How do Australian universities prepare pre-service teachers to teach EAL/D to multilingual learners in Australian classrooms?

Carly Steele, Julian Chen, Curtin University
Marisa Schiavi, Catholic Education Western Australia
Belinda Stewart, Cyril Jackson Senior Campus Western Australia (WATESOL)

October 2026

POLICY LANDSCAPE

Limited AITSL Standards

AITSL standards minimally address linguistic diversity with only one area for diverse learners.

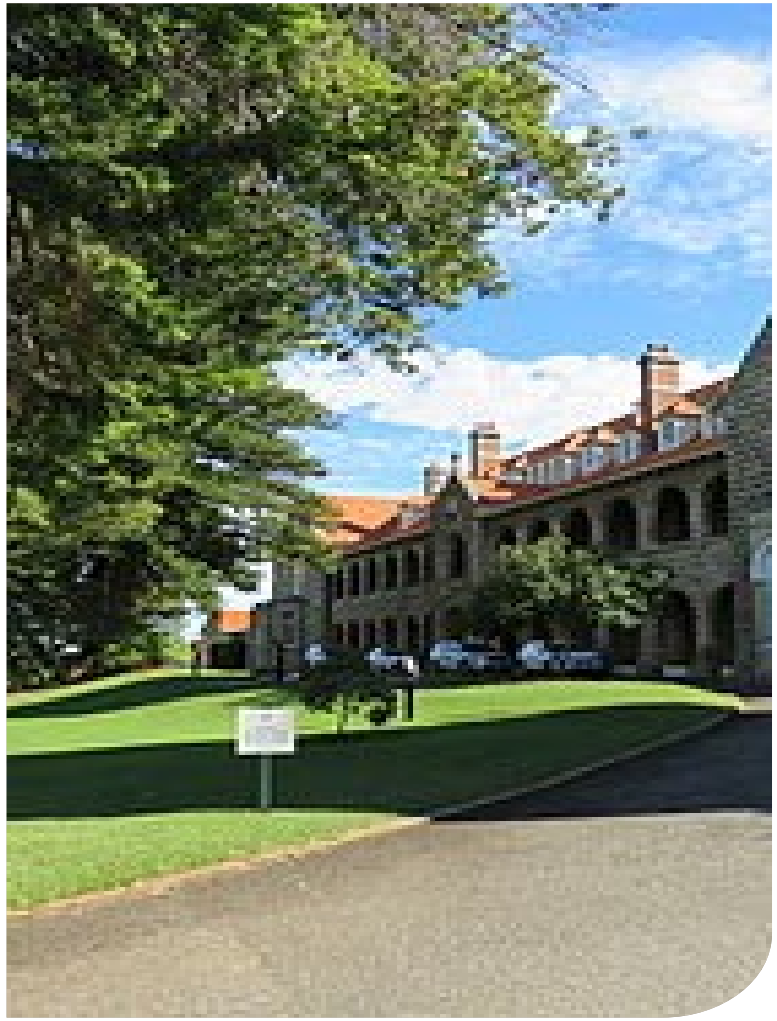
Unimplemented Training Recommendations

Parliamentary inquiries recommend mandatory EAL/D training, but these remain mostly unimplemented.

A BROKEN SYSTEM:
MULTIPLE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES THAT RECOMMEND

- "compulsory English as an Additional Language or Dialect training for all teaching degrees" (Australian Parliament House (APH) 2012, p. viii)
- "as a matter of urgency: English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) training be made a compulsory component for all teaching degrees" (APH, 2017, p. xvi)
- “as part of the new National School Reform Agreement … the Australian Government seek the agreement of the states and territories to require a proportionate number of qualified English as a second or additional language (TESOL) educators to be provided, on an ongoing basis, to the number of enrolled English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners in schools.” (APH 2022, p. xxiii)
- In response to the report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (Strong Beginnings, 2023) that responsive teaching, including for students who have English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) should form one of the four types of core content that “every teacher should learn in ITE to be prepared for the classroom and best support students” (p. 9)

WHAT DO INDUSTRY PARTNERS SAY?



Marisa Schiavi

Catholic Education Western Australia

WATESOL

WESTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Belinda Stewart, WATESOL

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Model

The model emphasizes recognition of cultural backgrounds and redistribution of educational resources. Study framed by social justice emphasizing equitable education for multilingual learners.

PART 1 AUDIT COMPONENT

Scope

215 ITE degrees at 37 Australian universities covering 2024 to 2025 programs.

Criteria

Universities that included one mandatory unit on EAL/D learning and teaching EAL/D/TESOL specialisations were included as elective units

.

Unit Categorisation & Parameters

- Units classified into EAL/D, applied linguistics, and linguistic diversity categories.
- 3 key parameters: Strong evidence/Some evidence/Very little evidence of responding to EAL/D learners.

Data Collection

Data gathering involved complex website navigation and verification through peer debriefing.

Significance

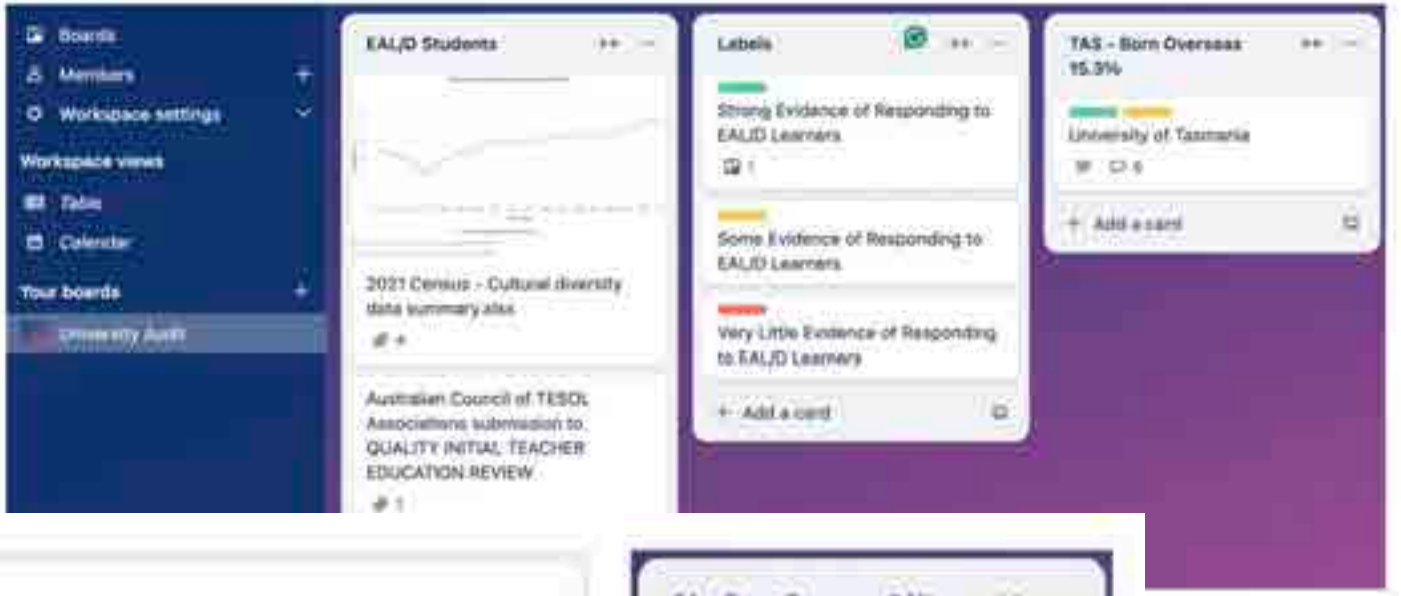
Baseline for EAL/D preparation in ITE and informs future qualitative research.

AUDIT- HOW TO DECIDE WHAT COUNTED AS AN EAL/D LEARNING AND TEACHING UNIT?

Name	Level	Description	Inclusion/exclusion criteria	Examples	Considerations
EAL/D units	1	These units explicitly and solely focused on EAL/D learners and learning and teaching strategies to support multilingual learners in the classroom.	Explicitly references EAL/D learning and teaching in the unit's name or description. Includes variations of this term, such as "English language learners", "learning of standard Australian English" and "second language learners".	"Teaching EAL/D learners" (Queensland University of Technology), "Teaching English language learners" (Central Queensland University).	It was not always evident from the unit's name, and it was sometimes only through an evaluation of the unit content that the EAL/D learner focus became clear. For example, "Intercultural communication in the Early Years" (University of Southern Queensland) and "Literacies Learning in Diverse Contexts" (University of Southern Queensland).
Applied Linguistics units	2	These units drew on content from the fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistics, language and literacy which is relevant for teachers of EAL/D learners but is not focused on EAL/D learners.	Does not explicitly reference EAL/D learning and teaching but does have a focus on language. Where EAL/D learners were referenced, they were not the primary focus of the unit. This applied when it was a professional experience unit (teaching practicum) and/or references to EAL/D learners were prefaced with phrases such as "as well as", "also considered" "in addition" and "that include".	"How Languages Work: Linguistics and the Structure of Language" (University of Newcastle), "Plurilingual Pedagogies and Dialogic Reading" (University of New England), "Diverse Literacies" (University of Western Sydney)	There was a focus on language development, language acquisition, literacy development as well as how language works including language analysis across the five levels of language. There was a tendency toward these units being part of the course's literacy units and may tend to focus on language and literacy development in first language contexts with some consideration given to additional languages. Or they were units with linguistics or TESOL codes, or in some cases subject English codes that were broader in content.
Language diversity units	3	These units focused on diverse learners or learner diversities which included diverse linguistic/ language backgrounds.	Explicitly references linguistic diversity – or diverse language backgrounds but does not extend beyond this.	"Inclusive Teaching for Diverse Learners" (Queensland University of Technology), "Responding to Diversity and Inclusion" (Central Queensland University)	It was clear that these units were designed to meet AITSL Focus Area 1.3: Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, and in fact, this sentence was replicated word-for-word in many of these units making them easy to classify.

- publicly available unit description which varied greatly from a couple of paragraphs to a few sentences (and in one case – a single sentence!)
- impossible to comment on the quality of the units and we could only categorise them based on what the unit descriptions and outcomes stated would be achieved.
- judged the focus on EAL/D learners and learning and teaching strategies.

AUDIT CODING EXAMPLES



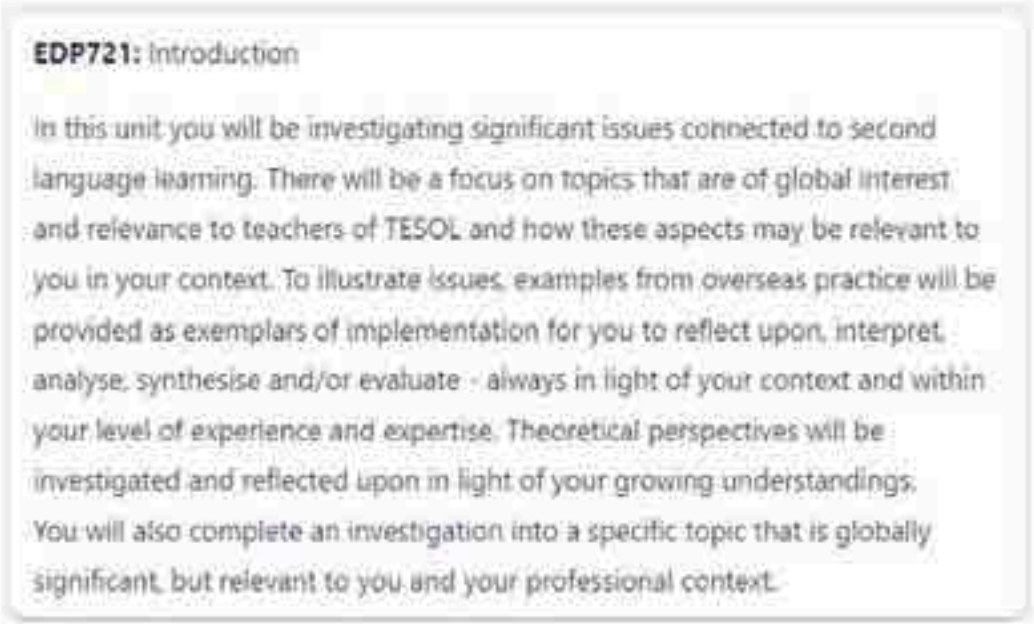


Figure 2. *Coding example: ITE courses and related units (left), a unit description (middle), and universities in South Australia (right).*

AUDIT CHALLENGES

Difficult and time-consuming:

- the university websites were not easy to navigate, and it often involved a search spanning multiple webpages.

Information unavailable online or inconsistent:

- Ex: the Bachelor of Primary education degree offered by the University of Sydney is not included in the data set, but the other ITE degrees offered by this university are.

*We will not be able to include any information that we receive today that is not publicly available due to this search criteria.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

AUDIT FINDINGS SUMMARY

Table 2. *EAL/D learning and teaching units by Australian university.*

University	Core EAL/D units	Elective EAL/D units	No EAL/D units offered
University of Tasmania		3	
Australian Catholic University		3	
University of Canberra	3	1	
Charles Darwin University	1	5	
Flinders University		4	
University of Adelaide		2	
University of South Australia		10	
University of Western Australia		1	
University of Notre Dame		1	
Edith Cowan University	1	1	
Curtin University			x
Murdoch University			x
Griffith University		1	
University of Southern Queensland	2		
University of the Sunshine Coast			x
Queensland University of Technology	2		
James Cook University	2		
Central Queensland University	1		
University of Queensland	1		
Federation University Australia			x
Monash University			x

AUDIT FINDINGS SUMMARY (CONT'D)

Deakin University			x
Latrobe University	1	1	
Victoria University	1	3	
Swinburne University	1		
University of Melbourne		3	
RMIT University	1	2	
Southern Cross University			x
Charles Sturt University	1		
University of Wollongong	1		
University of Technology Sydney	3		
Western Sydney University	1	2	
University of Sydney	2	4	
Macquarie University			x
University of Newcastle		4	
University of New England	2	2	
University of New South Wales		2	
TOTALS	**18 universities** (27 units)	**20 universities** (55 units)	**8 universities**

Table 3. *EAL/D learning and teaching units by ITE degree course and specialisation.*

Degree Type / Course	University ITE Degrees	Core EAL/D Units	Core Applied Linguistics Units	Core Linguistic Diversity Units	Elective EAL/D Units	Elective Applied Linguistics Units	Elective Linguistic Diversity Units
Combined	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
B.Science/Art and M. Secondary	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Undergraduate	**117**	**30**	**30**	**33**	**41**	**25**	**6**
Birth to 5 Years	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
ECE	24	7	4	7	2	1	1
ECE and Primary	13	1	7	5	1	0	1
Primary	35	11	10	9	11	2	3
Primary and Secondary	9	3	7	2	4	1	0
Secondary	34	7	2	10	23	21	1
Postgraduate	**97**	**12**	**19**	**17**	**27**	**5**	**1**
Birth to 5 Years	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
ECE	14	1	0	3	0	0	0
ECE and Primary	6	2	3	0	0	2	0
Primary	34	5	9	6	4	2	0
Primary and Secondary	2	0	3	1	0	0	0
Religious Education	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary	36	4	4	7	23	1	1
Special and Inclusive Education	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**215**	**42**	**49**	**50**	**68**	**30**	**7**

FINDINGS

- There are more core EAL/D learning and teaching units in undergraduate degrees, compared with postgraduate degrees (26% vs. 12%, respectively), and more in Primary Education courses (23%), than ECE (21%) and Secondary Education (16%) courses.

- For undergraduate degrees, the number of core EAL/D units (n=30) is slightly less than the number of core linguistic diversity units (n=33), which means that approximately 26% of university ITE degrees offer EAL/D learning beyond the minimum requirement of the AITSL standards (Focus Area 1.3) whereas 28% of university ITE degrees follow this benchmark (i.e., the Linguistic Diversity units) and 26% are providing what we have categorised as core Applied Linguistics units (n=30).

- For postgraduate degrees core applied linguistics units are the dominant type of unit offered, 20% compared with 12% for core EAL/D and 17.5% for linguistic diversity units.

- That there are little to no elective Linguistic Diversity units points to the creation of these units specifically to meet the AITSL standards Focus Area 1.3: Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, which as a requirement of accreditation are therefore, core units.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Systemic Gaps in Preparation

Many universities lack consistent EAL/D unit content across initial teacher education degrees.

Monolingual Ideologies

Mainstream subjects are prioritised, reflecting entrenched monolingual views and accreditation limits.

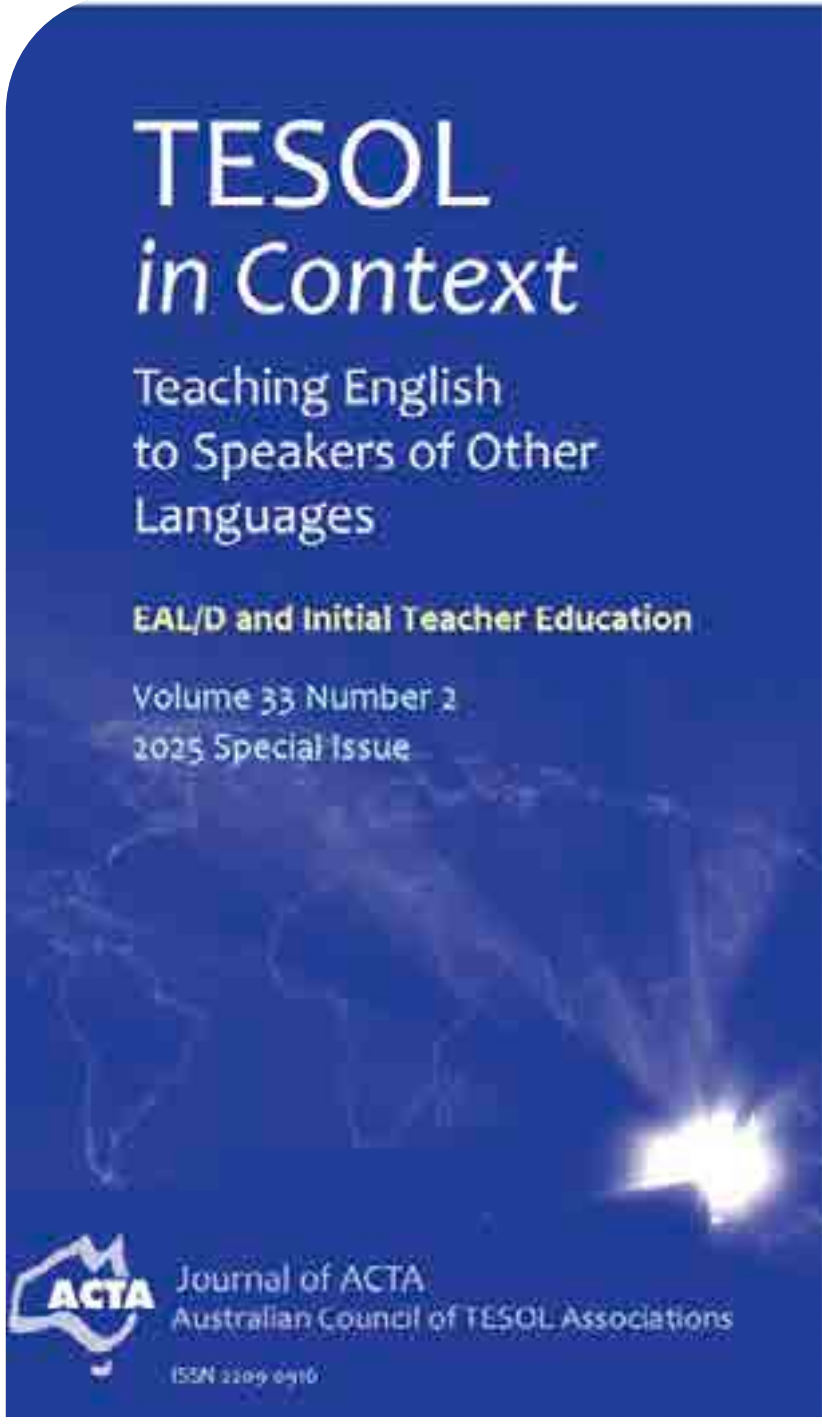
Social Justice Issue

Marginalising EAL/D learners denies them equitable education access and opportunities.

Call for Responsive Pedagogies

Shift educational priorities to value linguistic and cultural diversity in teaching practices.

PUBLICATION

- Steele, C., Chen, J., Andreassen, K., Dobinson, T., Dryden, S., Veliz, L., … & Stewart, B. (2025). *To what extent do Australian universities offer dedicated units to prepare pre-service teachers to support EAL/D learners?*. *TESOL in Context*, *33*(2).

https://doi.org/10.21153/tesol2025vol33no2art2108