

Case Study 1: Aadan From Somalia

Aadan came to the United States 9 years ago as a refugee, when he was 19 years old. Prior to coming to the United States, he experienced interrupted formal schooling, attending school for just 3 years in a refugee camp and acquiring minimal literacy skills in his own language. Aadan is now married and has four school-aged children. He works as an attendant in a parking garage and attends English classes three mornings a week. Because of his limited literacy skills, he has been placed in a beginning-level English language acquisition class. However, he has strong oral language skills and is quite confident communicating with teachers and people in his community. His dream is to achieve a high school equivalency diploma.

What are Aadan's personal and professional goals?

- Read documents sent home from his children's school
- Read work documents
- Support his children's academic achievement
- Take part in community activities and events
- Complete a high school equivalency diploma
- Attain a higher paying job

What strengths does Aadan bring, and what challenges does he face in meeting his goals based on the information provided?

Strengths

- Resilience in committing to his education, even while working and raising a family
- Strong communication skills
- Confidence in his ability to communicate with others
- Experience in the workplace

Challenges

- Limited formal schooling. Having received limited formal schooling both in his first language and in a high school in the United States, Aadan did not acquire the necessary academic language skills to meet his educational goals.
- Competing demands. Both his work and his family are important to him.
- Managing his expectations. Aadan has a long road ahead of him, but with time and the right support, he most likely can attain his goals.

What are his language needs?

- Reading and writing informational texts for work and school
- Speaking and listening to engage with community activities
- Acquiring digital literacy skills

How can instruction in his beginning-level English class begin to lay a foundation for the skills Aadan needs to meet his goals?

- Aadan needs focused literacy instruction. As he has strong oral language skills, an approach that draws on this strength would benefit him greatly (e.g., the whole-part-whole method; language experience; meaning-based, contextualized phonics), using motivating content and topics. (See [New American Horizons' Building Literacy With Adult Emergent Readers](#) for an example.)
- Having received limited formal schooling, Aadan needs intensive practice in using reading and listening strategies, taking notes, meeting classroom expectations, and following classroom routines that will help him to work on his language skills more independently. If he finds himself in a class focused on life skills (e.g., opening a bank account, going to the doctor), his needs will not be met. He needs to work with meaningful content that represents what he may encounter at school or at work.
- Aadan needs exposure to and practice reading a variety of text types, such as short prose, charts, and graphs.

Adapted from LINCS ESL Pro, Module 1: Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner, Unit 1: Increasing the Rigor of Adult English Language Instruction
Available from the LINCS Learning Portal, Adult English Language Learners: <https://lincs.ed.gov/learning-portal>

Case Study 2: Inez From Ecuador

Inez has lived in the United States for 10 years and has three school-aged children. She completed Grade 10 in Ecuador. She works in housekeeping at a hotel and is enrolled in a low-to intermediate-level English language acquisition class at a volunteer-run program in her community. The program she attends focuses on improving learners' life skills (e.g., shopping, applying for jobs, navigating transportation systems). Inez feels frustrated because she cannot express herself well in English and has trouble communicating with her boss. Her dream is to earn her high school equivalency diploma and then become a nurse. She loves using computer apps to practice English.

What are Inez's personal and professional goals?

- Support her children's academic achievement
- Take part in community activities and events
- Communicate more effectively with her coworkers and supervisors
- Move out of a low-wage job in housekeeping
- Complete the high school equivalency diploma
- Study to become a nurse
- Improve her communication skills so that she is better understood

Strengths

- Resilience in committing to her education while working and raising a family
- Experience in the workplace
- A professional goal she feels passionate about
- Comfort using digital learning tools

Challenges

- Finding the right instruction to meet her needs. Even students who received prior formal schooling may not have acquired the necessary academic language skills to meet their educational goals. Given her current work situation and enrollment in a program that focuses primarily on life skills, Inez may not be receiving instruction that is adequately rigorous or challenging.
- Balancing the demands of work and family.
- Managing the sense of frustration in her interactions with others and with her boss.
- Managing her expectations. Inez has a long road ahead of her, but with time and the right support (e.g., rigorous instruction, career-focused content), she most likely can attain her goals.

What academic language and skills development do you think Inez needs to meet these goals?

Does Inez have any concept of the many steps that are needed to reach her academic and professional goals? Can she set short-term goals along the way? What kind of program might enhance her current work experience, while also preparing her for advancement in her English language acquisition class?

Ultimately, Inez will need to acquire the following kinds of reading and writing skills in order to attain a high school equivalency diploma:

- Pre-reading and scanning academic materials to get a sense of a text's scope and emerging meaning
- Determining an author's purpose, intended audience, and tone, and the text's general context
- Recognizing and understanding a work's thesis or theme and the methods of organization used to support the thesis or develop the theme
- Summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing ideas from what she has read
- Evaluating the evidence presented and stating an opinion about what she has read

In her writing, she will need to demonstrate the following skills:

- Using effective vocabulary, idioms, grammar, and sentence structures
- Brainstorming, drafting, and outlining ideas for essays and other forms of academic writing

- Developing a thesis and supporting topics, and organizing evidence using basic rhetorical patterns
- Integrating material from outside sources in her own writing
- Citing sources appropriately and maintaining academic integrity in her work

Given her stated frustration with not being understood and not being able to express herself clearly to her boss, Inez needs to work on a variety of oral communication skills, including the following:

- Seeking and offering clarification appropriately in spoken communication (e.g., clarifying questions, paraphrasing, restating)
- Repairing communication breakdowns respectfully and effectively
- Using appropriate intonation (e.g., a polite tone, an appropriate rise and fall of vocal pitch)

How can instruction in her low- to intermediate-level English language acquisition class begin to lay a foundation for these skills?

- Inez needs to practice using reading and listening strategies, taking notes, meeting classroom expectations, and following classroom routines that will help her to work on her language skills more independently.
- She needs exposure to and practice reading a variety of text types, including short prose, charts, and graphs.
- She needs to practice using effective communications strategies so that she can ask more easily for clarification, describe a problem, and interrupt appropriately in work contexts. Her intelligibility (the ability to be understood by others) seems to be an issue for her, so she could benefit from working on aspects of her pronunciation that are causing breakdowns in communication. Given her interest in nursing, she needs to be working with rich content related to that field.
- She needs to practice listening to authentic speech in a variety of contexts.

Adapted from LINCS ESL Pro, Module 1: Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner, Unit 1: Increasing the Rigor of Adult English Language Instruction

Available from the LINCS Learning Portal, Adult English Language Learners: <https://lincs.ed.gov/learning-portal>

Case Study 3: Carlos From Mexico

Carlos was a high school mathematics teacher in Mexico. He is currently working in a manufacturing company as he improves his English. He needs to work with his state to see if he meets licensure requirements. He most certainly needs to enroll in education classes and pass licensing exams, but he feels like that is a long way off. Right now, he is in an intermediate- to high-level English language acquisition class in a large, urban adult education program. He has not scored high enough to be placed in the more advanced college bridge courses, but he thinks that is what he needs to achieve in order to get ahead.

What are Carlos's personal and professional goals?


- Move from a lower wage job in manufacturing to a job in teaching
- Navigate the licensing processes for teachers in his state
- Move up to the advanced college bridge course
- Enroll in teacher licensure courses
- Prepare for state teacher tests
- Return to a job as a mathematics teacher

What strengths does Carlos bring, and what challenges does he face in meeting his goals based on the information provided?

Strengths

- A transferable credential
- Resilience in committing to his education and attending school even while working
- Experience in the workplace
- A professional goal he feels passionate about

Challenges

- Finding the right instruction to meet his needs. Even students who received prior formal schooling may not have acquired the necessary academic language skills to meet their educational goals. Given his current work situation and enrollment in a program that may focus primarily on life skills, he may not be receiving instruction that is adequately rigorous or challenging.
- 

- Balancing the demands of work.
- Managing his expectations. Carlos has a long road ahead of him, but with time and the right support (e.g., rigorous instruction, career-focused content), he most likely can attain his goals.

What academic language and skills development do you think Carlos needs to meet these goals?

Carlos has a college degree from his country. He has the advantage of having experienced and most likely developed some academic language and skills in his first language. He needs intensive practice using these skills *in English*. He also needs to learn how to navigate the state licensing system. The information he needs and the tests he will take will most likely be online, so he needs to feel comfortable in the digital world. He needs to acquire the following skills:

- Identifying and using resources (print, electronic, and human) to learn about the state licensing procedures.
- Recognizing, developing, and maintaining relationships that may provide further or future assistance—for example, a local mathematics class. (Carlos may be able to find a mathematics teacher mentor in the community.)
- Choosing appropriate processes for communication with others (e.g., scheduling a meeting with a mathematics teacher, e-mailing a state office).
- Employing listening skills that are appropriate for the content and task at hand (e.g., listening for gist, specific information, signal words).
- Taking notes while listening.

How can instruction in his intermediate- to high-level English language acquisition class begin to lay a foundation for these skills?

- Carlos needs to learn academic language and skills in English. Although he may have practice in a classroom setting, he will benefit greatly from practice using reading and listening strategies, taking notes, and meeting expectations and following routines that are common in a U.S. classroom.

- He needs exposure to and practice navigating the digital world. Within his language class, he can practice these skills often, using rich experiences for problem solving in today's world (visit LINCS ESL Pro: Module 2 for instruction and guidance in this area).
- He will also benefit from practice using effective communications strategies so that he can interact more easily with potential mentors in the community. Given his interest in mathematics, any classroom activity that incorporates numeracy will be a bonus for him (e.g., working with and analyzing real-world data).

Adapted from LINCS ESL Pro, Module 1: Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner, Unit 1: Increasing the Rigor of Adult English Language Instruction

Available from the LINCS Learning Portal, Adult English Language Learners: <https://lincs.ed.gov/learning-portal>

Unit 1: Tools for Assessing Learner Needs

Short Surveys/Questions

Create three- to four-item surveys using any number of online tools and send them to learners to complete before a class starts, before the start of a unit, or during a first class.

Four Corners

Provide signs that represent learning outcomes in four corners of the room. First, invite learners to move to the corner of the room that represents what they **can do** in English. Then, invite them to move to the corner that represents what they **need to learn** most in English. Learners then share why they chose that corner. The signs can be related to topics of interest (applying for jobs, talking about environmental issues); strengths in the four skill areas (reading, writing, listening, and speaking); digital literacy practices and needs; or learning style preferences.

Polling

Use a free online tool to create short surveys at the start of a term, at the start of a unit of instruction, or at the start of a lesson. Polling can also be done using a raised hand, post-it notes, or other nondigital means.

Can-Do Statements

Learners make “can-do” statements related to the topics of instruction. Teachers can post prompts and then ask learners to point or stand next to these signs in a face-to-face class, or to answer in the chat in an online class. Notice “I do that in my home language” is included as an option.

I can do that in English

I can't do that in English

I want to learn that in English

I do that in my home language

Call out different goals for a class or different learning outcomes for a lesson. Examples include the following:

- Ask a coworker for help
- Follow instructions at work
- Make small talk with coworkers
- Ask for time off at work

Prioritizing Group Needs

In teams, learners generate lists of the language, skills, and/or knowledge they need related to a topic of instruction. Learners present these lists to others and conduct learner-led polling to determine the most important needs.

Frequent Exit Tickets

An exit ticket is a brief assessment at the end of a class that gives immediate feedback on student learning and helps to determine needs for subsequent lessons. Possible formats for exit tickets include the following (adapted from):

- **“3-2-1”**: Learners list three things they have learned, two things that surprised them, and one question they have from the class.
- **Mini quizzes**: Learners respond to two or three questions related to the learning objectives of the day, either by answering in the chat in an online class or by sharing answers on a sticky note or index card in the classroom.
- **Reflection on learning**: Learners reflect on what they have learned that was new for them, what was most difficult, and what was most useful.

Additional ideas for needs assessment can be found in the Practitioner Toolkit developed by the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA).

Unit 1: Checklist of Learner-Centered and Inclusive Teaching Practices

Use this checklist of teaching practices as you observe classes or view videos of classroom teaching. (Information on videos of classroom teaching can be found in the references and recommended resources for this unit.) Take note of where you see these teaching practices applied. You can also use this checklist to evaluate your own practice!

Learner-centered, inclusive teaching practices	How is this evident in the lesson I am observing, or in my own teaching?
1. Activate learners' knowledge and experiences	
2. Make instruction relevant to learners' needs and interests	
3. View learners' first language and culture as resources for learning; value language variety	
4. Give learners choices and active roles in the classroom	
5. Make classroom interactions and tasks authentic	
6. Challenge learners to employ higher order and critical thinking skills	
7. Choose materials that are reflective of learners in the class	
8. Foster a classroom climate of respect; respond to comments or acts that are offensive or disaffirming as they occur in the class	