

ACADEMIC WRITING, SERVANT LEADERSHIP, AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNING CLASSROOM—A CASE STUDY

Iliyana Vassileva

American College of Education

Adult learners' English proficiency and communication skills are essential for securing specialized positions in the 21st-century competitive labor markets. Addressing the unique needs of adult English language learners (ELLs) revealed a critical gap in the existing literature and highlighted the need for further theoretical exploration and practical strategies. A qualitative case study investigated the role of servant leadership and technology integration in teaching academic writing to adult ELLs. Using a case study design, data generated from 15 adult educators illuminated their self-perceptions as leaders who foster inclusive learning environments and deliver high-quality instruction. The study's outcomes signified implementing immediate feedback, integrating a flipped classroom approach, leveraging advanced technology, and enhancing professional development to elevate workforce readiness for language acquisition and learning experiences.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Adult English Language Learners (ELLs), Writing, Feedback, Flipped Classroom, Advanced Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education faces an urgent literacy gap rooted in the need for transformative learning approaches (Grotlüschen et al., 2025). According to the National Center for Education Statis-

tics (NCES, 2019), 43 million adults lack basic English literacy skills, with 34% being immigrants. Both literacy and numeracy percentages of adults performing at the lowest proficiency level (Level 1 or less) rose between 2017 and 2023. In 2023, 32% of adult

• Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Iliyana Vassileva, vassilevai@yahoo.com

The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, Volume 25(4), 2024, pp. 51–62
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ISSN 1528-3518
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Americans exhibited the lowest level of adaptive problem-solving (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Therefore, this study examined how integrating technology enhances critical thinking and employability, integrated scaffolding strategies to connect learners' experiences to academic writing skills and job demands, and applied servant leadership techniques to maximize learners' potential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An ample literature review identified three pivotal themes for advancing adult ELL education. Academic writing is vital in equipping learners with the writing skills needed for college and career success: technology integration and advanced tools to enhance learning and foster critical thinking. Servant leadership prioritizes learners' needs and educators as servants of student success, lifelong learning, and professional growth. These themes highlighted educators as pivotal leaders in addressing workforce readiness, educational equity, and diverse cultural inclusion.

PURPOSE

This qualitative study explores how adult educators integrate servant leadership into teaching academic writing through technology to improve workforce readiness for over 300,000 ELLs in Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2025). In an in-depth examination of the unique needs of adult learners, the study findings could establish servant leadership as an innovative approach to adult education, potentially transforming instructional methodologies nationwide.

Two research questions guided this case study:

- Research Question 1: How do educators implement servant leadership theory while teaching adult ELLs?

- Research Question 2: What are educators' perceptions of effective strategies for teaching academic writing?

METHODOLOGY/DESIGN

A case study investigated teachers' practical experiences in various aspects of instruction and decision-making (Atmowardoyo, 2018; Creswell, 2007; Sibbald et al., 2021). This qualitative case study captured educators' perceptions and experiences, focusing on personal perceptions for applying servant leadership and instructional strategies. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys, providing rich, multi-faceted insights into best practices for teaching academic writing to adult ELLs (Creswell, 2007). A thematic data analysis ensured the findings aligned with the Florida Career College Readiness Standards, enhancing their applicability (Vassileva, 2023).

SETTING/POPULATION/ SAMPLING

Twenty-five adult English language educators from two adult education institutions in a large Florida school district were invited to participate in the qualitative study. Fifteen ELL educators from two adult education facilities in the district participated. Convenience sampling ensured accessibility. The participants were selected based on their tenure and experience teaching advanced-level adult ELLs (Golzar et al., 2022). Data collection methods guaranteed participants' anonymity. The sample size satisfied research validity.

INSTRUMENT

Three research instruments, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews, generated data for this qualitative case study (Vassileva, 2023).

The first instrument was semi-structured, open-ended interviews, which explored how teachers successfully embrace servant leadership in teaching academic writing. As a second instrument, focus groups cultivated candid and unscripted conversations on effective writing instructional strategies and technology implementation generated data (Karl et al., 2022). A nine-question questionnaire was the third instrument. It enabled adult educators to freely express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and concerns of the individual participants in the questionnaires and interviews communicated via email. The results can cast doubt on preconceived notions and prompt a more thorough inquiry (Vassileva, 2023).

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Triangulation methodology ensured objectivity and credibility by incorporating diverse data sources and methods, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire (Stahl & King, 2020). A comprehensive review of all relevant results ensured the reliability of the dialogue. Thematic analysis, combined with open coding, enhanced the depth and consistency of findings by systematically categorizing and interpreting participants' responses. Data saturation ensured comprehensive coverage of the research objectives. An evidence-based approach reinforced the study's reliability and applicability, providing clear justifications for weighting participants' perceptions. The validity and reliability were achieved by rigorous data collection and preparation methods (McLeod, 2024). This thorough research process instilled confidence in the study's conclusions and demonstrated the robustness of its findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's thematic analysis identified key themes related to educators' application of

servant leadership and strategies for teaching academic writing, highlighting their profound impact on instructional effectiveness. These themes emphasized the following critical areas:

Servant Leadership

Findings emphasized an urgent need for professional development grounded in servant leadership principles to improve instructional effectiveness. Training programs that promote strategies such as fostering a growth mindset, recognizing individual strengths, and encouraging collaboration could enhance learner outcomes and the effectiveness of academic writing instruction. These programs would empower educators as transformative servant leaders in adult education, prioritizing adult ELLs' educational goals and personal growth. Participants embodying servant leadership traits like emotional intelligence and empathy viewed themselves as leaders (Vassileva, 2023). However, they identified a lack of leadership opportunities and professional support, which hindered their ability to implement evidence-based writing strategies (Donald et al., 2020; Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding emerged as a vital strategy for bridging learners' personal experiences with academic content. Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring instruction to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, enabling learners to draw meaningful connections between what they know applied toward acquiring new knowledge. For example, educators used real-world examples, collaborative tasks, and immediate feedback with step-by-step guidance to help students navigate complex writing concepts (Butarbutar, 2024). This approach fostered deeper comprehension and built adult ELL students' confidence and motivation to engage with academic material. The importance of scaffolding should validate edu-

cators' efforts and make them feel recognized for their role in shaping students' learning experiences.

Flipped Classrooms

Flipped classrooms, a pedagogical model in which a course's typical lecture and homework elements are reversed, were identified as a game-changing strategy for maximizing in-class engagement (Fisher et al., 2024). Educators provided preparatory materials, such as videos, readings, and interactive exercises, for students to review before class. This pre-class preparation allowed learners to familiarize themselves with foundational concepts, enabling more interactive and productive class time. Participants noted that flipped classrooms facilitated collaborative discussions, peer reviews, and hands-on writing practice, making the learning experience more dynamic and learner-centered.

Technology Integration

Technology integration was a recurring theme, with participants highlighting its potential to foster critical thinking and enhance employability skills. Tools such as collaborative writing platforms, grammar-checking software, and online research databases were cited as invaluable resources for developing students' academic writing abilities. Additionally, technology-enabled personalized feedback and self-paced learning cater to the diverse needs of adult English learners. Educators also pointed out that incorporating digital literacy skills into writing instruction prepares students for the technological demands of the modern workforce. This emphasis on the role of technology should inform policymakers and make them aware of its importance in shaping the future of education.

Participants consistently underscored the transformative potential of servant leadership in fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. By prioritizing their students'

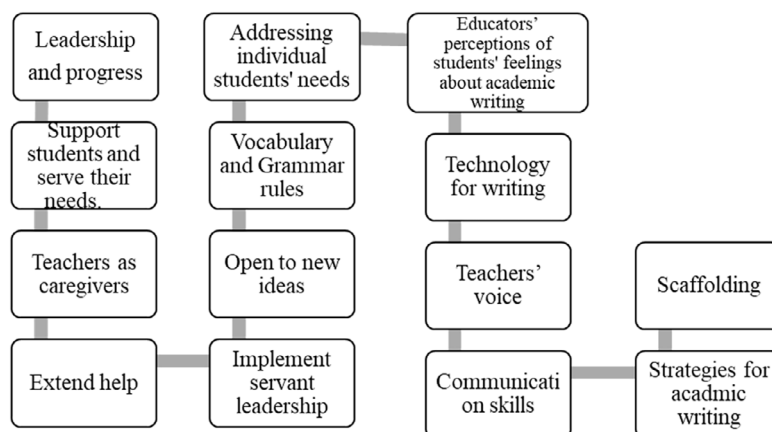
needs, growth, and well-being, educators created spaces where learners felt valued, respected, and motivated to achieve their goals. The findings revealed that servant leadership practices, such as active listening, empathy, and collaborative goal-setting, were instrumental in addressing the unique challenges faced by adult English learners, including low confidence and diverse learning paces. This recognition of the power of servant leadership should empower educators to continue creating such transformative learning environments.

Six semi-structured interviews generated additional insights and themes. Figure 1 illustrates identifying the first 15 emergent themes and how they relate to the study topics.

The collected topics were categorized through open coding. A more accurate theme analysis was achieved using NVivo 12 Pro (Dhakal, 2022). Rev.com transcribed audio recordings verbatim with 95% accuracy (DeCarlo, 2018; McNiff, 2022). Related words and phrases were further grouped, regrouped, and interpreted. Themes coded in NVivo are presented in Table 1 (Vassileva, 2023).

A consistent code application across transcripts, thorough explanations of each code's meaning, and word tree data visualization presented three significant themes based on the frequency of recurring words on a semantic level and the words that interviewers used most frequently. Figure 2 illustrates those three themes.

Further data analysis determined fourteen overarching themes that needed additional breakdown. Four data revisions and assessments have resulted in more accurate theme definitions. The final three themes—academic writing, servant leadership in adult ELL classrooms, and technology for academic writing instruction—were identified by inductive coding (Arlinghaus et al., 2024; Bingham, 2023; De Paoli & Mathis, 2024). This approach facilitated finding commonalities and variances in viewpoints across disparate groups. Several stages of examination and improvement were necessary for open coding, illustrated in Table 2.

**FIGURE 1***Emerging Themes (Vassileva, 2023)***TABLE 1***Second Theme Analysis*

<i>Theme 1</i>	<i>Theme 2</i>	<i>Theme 3</i>	<i>Theme 4</i>
Academic writing	Teaching carriers	Technology	Leadership
Research writing	Individual needs	Interactive TV	Person in charge
Skills for writing	Learning styles	Smartboard	Servitude
Strategies for writing	Students' goals	Web search	Class management

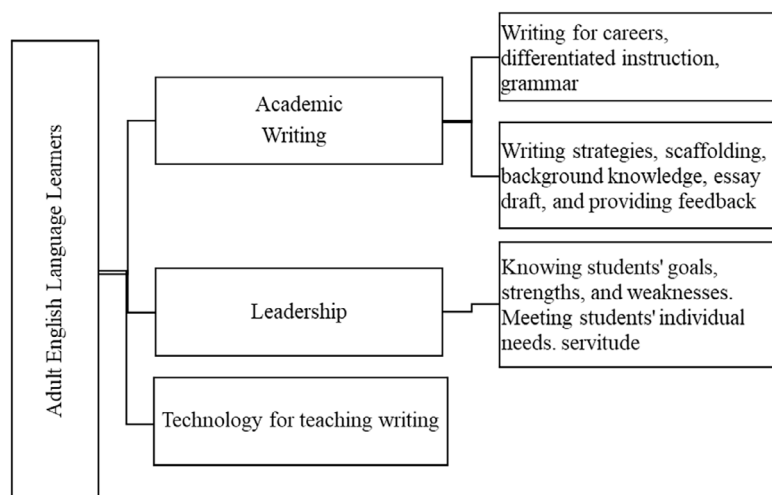
**FIGURE 2***Themes Word Tree (Vassileva, 2023)*

TABLE 2
Collapsed and Final Themes

<i>Emergent codes or emergent words and phrases</i>	<i>How those were coded and collapsed</i>	<i>Final themes</i>	<i>Participants' Quotes</i>
Leadership and progress	Thematic analysis is a six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Leadership and encouragement	"We do everything to better ourselves and guide students in the right direction."
Implement servant leadership	The themes were then verbatim transcribed (Hill et al., 2022). Each transcript was reviewed four times to ensure no valuable data was missed.	Building trust	I devote all my attention and time to my students."
Encouragement	More precise definitions of themes emerged from the review.	Relationships with students	"Servant leadership is built Build trust, cultural connections, relationships, and understanding of students. Put them first." "Empathy and understanding"
Open to new ideas	Fifteen emerging themes collapsed further.		"I lead the class, instruct, and decide what and when to teach." "I welcome, emphasize, encourage, and support students."
Vocabulary and Grammar rules			"Collaborative learning to provide opportunities for direct feedback." "I'm always open to new ideas and thrive on change." "Teaching vocabulary and grammar related to the topic." "Sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary are more complex."

Scaffolding		“Providing written examples, editing.”
Modeling the writing process		“No students understand the structure of writing.”
Feedback		“Give reason and purpose of editing.”
		“We practice mock interviews and collect help for Ukraine or the day’s problems.”
Strategies for academic writing		“Sentence stems so helpfully for them.”
		“Sentence stems so helpfully for them.”
		Brainstorm ideas, ask for background knowledge, initial understanding of the topic.” “Provide feed-back, elaborate techniques, and show how to connect ideas and provide connections.”
Teachers’ voice communication skills		“Students need to learn how to write together because they make similar mistakes; map their thoughts.” It’s all about guiding them.”
		“A servant leader is a good communicator and a steward of good communication.”
		“Not many opportunities for professional leadership development in actual practice.”
Technology for writing in the classroom		Technology serves as an accommodation for all types of learners.” “It is helping students increase their vocabulary and reading skills, so they become better writers.” “I use a whiteboard.”
		“I use a Smartboard.
		“I don’t like technology for writing because students need to learn how to correct grammar manually to learn.
		“Programs are not perfect.”
		“Using writing websites corrections; terminology; interactive writing.”

TABLE 3
Collapsed and Final Themes

<i>Collapsed Themes</i>	<i>Final Themes</i>
Leadership, encouragement, and trust	Leadership and support
Relationships with students	
Background experiences	
Scaffolding	Teaching writing through
Modeling	Scaffolding, modeling, and Feedback

Finally, the questionnaires and interviews examined how adult ELL instructors perceive their methods and strategies when teaching writing. Two themes came to light: educators' leadership and the employment of servant leadership to teach writing. Teachers' perspectives as classroom leaders—who led, facilitated, empowered, and supported adult ELLs used to address the first research question. Meeting students' needs while instructing them in writing techniques and implementing leadership efforts were among the themes presented in Table 3.

Adult educators embraced a servant leadership approach for lesson planning aligned with their awareness of students' unique needs for academic writing. Data suggested invaluable strategies such as activating prior knowledge, generating new ideas, creating structures, and modeling intricate grammatical rules. According to interviewees, teachers

develop leadership skills by gaining awareness of their students' challenges, aspirations, and life objectives. By creating engaging classes and utilizing technology to support a variety of learning styles, educators differentiate instruction to accommodate students' abilities, skills, and knowledge. Table 4 illustrates educators' perceptions and tells their stories.

Telling the story illustrated and reflected educators' feelings about their leadership efforts to help students write effectively for academic purposes. The significance of participants' leadership styles in a culturally diverse and supportive setting was highlighted. However, educators shared frustration and difficulties integrating technology for instruction due to erratic internet connections and the challenge of public speaking in front of a large audience. Two key issues emerged from the data: teaching writing and leveraging technology to enhance academic writing. Rubrics, modeling,

TABLE 4
Perceptions and Telling the Story

<i>Participants' Codes</i>	<i>Participant Quotes</i>	<i>Answers Interpretation</i>
Interview Participant 1 (IP 1)	"Everybody needs a leader. Somebody has got to set the pace, to take charge." "We seek leadership and take that role depending on the environment and the situation."	Adult ELL educators view themselves as leaders when there is a need in their daily practices. They guide and lead.
Interview Participant 4 (IP 4)	"Experienced teachers can present a voice full of wisdom and have an important leadership role."	Having an immense teaching experience allows educators to offer wisdom to school leaders.
Interview Participant 6 (IP 6)	"I see myself as a leader, and I reach out and ask what the problem of the student is. That's my way of giving back and helping and assisting them."	Educators strive to assist individual students, meet their needs, support them, and guide them while teaching them English.

feedback, and contextual vocabulary instruction were all successful tactics to combat the challenges. Despite technical difficulties, educators have a compelled approach to implementing virtual presentations, digital projects, and direct instruction in the classroom.

Further investigation of the function of servant leadership in writing instruction emphasized the importance of encouraging candid communication and valuing the abilities of adult ELLs. They underlined the importance of creating a multicultural, varied classroom where ELLs feel appreciated. Finally, the research results emphasized the importance of writing instruction for career advancement. Data from focused group discussions is presented in Table 5 (Vassileva, 2023).

Three final themes stemming from the questionnaire were the demand for excellent writing skills due to rapid economic growth, the need to

empower leaders in the classroom, and students' feelings of belonging to their learning community. Findings are presented in Table 6.

Examining effective educators' writing techniques and servant leadership philosophies revealed that participants strongly emphasized developing empathy, self-awareness, and an atmosphere that welcomes different viewpoints. Educators promoted creativity and applying new ideas in writing among adult learners. All participants underlined the significance of academic writing in preparing ELL students for both the workplace and life. They discussed practical tactics that address learners' unique abilities, guidance, resources, and stewardship. Emphasized the value of students' ability to communicate in another language, create an inclusive environment, and give candid feedback.

TABLE 5
Focused Groups Data

<i>Codes of the Participants</i>	<i>Participant Quotes</i>	<i>Answers Interpretation</i>
Focused group 1 participant	Academic writing "enhances their lives dramatically because it opens doors for them. It opens doors academically to college and professionally." "Basic essay: once you know the rubric, you teach them construction." "How we can transfer that in their writing and use the model." "I can train them to... become teachers."	Academic writing is vital for students' success and professional realization. When teaching writing strategies to construct an essay, use a rubric. Teachers serve students by empowering them to take ownership of their learning.
Focused group 1 Participant 2	"A professional development training to us... honestly...I have learned the most from our staff members."	Peer collaboration and in-house professional development are valuable for adult educators' growth.
Focused group 2 participant 2	"We had to write an essay...so without that, I would not be able to do it and pass the test, so I think it is essential for some for most of them if they want to continue with their education, yeah, but I think it is very important what professional development training assisted to learn how to write."	Teachers need the training to instruct students to draft essays to instruct students effectively. Educators' confidence and professional development significantly impact the quality of their teaching.
Focused group 2 participant 1	"There is no professional development" for adult teachers in instructing students on academic writing. With the adults, every student has different needs, and every student has different weaknesses; they are all at different levels, so I had to teach the students individually and with e-learning." "Teachers don't get technology training."	Adult ELL educators need training on how to use advanced technology. They feel that professional development for adult educators are unavailable or inadequate to meet their professional needs and growth. Technology failures and lack of resources in adult ELL classrooms hinder instruction, especially teaching evening classes. Advanced technology tools.

TABLE 6
Themes from the Questionnaires

<i>Emergent codes</i>	<i>Final Themes</i>	<i>Participants' Quotes</i>
Workforce readiness	Academic writing for jobs	"getting students prepared for the workforce...enables greater self-efficiency."
Emotional engagement		"Teachers change lives." "They are mentally and emotionally engaged." "respects, empathy, and understanding." "Meeting their needs."
Leading, initiating, guiding	Choosing to be a leader	"Teachers can choose they lead the class." "Lead by way of curriculum and test planning." "Be a steward of good communication." "Observation is the key." "In the middle, not too many corrections but just enough." "Providing advice and resources." "Students to take an active role in improving their classroom experiences."
Students' empowerment Create a sense of inclusion	Belonging, Inclusion	"Sense of belonging is empowering." "My leadership style would be a more organic one." "I am leading in initiating and guiding."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Scaffolding

Educators should provide consistent scaffolding, culturally appropriate resources, use evidence-based methods, and flexibility for writing. Customized instruction and feedback should convert traditional training into self-paced adult learning. Implementing new technology and flipped classrooms can help adult learners prepare for advancements in the global workforce. Education is changing due to the incorporation of advanced technology in classrooms, and further study should assist adult educators in getting students ready for new challenges.

Leadership

Professional growth is essential for adult educators as they become language experts and seasoned facilitators, which requires more training. Additional research could assist in improving the curriculum and boosting the effectiveness of everyday education. In addition to understanding and embracing servant leadership, more studies should examine how empowering adult educators enhances the professional and social standing of the field. This qualitative case study emphasizes how crucial

leadership is to encouraging creative faculty conduct and servant leadership in the classroom. Leaders of adult technical and post-secondary institutions should work together to increase the involvement and engagement of adult educators in the process. The research highlighted two significant characteristics in the teaching strategies of adult ELL educators: sharing practical leadership efforts. The concept of servant leadership emphasizes empathy, self-awareness, and fostering an inclusive atmosphere. Educators should develop a culture that recognizes the abilities of ELL students, and teaching academic writing to meet employment demands should become an essential objective.

Community Building

Educational leaders should prioritize servicing their stakeholders as they increase the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and adjust to shifting cultural norms. They should collaborate with local communities, promote understanding, build supportive student relationships, and foster inclusivity in adult education. In addition to highlighting the influence of leadership qualities on instructors and adult learners, the study seeks to advance servant leadership ideas in education (Vassileva, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study thoroughly examined adult ELL educators' servant leadership model and writing instruction methods, emphasizing their transformative impact on educational practices. Servant leadership traits—such as honest communication, empathy, and attentiveness to individual student needs—are pivotal in fostering trust and creating an inclusive, learner-centered environment. Essential teaching strategies, including rubrics, modeling, personalized feedback, contextualized learning, and critical thinking assignments, were key drivers in elevating instructional rigor and complexity.

Moreover, integrating innovative software platforms and reliable technologies significantly equips students with the skills to thrive in the 21st-century global market economy. Such tools enhance workforce readiness and support seamless transitions to postsecondary education by aligning learning outcomes with real-world demands. The study underscores the urgent need for ongoing professional development to empower adult educators with cutting-edge teaching methods and strategies, such as flipped classrooms, which promote active, self-directed learning.

Equally significant is the potential of servant leadership techniques to enhance adult educators' social and professional status. Institutional leaders can inspire educators to contribute meaningfully to the field's advancement by fostering a culture of collaboration, transparency, and shared vision. These efforts have far-reaching implications, encouraging postsecondary institutions to engage educators in candid dialogue and inclusive decision-making processes. Ultimately, this case study suggests that embracing servant leadership principles can pave the way for adult education's more innovative, equitable, and inspirational future.

MAJOR ARTICLE

This piece is not under consideration for publication elsewhere and has not been published previously.

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