

# Generation 1.5 and Academic Libraries: Strategies for Supporting English Learners (ELs) in Reference and Instruction

Megan Margino Marchese

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## Article abstract

**Background** – Compared to native English speakers, English Learners (ELs) often face additional barriers to academic success. Though typically competent in social English, Generation 1.5 ELs struggle with academic English at the postsecondary level and are still considered to be in the process of learning English. As colleges become increasingly linguistically diverse, academic librarians must adapt to support the growing numbers of ELs in the campus community.

**Objective** – This paper aims to provide academic librarians with information on the scope of English Learners in K-12 through postsecondary education, academic challenges of Generation 1.5 students at the postsecondary level, and strategies that librarians can employ to support English learners in the contexts of reference and instruction.

**Methods** – The author searched journals in the disciplines of academic libraries, higher education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and linguistics. Additional resources searched include education data and statistics, research institute publications, and English as a New Language (ENL) teaching resources. These sources were explored in regard to the topics of EL educational statistics, K-12 ENL programs, ENL pedagogy, ELs in postsecondary education, Generation 1.5 students, ELs' academic challenges and educational needs, and academic libraries and ELs.

**Results** – A review of the literature on ELs in academic libraries, particularly Generation 1.5 students, reveals that Generation 1.5 is a population that is in need of support at the postsecondary level. Because Generation 1.5 students often hold strong social English skills, they may enter college without an EL designation or specialized academic support. However, research shows that Generation 1.5 students struggle with college-level academic English, specifically in grammar and vocabulary. These challenges impact students' communicative success both in college classroom and library environments.

**Conclusion** – Academic librarians may adopt pedagogical strategies commonly employed in ENL classrooms to use in reference and instruction environments. Techniques include themes such as awareness of language use and reinforcement of content, and require low-stakes implementation into library practice. Though librarians may be unaware of the language learning needs of their students, such strategies have shown to be useful for all students. Because techniques that are helpful to ELs also typically benefit all students, these strategies are also applicable to native English speakers.

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*Review Article*

**Generation 1.5 and Academic Libraries: Strategies for Supporting English Learners (ELs) in Reference and Instruction**

Megan Margino Marchese  
Reference and Instruction Librarian  
Farmingdale State College  
Farmingdale, New York, United States  
Email: [megan.marchese@farmingdale.edu](mailto:megan.marchese@farmingdale.edu)

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## Introduction

Despite growing numbers of English Learner (EL) students across the United States, academic librarians are often unaware of best practices in working with students whose native language is not English (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Across the United States, 10.2% of public school K-12 students are enrolled as English Learners (ELs). In most areas of the country, the number of EL students is increasing each year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), and the National Education Association (2020) projects that 25% of K-12 students throughout the United States will be ELs by 2025. These statistics suggest that institutions of higher education will also be impacted by the continued growth of the language learner population in future years.

In the K-12 environment in the United States, ELs receive language assistance programs to help them attain English proficiency. In higher education settings, EL support is dependent upon the characteristics of the language learner. Outside of K-12, Bergey et al. (2018) assert that ELs may be considered in three categories: international students, recent immigrants, and Generation 1.5 students. The Generation 1.5

designation comprises young people who are U.S.-born children of immigrants, individuals who immigrated to the United States as children, or those who were raised in environments where English is not the primary language of the home and community (Huster, 2012). While college-level English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the United States are often designated for international students and recent immigrants, Generation 1.5 ELs are not typically in language support programs at the college level. This is because Generation 1.5 attended K-12 schools in the United States and they are often proficient in social English. However, while Generation 1.5 students are competent in conversational communication, they may still struggle with academic English and can be challenged by academic tasks at the college level (Asher et al., 2009; Bergey et al., 2018; di Gennaro, 2008; Haras et al., 2008; Harklau, 2003; Huster, 2012; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012).

## Aims

There is currently limited research on best practices for working with Generation 1.5 ELs in academic libraries, particularly concerning

strategies for supporting Generation 1.5 through reference and instruction practices. This paper aims to apply research conducted in the areas of K-12 EL pedagogy and ELs in higher education to the context of academic libraries. Specifically, this paper will explore how academic librarians in reference and instruction settings can employ strategies that are beneficial to ELs while simultaneously supporting all students.

## **Methods**

The author of this paper conducted a literature review in disciplines related to academic libraries, higher education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and linguistics. Databases searched include EBSCOhost Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text, EBSCOhost Education Source, EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Education Database, ProQuest Research Library, and ERIC. The author also searched the PRIMO Discovery Service via Farmingdale State College, Google Scholar, and online resources published by ENL and ESL educators. Insight on United States federal data pertaining to ELs was gathered through the U.S. Census Bureau, research organizations such as the American Institutes for Research, the Migration Policy Institute, and United States education associations. Consistent terminology was used in searching across platforms through utilizing combinations of the following search terms: English Language Learners, English Learners, English as a New Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL), Generation 1.5, international students, academic libraries, reference, information literacy instruction, higher education, K-12 education, pedagogy, teaching methodology, teaching strategies, teaching techniques, and academic challenges. Backward citation searching was used to explore major researchers in the field of Generation 1.5, the evolution of the Generation 1.5 definition, trends in U.S.-based EL pedagogy over time, historical legal protections for ELs in the United States, and changing EL terminology. Forward citation

searching was also used to discover the most recent available research on these topics.

Further, the author's institution, Farmingdale State College, a technology college in the State University of New York (SUNY) system, acts as an example institution to investigate the availability of postsecondary statistics maintained on non-native English speakers, offerings of language support programs, and general academic support prerequisites. This institution is located on Long Island, New York, and serves approximately 10,000 students primarily at the undergraduate level, including 47% of students from minority populations largely from Long Island and the New York City area (Farmingdale State College, n.d.-a; Farmingdale State College, n.d.-b).

The research process began by exploring journal articles on general strategies for supporting English Language Learners in academic libraries. Through the review process, the term Generation 1.5 revealed itself to be both relevant to the diverse composition of the author's institution and in need of further consideration in regard to academic libraries. At the time of this writing, journal articles that focused on Generation 1.5 students in academic libraries were primarily targeted toward students' perceptions of libraries and their library space usage. A review of the literature revealed a lack of resources with a specific focus on methodology for supporting Generation 1.5 ELs in academic library reference and instruction contexts. The author's background holding a Master of Arts in TESOL and serving as a Reference and Instruction Librarian lent itself to search a range of resources including journals, reports, and educator-based online publications in the fields of academic libraries, TESOL, linguistics, higher education, K-12 education, and United States education data.

Resources included as references in this paper provided information in one or more of the following areas: Generation 1.5 students and academic libraries; academic librarian EL-based

pedagogy; Generation 1.5 students in higher education; the history of ELs in United States K-12 education; Generation 1.5 students' academic and linguistic challenges; ELs' transition experiences from high school to college; EL pedagogical strategies that can be applied in academic library contexts; and United States EL statistics.

Resources that were examined in the literature review process, but were ultimately excluded from this article include the following categories: research on international students in higher education that does not pertain to Generation 1.5 ELs; United States K-12 teaching pedagogy that is not applicable for academic libraries; technical linguistics research that is not suitable for academic library audiences; EL-based research that does not provide practical teaching applications; and New York-specific EL statistics. Searching the literature through the above methods resulted in the emergence of several themes presented in this paper which are organized to highlight the importance of language learner identification in United States K-12 education, Generation 1.5 students' academic challenges, and EL-based pedagogy that is applicable to academic libraries.

## Results

A review of the literature resulted in the emergence of several major themes surrounding the identification of ELs in K-12 education compared to that of postsecondary education, and the academic support differences typically received at each level. Through exploring ELs' academic needs, it is evident that Generation 1.5 students are an underserved population that is often challenged by academic language at the college level, despite their appearance of social language proficiency. These academic challenges include all forms of academic communication, such as grammar and vocabulary, which impact students' success in the college classroom and also extends to library usage.

## *Identifying English Learners in K-12 education*

In the K-12 environment, United States schools are federally mandated to provide ELs with equal access to the curriculum through linguistic and academic support (Nunez et al., 2016). While this support is a federal requirement in the United States, individual states and school districts have the autonomy to (1) establish the processes for identifying ELs who need linguistic support, (2) manage the level of support provided over time, and (3) determine when students no longer need support (Nunez et al., 2016). For example, in New York State, support for ELs and multilingual learners include programs such as (1) English as a New Language (ENL), where instruction is primarily in English using specific ENL instructional strategies, and, (2) Bilingual Education (BE), which provides instruction in both English and students' native language to varying degrees (New York State Education Department, n.d.). In the United States, many schools use standardized test scores on English language proficiency tests to decide whether a student needs linguistic support and should be classified as an EL. The EL students who score at grade level on standardized academic assessments may meet state criteria to lose their EL classification and change their status to Reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) (Nunez et al., 2016). This reclassification means that EL students lose access to specialized language support services (Sugarman, 2018). In theory, the reclassification signifies that students who were formerly considered ELs are no longer in need of language and academic support. However, Nunez et al. (2016) argue that while these reclassified students would theoretically no longer need English support, in reality, many RFEP students "are not truly 'fluent English proficient' nor sufficiently academically prepared to be self-sufficient in the mainstream classroom" (p. 58). Achieving a predetermined academic threshold sufficient to exit a K-12 ENL program is not necessarily indicative of full English proficiency; students who were formerly classified as ELs might not

be at comparable language and academic levels compared to their non-EL peers. This notion indicates that United States ELs, including ELs who have achieved grade-level test scores, are at risk for being underprepared to succeed in mainstream K-12 classes, and subsequently in college.

### *Identifying English Learners in Postsecondary Education*

Research shows that ELs in the United States are often underprepared in regard to college readiness and ELs' postsecondary outcomes are lower than those of native English speakers (Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Nunez et al., 2016; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). While Kanno and Cromley (2015) found that 45% of native English speakers attend four-year colleges, only 35% of English-proficient EL students and 19% of all ELs advance to four-year colleges following graduation. It is more common for ELs to attend community college, though ELs' degree completion rates are lower than those of community college students in general (Nunez et al., 2016). In terms of six-year college degree completion, one in eight ELs completed a college degree in this time frame compared with one in three non-EL students (Bergey et al., 2018). However, data on the transition of ELs from high school to postsecondary education in the United States is limited.

Because students' EL status is not a permanent label, the fluidity of this group lends difficulty to tracking a cohort of language learners over time (Sugarman, 2018). In the United States, there is no long-term coordination between identifying ELs in K-12 schools and later at the college level. Longitudinal data is needed to assess long-term language skills; however, federal data sets have limited data on language (Nunez et al., 2016). EL status is often measured in different ways according to different jurisdictions and other data pose challenges in generalizing outside of specific geographic areas (Nunez et al., 2016). This lack of coordinated longitudinal data between ELs in high school and college results

in difficulty identifying and assessing EL students who were formerly in a K-12 ENL program, as their EL or RFEP status no longer exists at the postsecondary level (Nunez et al., 2016).

While institutions of higher education usually collect demographic data such as race, ethnicity, and first-generation college student status, they typically do not systematically collect data about language background and progress toward language proficiency (Bergey et al., 2018). For example, the SUNY System asks applicants "is English your native language?" However, because this was not a required question on the application, the data on this topic is incomplete. For example, of the Fall 2020 applicants at Farmingdale State College, 66% left this question blank (Farmingdale State College Office of Institutional Research, personal communication March 22, 2021).

Most four-year institutions require students to demonstrate a certain level of English proficiency (Bergey et al., 2018). Though EL students' English skills might be at levels high enough for college acceptance, they still may benefit from specialized EL support at the college level. However, there is no state or federal guidance to determine how ELs should be "assessed, monitored, and served in colleges and universities" (Bergey et al., 2018, p. 7). There are also no legal requirements for the academic support services that ELs' receive in K-12 schools to extend to postsecondary education. Institutions of higher education make their own decisions about whether and how to identify students who come to their institutions with limited English skills. At the postsecondary level, EL identification is not standardized and language learners might be identified by a number of standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) Reading Test, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), College Board's ACCUPLACER, the America College Testing (ACT) COMPASS placement test, or in-house placement tests (Nunez et al., 2016). Based on the results of test

scores such as these, linguistic and academic support may be provided to postsecondary ELs in a number of ways.

Some institutions require students to complete non-degree English as a Second Language (ESL) courses prior to or alongside their participation in regular academic courses (Bergey et al., 2018). However, not all colleges and universities offer ESL courses or programs. Schools may also offer other types of developmental courses which are often non-credit and not applicable to a degree, but are required in order to advance to credit-bearing courses. At Farmingdale State College, students are required to pass English 097: Basic Writing Skills if they do not achieve a certain score on the writing or reading sections of the SAT or ACT, or if they do not pass an English department diagnostic exam on the first day of English 101 Composition: College Writing, a required course for all students (Farmingdale State College Course Catalog, 2020-2021). Nunez et al. (2016) note that four-year colleges may be moving towards integrating language with writing instruction by recognizing the need to “take responsibility for the regular presence of second language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs” (p. 67).

Aside from developmental courses that postsecondary institutions might require, college students are primarily responsible for addressing their own linguistic challenges. While K-12 schools are legally required to provide ELs with linguistic support, there is no such requirement at the college level and this responsibility instead shifts to the students themselves (Nunez et al., 2016). Additionally, some ELs, particularly Generation 1.5 ELs, might score high enough on standardized exams to determine that they are language proficient and they are not placed in any type of support program at the college level. However, Generation 1.5 students often struggle to perform at the same academic level as native

English speakers. Research shows that even students who were formerly in a K-12 program and were Reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) do not necessarily have the English skills needed for academic success at the college level (Nunez et al., 2016; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012).

### *Generation 1.5 Students*

Coined by Rumbaut and Ima (1988), the term Generation 1.5 was first used to describe children born outside the United States who hovered between the traditional definitions of first-generation and second-generation immigrants. This term has evolved over time and Roberge (2002) argues for a definition of Generation 1.5 that encompasses young people who were born in the United States in addition to those who immigrated to the United States at a young age. Further, Huster (2012) emphasizes that the Generation 1.5 designation includes individuals who (1) immigrated to the United States as children, (2) are U.S.-born children of immigrants, or (3) were raised in environments where English is not the primary language of the home and community. Many Generation 1.5 students do not identify as ESL students upon entering postsecondary education because they are native-born, or because they have spent a great deal of their lives in the United States and have received much of their K-12 education in the United States (Bergey et al., 2018; Haras et al., 2008).

Roughly one in five children in the United States lives in a home where a language other than English is spoken (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey reports that 72% of public school students ages 5 to 17 who report speaking English “less than very well” were born in the United States (Bialik et al., 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). These students attended schools in the United States from a young age or throughout their entire lives. Because English is not the primary language spoken at home or in the community, Generation 1.5 ELs are likely to

have been part of linguistic support programs at some point in the K-12 public school system (Huster, 2012). Throughout their time in English-language schools, most ELs develop strong conversational English skills. However, while Generation 1.5 ELs appear fully conversant in American English and culture, they are still in the process of learning English when they enter college and face a variety of academic English challenges (Asher et al., 2009; di Gennaro 2008; Haras et al., 2008; Huster, 2012). Despite their participation in K-12 U.S. schools, many Generation 1.5 students still need support to meet the demands of academic English required at the postsecondary level (Bergey et al., 2018).

### ***Understanding Academic Challenges Faced by Generation 1.5***

#### *Academic English*

ELs can develop communicative proficiency in social English within two years of participating in an English-speaking school setting (Gonzalez, 2016). In contrast, developing academic language proficiency is a long and gradual process, sometimes taking up to ten years to master (Gonzalez, 2016; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Communicative language includes everyday language needed for basic conversation that may be accomplished with a vocabulary of up to 5,000 words. In comparison, a native English-speaking high school graduate might have a vocabulary of about 18,000 word families (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Roessingh and Douglas (2012) explain that academic language demands “abstract uses of language that require language itself to interpret and comprehend” (p. 291). College-level reading and writing assignments often include academic and technical language that can prove to be difficult even for native English speakers. If Generation 1.5 students have not fully mastered academic English, they are likely to face reading and writing challenges in college. The discrepancy of appearing to be fluent while facing certain academic difficulties might result in instructors’

reaction of judgment towards students and a lack of understanding their need for extra support.

#### *Academic Language Stigma*

Generation 1.5 students may also feel embarrassed and disappointed in their English ability, particularly for the purposes of college writing and participating in the college classroom (Huster, 2012). Huster’s (2012) study of Generation 1.5 revealed that these students often exhibit deviations from Standard English. Though the meaning of their communication was usually clear, the students felt that grammar and vocabulary errors limited their ability to fully participate in class and stigmatized them as “nonnative, foreign – or even worse as uneducated, or unintelligent” (Huster, 2012, p. 21). Roessingh and Douglas (2012) found that students’ self-reported level of spoken English might not reflect the level of academic English needed for postsecondary education and these struggles might not become evident to students until reaching college. In particular, one student in Huster’s (2012) study did not feel limited by her English ability in high school, but began to feel “awkward and unprepared” once attempting to participate in college classes (p. 18). This may be partially due to ELs’ K-12 educational experiences.

#### *ELs’ Educational Background*

ELs in the United States are more likely to have attended an under-resourced school compared to native English-speaking classmates and are more likely to have received insufficient instructional support (Asher et al., 2009; Bergey et al., 2018). Further, ELs are more likely to have been tracked into low-level courses that do not prepare them for college (Bergey et al., 2018; Haras et al., 2008; Nunez et al., 2016; Roberge, 2002). ELs are underrepresented in high-level academic courses in middle school and high school and Nunez et al. (2016) argue that students’ EL status in K-12 education acts as a barrier to access to AP college preparatory



courses. This “limited access to rigorous curricula perpetuates a cycle of low achievement” (Nunez et al., 2016, p. 65). Students placed in lower-ability courses in high school had little experience with academic writing and were socialized into literary practices that were different from those used in higher track courses (Harklau, 2003). Such high school tracking practices may heighten the challenges that Generation 1.5 students experience in college, as work that was once deemed acceptable is now held to a higher standard.

### *Specific Academic Struggles*

Generation 1.5 students often struggle with academic reading and writing and the overall demands of college coursework due to a host of factors (Bergey et al., 2018). These students have limited literacy in their first language, lack fully developed oral or written systems of their first language, and may be at risk for losing their first language. Unlike international students, Generation 1.5 often did not learn a writing system in their first language (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Roessingh and Douglas (2012) compared ELs to native speakers by profiling excerpts of assigned first-year college readings and other coursework. While EL students were found to be academically competent and showed high math scores, their reading levels were lower than native speakers. Though able to effectively convey their meaning through verbal and written communication, Huster’s (2012) research shows that Generation 1.5 students commonly use grammatical and vocabulary errors. Because postsecondary education places a high value on academic language proficiency, such as advanced reading ability, independent library research, group work, and presentation skills, ELs’ difficulty in these areas may negatively impact their success (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012).

### *Grammar*

Generation 1.5 ELs often deviated from

Standard American English by using irregular forms of nouns and verbs, grammatical inconsistencies with non-count nouns, and subject-verb agreement errors, present in both their writing and speech (Huster, 2012). The participants in Huster’s (2012) study attended K-12 United States schools for their entire education and did not have a distinctive pronunciation or accent. However, they did show language pattern alterations related to English morphology (the way words are constructed, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes), and syntax (the arrangement of words into phrases and sentences). Sample errors are italicized below:

Generation 1.5 ELs may show errors in grammatical structure such as past tense, plural forms, and whether words are regular or irregular (Harklau, 2003), e.g.: “we *seeked* for a higher education” (Huster, 2012, p. 12). Another variation example includes noncount nouns, which are nouns that cannot be counted, e.g. “my older sister will call me... and ask me for *advices*” (Huster, 2012, p. 13). Further, Generation 1.5 showed difficulty in subject-verb agreement (Harklau, 2003), e.g. “I love to help those... families that *doesn’t* speak English. It makes me happy knowing that I can be a middle man for those that *needs* translating” (Huster, 2012, p. 13).

### *Vocabulary*

Huster (2012) also found that Generation 1.5 ELs were frustrated with the limitations of their vocabulary and felt that this impacted their ability to perform academically. Even though Generation 1.5 students have been exposed to academic vocabulary throughout their time in United States schools, they have not necessarily mastered that vocabulary. Huster’s (2012) study revealed that the participants sometimes had difficulty answering questions posed by the researcher because they did not understand a word in the question. This problematic gap in vocabulary also occurs in classroom contexts and can significantly affect ELs’ writing and

their ability to effectively participate in class. One student in Huster's (2012) study revealed dissatisfaction with her range of vocabulary, noting: "I frustrate often at finding the right word" (p. 15). Another student expressed the following acknowledgement:

"I don't feel like I have a big enough vocabulary cause I guess just hearing other people talk with you, they use a lot of big words. Sometimes when people speak out in classes, like other students or my peers, there's some times I don't know what they mean because I've never heard [the words] before. Or like I've heard of it, but I don't remember the definition or what it actually means" (Huster, 2012, p. 16).

#### *Lack of Sufficient Support*

Though Generation 1.5 students' meaning was generally clear in their verbal and written communication, obvious surface errors are present and are likely to have a negative impact in postsecondary coursework. ELs' writing may exhibit less fluency (fewer words), less accuracy (more errors), and less effectiveness (lower holistic scores) (di Gennaro, 2008). Bergey et al. (2018) argue that K-12 ENL programs need to provide students with increased academic writing instruction that can be applied to real life academic and professional contexts beyond high school. Ideally receiving instruction that differs from the content and methods used for international or immigrant students, Generation 1.5 would benefit from targeted instruction that is personalized to their proficiency levels (Bergey et al., 2018). However, while scaffolding supports are present in high school, they are absent at the college level and many Generation 1.5 ELs are unidentified as language learners who are tackling college-level coursework. ELs' easily noticeable errors noted by Huster (2012) may be bothersome to college-level instructors, particularly those who do not have background knowledge of ELs. It is common for students to encounter teachers who lack training in how to work with ELs and who are unaware of their

specific needs, and this may negatively impact students' college performance (Harklau, 2003).

The aforementioned reasons illustrate why ELs, including students who were formerly classified as EL, may benefit from specialized strategies and pedagogical techniques known to help language learners. As academic libraries are entities of support on college campuses, it is beneficial for librarians to be familiar with the EL community, including potential challenges they may face and strategies to support them in their transition to postsecondary education.

#### *Generation 1.5 and Academic Libraries*

Because Generation 1.5 ELs are proficient in social English, librarians might be unaware of students' academic English skills. Further, as this student population is largely unidentified at the college level, academic librarians might also be unaware of the overall needs of Generation 1.5 students. While limited research has been conducted on Generation 1.5 students and academic libraries, Asher et al. (2009) found that they attached greater value to the library facilities compared to non-Generation 1.5 students. Generation 1.5 students reported that the library's physical space was important to them because it allows for unstructured social learning and provides the technology they need for coursework, even if they had the technology they needed at home (Asher et al., 2009). However, while Generation 1.5 ELs are strong users of library spaces, they may still face difficulties conducting library research and seeking the help they need in libraries.

#### *Library-Specific Challenges*

While some students' information literacy skills are primarily developed at the K-12 level (Haras et al., 2008), not all students are equipped with a background of familiarity and confidence using libraries. Because ELs in the United States often attend under-resourced K-12 schools in non-college preparatory classes, they may not have had experience using a school library or

searching databases prior to entering college. Haras et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of high school librarians working with classes to teach them the research process and prepare them for what is expected in college, though students do not always have these opportunities. For example, an information literacy class taught at Farmingdale State College may yield student feedback showing that some students learned how to search databases in high school while others did not.

ELs who lack knowledge of academic libraries and the research process may also lack the confidence needed to seek assistance from librarians. Compared to native English-speaking students, ELs tend to have higher library anxiety in communicating with librarians and using libraries (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). Generation 1.5 was also reported to be less confident in using electronic resources (Asher et al., 2009). While it can be difficult for any student, even native speakers, to admit they do not know something, ELs' language challenges often result in a lack of confidence to advocate for themselves in regard to the help they need to succeed. This hesitation may preclude them from approaching the reference desk or asking a question in an information literacy class.

As Huster's (2012) study showed, Generation 1.5 students can easily misunderstand a word in a conversation. These vocabulary gaps may contribute to students' potential confusion during a reference interaction or during an information literacy class. Adding to their lack of confidence, information literacy classes also often involve vocabulary with which ELs may be unfamiliar. A major aspect of database searching includes selecting keywords, a task that becomes increasingly difficult as one's vocabulary range decreases. In addition to experiencing difficulty selecting keywords, ELs might be challenged by other database-related language uses such as using plural forms, synonyms, and correct spelling. Such factors can limit students' effectiveness in searching (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). Librarians'

awareness of these common challenges that Generation 1.5 ELs face enables them to better provide support to this student population.

## Discussion

### *Strategies for Supporting Generation 1.5*

Academic librarians have the ability to recognize and address these challenges by understanding the needs of the EL community and adopting EL-specific strategies into daily interactions with students. Librarians can employ a variety of strategies both at the reference desk and in information literacy classes to support EL students. These methods can be used to reinforce content for students and establish rapport with students, both of which are key to helping the EL student community. As it is generally difficult to recognize Generation 1.5 students due to their proficient social English skills, their possible lack of an accent, and the common loss of the EL label at the college level, librarians might not be aware of which students are ELs. The benefits of adopting EL-based techniques are not limited to EL students only. Librarians' implementation of methods that are known to help ELs, including Generation 1.5, can also be used in support of all students. Because ELs may not be identifiable by accent or pronunciation, the following recommendations are not only beneficial for ELs, but are also useful for all academic library users.

### *Acknowledging Anxiety*

One introductory step that librarians can take to support Generation 1.5 is acknowledging potential anxieties that students may hold about using the library or doing research. Conteh-Morgan (2002) surveyed EL students about their ideal learning environment. Students reported that they wanted teachers to have "enthusiasm, patience, a warm reception, and personalized acceptance and concern for each student" (p. 193). These characteristics are often exhibited in a typical K-12 ENL classroom, and students

would like these qualities to be replicated in other learning contexts as well. Actions such as offering a welcoming smile, providing students with an introduction, and making an effort to acknowledge and address students' concerns can make a significant difference in ELs' comfort level. Librarians who frequently work with EL students reported using techniques such as consciously showing empathy, understanding, and interest in students' questions and responses, in addition to using active listening techniques (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). While research shows this is an EL-based strategy, fostering a welcoming environment for students is a core mission of libraries. Reassuring students that help is available to them is a small step in making them feel comfortable using the library.

### *Language Use*

It is also recommended to avoid using technical and library-specific jargon (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014), and to limit the use of slang and idiomatic expressions in conversations with ELs both at the reference desk and in information literacy classes (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). Some examples of idioms that might be used while teaching include phrases such as "to make sure we're all on the same page," "so far so good," "cover a lot of ground," and "draw a blank," etc. Refraining from these types of expressions can help ensure that ELs, including Generation 1.5 students, understand the content that is being communicated. It can be helpful for librarians to adjust their speaking style when working with ELs, such as repeating or rephrasing words to help with any gaps in vocabulary students might have (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). Further, it is beneficial to pause between different groups of ideas and to restate ideas to help learner comprehension.

It is also important to be aware of how language and culture can intertwine. Different communication styles can result in misunderstandings. Wang and Frank's (2002) research on this topic showed that some ELs

were confused by the phrase "check out books" on library signage. Focus groups revealed that the students thought that "check out" implied "examining or searching" and they were not interested in being examined or searched. Another group of students thought the phrase "checking out books" was associated with paying for books. In this case, the library changed the signs to "borrow books" (Wang & Frank, 2002). This example illustrates how easily miscommunications can occur between non-native and native speakers.

Additional language considerations include nonverbal communication. Different cultures have different views of facial expressions, physical gestures, posture, eye contact, and voice pitch or volume. American students usually use eye contact in one-to-one conversations, which typically indicates interest and respect. Wang and Frank (2002) explain that students from other cultures might look away in conversations which could possibly be perceived as not paying attention. Personal space can also be different in different cultures. One example is that Middle Eastern students tend to be physically closer to people to whom they are speaking, indicating a sign of interest. According to Wang and Frank (2002), Japanese students tend to maintain some physical distance in conversations, demonstrating respect for others. Additional examples include correct posture being related to respect by some Chinese students and sitting with one leg crossed over the other leg possibly being viewed as offensive by some Middle Eastern students (Wang & Frank, 2002). Librarians' acknowledgment that different cultural norms exist for different library systems and services can help them understand students' actions and foster a non-judgmental environment throughout the library (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014).

### *Implementing Language Objectives*

ENL classes often incorporate language objectives as part of the lesson. Language

objectives aim to give language learners equal access to the curriculum, even though these students may not be fully English proficient (Himmel, 2012). Often, K-12 content area classes will have both content objectives and language objectives for each lesson. In order to outline new and important vocabulary, librarians can adapt the concept of establishing language objectives in information literacy classes by outlining the academic language that will be learned and mastered in that lesson. For example, language objectives for an information literacy class might include explaining vocabulary words such as abstract, plagiarism, peer-reviewed journals, and so on. This explicit outlining of key terms can help ELs identify important vocabulary, particularly if they struggle in this area.

### *Non-Linguistic Cues*

Because Generation 1.5 students may have gaps in their academic vocabulary, visuals, gestures, intonation, and other non-verbal cues can make language and content more accessible to students (Ferlazzo, 2016). Teaching with visual representations of concepts can be very helpful for ELs, and providing any visual example of class content is beneficial. For example, if different types of sources are being discussed, provide images of a peer-reviewed article compared to a magazine article; if a citation format is being taught, display images of in-text citations or a reference list. Even though students may have mastered social English, it can be more difficult for ELs to absorb content in an information literacy class, which might include new terminology and concepts. Visuals are key instructional tools in K-12 ENL classes and can be easily incorporated into library instruction.

Graphic organizers are a type of visual scaffolding tool that are beneficial for ELs because they help students plan and organize their ideas. One way that graphic organizers can be used is with concepts such as citing sources. This graphic organizer would prompt students

to identify different elements of a citation in a chart, such as author, title of source, date, and so on. Once students identify what the different elements are, they can use the chart to construct the citation (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Graphic organizers are widely used in K-12 ENL programs and the act of breaking up a process into multiple steps can be very helpful for ELs.

Another type of useful graphic organizer is a KWL chart, abbreviated from Know, Want to know, and Learned (Tran & Aytac, 2018). The K section, what students know, helps to activate background knowledge and make connections to the class content. This section might prompt students to consider if they already know something about the content that is going to be taught that day, such as searching library databases. This step helps prepare students for what is going to be taught. The W section, what students want to know, helps to engage them in a new topic. In addition to encouraging students to think about the class content, this tool also helps the instructor learn about students' prior knowledge. These responses could be submitted in a form at the beginning of class for the librarian to quickly review before beginning teaching. The last section of the KWL chart, what students learned, can be filled out at the end of class and used as a short term assessment tool. This section could also be completed with the class as a whole to create a master list displaying what students learned (Tran & Aytac, 2018).

### *Wait Time*

Providing students with enough wait time to form their responses when posing a question in an information literacy class is another helpful strategy for ELs. Students might be thinking and producing in two or more languages and they need time to process the question (Ferlazzo, 2016; Huster, 2012; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Instead of calling on someone immediately, allow wait time for students to have enough time to comprehend the question, think about their answer, and feel comfortable answering in

front of a class. In addition to seeking verbal responses from students in class, using an online polling program such as Poll Everywhere allows students to anonymously ask and answer questions, or share quick thoughts (Poll Everywhere, n.d.). Anonymity provides students with the freedom to contribute and get the answers they need without exposing themselves as not knowing something, or publicly getting an answer wrong. This method also aids the instructor in checking students' understanding of class content and offers opportunities to address any uncertainties. As with many other EL-targeted strategies, providing ample wait time during class benefits all students, including Generation 1.5, among others.

### *Cooperative Learning*

Similar to the concept of providing wait time, cooperative learning, or group work, is another practice that permits students thinking time and is a demonstrated support for ELs (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Known to provide ELs with a low-stress and friendly learning environment, cooperative learning allows students to brainstorm ideas with peers and try out their ideas in a low-stakes setting. Group work also facilitates peer to peer learning, as students ask each other questions and explain tasks and concepts to each other. Students are more likely to ask questions and share their opinions in a small group compared to an entire class. In addition to dividing students into groups, librarians might also implement think-pair-share as a quick collaboration method. Following a question, think-pair-share first prompts students to independently think or write about a response themselves. Next, students turn to someone near them and discuss their thoughts. Lastly, the librarian can ask a few groups to share with the entire class. This strategy supports ELs by providing thinking time and a low-stakes setting to test their ideas with minimal time and effort required. Additionally, story reenactment is another collaborative strategy that is useful for language

learners. In this method, students act out stories as part of the learning process. For example, in a lesson on plagiarism, students can be assigned different roles, such as someone who cuts and pastes, someone who quotes information without using quotation marks, and so on (Tran & Aytac, 2018). This strategy both helps to reinforce content and fosters a memorable learning experience.

### *Modeling and Thinking Aloud*

ELs benefit from seeing a step-by-step process of how to complete a task (Ferlazzo, 2016). When explaining a concept such as searching databases or citing sources, it is helpful to provide granular details of each step in the process. While information literacy classes often include searching demonstrations, it is important to describe the actions that are being taken and the thought process behind those actions. At the reference desk, it might sometimes be easy to forget that routine tasks such as navigating the library website and searching databases could be completely new to someone. Instead of providing students with the materials they request with minimal or inconsistent explanations, using the think-aloud technique allows researchers to understand librarians' complete thought process behind their searching. Though explaining each step as it is being taken might feel redundant, sharing thinking processes is very helpful to ELs. Additionally, providing models of finished products is particularly useful for ELs. Rather than telling ELs what to do, it is better to show them what to do (Ferlazzo, 2016).

### *Creating Resources for Your Learners*

Because ELs might have difficulty understanding every word in information literacy classes or reference conversations, written instructions can be very helpful for ELs (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Depending on the class, students might be trying to follow along on their own computer or learning new library-related vocabulary, and it may be difficult to remember

every detail once class is over. Librarians who are experienced in working with ELs reported utilizing prepared handouts and written communication such as writing down key points in order to benefit their learners (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). Providing written resources for ELs allows them to have more time to process information in class because they do not need to write down as much information (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). Including examples of successful end-products is also significantly helpful for ELs, as it shows them how to complete a task. Models of finished products might include example citations, a sample paper formatted in a particular citation style, or an annotated bibliography. In reference interactions, librarians might also create simple written instructions on-the-fly in order to provide students with a guide for referencing later. Further, creating an electronic handout, such as a Google Doc, easily allows for students to access links to other resources, such as class presentation slides, research guides, databases, or video tutorials.

### *Flipped Classroom*

EL students benefit from having a preview of class content and a flipped classroom lesson is one way to allow students extra time to absorb content prior to class (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Though this method requires advance coordination between librarians and teaching faculty, allowing students to have multiple exposures to content can be very helpful to ELs (Tran & Aytac, 2018). Students can review information literacy resources prior to class, such as videos, handouts, or research guides. With buy-in from the instructor, these resources could be posted as an assignment through their course's Learning Management System (LMS) page. This allows for class time to be used to do the harder work of assimilating those resources, such as having more hands-on time to practice searching databases, identifying keywords, building a reference list, etc. Depending on the language needs of the class, it could also be helpful to provide the instructor with the

library-specific vocabulary to be covered prior to class.

### *Word Walls*

Another strategy that addresses library-specific vocabulary is word walls. A word wall is a location on the classroom wall, or possibly a whiteboard, where relevant vocabulary is listed. This vocabulary might also include an image or brief definition. Many ENL classes use word walls to help ELs with vocabulary, and this practice could also be implemented for information literacy classes (Tran & Aytac, 2018). While not applicable for every class, creating a word wall in the classroom space or on a handout provides opportunities for pre-teaching and vocabulary front-loading. Identifying vocabulary before being used in the context of a lesson is a useful strategy when teaching language learners.

### *Checking for Understanding*

Throughout teaching and working with students at the reference desk, it is important to assess students' understanding of content (Ferzallo, 2012). ELs in particular might be hesitant to ask questions, and librarians who work with language learners noted the importance of paying attention to students' reactions to their explanations to see if they were understanding (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2014). While not applicable for all ELs, some cultures might be sensitive about "saving face," and would not want to "lose face" by admitting that they do not understand a concept. In these situations, students might say they understand even when they do not, and they also might not want their lack of understanding to negatively reflect on the instructor as well (Wang & Frank, 2002). Because of students' possible hesitancy to share that they do not understand, it is recommended to periodically check in with students throughout class. Anonymous polling can be a helpful tool to gauge students' understanding without requiring students to stand out as someone who needs assistance.

Because students might be hesitant to ask questions due to embarrassment or fear of judgement, anonymity provides the freedom to be honest. Students are also more likely to ask questions if provided time during class to discuss individually with the instructor.

### ***Informal Practices***

Additionally, informal practices can also supplement EL-based pedagogy in supporting Generation 1.5 students in libraries. Students' awareness and willingness to seek assistance when needed is a significant component of college success. Some students might face difficulty in approaching the reference desk or asking for help, particularly if they are not sure how to phrase a question or if they are concerned they are going to be judged for not knowing something. Having a friendly face can go a long way in building rapport with students (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). It is important to emphasize that librarians aim to help students and they should not hesitate to ask questions or seek assistance. It is also necessary for librarians to acknowledge that students might come from all types of backgrounds. Though students' conversational English might seemingly indicate that they are native English speakers, it is important to remember their possible difficulties with academic English. Students' comfort level in seeking out help plays a significant role in helping them succeed in college.

### **Conclusion**

The aforementioned EL-targeted pedagogical strategies address challenges that Generation 1.5 students may face at the postsecondary level. Though observed to be resilient and tenacious (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012), Generation 1.5 ELs often experience struggles that are detrimental to college students, such as insufficient academic grammar and vocabulary (Huster, 2012). As academic librarians are often unaware of

students' linguistic backgrounds, it is beneficial to avoid the assumption that students are native speakers based on their proficiency in social English; Generation 1.5 students still benefit from EL-based teaching techniques despite their conversational English competency. Librarians should be aware that students may come from a variety of educational backgrounds and ELs in particular may lack adequate college preparation at the high school level. Because Generation 1.5 students often lose their language learner label once entering college, it is often the case that these students no longer receive specialized support. However, the academic library is an entity of support itself, and librarians are equipped to employ EL-based strategies in order to better meet students' needs, even if they are unaware of a student's language proficiency. It is beneficial for librarians to be aware that Generation 1.5 students might feel stigmatized because of academic language barriers. In libraries, these barriers may present themselves through difficulties with keyword searching and understanding explanations at the reference desk and in information literacy classes. Overall, it is most important for librarians to provide students with a non-judgmental environment of support, both meeting their research needs and allowing them to feel comfortable and confident advocating for the help they need. While the strategies presented in this paper are targeted toward ELs, these methods also help all students learn to effectively conduct research and support their transition to college.

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