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# Resisting research evidence-base deficits: a comprehensive analysis of a leading English association journal over a decade

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the research evidence-base informing teaching practice and policy in subject English in schools. We explore the *Australian Journal of English Education*, the flagship research publication from the Australian Association of Teachers of English, at a time when an evidence-base is in high demand. Our aim is to understand the research outputs that are valued by the authors, editors, reviewers and readers of this association journal. We analyse the research published from the release of the *Australian Curriculum English* in 2014, until the end of 2022. We deduce the particular topic contributions made in 139 research articles according to the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. We also consider the theories, methods and recommendations made in the light of increasingly recognised deficits in the research evidence base around knowledge, efficacy and application. Our findings indicate robust engagement with highly contextualised research making visible the transformative work of English teachers.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Research evidence base; teacher professional associations; journal articles; knowledge deficit; efficacy deficit; application deficit

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the contribution of Teacher Professional Association (TPA) journals by considering what research is “out there”, and the nature of the manuscripts informing teaching practice and educational policy in subject English. We hone in on one long-standing national journal, the *Australian Journal of English Education* (formerly *English in Australia*), the flagship publication owned and published by the Australian Association of Teachers of English (AATE). We report on the research guiding English teaching in Australian schools across 9 years (2014–2022). Our aim is to understand the outputs that are valued by the authors, editors and reviewers of this association journal and made available to researchers, teachers, pre-service teachers, policy-makers and policy workers.

We use the nomenclature of teacher professional associations (TPA) to highlight teaching as a profession and the ongoing professional learning work of teachers. Morony (1999) illustrates the importance of TPAs, noting their place as the “third side of the triangle of support for teachers’ work” (p. 1), with the other two sides being

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the initial teaching qualification, and ongoing professional learning provided by the employer. Research outlines that TPAs have a long history of assigning representatives to participate in system-based curriculum renewal, develop resources for teachers and students and coordinate teacher professional learning (Akpan 2010; Hallstrom 2014; Marchant, Mulvihill, and Martin 2015). These activities are a time-honoured tradition that showcases a dynamic network of flexible spaces that support teachers “to cope with changes in the nature of professionalism” (Lamb 2012, 287). According to Bonilla (2017), the TPA activities evolve out of, and contribute to, teachers’ relational professionalism “with the self, with others and one’s teaching practice” and are important in an era of “increasing use of technocratic curricula and institutional controls” (p. 304) and “neoliberal ideologies in schooling that challenge the role of teacher agency” (p. 306).

Many English/English Language Arts journals, such as *English Teaching Practice & Critique*, are not affiliated with a TPA. However, a number of TPAs are known for publishing high-esteem research journals and magazines orientated to descriptions of professional practice. Some TPA research journals have been contributing to the evidence-base for more than half a century. The Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) is an open-access portal, commissioned in 1996, that draws citation data from over 34,100 titles across more than 5,000 international publishers to “assess and analyze scientific domains” (Scimago Journal & Country Rank 2024). For example, the US-based International Literacy Association (ILA) has, for 77 years, published the *Reading Teacher*, ranked as Scimago Quartile One (Q1) in the field of linguistics and language, and for 67 years published the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, ranked as Scimago Q1 in the field of Education. Similarly, the US-based Literacy Research Association has published the *Journal of Literacy Research*, also ranked Q1, for over 50 years. The United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) has published for 57 years *Literacy*, ranked as Scimago Q1 for linguistics and language. These journals are owned by the TPAs whose members continue as editors and peer reviewers to quality assure the content and improve the submission *en route* to publication. The publishing and dissemination are, however, contracted to for-profit “knowledge” businesses such as Sage, or Wiley-Blackwell Publishing which publish 7.5 million articles across 2,000 journals (Wiley 2024).

One journal that continues to be owned and published by the TPA is the flagship research journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), the *Australian Journal of English Education* (AJEE) (formally *English in Australia*). AJEE, established for 59 years, is ranked as Scimago Q1 for history and Q2 for linguistics and language. Our interest is in what constitutes the research evidence base in *AJEE* over a 9-year period from 2014 when the inaugural *Australian Curriculum English* (ACARA 2024) was taken up in schools, through to the end of 2022, covering volumes 49–57 inclusive.

Over time, educational research has been heavily influenced by the pressure to generate an indisputable evidence base to lead changes in policy and practice. The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) (2021) defines evidence-based teaching as “teaching practices that research has shown will have the greatest impact on student learning”. However, scholarship is calling the preoccupation with certain evidence, and the nature of this evidence, into question. Slavin (2002) purports that while policymakers and educators often reach for research

based on experiments that evaluate replicable programmes and practices, other more descriptive (qualitative) yet equally disciplined forms of inquiry are still needed.

Taking a more critical lens, Biesta (2010) identifies three deficits in the argument for “evidence-based” education. First, a *knowledge deficit* exists as knowledge about actions (e.g., ways of teaching) and consequences (e.g., learning) can only provide possibilities, not certainties. Put another way, research evidence can point out what worked in the past but cannot dictate future action. Second, an *efficacy deficit* exists in relation to the context and conditions surrounding practice. The efficacy deficit is framed on the understanding that social interactions, such as teaching, are open systems, so the action-to-consequence loop can never be pre-determined. Third, an *application deficit* exists when the actual work for/in applying knowledge to transform practices remains opaque, or less tangible. A fundamental issue, Biesta (2010) asserts, is that “knowledge is not a depiction of a static world ‘out there’—”(p. 495). Research knowledge is, he argues, relational, transactional, functional and ever evolving (Biesta 2010).

### The remit of the AJEE journal

*AJEE* has been published since November 1965 by AATE (AATE 2024). *AJEE* comprises peer-reviewed research from academics and practitioners and commentary on the teaching of English. The shifting remit of *AJEE* is evident in the editorials that accompany each issue. For example, as the outgoing editor, Gannon mentioned the “radical shifts in systemic priorities and practices” from 1996 to the time of the editorial in 2015, noting the newfound interest in “*local* collection and interpretation of school data” (Gannon and Jetnikoff 2015, 2, emphasis in original). Gannon also pre-empted “following the continuing evolution” of the journal (3).

Aside from the editorials and bona fide research, each issue of *AJEE* includes book and resource reviews, reports from state presidents, conference reports and conference advertisements, life member biographies, obituaries, poetry and short stories written by AATE members, commentaries, or provocations. Since 2018, *AJEE* has included a *Perspectives from the Past* which is a previously published article with a contemporary introduction (AATE 2024). Each year AATE has published three issues of *AJEE*, except in 2020 and 2022 when two issues were published due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (AATE 2024).

### Theoretical tools

As a TPA journal, we expected the corpus of articles to cover what Bernstein (2000) refers to as the three message systems of education: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. Drawing on Bernstein’s influence, Moore (2013) explains that these three message systems are the “primary sites of symbolic production and control and also as potential sites of change – of thinking the ‘unthinkable’” (p. 13). We also employ Biesta’s (2010) tripartite problematisation of what is commonly seen as the “evidence-base”, as outlined above, the knowledge, efficacy and application deficits. The two layers of theory allow us to describe the articles according to topic (Bernstein 2000), and then analyse how the

research articles manage the deficits inherent in research work (Biesta 2010) in the following ways:

- The knowledge deficit: Are the articles assuming “knowledge possibilities” that need to be explored further, rather than abstract certainties?
- The efficacy deficit: Do the articles recognise the complex contextual conditions that shape knowledge and practice in open, non-deterministic systems such as schools?
- The application deficit: Are the articles seeking to make visible the everyday work of knowledge application and practice transformation in English education?

## Methodology

The research questions guiding our inquiry were:

- (i) What topics, methodologies, theoretical approaches and recommendations have trended in *AJEE* across 2014–2022?
- (ii) How do the articles present research as “evidence” in terms of knowledge, efficacy and application?

We began by recording in an Excel spreadsheet the details of the 293 articles published in *AJEE* across 2014–2022. We recorded volume/issue number, year, editor, special edition or not, article title, author/s, lead authors’ institution and position, topic/s, research question/s, conceptual/theoretical lens/es, methodology and method of analysis, data sources, recommendations, keywords/subjects and an APA 7 citation. Detailed findings were of less interest to our analysis about the potential for the three deficits in the research base.

Early in the data-gathering process, we noted that quite a few articles did not conform to standard processes such as displaying a clear research question, conceptual/theoretical lens, methodology, data sources, or recommendations. These articles were scrutinised by all members of the team until consensus was reached to identify if the article could be classified as research, in that they may have explored a phenomenon theoretically, analysed texts or used approaches that challenged traditional research paradigms. The number of research articles was 139, with further 154 articles classified as “commentary” (refer Table 1).

According to Table 1, the research articles comprise approximately half of the total number of articles within this date range, suggesting the editors are selective in the

**Table 1.** Research and commentary articles in *AJEE* 2014–2022.

Year	Volume & Issue	# of Research Articles	# of Commentary Articles	Total Articles
2014	Vol 49, Issues 1, 2 & 3	13 (35%)	24 (65%)	37
2015	Vol 50, Issues 1, 2 & 3	22 (56%)	17 (44%)	39
2016	Vol 51, Issues 1, 2 & 3	23 (59%)	16 (41%)	39
2017	Vol 52, Issues 1, 2 & 3	14 (37%)	24 (63%)	38
2018	Vol 53, Issues 1, 2 & 3	22 (51%)	21 (49)	43
2019	Vol 54, Issues 1, 2 & 3	13 (50%)	13 (50%)	26
2020	Vol 55, Issues 1 & 2	11 (52%)	10 (48%)	21
2021	Vol 56, Issues 1, 2, 3	13 (48%)	14 (52%)	27
2022	Vol 57, Issues 1 & 2	8 (35%)	15 (65%)	23
Totals	24 Issues	139	154	293

research being published. Such an approach is befitting of a Q2/Q1 journal. The high number of commentary articles suggests *AJEE* provides a range of content formats for its readership. This non-research content does important relational work for the TPA and its membership.

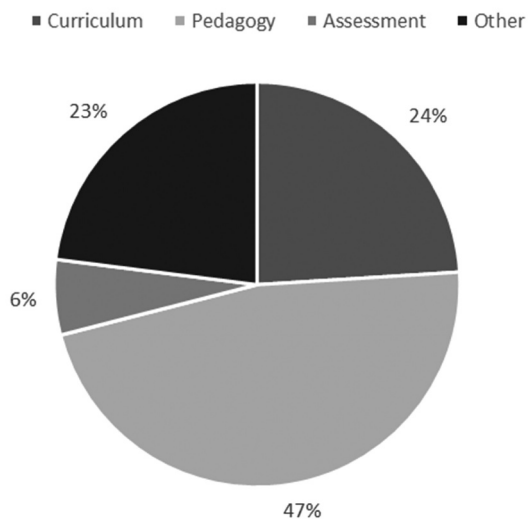
### **Analytic methods**

To analyse the topics of the 139 articles, we used Bernstein's (2000) three message systems of formal educational knowledge: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation/assessment. For Bernstein (2000), curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge; pedagogy defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge; and evaluation or assessment is defined as what counts as a valid realisation of this knowledge. These definitions became the analytical lens for categorising the research articles to see the areas of interest being promoted. We added a fourth category, "other", to account for articles that were not mutually exclusive, or pursued topics outside the three message systems. We then collate and describe the theories and methods used and recommendations made, since these arguably comprise the engine room of the "evidence", and interpret these using Biesta's (2010) three deficits of knowledge, efficacy and application in research.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In the following section, we first explain our findings relating to the way the 139 articles mapped onto curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and other categories, and then draw on Biesta (2010) to further explore the evidence base.

Distribution of Research Articles 2014 - 2022



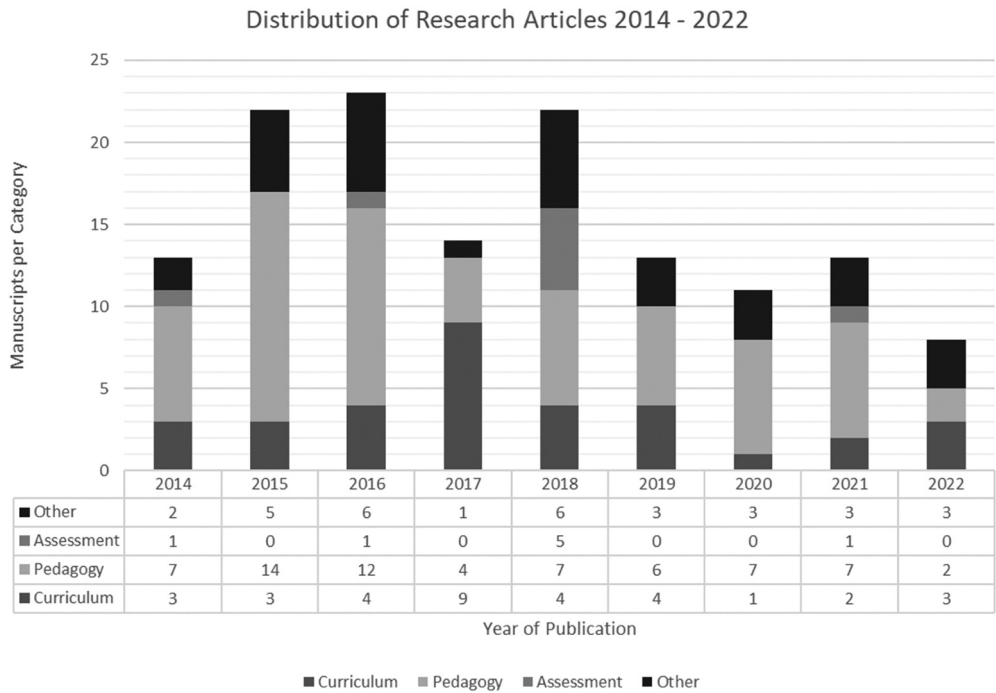
**Figure 1.** Distribution of articles 2014–2022.

**Categorising the topics in the 139 articles**

Results from our categorisation, using Bernstein’s (2000) three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation/assessment, are illustrated in Figure 1.

Almost half of the 139 articles focussed on pedagogy (47%) revealing a keen and ongoing interest in this message system. Almost a quarter of the articles were devoted to each of curriculum (24%) and the “other” category (23%), with a minority of articles focussing on assessment (6%).

Figure 2 illustrates that the number of articles published in 2014, 2017 and 2019–2022 were consistent, ranging from 8 to 14 articles each year. Unsurprisingly, the 3 years of the COVID-19 disruption had 11 (2020), 13 (2021) and 8 (2022) articles with 2020 and 2022 producing 2 issues instead of the regular 3 issues. Data collection, writing and reviewing services, as well as in-person conferences where research collaborations often gain momentum, were disrupted during this time. The three bumper years included at least one special issue each year, where the editorial team invited researchers to write on a pre-determined topic such as research methods used to examine English teaching pedagogy (2015), assessing English (2018), and following the Australian vote for same-sex marriage, a special issue on “Love in English”, focussing on Gender and sexuality (2018). The special issue on assessing English (2018) produced more articles on assessment than in the other 8 years combined, thus demonstrating the outcomes of editorial decision-making. The bumper years of 2016 and 2018 welcomed new editorial boards, bringing new energies and opportunities to draw on new networks. There are affordances to regularly refresh the editorial board with well-connected researchers. These same two years also hosted special



**Figure 2.** Distribution of articles 2014–2022.



issues devoted to the Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ASFLA) conference (published 2016), the national AATE conference (published 2016, 2018) and revisiting the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the international Dartmouth seminar (published 2016). These special issues elicited articles on “hot topics” that contributed to the research evidence – base.

Sixty-six (47%) articles addressed the message system of pedagogy, showing interest in a wide variety of subtopics: policy or programme evaluation; the impact of government reform and standardised testing; interpretations of syllabus and syllabus change impact; the influence of teacher education on pedagogy; teaching writing including creative writing; using multimodal/video/digital texts; teaching literature; literature selection (including canonical and diverse); teaching vocabulary, drama, film and poetry, reading, grammar and language, oral language, translanguaging and Shakespeare; teachers as writers and learnings for teachers’ pedagogical practices; teachers’ experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown; teachers’ views on LGBTIQ+ and developing a Queer pedagogy for the English classroom; ethics in teaching; boys and literacy, teachers’ and students’ actions and processes of change; building linguistic knowledge with multilingual learners; and critical literacy. Overall, interest in a range of pedagogies was evident including: critical; creative; relational; culturally sustaining; inquiry-based; and metalogue pedagogies. This diversity speaks to Sellar’s (2009) view of ethical, locally connected pedagogies that are an “inherently relational, emergent and non-linear process that is unpredictable and therefore unknowable in advance” (p. 351).

Thirty-three (24%) of the articles addressed the message system of curriculum, including just over half which were focussed on prescribing/proscribing text selections. Articles discussed selecting texts with particular student groups in mind, such as Indigenous students, English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) students and students from religious schools. Articles discussed selecting texts with diverse representations of people’s lives, such as those living with a disability, Queer identities, girls’ culture, gender stereotypes, and from the viewpoint of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Single articles challenged the privilege of standard Australian English over Aboriginal English, and teachers’ professional learning for curriculum knowledge. As can be expected from a national TPA journal, some articles were more parochial, giving attention to the development of state-based and national curricula, including the various aims of English curricula such as specialised English curricula for EAL/D students.

Eight (6%) articles addressed the message system of assessment, including: formative assessment; assessing writing; automated essay scoring; teachers’ written feedback to students; teachers’ perceptions of assessment; the imposition of national standardised testing on curriculum delivery; and public reporting of national standardised testing on writing. Taken together, the articles highlighted teachers’ intellectual work as content assessors, as well as critical reflections on the way system mandated literacy assessments encroached on the curriculum enactment.

Thirty-two (23%) of the articles were categorised as other, either because they covered more than one message system, or because they covered new themes outside of the message systems. Topics that covered multiple-message systems included: teachers as writers; reflections on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the international Dartmouth seminar; the role of popular culture and new literacies in motivating boy readers; early-career teachers’ experiences; Postcolonial English teaching; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment reform;

evaluating past curricula and how standardisation and measurement narrowed curriculum; implementation. Topics that sat outside the message systems included: erosion of teacher agency; teacher identity; increasing teacher workload; sustaining the motivation to teach; textual analysis of the safe schools policies and videogames; representations of “whiteness”, “Englishness” and LGBTQI+ identities in English texts; the historical diaries of a former English teacher; the work of English leaders; teachers undertaking online professional learning; and students’ experiences of transitioning from secondary schools to tertiary institutions. The attention given to historical matters justifies the Scimago Q1 rating for history.

### **How AJEE researchers engage with the evidence deficits inherent in research work**

In the following, we drill down into the 139 articles to identify the theoretical framings, methodologies, methods, and recommendations that comprise the evidence base on offer in the journal.

#### ***Theories and conceptual frameworks used in the articles***

The range of conceptual and theoretical framings within the 139 predominantly qualitative articles is wide. Well-established, or “grand” theories underpinning many of the studies included: Grounded theory (e.g., Glaser and Strauss 1967); Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (e.g., Engeström 1987); Discourse theory (e.g., Fairclough 1992; Gee 2014); Dewey’s pragmatism and experience (Dewey 1916/2011/2011, 1938/1997/1997); Bourdieu’s concepts of identity formation (Bourdieu 1984), capital (Bourdieu 2003), habitus and field (Bourdieu 1990); Foucauldian lenses such as governmentality (Foucault 2008); Bernstein’s (2000) classification of curriculum knowledge, framing of pedagogic practice, and regionalisation; New Historicism (Greenblatt 1990); and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000).

Some articles used broader and well-established paradigmatic and theoretical categories such as Sociocultural perspectives, Constructivism, Post-structuralism, Postmodernism, Critical, Postcolonialism, Feminism, Bilingualism, situated cognition and metacognition. Others drew on less frequently pursued conceptual framings such as: spatial theories; Queer theories; posthumanism and new materialism (e.g., Barad 2007); affect theories; identity theories (including teacher professional identity, teacher-writer identity and identity texts, e.g., Cummins and Early 2011); concepts of agency (e.g., Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015); practice; plurilingualism; translanguaging; sociability; reflection; reflexivity; inquiry; mythology; values; intercultural understanding; and assessment cultures.

Other articles drew on theorisations that are very familiar to researchers and teachers in the discipline of English: Personal Growth Model (Dixon 1967); theorisations from the new literacies turn, for example: multimodality, text analysis, textuality, text diversity, social semiotics, visual literacy, hypertext, metafiction, film literacy, visual literacy, games literacies; Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014) and Appraisal Theory (J. R. Martin and White 2005); Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt 1938/1978/1978) and Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt 1994); Green’s 3D

**Table 2.** Specific theories used in the articles to generate new knowledge.

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Indigenous standpoint theory Moreton-Robinson (2013)
Bakhtin's "ideological becoming" M. M. Bakhtin (1981), carnivalesque M. Bakhtin (1984), dialogism M. M. Bakhtin (1986)
Awareness, Autonomy, Authenticity in constructing curriculum as interaction Van Lier (1996)
Repertoires of practices Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003)
Creative interactivity Semler (2014)
Linguistic Subject Knowledge (LSK) & Linguistic Pedagogical Subject Knowledge (LPSK) (Love et al., 2105)
Who? & What? stories Cavarero (2000)
Multiple Literacy Theory Masny and Cole (2009)
Literature as Verbal Art Hasan (1989)
Concept of "compromise" Derrida (2005)
Political promise of literature Nussbaum (1997)
Linguistic colonisation Cormack and Green (2008)
Percept and affect, landscape as mental construct Deleuze (1989)
Concept of commonplace Locke (1706)
Interpellation Althusser (1970/1984/1970/1984)
3 registers of the psyche Lacan (2006)
Globalisation theory Held (1999)
Whiteness theory Bhopal (2018)
Complexity theory S. D. Martin and Dismuke (2017)
Cultural hybridity Bhabha (1994)

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Model of Literacy (2012); and writing development, e.g., Hyland's teaching of writing (Hyland 2016). Perhaps most interesting is the range of specific theories mobilised to generate highly nuanced analysis, shown in Table 2.

Following Biesta's (2010) analysis of the knowledge deficit in the research base, we consider the kind of knowledge being disseminated to readers through this range of theorisations. Firstly, diverse paradigms and conceptual lenses within the qualitative research tradition are drawn upon. Accordingly, knowledge is deemed mostly to provide possibilities with which readers can grapple, rather than presenting certainties arrived at through using more restricted, technological lenses, such as purely quantitative, interventionist studies. This is consistent with expansive, interpretivist, subjective views of knowledge that underpin English teaching, what Macken-Horarik et al. (2019) call hard-to-discern, "fuzzy" concepts. Some use of theory, such as Moreton-Robinson's (2013) Indigenous standpoint, offers stronger, normative positions on what constitutes knowledge. There are also a few New Materialist articles that provide less traditional researcher interpretation, instead inviting readers to draw conclusions.

Through drawing on these kinds of theory, rather than identifying an efficacy deficit, research efficacy was promoted through deep contextualisation, subject to certain conditions that shape practice. By way of example, the articles that use Bernstein's (2000) classification of curriculum knowledge and framing of pedagogic practice, Dewey's (1916) student experience, or Semler's (2014) creative interactivity, foreground what is going on in particular spatial, temporal and material contexts. The authors illuminate that "understanding 'what English is all about' is dependent on teachers' capacities to bring the subject to life and to light" (Macken-Horarik et al. 2019, 28). Rather than presenting as a how-to-manual, *AJEE* offers insights into the adaptive professionalism of English teachers as they specialise curriculum enactment for contexts of learning and teaching; this is the technical role of research in *AJEE*.

The researchers' choice of the theorisations demonstrated the avoidance of the application deficit that Biesta (2010) warns of by situating the research in paradigms that call for making visible the work of teachers, researcher/teacher and teacher/student collaborations. These articles provide rich examples of the relational, transactional, and functional practices required for English teaching and to create change around understandings of the English curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

### Methodologies and methods used in the articles

In a number of articles, identifying the methodological approach was neither readily apparent in the abstract nor present in the methods section. Upon closer scrutiny, a range of methodologies became evident, indicating broad engagement with traditional qualitative approaches and paradigms and a smaller number of studies that included a survey component using descriptive statistics. Close to half of the articles were either stated explicitly as "Case Studies", including instrumental, multisite and cross-case studies, or recognisable as such. Around a dozen articles described the work as "qualitative inquiry". Another dozen or so were non-empirical, theoretical pieces and another dozen used text analysis. There is a notable absence of RCTs and the use of descriptive analysis of surveys in mixed methods articles. The range of methodologies, which includes for the most part traditional, qualitative research designs, is shown in Table 3.

In the empirical articles, thematic analysis in various forms was the most commonly reported method of engaging with the data. However, at times it was not clear that a recognised thematic or coding analysis approach was used. "Coding" or "inductive" or

**Table 3.** The range of methodologies deployed in the articles.

Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed
Case Study	Surveys (analysed descriptively)	Action research including survey
Ethnography – critical, institutional, linguistic		Interventions – pre-post studies
Narrative Inquiry		Mixed-methods approach
Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology		
Autoethnography		
Design Based Research and other collaborative designs (including innovations)		
Action Research/Practitioner Inquiry -		
Text analysis e.g., film, literature, websites, policy, curriculum.		

**Table 4.** Analytic methods used in the articles.

Thematic Analysis, or "Coding" (incl. constant comparative analysis)
Content analysis and latent content analysis
Discourse analysis
Critical Discourse Analysis
Phenomenological Analysis
Narrative Inquiry methods
Interactive model of analysis
Deductive analytic methods associated with the chosen theoretical lens, e.g., analysis of film using Deleuzian concepts, or of video games using Appraisal
Post-qualitative approaches
Descriptive statistics

“deductive” analysis was commonly used to explain the process. Table 4 shows the analytic methods used with the data across the papers.

The empirical articles are mostly qualitative, drawing out rich sources of local data from some kind of case. Research designs and analyses overall show an assumption that the gap between English teachers’ actions and the knowledge base for practice is not as clean cut as some “what works” research attempts to show. Assertions about categorical knowledge are eschewed in favour of exploring partial and subjective knowledges (plural), laying out possibilities for consideration. Many articles are written by researchers working in close collaboration with teachers as partners, sometimes for lengthy durations. Thus, the research designs on the whole are approached not from the view of being “spectators of a finished universe” (Biesta 2010, 495), as is the case with much experimental and interventionist research, but as players in an evolving set of relations and systems.

A few articles used post-qualitative approaches, for example Truman (2014) who offers an autobiographical rendering of vignettes from her teaching. As Lather and St Pierre (2013) assert, post-qualitative inquiry seeks to generate knowledge by avoiding “stand-point epistemologies” (p. 635) which represent a humanist subject position offering “transparent descriptions of lived experiences” (p. 635) claiming some form of “truth”. In this way, these articles offer knowledge possibilities rather than certainties.

Similarly, the efficacy deficit is addressed through the methodologies describing specific details of the contexts and conditions surrounding the data and its generation. Analysis largely considers the social, cultural and political nature of teaching practice and findings are generated recognising the complex, open systems within which readers teach or research. Even the “text analysis” articles that explore options for using literature, film and media texts, etc, take contextual conditions of practice into account. As a case in point, Lowien (2016) links analysis of video games to curriculum content descriptors and frameworks for teaching literacy in schools.

In terms of how the research-based methodologies handle the application deficit, the range of interviews with teachers and students, work samples, observations, innovations and collaborative interventions ground the research by “capturing discrete moments that illuminate the work of English teachers” (Cheung and O’Sullivan 2022, 63). A number of more theoretical articles offer practical application aligned to required curriculum and available resources.

### **Key recommendations made in the articles**

The articles orientated to pedagogy recommended pedagogical practices that aligned to the curriculum requirements, including: introducing students to a metalanguage for written, visual and multimodal texts that draw on language as a system of choice; supporting students as creative writers via inquiry based pedagogies, including collective biography and Australian gothic; teaching strategies for reading Shakespeare, reading with a Queer lens, and reading for pleasure; a pedagogy of metalogue to explore values and intercultural understandings; strategies that recognise EAL/D students’ linguistic resources, including Indigenous students’ rights to learn in their own language; and strategies for teaching English during the COVID lockdown. Additional papers made recommendations for classroom pedagogy that ensured a focus on

student health and wellness when engaging with traumatic themes, and an ongoing focus on English for personal growth, and the importance of time for quality teacher professional learning for classroom pedagogies, including auto-ethnography for reflection on practice.

The articles orientated to the curriculum recommended a principle-based approach aligned to the curriculum, such as proscribing/prescribing text selection that considered the needs of students, including EAL/D students, and the importance of students accessing a wide range of writing and multimodal text styles about a diverse range of lived experiences, values and worldviews. Other articles discussed the important reconciliation work and individual and national identity work possible with careful text selection. One paper issued a call for privilege to be removed from the curriculum.

The articles orientated to assessment provided recommendations about reflective feedback practices, and balancing national testing demands with classroom-based formative and summative assessment. One article issued a call to use assessment data to close the curriculum/pedagogy/assessment loop, and another article recommended teachers take stock of the subjectivity/objectivity debate around marking English assessment tasks, both in national assessments being marked by artificial intelligence, and teacher marked assessments.

The articles categorised as other, included an array of recommendations, mainly for the English teacher. Suggestions included tapping into the big struggles of teaching, including the reform and practice in the English subject area; the need for ongoing reflexivity on the part of the teacher; and being cognisant about continuity and change across stages of learning. Recommendations shed light on teacher professionalism, including the projects where teachers were writers; recommendations for leadership in the English subject area, and a focus on student identity and the implications of teachers' word choices to describe students; teacher agency; and the seemingly hidden teacher workload in the English subject area. Recommendations continued to explore the need for teachers to tune into the issues of whiteness and racism in the English subject area; the use of new resources and texts; the relationships between secondary and tertiary study; and learner motivation for learning reading and writing.

The suite of recommendations published in *AJEE* articles do not provide definitive lists of text selection, or what Biesta (2010) refers to as a "cookbook" approach for future pedagogic practices. In the main, the recommendations drew attention to what was possible (past tense) in terms of connecting content to the curriculum for particular student groups. Commonplace was the importance of teacherly reflection on actions and consequences in the fray of practice, with a view to being "inclined" to take contextually specific "intelligent" action in the future. In a social realm such as teaching in the subject area of English, there is no guarantee that the future will be the same as the past. The recommendations emphasised that continual reflection is required to avoid the knowledge deficit of research.

In relation to the efficacy deficit, the recommendations in the articles consistently highlighted the need for fit-for-purpose pedagogies that aligned with the multiple and disparate agendas of the curriculum and the students' circumstances. This theme of fit-for-purpose carried over into recommendations about the formative and summative assessment practices that had to be sufficiently flexible to strike a balance between writing for the examiner and the act of creating, rather than assessment tasks as formulaic. Teachers

who are addressing the efficacy deficit need deep knowledge about the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment loop so they can differentiate instruction for a wide range of students, including those who are struggling to achieve and those who are considered to be high performing.

In relation to the application deficit, some recommendations offer advice or make stipulations about what is considered useful in practice, however, the recommendations do not generally adopt a technological, pre-determined, wide-spread applicability, instead paying attention to situations that are in some respect unique (Biesta 2010). Indeed, rather than claiming “best practice” in the articles’ conclusions, a generative tentativeness exists through the use of language such as “I wonder if...” and “I would suggest that...” and “All I can offer is...”. Some articles outlined general principles for one or more of the many pedagogies that would support teachers to respond to the different ways of engaging with specific genres (e.g., collaborative autobiography *vis-a-vis* the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare’s blank verse) and cohorts of students with particular learning needs (e.g., EAL/D students and high achieving students).

## Conclusion

This paper explored the contribution of *AJEE* to the research base across 2014–2022, a time when an evidence base is in high demand by government funding bodies and policy-makers. We established that the research base centres mostly on topics related to pedagogy, and curriculum, with a number of “other” articles, but fewer articles devoted to assessment. The assessment articles are highly cognisant of the need for careful consideration of how assessment intersects with the other message systems and the need to be fit-for-purpose.

The articles are largely qualitative in nature, based chiefly on case studies using wide-ranging sociocultural and critical lenses, which, not surprisingly, aligns with the epistemic base of English as a disciplinary field. As Cheung and O’Sullivan (2022) note, “It is through smaller stories, conveyed through case studies and teacher reflections deliberately sought out for research posterity, that a rich tapestry of English teacher practice and praxis is woven” (p. 63). This enables the journal to push back on the deficit assumptions around knowledge, efficacy and application in experimental and quasi-experimental research, as noted by Biesta (2010). On the whole, the research base makes the transformative labour of teaching highly visible illuminating “what *might* work here” and “for whom it *might* work”.

The recommendations in the articles point to the serious complexities of subject English as a field of study and practice, and the issues with adopting a technicist approach to assessment in response to the public call for an evidence-base. Unlike the standardised, large-scale randomised control trials being adopted in fields such as medicine, agriculture, transportation and technology (Biesta 2010), the suite of recommendations in *AJEE* research articles mainly comes from a large set of rigorously executed small-scale detailed contextualised research case studies. Our analysis provides a model that can be taken up by others interested in analysing the research trends in journals in their own locality. Should others pick up this innovation, our work provides a point of comparison.

We concur with Australian academic Masters (2018) who asserts that published research is not the only form of evidence that teachers should draw on: “evidence-based practice depends on the *integration of reliable, local, practitioner-collected evidence* with evidence from systematic, external research” (p.4). However, some gaps exist in the *AJEE* corpus; for instance, there is a dearth of post-qualitative research. The reliance on thematic analysis and its limitations to generate knowledge production shows through. We suggest more attention is paid to documenting the methods used, and if thematic analysis prevails that a *reflexive* thematic analysis is used to strengthen the journal’s obvious commitment to foregrounding subjectivities and dynamic relations over objectivities and static worlds.

### Disclosure statement

Jennifer is on the Review Board of *AJEE* and has published in the journal under the former title of “English in Australia”. Beryl has been a guest editor of an issue and has published in the journal under the former title of “English in Australia”.

### Notes on contributors

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## Data availability statement

Data are freely available on the AATE journal website.

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