



LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



Bridging Cultures: Understanding ESOL

LEAP Online

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Introduction

In today's increasingly diverse higher education environment, it is essential to recognise and support students who do not speak English as their first language. These students bring rich cultural experiences to our classrooms at the University of Bolton, but face unique challenges related to language barriers and cultural adjustment.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this tutorial is to help you:

1. **Increase cultural sensitivity:** Gain insights into how language and culture shape identity, behaviour, and learning styles, encouraging respect and inclusivity within diverse student communities
2. **Recognise the impact of language barriers on academic success:** Understand the role language plays in the learning experience and how you can support English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners in overcoming these barriers
3. **Promote inclusivity and intercultural competence:** Learn how to contribute to a university culture that values diversity and actively works to bridge gaps between cultures

Who Should Complete this Tutorial?

It is recommended that you should complete this tutorial if:

- You're a new student at the University of Bolton
- You're new to studying in the UK
- You're an undergraduate or postgraduate student (including Trainee Teachers)
- You've been advised to complete this tutorial by a member of staff

Raising Cultural Awareness



Watch the following video: [Bridging Cultural Awareness: Understanding ESOL](#)

Acronyms



In the field of English language teaching and learning, various acronyms are commonly used to describe different aspects of English Language instruction. Below are some key terms you may encounter:

Acronym	Definition	Usage Notes
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages	Often used for teaching in college settings
EAP	English for Academic Purpose	Often used for teaching in HE settings
EAL	English as an Additional Language	Often used for teaching in school settings
ESL	English as a Second Language	Referring to contexts in which learning occurs where English is the primary language spoken
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages	A professional activity that requires specialised training. It is also used to refer to TESOL International Association, as well as its signature event, the annual TESOL convention.

(TESOL, 2024)

Understanding these acronyms will help you navigate the diverse field of language education. For the purpose of helping you navigate this tutorial, the acronym ESOL will be used.

Imagine This

Lost in translation

Imagine two university students, Maria, an international student and John from the UK, are assigned to give a group presentation on global business strategies. They arrange to meet up and plan their presentation. However, things don't go as smoothly as they hoped.

Maria's perspective

Maria arrives 15 minutes late, not seeing it as an issue because, in her culture, social flexibility around time is common. She starts the meeting by engaging in personal conversation, hoping to build rapport before discussing the task. She assumes they'll discuss ideas collaboratively and bounce ideas off each other over coffee at some point.



John's perspective

John arrives on time and waits for Maria, growing frustrated when she's late. He's ready to dive straight into work, with a clear plan for efficiency. When Maria starts with personal talk, John feels she's wasting valuable time and isn't being professional.

As the meeting continues, Maria feels John is rushing through the process without any genuine connection, while John feels Maria is disorganized and unfocused.



So what happened?

As seen earlier, Maria and John approached the meeting from two very different cultural lenses, which led to frustration on both sides.

Maria's cultural lens

In many cultures, time is seen as fluid rather than rigid. For Maria, being 15 minutes late is perfectly acceptable, as her focus is on building a strong personal connection before diving into work. She believes that this rapport will lead to better collaboration and a more productive outcome. Maria's approach reflects a **relationship-oriented** culture, where personal connections often take precedence over strict adherence to schedules. She expected that the meeting would begin with informal conversation, giving them a chance to bond before moving to the task at hand. When John didn't engage in this way, Maria felt there was a lack of connection and understanding, which made her feel alienated and rushed.

John's cultural lens

John, on the other hand, comes from a culture that tends to value punctuality and task efficiency. For him, starting a meeting late and not focusing immediately on the work at hand signals disorganisation. His approach represents a **task-oriented** culture, where time is a valuable resource, and sticking to a schedule is seen as a sign of respect and professionalism. When Maria arrived late and wanted to begin with personal conversation, John felt like his time was being wasted. His frustration grew as he perceived her approach as unprofessional, making it hard for him to connect with her working style.

The cultural divide

The breakdown in communication came from a lack of understanding about each other's cultural values. Maria and John had different expectations about how to approach the task: Maria prioritised building a relationship, while John prioritised efficiency. These contrasting approaches led to mutual frustration, with neither student feeling like the meeting was productive. Both students could have benefitted from discussing their expectations upfront and finding a middle ground that allowed for both social connection and task-focused progress.

Bridging Cultures: Understanding ESOL

Understanding these cultural differences could help students like Maria and John navigate collaboration more effectively, improving both the working relationship and the quality of their final presentation.

But what exactly is culture? And what role does culture play in our lives and at the University of Bolton? Explore the answers to these questions in the next section.

Culture Is Our Way Of Life



Culture is a complex system of shared values, beliefs, practices, and behaviours that shape how individuals within a group understand the world and interact with each other. It influences everything from how people communicate to how they view time, what they wear, authority, and relationships. Culture is passed down from one generation to the next, continually evolving over time. In a university setting like Bolton, understanding and applying cultural awareness is key to fostering a supportive, inclusive environment where students and staff from all backgrounds can thrive.

“Culture is the name for what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table-talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training, the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire. All communities have a culture. It is the climate of their civilization.”

Walter Lippman (1913, cited in Shaffer, 2008, p.1)

Applying culture at the University of Bolton

At the University of Bolton, both students and staff come from diverse cultural backgrounds, each bringing their own unique perspectives. By recognising and applying cultural awareness, we can better understand each other, avoid misunderstandings, and enhance collaboration and learning.

Let's move on to explore how the key components of culture can be applied to the university setting.

How Culture Shapes Our Everyday Interactions and Experiences



A few examples

In this section, you'll explore some of the different ways culture influences the way we communicate, behave and interpret the world around us. Each of the slides takes you deeper into real-world examples and insights on bridging cultural differences and building a better understanding of each other. Click through to discover how culture shapes not just what we say, but how we apply it - and what it means for connecting with peers from diverse backgrounds.

Example 1 – Shared Values and Beliefs

Language is a critical tool for communication, but at the University of Bolton, we recognise that language extends beyond words. Students may come from various linguistic backgrounds, so being mindful of how we communicate is essential. To apply cultural awareness in communication:

- **Respect differences** by being open to new perspectives and learning from the diverse student body
- **Support inclusivity** by creating spaces where everyone feels valued, such as participating in cross-cultural events, volunteering, or engaging in debates that challenge assumptions and stereotypes
- **Promote equality** by standing against harassment and discrimination and being mindful of how cultural differences might affect academic or social experiences

Example 2 – Shared Systems of Language, Communication, or Symbols

Language is a critical tool for communication, but at the University of Bolton, we recognise that language extends beyond words. Students may come from various linguistic backgrounds, so being mindful of how we communicate is essential. To apply cultural awareness in communication:

- **Be patient with language barriers.** ESOL students may take longer to express themselves in English, so offering time and support can foster better understanding
- **Understand non-verbal communication.** Gestures, body language, and eye contact can have different meanings across cultures. Being aware of these differences can prevent miscommunication. For example, a smile in one culture may signify politeness, while in another it may be seen as insincere
- **Use inclusive language** in academic settings to avoid alienating others and acknowledge different cultural references when discussing topics in class

Example 3 – Shared Practices, Customs, and Expectations

Cultural customs and practices shape how individuals behave in various situations, including academic environments. At the University of Bolton, students bring with them diverse traditions and practices that reflect their cultural backgrounds. To apply cultural practices at the university:

- **Participate in multicultural events** like cultural festivals or international student days, where different customs and traditions are celebrated
- **Respect personal and cultural boundaries.** For example, understand that some students might prefer to work in groups, while others may come from cultures that emphasise individual work
- **Be mindful of different learning styles.** Some cultures emphasise rote learning and memorisation, while others encourage debate and critical thinking. By embracing various approaches to education, students and staff can create a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience

Example 4 – Shared Rules, norms, Laws, and Morals

Every culture has its own set of rules and norms, both formal and informal, that guide behaviour. At the University of Bolton, we have shared norms around academic integrity, professionalism, and respect for university policies. To apply cultural awareness to rules and norms:

- **Adhere to university guidelines**, such as those on plagiarism, attendance, and respectful communication, which ensure fairness and accountability for all students
- **Be aware of social norms**, such as the expectations around participation in class discussions or forming relationships with lecturers and peers, which can vary by culture
- **Uphold ethical standards** that respect the rights and dignity of others, both in academic work and personal interactions. This includes being mindful of moral differences and understanding that what may be acceptable in one culture might be inappropriate in another

“Tolerance, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected.”

Kofi Annan (2004, cited in United Nations, 2004, n.p.)

The next section will highlight a few of the key differences to be aware of when collaborating or working cross-culturally.

Verbal Communication



Verbal communication is one of the primary ways students exchange information, but the way we use words, tone, and timing can vary widely across cultures. These differences in communication styles often lead to misunderstandings, especially in multicultural settings like at university, where students may have diverse backgrounds and approaches to communication. In the case of Maria and John, their frustrations stemmed from differences in their verbal communication styles, which reflected deeper cultural values around how to collaborate and achieve goals.

What is communication style?

A communication style refers to how people express themselves verbally, including their tone, pacing, directness, and use of silence. Different cultures tend to develop distinct communication styles based on social norms, values, and expectations. Understanding these styles can help people bridge gaps in communication, especially when working in diverse teams.

There are two broad categories that verbal communication styles can fall into:

High-context communication

This style is common in cultures that emphasise interpersonal relationships and understanding through indirect cues. People in high-context cultures tend to communicate in ways that rely heavily on non-verbal cues, context, and shared understanding, with less emphasis on explicit verbal information.

Low-context communication

This style, common in more individualistic cultures, is more direct, where speakers often say exactly what they mean. In low-context communication, the focus is on clarity, efficiency, and explicit verbal expression of ideas.

Some common differences in verbal communication styles include

Direct vs. Indirect Communication

Some cultures prefer direct communication, where people state their thoughts clearly and openly (e.g., many Western cultures), while others use more indirect approaches, using subtler language to avoid confrontation or maintain harmony (e.g., many Asian cultures).

Formality vs. Informality

In some cultures, verbal communication tends to be formal, particularly in professional or academic settings, while other cultures are more informal, even when discussing serious topics.

Pace and Interruptions

In some cultures, fast-paced conversations and overlapping speech are normal, while in others, pauses and careful turn-taking are valued to show respect.

Real-world examples of cultural communication differences

The University of Bolton attracts students from various cultural backgrounds, and understanding how communication styles differ across cultures can help foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment. Below are examples of cultural communication differences from five countries that represent the largest international student populations at the University: **Nigeria, Pakistan, India, Ghana, and Nepal**. Understanding these differences is crucial for effective communication in academic and social settings.

Ghana

In Ghana, communication tends to be indirect, especially when dealing with sensitive topics or authority figures. Respect for elders and those in higher social positions plays a significant role in how conversations unfold. In an academic setting, students may avoid direct disagreement with lecturers and use polite language to express dissent or critique indirectly (Intercultural Programs, 2024). Group harmony is often prioritised, so maintaining positive relationships can sometimes outweigh the need for direct communication.

Nepal

In Nepal, communication is generally high-context, where much of the meaning is derived from nonverbal cues, tone, and the relationship between individuals. There is a strong emphasis on politeness and deference to authority figures, which means students might be hesitant to speak up in class or openly challenge contrasting viewpoints (Shah and Bhattarai, 2023). Silence is often used as a sign of respect, and students may listen carefully without always actively participating in discussions, especially when interacting with lecturers.

India

India is known for its high-context, relationship-oriented communication, where non-verbal cues and the social context are important in understanding the full meaning of messages (Scroope, 2018). In hierarchical relationships, such as those between students and lecturers, there is an expectation that students will show deference and respect for authority. Relationships are valued, so building rapport is often seen as a key step before discussing academic matters.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, communication is typically indirect and high-context, where much of the communication relies on non-verbal cues and the relationship between speakers (Saeed et al., 2016). Politeness is critical, and individuals may avoid direct confrontation or criticism to preserve social harmony. In academic settings, students may hesitate to speak up if they fear that their contributions could be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful, particularly toward lecturers.

Nigeria

In Nigerian culture, communication is generally high-context, meaning that people rely on implicit messages, non-verbal cues, and shared understanding rather than direct verbal instructions. Politeness and respect for authority, particularly in formal settings, are paramount. E.g., students may be less likely to challenge or question lecturers openly, even if they disagree with them, because of the cultural emphasis on deference to elders and authority figures. Additionally, maintaining social harmony is prioritised, so criticism is often delivered indirectly (Obiegbu, 2016).

Applying these insights at the University of Bolton

Understanding these communication styles can help foster better interactions between students. By recognising that students from these cultures may communicate differently, you can adapt your approach to ensure everyone feels comfortable participating. Encouraging open discussions, providing space for indirect communication, and respecting cultural norms around hierarchy and respect can help build an inclusive learning environment for all of our students.

Let's move on to explore how the clash of verbal communication styles between Maria and John could be resolved.

Maria and John: A Real-life Example

In the scenario between Maria and John, we see a clash of verbal communication styles:

John's Approach

John, coming from a culture where **efficiency and directness** are emphasised, was ready to dive straight into the task. His verbal communication was likely direct, focusing on the business at hand with little time for personal interaction. He expected to work through the presentation systematically, without much casual conversation.

Maria's Approach

Maria comes from a culture where **relationship-building** is key to successful collaboration. Her verbal communication style was likely more indirect, focused on starting the meeting with small talk to establish rapport. She may have expected the discussion to gradually evolve into work-related tasks, viewing the personal conversation as essential to creating a comfortable working relationship.

These differing approaches led to a breakdown in communication. Maria felt rushed and disconnected from John, while John saw Maria's conversational approach as a waste of time, leading to frustration for both.

Steps Maria and John could take to resolve the issue

To move forward and prevent similar misunderstandings in the future, Maria and John could take the following steps:

Clarify Expectations at the Start

Both students could begin by openly discussing how they like to work. Maria could explain that she values building a personal connection first, while John could express his need for structure and efficiency. Acknowledging these preferences upfront could help them find a balance.

Agree on a Middle Ground

Maria and John could compromise by spending the first few minutes of their meeting engaging in brief personal conversation, as Maria prefers, before diving into the task, which aligns with John's work style. This way, they could balance personal connection with task-focused progress.

Be Mindful of Communication Styles

Both students should try to adapt to each other's verbal communication styles. John could slow down and be more patient with Maria's need for rapport, while Maria could recognise John's preference for directness and work to streamline conversations when time is limited.

Use Active Listening

By listening actively, both Maria and John can ensure they fully understand each other's perspectives. This involves giving full attention, asking clarifying questions, and being open to feedback without immediately judging or assuming negative intent.

Cultural Awareness Training

Attending workshops (e.g., Conversation Cafés) or participating in discussions about cross-cultural communication at the University of Bolton could help Maria, John, and other peers develop a better understanding of different verbal communication styles. This would prepare them for future collaborative work in multicultural environments at university and in the workplace.

By applying these steps, Maria and John could improve their collaboration, ensuring that both their relational and task-oriented needs are met. This will ultimately enhance their working relationship and improve the quality of their final presentation.

In the next section we will explore what this means for your everyday interactions at university.

What This Means For Your Everyday Interactions At University



Understanding and adapting to different communication styles can significantly enhance interactions with students who do not speak English as their first language. At the University of Bolton, you are likely to encounter peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, each bringing unique ways of communicating. By applying a few practical strategies, you can create a more inclusive environment that facilitates effective communication and mutual respect.

Strategy 1 – Practice Active Listening

Active listening involves paying close attention to both verbal cues and showing that you understand and value the speaker's perspective. This is especially important when communicating with international students who may use indirect or high-context communication styles.

Example: In a group project, if an international student remains quiet, it might be a sign of respect or reflection rather than disengagement. By actively listening, you can encourage participation by asking open-ended questions like, "What do you think of this idea?" or "Do you have any suggestions for improvement?" This shows you value their input without pressuring them to speak in a way that might feel uncomfortable.

Strategy 2 – Be Patient and Allow Extra Time for Responses

When communicating with students who are still learning English or come from cultures with indirect communication styles, it's important to allow extra time for responses. Avoid interrupting or rushing conversations. Some students may need more time to formulate their thoughts, especially if they are translating from their native language.

Example: In a classroom discussion, an international student may take a moment to collect their thoughts before responding. Rather than moving to the next speaker quickly, allow a brief pause. This small act of patience gives the student the space to participate more comfortably and at their own pace.

Strategy 3 – Clarify Expectations and Encourage Open Dialogue

In cultures where indirect communication is common, students may hesitate to ask for clarification or challenge ideas directly. To bridge this gap, be explicit about your expectations and create opportunities for open, non-judgmental dialogue.

Example: If you're working with an international student on an assignment, it's helpful to clearly define each person's role upfront. You might say, "I want to make sure we're both clear on our tasks. How would you prefer we divide the work?" Encouraging feedback, such as, "Please let me know if something isn't clear or if you'd like to suggest any changes," can make students feel more comfortable voicing concerns.

Strategy 4 – Adapt to Different Communication Styles

Flexibility in communication is key when working with students from different cultural backgrounds. Some cultures favour direct communication, while others rely on indirect methods to express ideas. By recognising and adapting to these differences, you can facilitate smoother conversations and avoid misinterpretation.

Example: If a Nigerian student appears hesitant to express disagreement directly, they may be using a more indirect communication style. Instead of asking bluntly, "Do you disagree with this idea?" try a more open-ended approach like, "What other perspectives should we consider?" This invites input without forcing the student to confront cultural discomfort around direct criticism.

Strategy 5 – Use Simple, Clear Language and Avoid Idioms

Students who are not native English speakers may struggle with idiomatic or slang phrases and complex vocabulary. Use simple, straightforward language to ensure your message is understood clearly. Avoid idiomatic and slang expressions or culturally specific references that may not translate easily.

Example: Instead of saying, “Let’s kill two birds with one stone,” try saying, “Let’s solve both problems at once.” Alternatively, instead of saying, “I need to complete this assignment ASAP”, try saying “The assignment needs to be completed As Soon As Possible.” This makes your meaning clear and avoids confusion that could arise from unfamiliar phrases.

In the next section, we will explore intercultural communication styles further by learning about differences in nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication

“Nonverbal communication forms a secret language that is in many ways richer and more fundamental than our words.”

Leonard Mlodinow

Common differences in nonverbal communication across cultures

Nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role in how we interact with each other, often conveying messages that words alone cannot express. However, the interpretation of nonverbal cues can vary significantly across cultures, leading to misunderstandings, especially in diverse environments like the University of Bolton. This section explores key areas of nonverbal communication, including eye contact, posture, facial expressions, hand gestures and physical contact. Understanding these differences is essential for fostering effective communication and inclusivity among students from various backgrounds.

Be Mindful of Eye Contact

Different cultures have varying norms regarding eye contact. While some may see direct eye contact as a sign of confidence, others may perceive it as disrespectful. Adjust your eye contact based on the comfort levels of those you are interacting with.

Observe Posture

Posture can convey openness or defensiveness. Maintain an open stance and be attentive to how others position themselves, adapting your own posture to create a welcoming environment.

Facial Expressions Matter

While some facial expressions, like smiles, are universally understood, others can differ in meaning across cultures. Pay attention to the context and the individual's reactions to ensure your expressions are interpreted correctly.

Use Hand Gestures Sparingly

Gestures can have different meanings in different cultures. For example, a thumbs-up is positive in some places but offensive in others. When communicating, try to use clear and simple gestures to avoid confusion.

Touch in Cultural Context

The use of touch can vary across cultures, affecting a person's perception and interaction. For example, in many western contexts, e.g., the UK, minimal touch, such as a handshake (or the occasional fist pump) is common, while excessive contact may feel invasive (Case, 2024). In contrast, some cultures often may touch, like a hug, as a sign of friendliness, with minimal touch perceived as cold.

Meanwhile, in many Asian cultures, such as in China, people often greet without physical contact (e.g., a bow) to respect personal space and tradition (Scroope and Eason, 2017).

Recognising these cultural differences in physical contact will help you to facilitate respectful, effective cross-cultural communication at university.

Social and Gender Norms

Gender also plays a critical role in the norms around physical contact. For example, in some Middle Eastern cultures, touch between members of the opposite sex may be seen as inappropriate. This expectation is critical for cross-cultural interactions, especially in education, where unintentional physical contact may be misunderstood.

Meanwhile, in some countries, such as France and Italy, same-gender greetings, like a kiss on both cheeks, is considered the norm, including between the same sex. Arguably, these greetings can seem overly confusing for someone from a culture where same-gender touch is uncommon or restricted.

It's worth noting that physical contact is culturally determined and navigating these nuances at university requires cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Bridging Cultures: Understanding ESOL

By being aware of these nonverbal nuances, you can create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere that encourages meaningful connections with all your fellow students.

In the next section, explore some of the literacy challenges ESOL students face.

Literacy

“The ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world.”

National Literacy Trust (2004a)

The latest literacy statistics provided by the National Literacy Trust (2024b), claim that 7.1m people in England have poor literacy skills. As an adult, without literacy skills, it is arguably very difficult to navigate everyday life from reading and writing at university, using the internet and making sense of instructions. These challenges can affect a person's confidence, self-esteem and make it difficult for them to secure the job they want.

Challenges ESOL students face

Adult literacy is a critical foundation for personal and professional development and success at the University of Bolton. This is particularly important for students who do not speak English as their first language. ESOL students have often encountered, and still do, several challenges that arise from personal and social factors, which can significantly impact their educational journey at university.

Low Self-Esteem and Confidence

Many ESOL students grapple with low self-esteem, often stemming from past negative experiences in educational settings or feelings of inadequacy in their language abilities (Lei and Tahereh, 2024). This lack of confidence can inhibit their motivation to participate in discussions or seek help.

Mental Health Challenges

Mental health concerns, for example, anxiety, are prevalent among ESOL students. The stress of adapting to a new culture, not least a new academic environment, combined with learning a foreign language, can make these feelings worse (Han et al., 2022).

Leaving Their Home Country

For some students who choose to study in the UK, they may have arrived from conflict-affected countries often carrying trauma that impacts on their ability to focus on learning. The disruption of their educational pathways can create significant gaps in foundational literacy skills (Taylor and Ali, 2017).

Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing

ESOL students may face distinct challenges across various literacy skills:

Speaking and Listening: Engaging in conversation in a new language can arguably be intimidating for many students. Students may struggle with pronunciation, English accents, slang words and understanding rapid speech, which can lead to feelings of frustration (Hinkel, 2005).

Reading and Writing: Reading for comprehension can be difficult due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures. As such, students need to adapt to academic conversations that differ from their own native language.

Employability Skills

Finally, many ESOL students wish to improve their employability proficiency, but struggle with the skills needed to communicate effectively in job interviews and workplace environments. Therefore, understanding industry-specific terminology can also be a significant barrier (Learning and Work Institute, 2020).

In the next section we will explore what this means for your everyday interactions at university.

What This Means For Your Everyday Interactions At University



As a university student, being aware of these challenges will help you to create an inclusive academic environment at the University of Bolton. Here are some practical strategies to help support ESOL students.

Strategy 1 - Be Patient and Encouraging

Create a supportive environment by being patient during conversations. Encourage peers to express themselves, even if they have made mistakes. Subtle encouragement and positive feedback can help boost confidence and motivation.

Strategy 2 - Use Clear and Simple Language

When you communicate with ESOL peers, try to use straightforward language, avoid jargon, slang and complex language. Speak slowly and clearly and check for understanding by asking if they understand what you have just said or have any questions.

Strategy 3 – Incorporate Visual Aids

Where possible, try to incorporate imagery or event videos to help you convey meaning to complex concepts.

Strategy 4 – Organise Study Groups

Create an inclusive study group where everyone feels comfortable participating. For example, provide a relaxed, informal environment for practicing language skills.

Strategy 5 – Share Resources

Introduce useful resources or let peers know about any workshops or events that may be taking place at the university e.g., Conversation Cafés. Encourage your peers to take advantage of these resources to enhance their literacy skills outside of the classroom.

Case study videos

In this real-life example, we'll take you inside an ESOL classroom to show how language barriers can impact communication and learning. You'll also see strategies that make a difference.

[ESOL Study Program: E2 ESOL](#) [YouTube]

Insights from a former ESOL student

To deepen your understanding of studying as an ESOL student at the University of Bolton, watch a video featuring a PGCE student who shares her experiences. This personal perspective highlights the support available to students training to be a teacher.

[Nadiia Kaba: Former ESOL Student](#) [YouTube]

Let's move on to look at how to put all this into practice to support university peers who are English to speakers of other languages.

5 Practical Steps



Here are five practical steps to support university peers who are English to speakers of other languages.

Step 1 – Learn

Cultivate curiosity about other cultures by actively seeking knowledge. Attend cultural events, read literature from different perspectives, or engage in conversations with people from diverse backgrounds. This openness will help you appreciate the richness of your peers' experiences.

Step 2 – Identify Your Own Values

Take the time to reflect on your own cultural values, beliefs and influences. Understanding how your background shapes your worldview will enhance your ability to interact thoughtfully with others and recognise your own biases.

Step 3 – Acknowledge Cultural Differences

Recognise and respect that cultural differences exist and that no single culture's way of experiencing the world is inherently right or wrong. Approach conversations with an open mind and a willingness to learn from diverse perspectives.

Step 4 – Empathise

Use your understanding of cultural diversity to empathise with your peers. Try to view situations through their cultural lens, considering their unique experiences and challenges. This empathy can foster deeper connections and improve communication.

Step 5 – Adapt

Be flexible and willing to accommodate or adapt to different cultural norms and practices. Whether adjusting your communication style or being open to new collaborative methods, demonstrating adaptability shows respect and can create a more inclusive environment for everyone.

By considering these 5 practical steps you can begin to foster a supportive environment for ESOL peers.

Summary



Key takeaways

- Understanding cultural differences and language barriers is essential in supporting students who do not speak English as their first language
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps and using clear language or examples can help overcome barriers
- Showing empathy, being patient, and offering practical help fosters a positive learning environment for everyone

Final guidelines and support

Supporting international students and promoting cultural understanding requires both awareness and access to key resources. The University of Bolton offers several avenues to enhance your knowledge of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and support international students.

University of Bolton guidelines and policies

The University has clear guidelines for supporting students from diverse backgrounds, including policies on Dignity at Study. Familiarise yourself with these policies to ensure that you are offering appropriate and sensitive support. For more information, consult the University's [Student Policy Zone](#).

Skills support and Conversation Cafes

For additional language practice, students can attend skills support workshops and the Conversation Café. These are informal settings where students can practice their English in a relaxed, social environment. It's an excellent opportunity for cultural exchange and improving communication skills.

By utilising these resources and understanding how cultural differences impact communication, you'll be better equipped to support international students and foster an inclusive, diverse learning community. For more information, consult LEAP Live.

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