from and what they've already accomplished ... I was reminded that quite a few are making the adjustment to Australian life, being away from their homes and learning to live and learn in a new country and university ... it brings the human element into the classroom – reminding me of the struggles and triumphs of those I'm teaching and working with ... It is a good activity ... to ground students in where they are at the start of the LDI ... to acknowledge what they already have overcome and bring to the week. It also brought more awareness and directed intentionality to my choice of activities or emphasis in delivering them ...*

Classroom activities such as the *Day 1 Reflection* and *Day 5 Reflection* could be easily incorporated into many ALL classrooms to provide equitable opportunities for the voiced and voiceless to be heard, thereby humanising the classroom and revealing more personal, multi-faceted factors that impact on students' learning. As students share their reflections, including their achievements and challenges in their learning journey with their peers and tutor, the students could gain a better understanding of one another, that they are not alone in their struggles, and thereby forge stronger rapport among students, as supported by a tutor's observation: "... *this session felt like a bonding session for the students as they can see that they are not alone in terms of limitations or challenges in studying at university ...*". This bonding could potentially break down any walls they have erected to save face because they are aware that everyone is facing similar and/or differing learning issues, thus enabling them to feel more connected.

Such activities could also help tutors discard any conscious and unconscious biases and assumptions, and be better informed about their students and how best to teach and support them, thereby creating a safer and more empathetic learning environment for students – one where students are empowered to feel sufficiently safe to show their vulnerabilities, and to know that they will not be judged; instead, they are confident that their peers and teachers will help transform their weaknesses into strengths.

Our research also suggests that it is possible for coordinators/designers to seamlessly and meaningfully embed these types of reflective activities into intensive programmes, and they can play a significant role in establishing class rapport and creating opportunities for meaningful scaffolded reflection on learning. One tutor recounted that:

*Once students had completed their team presentations today – breathing a sigh of relief – it felt right and appropriate to reflect. It was great to have an online form [Day 5 Reflection] for them to complete. I feel this made it feel more credible and important for the students – and for me as a teacher guiding them through it.*

### 3.1.3. Implications for ALL practices

The LDI programme presents several constraints and challenges for the programme coordinators/designers and tutors in creating a safe learning environment while supporting students to develop their disciplinary academic language and literacy skills to best meet the needs of the students while fulfilling the programme's objectives.

The inclusion of activities to encourage student voices in classrooms has important implications for enhancing ALL programme design and coordination, teaching practice, and student experience. For ALL coordinators/designers, the embedding of these activities into ALL programmes can allow us to demonstrate to both tutors and students that we value student voices. Providing these activities can support all students to have a voice, and have their voices heard and taken into account as they reflect on and share their learning experiences with their peers and tutors, thereby creating a more authentic and safer student-centred and student-driven learning environment. Such an environment is particularly useful, and beneficial for both students and tutors, in an intensive programme where time constraints do not afford them the temporal space to know one another and build a rapport; and even when they do, it is likely to occur when the programme is coming to an end. Additionally, the pressure to fulfil the programme's aims and objectives often stifles any room for creativity and innovation as a teacher is obligated to deliver the planned curriculum within a short period of time (measured in days, as opposed to weeks or months). However, program coordinators/designers can include such easy-to-implement reflective activities within a set curriculum, providing insights for teachers into which aspects of the curriculum students may find challenging and thus requiring extra attention. These activities can also be adapted to a range of different disciplines and learning environments.

While recognising the small scale of our AR study, it has affirmed that the inclusion of activities that support, scaffold, and encourage students to share their perspectives has positive implications for ALL teaching practice and student learning, and suggests the benefits of including such activities in intensive programmes.

## 3.2. Reflexive learning as action researchers and ALL practitioners

### 3.2.1. Communication

In Cycle 1, one week prior to the LDI, we briefed the tutors about the AR study at an induction meeting, with the assumption that they, as ALL academics, would understand the nature and breadth of the AR study, clarify all their concerns in that meeting, and disseminate the appropriate information to students. However, it was apparent that there was inconsistency across the tutors' understanding of the research as reflected in their journal entries (e.g., one tutor did not realise that they had access to the Day 1 student responses). This had flow-on effects: students' participation was contingent on tutors' appreciation of the AR study since the tutors had to explain it to students before obtaining their consent and guiding them in the completion of the Day 1 and Day 5 activities; the tutors' capacity to deliver a bespoke LDI programme relied on the relevance and appropriateness of students' responses in the *Day 1 Reflection*; and students' responses in the *Day 5 Reflection* would indicate if student voices were heard and the bespoke LDI programme a success in meeting students' needs.

In Cycle 2, tutors were given all the research-related information one week before the induction meeting so that they had time to digest the information before the meeting. Tutors were also encouraged to raise any concerns before, during, and after the meeting. Additionally, all the research-related information, including a video recording explaining the research, was collated in a Canvas module and made readily accessible to everyone before, during, and after the LDI. These measures were added to ensure that all participants were fully cognizant of the research, particularly those who were relied upon to communicate the research to others (e.g., tutors).

Clear communication with consistent, unambiguous messaging is vital in research. However, that could be thwarted when researchers make assumptions about, and project their own thinking and behaviour onto, research participants. Rather, one should consider all possible perspectives from every group of research participants and tailor the communication strategies accordingly.

### 3.2.2. Consent

In Cycle 1, we made the mistake of replicating what was done in a face-to-face environment in an online classroom. Pre-COVID, when teaching was delivered in brick-and-mortar classrooms, research consent forms in hardcopy would be distributed to students in class. When we implemented Cycle 1 in the online LDI, we disseminated the consent form as a Word document via email, and requested that students download it, fill it in, and email it back to us. Unsurprisingly, only 10% of them did.

Upon realising how convoluted and cumbersome the process was, we transferred the whole process to a digital format using Microsoft Forms in Cycle 2, where students simply clicked on a link to access all the research-related information, then select yes or no to consent and submit. Consequently, the participation rate in Cycle 2 increased threefold.

It is important for researchers to consider all aspects of the data collection process from the intended participants' perspectives, from obtaining consent to extracting data, without compromising research integrity. To enhance participation rates as well as meaningful participation and engagement in the research, researchers should aim to provide clear, explicit, unambiguous information and instructions; and ensure that participants have easy, direct access to all the resources they need, and that critical information may need to be repeated, and perhaps in different ways.

It is generally a challenge for researchers to recruit research participants, particularly when there are no explicit incentives for participation. Therefore, every effort should be taken to make it as easy as possible for participants to provide their consent while ensuring that they have been given all the research information, ethical considerations, and conditions of participation.

### 3.2.3. Action research and the collaborative approach

Prior to the commencement of our AR study, our post-LDI reflections had already informed the development and refinement of the programme. However, we recognised our decision-making around these changes was somewhat haphazard based on our educational 'hunches'. To ensure our future decisions were evidence-informed and research-based, we adopted an AR approach by scheduling weekly meetings dedicated to moving through the AR process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. We recorded these meetings, later transcribing and summarising key themes emerging from our conversations to document our learning and prompt future reflections.

This AR process brought new vigour to our reflections, resulting in better research and education practices. In Cycle 1, as outlined above, we uncovered issues with our communication strategies. This rattled our assumptions about the effectiveness of our communication practices as ALL practitioners, and brought to our attention some of our educational 'blind spots'. However, once recognised, we were able to make improvements to these practices, which we implemented in a far more successful Cycle 2. The AR process also provided insights into positive aspects of our practices; we noted the *Day 1 Reflection* had given both tutors and students more autonomy over the learning experiences in the LDI, and was supporting tutors to deliver a bespoke LDI programme.

It also highlighted the impact the activity had on creating a safer and more supportive learning environment – impacts we may not have realised prior to our AR study. Finally, it is important to note the key role collaboration played in our AR. For us, the collaboration was two-fold as we share the role of LDI coordinators/designers, as well as being co-researchers. In our AR meetings, we developed a practice of sharing our respective data analyses and reflections, bringing an openness and curiosity to our discussions, and a willingness to change our minds. This enriched our educational and research practices in ways that would not have been possible had we embarked on this research alone. We would encourage other AR practitioners to consider collaborating on their next AR pursuit.

For educators whose roles and interests traverse programme design and coordination, teaching practice and research, there is value in adopting an AR approach to investigate the challenges in their educational contexts. Through a systematic and iterative process, AR may prompt insights into established practices and new perspectives on familiar education settings, thus ensuring better teaching and learning experiences for students and teachers alike.

#### **4. Limitations**

A limitation of this AR study was the small sample size, particularly in Cycle 1 where  $n = 10$  (out of 102, or about 10%) due to the challenges in recruitment, although this was rectified in Cycle 2 resulting in a larger sample size where  $n = 32$  (out of 105, or 30%). Some might argue that the small sample size would limit the AR study's generalisability in regard to the overall student voices. While this may be true to some extent, one can also argue that the LDI students were all relatively similar in terms of their academic language and literacy skills, in that they were all identified as in need of language development – either through OPELA or their subject assessments – despite the demographic differences. Consequently, while this AR study may not be generalisable to a diverse student population of varying academic language and literacy skill levels, its findings and implications provide invaluable insights into the potentials of harnessing student voices in ALL classrooms.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It is possible, and pedagogically sound, for ALL educators to design and implement more tailored learning within the prescribed curricular boundaries. Through embedded activities, this AR study provided a platform for all students – the voiced and voiceless – and for the LDI tutors to take heed of student voices in tailoring the programme to address students' specific needs whilst working within the constraints of an intensive programme. Consequently, this approach led to a more comprehensive understanding of students and their needs, deeper tutor-student and student-student rapport, opportunities for scaffolded reflections, and a more empathetic, supportive, and safe learning environment. This is not to suggest that all classroom teaching should be determined by students. While it is important to harness student voices, it is equally important for teachers to listen to their own voices and draw from their professional expertise and experience to determine what is best for students. And in their continuous striving to improve students' learning experience, teachers should endeavour to collaboratively enhance their teaching practices through AR.

## Appendix A. Day 1 and Day 5 reflective activities

### LDI Day 1 Reflection: Achievements and Challenges (BUS)

Reflect on the learning experiences you had in your last semester at university. As you are reflecting, you will probably think about your **learning experiences**:

- inside the classroom (e.g., **participating in tutorial/lecture/workshop activities; in-class group activities/discussions; individual or group presentations**); and/or
- outside the classroom (e.g., **working on your assessments; doing group work with your classmates; researching for an assessment; reading in preparation for class; accessing academic support; joining a UTS club or society**).

The responses below will be shared with your LDI Tutor (and LDI co-ordinators, if you are participating in the 2023 Research Project). Your tutor may refer to your responses to tailor the LDI program to better meet your academic needs.

Hi, Joseph. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

1. **Reflecting on your learning experiences, list three things you achieved in the last semester.**



Enter your answer

2. **Reflecting on your learning experiences, list three things that you found challenging in the last semester.**

Enter your answer

Send me an email receipt of my responses

 Microsoft 365

This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls [Create my own form](#)

[Privacy and cookies](#) | [Terms of use](#)

## LDI Day 5 Reflection: Achievements and Challenges (BUS)

On the first day of the LDI, you reflected on three achievements and three challenges from the previous semester. You should have a copy of your responses (if not, your tutor may have a copy).

Now, reflect on your learning experience over the last few days in the LDI, and answer the questions below.

Your responses below will be shared with your LDI Tutor (and LDI co-ordinators, if you are participating in the 2023 Research Project).

Hi, Joseph. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

1. **Looking back at the three challenges you identified in Day 1**, have you **learned** any skills or strategies to help you **overcome** these challenges? **Provide some concrete examples to illustrate what you have learned/developed.**

Enter your answer

2. **Looking back at the three achievements you identified in Day 1**, have you further developed **any** of these strengths? **Provide some concrete examples to illustrate what you have further developed.**

Enter your answer

3. What other skills or issues related to your learning that you'd like to learn about or develop further beyond this LDI?

Enter your answer

Send me an email receipt of my responses

 Microsoft 365

This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls [Create my own form](#)

[Privacy and cookies](#) | [Terms of use](#)

## Appendix B. Tutor's 5-day journal entries

### July 2023 LDI Tutor's Journal: Day One

The purpose of the tutor's journal is to record your daily reflections on how the *Day 1 Achievements and Challenges* students' activity has influenced your teaching practice in the LDI class.

Please take between 10-15 minutes at the end of each day to record your observation and reflections. This journal will only be accessed by the researchers (Gemma and Joseph). Any references to students and/or tutors will be de-identified and treated confidentially.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Gemma and/or Joseph via email or Teams Chat. Thank you for participating in this LDI Action Research project. We really appreciate it!

Hi, Joseph. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

#### Day One



1. Please reflect on the questions below. Feel free to include anything else of relevance that is not covered in these questions.

- Have you accessed your students' responses to the Day 1 Achievements & Challenges activity?
- What have you learned about your students in terms of their achievements and challenges?
- How do you plan to incorporate that knowledge in your LDI class?



Enter your answer



This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls: [Create my own form](#)

[Privacy and cookies](#) | [Terms of use](#)

## July 2023 LDI Tutor's Journal: Day Two

The purpose of the tutor's journal is to record your daily reflections on how the *Day 1 Achievements and Challenges* students' activity has influenced your teaching practice in the LDI class.

Please take between 10-15 minutes at the end of each day to record your observation and reflections. This journal will only be accessed by the researchers (Gemma and Joseph). Any references to students and/or tutors will be de-identified and treated confidentially.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Gemma and/or Joseph via email or Teams Chat. Thank you for participating in this LDI Action Research project. We really appreciate it!

Hi, Joseph. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

### Day Two



1. Please reflect on the questions below. Feel free to include anything else of relevance that is not covered in these questions.

- What did you cover in your LDI class today?
- How much was that influenced, if at all, by the knowledge about your students' achievements and challenges from the Day 1 activity?
- How did it go? What worked and what did not work?



Enter your answer



This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls [Create my own form](#)

[Privacy and cookies](#) | [Terms of use](#)

(Note: Day 3 and Day 4 are identical to Day 2.)

## July 2023 LDI Tutor's Journal: Day Five

The purpose of the tutor's journal is to record your daily reflections on how the *Day 1 Achievements and Challenges* students' activity has influenced your teaching practice in the LDI class.

Please take between 10-15 minutes at the end of each day to record your observation and reflections. This journal will only be accessed by the researchers (Gemma and Joseph). Any references to students and/or tutors will be de-identified and treated confidentially.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Gemma and/or Joseph via email or Teams Chat. Thank you for participating in this LDI Action Research project. We really appreciate it!

Hi, Joseph. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

### Day Five



1. Please reflect on the questions below. Feel free to include anything else of relevance that is not covered in these questions.

- What did you cover in your LDI class today?
- How much was that influenced, if at all, by the knowledge about your students' achievements and challenges from the Day 1 activity?
- How did it go? What worked and what did not work?



Enter your answer

2. Overall, what are your observations and reflections on the *Day 1 Achievements and Challenges* activity? You may wish to use the prompts below:

- Did the *Day 1 Achievements and Challenges* activity influence your lesson planning, classroom activities, and/or teaching approach and practice? If so, can you provide some examples?
- What were the challenges or limitations of this activity?
- Did the activity have any impact on your students' experience of the LDI? If so, can you provide some examples?
- Did the activity have any impact on your teaching experience of the LDI? If so, can you provide some examples?
- Is there any feedback/suggestions you would like to share with us?



Enter your answer



This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls [Create my own form](#)

[Privacy and cookies](#) | [Terms of use](#)

## References

- Arkoudis, S., Dollinger, M., Baik, C., & Patience, A. (2019). International students' experience in Australian higher education: Can we do better? *Higher Education*, 77(5), 799–813. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0302-x>
- Burns, A. (2005). Action research: An evolving paradigm? *Language Teaching*, 38(2), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444805002661>
- Burns, A., Edwards, E., & Ellis, N. J. (2022). *Sustaining action research: A practical guide for institutional engagement*. Routledge.
- Conner, J. O. (2022). Educators' experiences with student voice: How teachers understand, solicit, and use student voice in their classrooms. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 28(1), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.2016689>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: “Student voice” in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), 359–390. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2006.00363.x>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Tracing the evolution of student in voice in education research. In R. Bourke, & J. Loveridge (Eds.), *Radical collegiality through student voice: Educational experience, policy and practice* (pp. 17–38). Springer Singapore Pte Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1858-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1858-0_2)
- Cook-Sather, A., & Luz, A. (2015) Greater engagement in and responsibility for learning; what happens when students cross the threshold of student-faculty partnership. *Higher Education Research* 34(6), 1097–1109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.911263>
- Cook-Sather, A., & Matthews, K. E. (2023). Practising student voice in university teaching and learning: Three anchoring principles. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 20(6), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.20.6.2>
- Dixon, L., & O’Gorman V. (2020). “Block teaching” – exploring lecturers’ perceptions of intensive modes of delivery in the context of undergraduate education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(5), 583–595. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1564024>
- Edwards, E., Goldsmith, R., Havery, C., & James, N. (2021). An institution-wide strategy for ongoing, embedded academic language development: Design, implementation and analysis. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 15(1), 53–71. <https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/745>
- Gilde, C. (2023). Innovative scheduling: The intensive delivery of higher education. In N. Coburn & R. Derby-Talbot (Eds.), *The impacts of innovative institutions in higher education* (pp. 189–213). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38785-2\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38785-2_8)
- Goldsmith R., Havery, C., Edwards, E., James, N., Murphy, A., Mort, P., Nixon, D., O’Donoghue, G., Yang, J. S., & Yeo, J. (2022). A multi-faceted evaluation of the impact on students of an Australian university-wide academic language development program. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 60, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2022.101192>
- Kane, R. G., & Chimwayange, C. (2014). Teacher action research and student voice: Making sense of learning in secondary school. *Action Research*, 12(1), 52–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750313515282>
- Kemmis, S. (2009). Action research as a practice-based practice. *Educational Action Research*, 17(3), 463–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790903093284>
- Mack, L. (2012). Does every student have a voice? Critical action research on equitable classroom participation practice. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812436922>

- Malthus, C., & Widin, J. (2018). EAP: Imagining a new tertiary community. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 12(2), 75–87. <https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/503>
- Manca, S., Grion, V., Armellini, A., & Devecchi, C. (2017). Editorial: Student voice. Listening to students to improve education through digital technologies. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 48(5), 1075–1080. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12568>
- Mathews, K. E., & Dollinger, M. (2023). Student voice in higher education: The importance of distinguishing representation and student partnership. *Higher Education*, 85(3), 555–570. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00851-7>
- Mitchell, M., & Brodmerkel, S. (2021). Highly intensive teaching in tertiary education: A review of recent scholarship. In T. Neimann, J. Felix, S. Reeves & E. Shilakhovchuk (Eds.), *Stagnancy issues and change initiatives for global education in the digital age* (pp. 190–210). IGI Global.
- Olmos-Vega, F. M., Stalmeijer, R. E., Varpio, L., & Kahlke, R. (2023). A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE Guide No. 149. *Medical Teacher*, 45(3), 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>
- Parr, J., & Hawe, E. (2022). Student pedagogic voice in the literacy classroom: A review. *Research Papers in Education*, 37(6), 773–796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1864769>
- Sampson, R. (2012). The language-learning self, self-enhancement activities, and self-perceptual change. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 317–335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812436898>
- Song, H. (2019). Action research as a praxis for transformative teaching practice in ELT classrooms. *TESL Ontario Contact Magazine*, 45(3), 7–15. <https://contact.teslontario.org/action-research-as-a-praxis-for-transformative-teaching-practice-in-elt-classrooms/>
- Toshalis, E., & Nakkula, M. J. (2012). Motivation, engagement, and student voice. *The Education Digest*, 78(1), 29–35.
- Warwick, P., Vrikki, M., Færøyvik Karlsen, A. M., Dudley, P., & Vermunt, J. D. (2019). The role of pupil voice as a trigger for teacher learning in lesson study professional groups. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 49(4), 435–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2018.1556606>
- Wingate, U. (2018). *Academic literacy and student diversity: The case for inclusive practice*. Multilingual Matters.
- Yeo, J., & O'Donoghue, G. (2023). The effectiveness and transferability of a block-mode discipline-specific academic language development program. *Student Success*, 14(1), 82–88. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2489>
- Zhang, X. (2023). Democratizing the online materials-based classroom: What can student writers' voices offer? *RELC Journal*, 54(3), 744–756. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211032410>