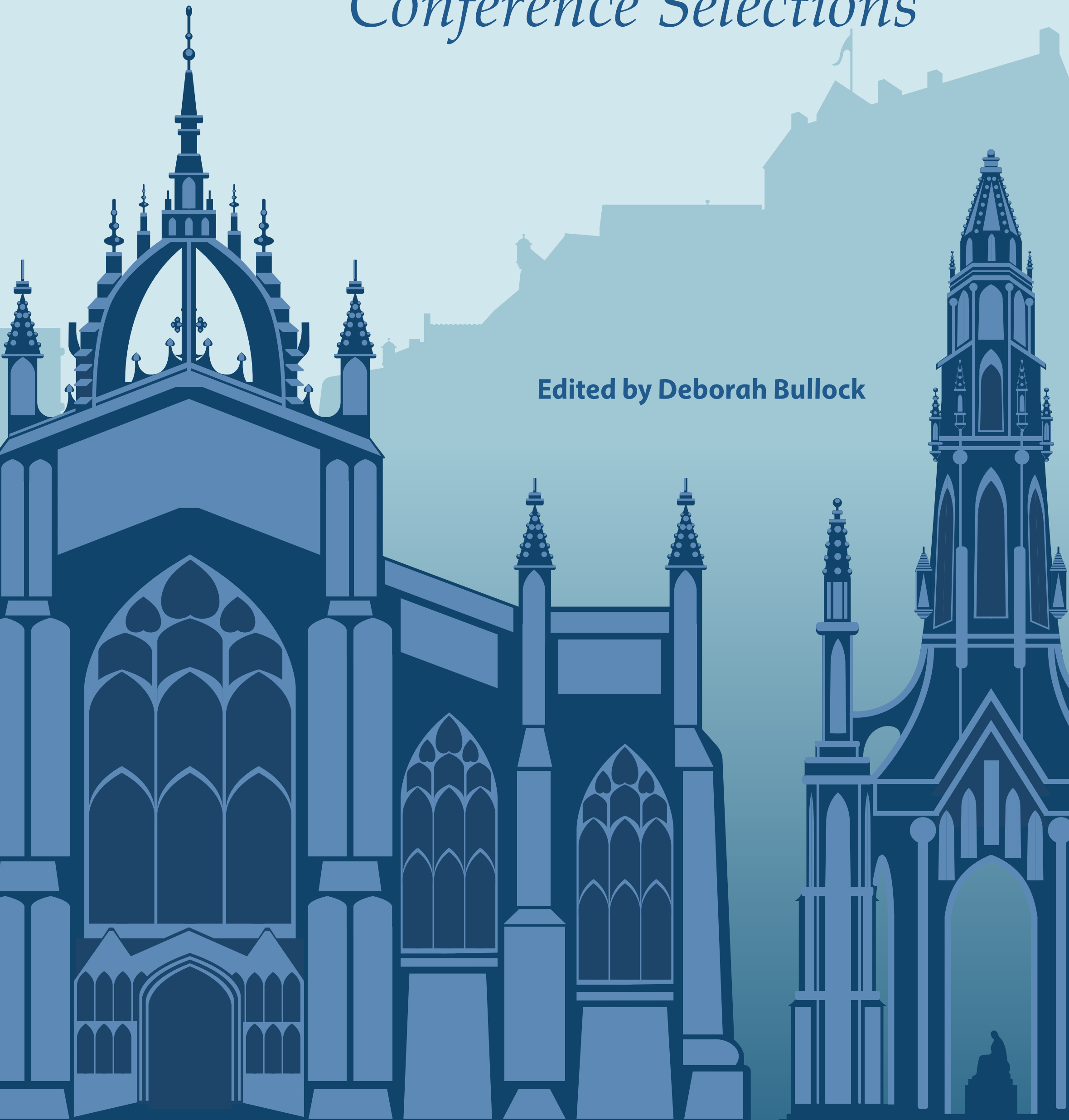
IATEFL 2025

Edinburgh Conference
Conference Selections



Edited by Deborah Bullock

IATEFL 2025

Edinburgh Conference Selections

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Edited by Deborah Bullock

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From the Editor

Looking out on a dull, wet November day, Edinburgh in the spring feels far away. But the 58th International Conference was certainly one to remember, with 673 sessions, 2,500 delegates from 115 countries, and luckily for us, fine sunny days.

As usual, the Conference programme was packed full of talks, Signature and Showcase events, forums, pop-up presentations and evening socials, not to mention meet-ups with colleagues and friends – old and new. A lot to take in! The beauty of *Conference Selections* is that we can take the time to digest and reflect on a lot of talks, including some we may have missed.

We can also reflect on some of the current major themes and developments in our field. And I think what struck me most in Edinburgh was the discussion around the future of English language teaching, its role in the future of education more generally, and how we can equip learners to respond to the real-world challenges they face. And this is reflected in this 2025 edition, starting with Chapter 1: *The future of ELT?*, where we find reports from three plenary speakers (Catherine Walter [**1.1**], Harry Waters [**1.3**], Neil McMillan [**1.4**]) and the Cambridge University Press & Assessment Signature Event [**1.2**].

You can find the fourth plenary paper by Carolina E. Kuepper-Tetzel [**2.1**] in Chapter 2: *Maximising learning*, where she explores the science of learning and how it can inform teaching practice. Indeed, Chapters 2 and 3 (*Tackling issues in the classroom*) are dedicated to optimising language learning and common classroom issues, offering approaches and strategies that teachers in diverse contexts can apply.

Unsurprisingly, *AI* was once again a hot topic at the Conference, but this year the debate has moved on from the *what* and the *why* to the *how*. For a range of practical examples of AI integration from diverse geographical contexts, head to Chapter 4.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on *teacher training and development*, showcasing a range of projects and experiences from the teacher education field, and featuring our fifth and final plenary paper by Daniel Xerri [**6.1**], who explores how classroom research can become a more inclusive, relevant and transformative practice.

As with previous *Selections*, we once again include a number of papers concerned with *ELT in higher education* (Chapter 7), *Teaching young learners and teenagers* (Chapter 8), *Assessment* (Chapter 9) and *Materials development* (Chapter 10).

And to end this edition, the papers in our final chapter *Global issues* (Chapter 11) discuss the implications of a range of real-world challenges facing practitioners and learners – disconnect, conflict, displacement, social equity, ecological consciousness, environmental stewardship, sustainability – and suggest how these might be addressed.

In short, *Edinburgh Conference Selections* reflects a wealth of professional experience and expertise and gives us all a lot to think about and learn from.

Finally, as always, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all those who took

the time and effort to submit their papers for review. I also thank my editorial team: Amos Paran, Jennifer MacDonald, Wendy Chambers and Karen Sigley for their invaluable input, and Nathan Hemming-Brown for his work on the design of this edition.

I look forward to seeing you again in person at the 59th IATEFL International Conference and Exhibition in Brighton.

Deborah Bullock
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1 The future of ELT?

What is the future of education? And ELT? These were two big questions being discussed at the IATEFL Edinburgh Annual Conference, and in this opening chapter of *Selections*. To look forward, we start by looking back, and in her opening plenary, *Fifty years on: what has changed?* **Catherine Walter** does exactly that. Reflecting on a long career in ELT, Catherine takes us on a journey of what has changed in fifty years, what can be learnt, what has not changed, and how this can shape our thinking about what is happening now and the future of ELT. Responding to change is very much the theme of our next paper from the Cambridge University Press & Assessment Signature Event – *A changing world: revisiting the purpose of education* (**Karen Momber**, **Helen Allen**, **Phil Hazell**, **Peter Watkins**, **Harry Kuchah Kuchah and Nicky Hockly**). In light of the 'unprecedented' uncertain and rapidly changing times we live in, it is argued that ELT educators need to go beyond the teaching of language to develop learners who are informed, compassionate and innovative agents for positive environmental and societal change. Such an agent of change is 11-year-old **Ali Waters Galán**, co-presenter and inspiration behind our next plenary paper, *Five burning questions for education from a young changemaker* by **Harry Waters**. Harry dives deep into Ali's five questions, encompassing concerns such as big climate worries, real-world challenges, making the world a better place and capitalising on strengths and passions, and ends with an invitation to us all – to stop *talking* about students, and start *listening* to them. Our final paper, *Big asks and uphill tasks: making a case for TBLT* by **Neil McMillan**, may appear misplaced here. Essentially focused on Task-Based Language Teaching and the obstacles that hinder implementation, Neil goes further. In his 'aside about methodology at IATEFL', he reminds us that methodology has *not* been solved – we are not living in a post-method *anything goes* era; and that teachers are *workers*. His message is political; not only a timely reminder but also a warning for the future of ELT.

1.1 Fifty years on: what has changed?

Catherine Walter *University of Oxford, UK*

Introduction

I began my English language teaching career over fifty years ago. At the 2025 IATEFL Conference, I reflected on how things have changed since then. Why? Because looking at what has happened earlier can help avoid mistakes, and can allow for a different kind of thinking about what is happening now. This article recounts those reflections and includes some of the responses from the audience.

In 1972, I began teaching English in a private language school in Paris. In many ways, I was in a position of privilege: I taught adults; class sizes were small; and I had access to a variety of teaching resources and good professional development opportunities. Now, as then, most English language teaching in the world happens in primary and secondary schools, often in state schools. Teachers in those schools are responsible both for their learners' English language learning and for their general social and intellectual development. This is a major challenge, and one that I have not faced. In addition, many teachers around the world, whoever they teach, have limited access to resources and few professional development opportunities. More seriously, some of our colleagues are teaching in conflict zones, with all the problems that their environment entails. To repeat, I have been privileged. However, in spite of the limits of my own experience, I hope that some of my reflections on changes in the English language profession will resonate with other teachers.

Knowledge about English; and English itself

One of the changes in our classrooms since 1972 is that we know more about English as a language. For example, the grammar of spoken English has been explored by scholars such as Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy. Knowledge of both written and spoken English is informed by larger and more accessible corpora than those recorded on index cards up to the 1970s. Today, anyone on the fortunate side of the digital divide can consult huge databases of information about the English language.

We also know more about lexis. When I was studying for my English teaching diploma in Paris, someone who had recently finished their master's degree at a prominent British university presented the session on linguistics. He asked, 'What do we study when we study linguistics?' People answered: 'Grammar.' 'Yes.' 'Pronunciation.' 'Yes.'. Because I had recently completed a degree at Université Paris III in linguistics and French literature, and had had the privilege of studying under one of the twentieth century's premier lexicologists, Henri Cottez – one of the founders of the *Petit Robert* dictionary (Rey-Debove & Rey, 2008) – I offered: 'Lexicology'. And the answer was, 'Oh, no, we're not interested in lexicology'. Fortunately, today's English language teachers are most definitely interested in lexicology, and they know much more about it than I did as a young teacher. Scholars like Paul Meara (for example, Meara & Miralpeix (2017)), have investigated areas such as vocabulary richness, size and growth. Corpora give us access to a wealth of information about words and how they are used.

It is not only that we know more about language: language itself has changed. New genres of writing and speaking have emerged. 2025 IATEFL Conference audience members offered examples of new genres of language that have emerged since they began teaching: emails, online meetings, memes, the language of YouTubers, the language of rappers and trappers, texting. These new genres evolve too, sometimes because of technological advances, for example, the use of emojis in text messages.

How people learn languages

We know more now than we did in the 1970s about how people learn new languages. For example, there is an awareness of the importance of deep processing of vocabulary. Carolina Kuepper-Tetzel's paper, *Lessons learned: using the science of learning to*

inform teaching (see Chapter 2, paper 2.1), recounts how spaced practice can improve retention of vocabulary items. Knowledge about spaced practice is used not only in classrooms and in teaching materials, but also in language learning apps for individual study.

Another trend over the years is a growing awareness that different people learn differently. Increasingly, English language teachers differentiate teaching, tasks and homework for learners with different speeds of acquisition, different interests, different preferred ways of learning. Where the situation allows it, some teachers are beginning to give learners a more active choice in how they learn and work, on the premise that if learners own their learning, they will learn more effectively.

Increasingly, differentiation also includes accommodating neurodivergent and disabled learners, for example, people who are dyslexic, ADHD or autistic, or people with visual impairments or hearing loss. The first time I taught a blind student, I struggled to find resources. I managed; by asking the learner what they needed, and by consulting the Royal National Institute for the Blind, I found ways of supporting their learning. I will say that everyone in that class learnt: all the learners learnt English, I learnt ways of adapting my teaching, and we all learnt about the benefits of working in a diverse group. I probably made some mistakes, but my teaching was good enough (about which, more later). Today's teachers of blind learners have the benefit of more support.

Indeed, there is currently a move towards thinking more proactively about how to include a range of learner profiles in the classroom from the outset. Sarah Mercer (2024) offers an interesting discussion of a proactive framework called The Universal Design for Learning in her new book *Compassion-based Language Education*.

Who teaches English and how?

In my school in 1970's Paris, teachers were required to be so-called 'native English language speakers' – in spite of the fact that then, as now, most of the successful English language teaching around the world is done by people whose original first language was not English. Speaking a language from childhood is no guarantee of knowledge about the language or of skill in being able to teach it. Fortunately, English teachers from a variety of backgrounds and communities are now more present in international classrooms.

The point in their life when a teacher began speaking English is not the only characteristic that has ceased to be a criterion for a teaching career. Today, quality international language teaching organisations employ teachers from a wide variety of ethnic origins, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities and abilities, religions and belief. It is entirely appropriate that the teaching force should reflect the groups of people who speak English.

It is very likely that having a more diverse team of teachers leads to better teaching and learning. I am not aware of research on diversity in English language teaching teams, but there is ample evidence from other sectors that diverse teams produce work that is more creative and has greater impact. For example, in a study of diversity in scientific research teams, AlShebli et al. (2018) studied over 9 million papers and 6 million scientists, finding a substantial advantage in relation to scientific impact, from the use of diverse teams, especially teams that were ethnically diverse.

What about the languages used in the classroom? My language school in Paris was a very good one, but it was of its time. Teachers were mandated to use only English in the classroom. Even though everybody in the room – myself and all the students – spoke French, the convention was that I should not translate the meaning of a vocabulary word into French. I had to use other means, for example mime, to communicate the meaning of a new word, no matter how abstract it was. I was surprised to learn that many audience members at the 2025 IATEFL Conference have been in the same situation.

Well-informed teachers today will realise that learners bring their whole beings to the classroom, and that part of what teachers and learners are doing in the classroom is interacting. Teachers can't erase learners' first language(s) when they walk into the classroom, and nor would they want to; teachers and learners use their first languages in practical and creative ways, whether it is called code-switching or translanguaging, whether the teacher does it or the students do it, and whether learners develop their own kind of English that works in their context. More and more teachers recognise the right of first languages to exist in the classroom.

…and what is English anyway? There is a growing awareness in our post-colonial world that there are not one or two or three standard Englishes; the English that teachers and students use will depend on a range of factors.

What about lesson planning? Here is another change. Some teachers are beginning to plan their lessons with the aim of creating opportunities rather than creating outcomes, basing the lesson plan on affordances (Anderson, 2015). This approach has developed out of some of the exciting innovations like Dogme and task-based teaching that work towards allowing emerging language to guide the classroom interaction. Affordance-based lesson planning involves having a plan, an idea of what's going to happen, but to have at various points branching possibilities and contingent plans. This is a fascinating and productive initiative, but I will say that it's something that some teachers have to some degree been doing intuitively for years. My partner Michael Swan used to say that if he got to get to the end of his language teaching lesson plan, he had failed. Working with affordances is not a completely new idea, but it is being elaborated and developed in more structured ways.

Another aspect of teaching that has changed is that more teachers encourage learners to become autonomous and self-regulated. Not all learners want this. But if a learner can own their language learning and choose ways of managing it themselves, that is likely to be a major advantage for their learning. One of the tools that teachers use to help learners become more autonomous is formative assessment: using assessment to feed into the learning process.

Materials for teaching and learning

There is a wealth of teaching resources to choose from today, especially for teachers with straightforward access to the internet. However, things were not as bad in 1972 as more recently qualified teachers might imagine. The first beginner's book I used, printed in black and white, was *First Things First* by Louis Alexander (1967). Lesson 1 had a picture of a woman getting up from her seat on a train and leaving her handbag behind, and being addressed by a man. I invite readers to reflect on how the dialogue exemplifies grammar, functions and phonology.

Man: Excuse me.
Woman: Yes?
Man: Is this your handbag?
Woman: Pardon?
Man: Is this your handbag?
Woman: Yes, it is. Thank you very much.

In my view, this is not bad. What do you think? There's a question form and a short answer with the present tense of *to be*; the difference between 'Excuse me' and 'Pardon?' is demonstrated; there is contrastive stress on the second 'handbag' on the cassette recording, along with intonation for questions and statements.

However, everybody in the class I taught received the same input and was asked for the same output, and every teacher who taught that class taught it pretty much in the same way. Teachers today can choose from flexible pathways, supplementary materials, support for teaching, multimodal possibilities.

Another change is that, for some teachers, teaching takes place both in person and online, or even exclusively online. This can mean increased inclusion for teachers and students. Especially if the lesson is asynchronous, and even if it is not, online lessons can make the newly-defined 'classroom' more accessible to those with family or other caring responsibilities, and to some who are neurodivergent or, like me, disabled.

Another difference between then and now is that those of us on the lucky side of the digital divide have a wealth of professional development resources available: free resources like the suite of British Council TeachingEnglish materials https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/, and excellent blogs and courses such as those available from Jo Gakonga's ELT-Training.com https://www.elt-training.com/.

Assessment, research and social responsibility

In summative assessment – assessment that evaluates the learner's performance and determines where they will go next in language learning, or will qualify them for other future pathways – major developments have taken place: examinations are more valid and reliable; accommodations are often made for learner differences; and there are exciting developments in terms of adaptive examining.

What about the relationship between research and the classroom? This too has changed over the years. I was fortunate in the 1970s, when Alan Maley was the English Language Officer of the British Council, and regularly brought speakers to Paris who were working on exciting topics in the applied linguistics and English language teaching landscape, but that was a privileged situation not shared by many teachers outside urban centres. Today there is a more active and fruitful dialogue between academic researchers and classroom teachers, both because of the availability of information on the Internet and because today's researchers are more active in engaging teachers in their research activity. Classroom research is burgeoning as well, and offers the dual benefits of allowing teachers to see their teaching through a different lens, and to use their research to feed into their professional development.

Another change that I sense today is that more English language teachers see the teaching of social responsibility as part of their job: witness IATEFL's Global Issues SIG, and some other recent initiatives. These teachers feel that because language is a way of communicating between people and communities around the world, thinking about the world should be a part of their teaching activity.

Using AI

AI can make positive contributions to an English language teacher's repertory of resources, for example by drafting straightforward practice activities or by streamlining administrative tasks. Learners can also access commercial language apps to supplement classroom work.

However, there are risks in using AI for teaching. For example, in some cases the exercises are not designed on the basis of teaching principles, but are configured by technicians because those exercise types are ones that the apps can support.

Teachers can use their knowledge of conventional classroom principles to curate learners' experience of AI-produced activities and their use of language learning apps. Having a forum like IATEFL gives them a source of information and the support of a community of colleagues who are dealing with similar issues.

Expectations and mistakes

Teachers put pressure on themselves to do a good job, and they deal with the expectations of their learners and their employers. Teachers of children and adolescents also face the expectations of parents and guardians, ministries and public opinion: a substantial weight.

Here is another anecdote. My first child, who was born in the late 1970s, had an illness while I was carrying him, and he had a lot of problems as a young baby. My partner and I were on our own; I didn't have family nearby. I was terrified that I was going to do something that would scar the baby's psyche for life. Then one day I picked up a book that I had bought before he was born, by British child psychologist D. W. Winnicott (1987), and this sentence jumped out of the page at me: A good enough mother is good enough. I can still feel how the weight of my expectations lifted from my shoulders when I read that sentence, and I'd like to assure you, readers: A good enough teacher is good enough. You don't have to be perfect.

Another story: I was once following a class in Italian taught by a method called The Silent Way. Although this approach is rather unconventional, it has some extremely good features that have made their way into mainstream language teaching. However, one unusual characteristic of The Silent Way is that the teacher hardly speaks; they say a few words or phrases per class. They elicit output from the learners, and then silently work with the output. You can imagine that in my Italian Silent Way class, we learners hung on the teacher's every word – there weren't very many words to hang on to!

In one class, the teacher said something, and then she shook her head, and mimed taking the word out of her mouth and throwing it away, over her shoulder. This was another powerful moment for me: she had indicated clearly that it was okay to make a mistake, to admit it, and to pass to the next activity. And if it was okay for her to make a mistake, it was okay for me as a learner to make mistakes. Might classrooms be better places for learning if mistakes were treated like this more often?

Change is not always linear

I have spoken about a number of changes, but I would also like to point out that change isn't necessarily linear, and it may not always be clear what causes the bumps in the road. Here is an example: authors and publishers been working hard over the past few years to depict more diversity in language teaching materials, representing people

from different communities. In what year do you think the first depiction of a same-sex couple with children appeared in a British English language teaching textbook? In fact, it was in 1992 (Swan & Walter). In a lesson that included a variety of families, including a multi-generational South Asian family and grandparents who had adopted their biological grandson, there were two women described as living together, with two children. Same-sex marriage was not yet legal in the UK, so we couldn't describe them as married, but they were present; they were just another family. However, I am not sure that there has been a second instance of this in the intervening 33 years. Why did other publishers not follow suit? Was it an isolated example because it wasn't part of a systematic, programmatic effort, but just something that we took for granted as possible, and that our wonderful publisher was happy to support?

However, here is another example where an effort was systematic and programmatic, but all the same did not last. In 1991, there was a project called Women in EFL Materials, comprised of Jill Florent, Kathryn Fuller, Jenny Pugsley, Annemarie Young and myself. We canvassed teachers in over 650 schools around the world about the language and images of women and men in English-language teaching materials, and received over 400 responses. We reviewed research, for example: on how people perceive the word *man* when it's used generically; on how English authors (including Shakespeare) have used *they/their* as non-gendered singular terms; and so on. We consulted authors, publishers and examination boards. We then proposed an evidence-based set of guidelines (Women in EFL Materials, 1991) to the English Language Teaching Committee of the British Publishers Association. The Committee agreed to recommend the guidelines to all their members.

We figured it was a success. However, a few years later, it had sunk without trace. It is not clear why it didn't last. Perhaps sometimes people just have to keep trying, and hope that Martin Luther King was right when he said that 'the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice'.

Final thoughts: four key changes, and what hasn't changed

One of the key changes that I have identified in this article is *agency.* Teachers and learners are exercising more agency. People from different backgrounds and communities are exercising more agency.

A second key change is *inclusion*: inclusion in the community of learners, in the community of teachers, in representation in teaching materials.

Another key change has to do with *evidence*. We continue to make progress as a community of teachers because we are becoming more literate about what kind of evidence to accept when we are presented with an innovation. We also respect the evidence that comes from our own experience, and being ready to re-examine something that doesn't work, and asking why.

The last key change is *curation*. The abundance of available materials means that curation is now an important part of a teacher's job. This is especially relevant to our use of AI. We can't just set our learners loose in the AI field. We need to curate their experiences and to teach them how to curate their own experiences so that they develop ways of judging what is sound and what isn't.

To end on a positive note, what has not changed since I began teaching? Quite simply: teachers foster learning. Good relationships between teacher and learner, and

good relationships among learners, are the sources of successful learning. There is a notion in psychology that a good relationship can create what Carl Rogers (1975) calls *empathic understanding*. In a classroom where empathic understanding happens, a shared intersubjective space forms, where learning happens almost as a kind of magic. You and your learners can create this space as you move forward in opening real and virtual doors around the world through their learning of English.

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1.2 Cambridge University Press & Assessment Signature Event: A changing world: revisiting the purpose of education

Karen Momber *and* **Helen Allen** *Cambridge University Press & Assessment, Cambridge, UK*

The context of a changing world

There is broad recognition that we are in a period of unprecedented change: an age of increasing geopolitical tensions and increasing levels of misinformation; a time of climate emergency; and a time of exponential technological development. In this uncertain and changing world, our response as educators is critical; we have an imperative to ensure that education supports young people to thrive as active agents in their futures.

In short, we need to revisit the purpose of education; to think about the extent, and ways, in which education needs to evolve so that societies have the knowledge

and skills they need to face future challenges. UNESCO (2021, p. 11) suggests that education should move from an individualistic focus to a more collective approach, in order to 'shape sustainable futures for all anchored in social, economic, and environmental justice. It must redress past injustices while preparing us for environmental, technological, and social changes on the horizon'.

In the English language teaching community, there are indications that educators align with the view that we have a responsibility, beyond the teaching of language, to consciously develop compassionate and active young people who can negotiate our changing world. The results of a small-scale global survey showed strong agreement that education has a clear role to play in this. When asked if current models of education were adequate, however, responses were less unified, with only 43 per cent of respondents feeling that education is adequately preparing people for the future, as illustrated by a teacher from Vietnam: 'Graduates are reported to lack practical skills in employment due to theory-based learning in many regions. Furthermore, the world is changing so rapidly that education often struggles to keep pace with advancements'.

To consider how education can help develop learners to become informed, compassionate and innovative agents for positive environmental and societal change, it is necessary to look at some of the challenges and think about the skills and attributes needed to address them.

Environmental challenges: the need for systems thinkers and change makers

Phil Hazell, Portfolio Director, Executive Education, University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, talked about our age of climate emergency. She illustrated how some of the natural disasters we see around us, such as the Los Angeles fires, are not simply centred around climate, but have wider social, economic and environmental dimensions. She outlined some of the social justice issues arising from how we currently consume our natural resources, such as inequality, a decline in health and wellbeing, and societal polarisation. Given this interconnectedness, Phil proposed that we need to develop an ability in young people to identify those connections and the need for interconnected solutions; supporting them to become systems thinkers, able to understand the systems we are a part of and find interconnected solutions to issues. Phil further suggested that we should be supporting learners to understand their responsibility regarding natural resources, and that education should provide opportunities for learners to reconnect with nature. Finally, Phil emphasised the need for both educators and learners to act as agents for change and help shape the future: 'As educators and as learners, we need to think in systems, reconnect with nature, and use our unique levers for change to help shape a just and regenerative future for all'.

Societal challenges: the need for criticality, collaboration and inclusivity

Peter Watkins, Associate Professor of Language Learning and Teaching at the University of Portsmouth, addressed the importance of developing skills beyond language to help learners understand a world where we receive information through a plethora of channels, and where misinformation is rife. It is also a society where employers are increasingly identifying the need for employees to demonstrate good communication skills, critical thinking and the ability to work collaboratively. Peter acknowledged

that, in recent years, there has been an increasing recognition that language development is not the only desired outcome, and that language lessons can contribute to a wider curriculum, developing skills beyond language. He argued, however, that much needs to be done to develop these skills more effectively and explicitly. Peter advocated for a greater focus on teaching critical thinking so that learners are able to justify opinions in an evidence-based way, and suggested that collaboration is more than giving learners the opportunity to work in groups. He outlined how teachers could actively support learners in contributing to group activity and develop ways of co-constructing ideas, thus developing their collaborative skills. Peter also spoke about representation and inclusivity in learning materials and the need for educators to be aware of the values embedded in the content that they are using. He suggested that education has a role in supporting learners to understand what equity and inclusion look like, saying that we should 'empower students to be evaluators, critical of the materials, problematising things in the material which they feel are not inclusive or do not represent them'.

Societal challenges: the need to nurture local and global citizens

Harry Kuchah Kuchah, Associate Professor of Language, Social Justice and Education at the University of Birmingham, addressed how language policies can have a detrimental impact on learning, with a particular focus on the use of the learners' own language. Harry posited that there was an epistemic exclusion of own languages in the classroom, resulting from a colonial language dominance. This has resulted in the view held by some teachers, as illustrated in a 2019 study in Cameroon, that English should be the only language used when teaching English, with the use of other languages seen as counterproductive. He pointed out that when English is used as a medium of instruction, the cognitive challenges for learners are huge, both the subject demands and linguistic ones. Harry argued that this contrasts with the growing body of evidence that the exclusion of children's linguistic resources discourages classroom participation and hinders the co-construction of knowledge essential for meaningful learning. However, there are teachers working to decolonise language policy in their classrooms, and this was exemplified through teacher stories from Ghana and Kenya, where teachers are engaging in community-based practices. These include: learner interactions with local people, obtaining insights into cultural and social dynamics, which they take back into the classroom; and project-based work addressing the topic of plastic pollution, involving authentic learning experiences through interactions with coastal-based communities and environmental groups. The connection between local culture and global citizens is key, with Harry stating that to achieve change we need to 'nurture citizens who are deeply rooted in their culture and at the same time open to the rest of the world'.

Technological challenges: the need for critical AI literacy

Nicky Hockly, Director of Pedagogy at TCE (The Consultants-E), considered the impact of the rapid pace of technological change, with a focus on AI. A number of issues identified by educators were set out, which give a sense of the impact and challenges posed by AI. A teacher educator from India was in favour of AI for its potential to make a teacher's life easier through workload reduction. A teacher from Chile

reported that their learners were already using AI for assignments and the challenge was to support them in using it responsibly. In order to do so, however, they noted that teacher education was critical. A concern raised by a teacher in Egypt was around equitable access: 'I'm worried that AI tools will increase the gap between students who have access to technology and those who don't. Not everyone can afford to use technology'. Nicky amplified the concerns, suggesting that we should consider who is being left out in the discourse around AI and highlighting the notion of adverse incorporation, where AI brings no benefit to the people using it as the tasks they can carry out are limited, but the benefits belong to the big tech companies. Given the lack of clarity around AI, including in defining it, Nicky stressed that what is needed is critical AI literacy, the ability to 'apply a critical lens to the evolution of AI and its growing impact on human society'. She suggested that this implies a techno-sceptical view of AI, though not a cynical one, which will enable both teachers and learners to understand and use AI in effective and principled ways.

Pulling it together

The speakers identified a number of areas where English language educators can play a role in developing attributes to support learners thrive in our changing world. It was felt that the educational community – publishers, materials writers, teachers, teacher educators, educational managers – all have a responsibility to engage with this. The need for criticality and collaboration, in both teachers and learners, was key, and this cut across all areas. The ability to co-construct a more holistic vision of education requires us to ask the right questions and to work together to do so, engaging with our peers. A final thought was about the need to bring optimism into the classroom, to foster a sense of agency and action, where learners envisage a positive and hopeful vision of the future.

The response from educators

There were some positive responses from educators attending the session, acknowledging the challenges and sharing thoughts about areas they wanted to explore to support the development of compassionate and active young people. These included: promoting communication and interdisciplinary collaboration; building a sense of belonging through inclusion of community languages; developing skills to help students become responsible, sustainable and active global citizens; developing critical AI literacy, with a reflective use of technology and critical evaluation of learning materials; and developing optimism in learners through working collaboratively on real-world scenarios that address challenges the world is facing today.

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1.3 Plenary: Five burning questions for education from a young changemaker

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Introduction: A plenary like no other

When I was invited to deliver the closing plenary at IATEFL 2025, I was excited, honoured and mildly terrified. It is not every day you get to speak at one of the biggest events in English language education, and certainly not something you've dreamt of for a good few years. However, what made this experience truly unforgettable was not the stage or the size of the crowd or even the Conference itself, it was who I shared it with.

My co-speaker was Ali Waters Galán. At 11 years old, she was the youngest speaker at IATEFL. She is a member of Kids Against Plastic, and a passionate young change-maker with more clarity, honesty and courage than many adults I know. She also happens to be my daughter. Together, we delivered our talk.

The session was not theoretical. It was raw, personal, and filled with real questions Ali had been carrying around for a while. These were not ideas we sat down to brainstorm the week before. They were frustrations born from homework sessions around our dining room table, conversations during long walks, late-night questions whispered before bed.

Before stepping onto the stage, Ali was nervous. Understandably so. She paced backstage, fidgeting with the edge of her notes, rehearsing key lines under her breath. It was a big ask for anyone, let alone an eleven-year-old, to address a room full of seasoned educators. But as soon as she walked out onto that stage, the nerves seemed to disappear. She spoke with a quiet confidence that carried far beyond her years.

Ali would be the first to say she does not claim to speak for every young person. She was sharing her experiences, her perspective, her hopes. But the bigger truth she illuminated was this: it is long past time we gave young people a meaningful voice at events like these.

What follows is a deeper dive into each of Ali's five burning questions, questions not just for education, but for how we imagine the future itself.

Learning for the future

Why do we spend so much time learning things we'll never use, instead of how to make the world a better place?

The first seed of this question was planted around our dining room table. Ali was ploughing through a stack of homework sheets about types of rock, the features of rivers, and, once again, volcanoes. She looked up at me, genuinely puzzled: 'Dad, why do we keep learning about volcanoes? I already know about volcanoes. Why can't we

learn about how to grow food or what we can do to prevent the genocide in Gaza or deal with the climate crisis?'

This was not boredom speaking. It was a deep hunger for learning that felt relevant and real. The truth is, our education system still leans heavily toward content memorisation, often shaped by tests designed in a different century. If everything in the world has evolved over the past 300 years, why is the education system stuck so far in the past?

We tell young people they need 21st-century skills, but we prepare them with 19th-century methods. The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2023* emphasises that creativity, resilience, collaboration and problem solving are among the skills most critical for the coming decades. Similarly, the OECD's *Future of Education and Skills 2030* project underlines the urgent need for education systems to move beyond rote learning towards the development of agency and adaptability.

In our session, we shared ways teachers can make this shift:

- **project-based learning** that lets students tackle real-world problems;
- **curriculum integration**, where subjects work together, for example, writing pesuasive letters to governments about local environmental issues in English class, or calculating food waste statistics in maths;
- **community engagement**: inviting local activists, entrepreneurs and scientists into the classroom to show students what action looks like in real life.

When I spoke to Ali about a project I saw in Türkiye, where students design a sustainable city, including how to manage waste, grow food, and generate clean energy, she looked at me in amazement: 'If my school let us figure out how to fix problems', she said, 'maybe we would believe we could.'

Another example came from a school in Sweden, where students were tasked with reducing their school's energy usage by ten per cent. Students measured energy flows, proposed changes, and saw real-world impacts by means of a living curriculum, not a static one. That belief, nurtured early, is priceless.

Kids vs adults on the environment

How can I be expected to make the world a better place if adults are ignoring the science?

Ali has been collecting litter since she was seven. What started as a family day at the beach became a mission supported by her amazing support network Kids Against Plastic. She decided she wanted to pick up one million pieces of plastic. On the Monday before she took the stage, she picked up piece number one million – a cigarette butt on the streets of Edinburgh. It is an extraordinary achievement. But behind that number is a quieter truth exhaustion.

She sees the headlines. She listens to the promises. And then she watches governments approve new oil drilling projects or companies push even more plastic packaging into the world.

In our plenary, she asked why she should be expected to 'change the world' when some high-standing adults very clearly ignore science. It was a hard thing to hear, and many in the room shifted uncomfortably. Because she is right.

We often expect young people to save the world while adults continue business as usual. We celebrate youth activism while outsourcing responsibility. As educators, we need to do better:

- **Model imperfect action**. No one is perfect. What matters is showing commitment and honesty.
- **Give students leadership roles** in sustainability projects rather than token involvement.
- **Reflect together** on what systemic change looks like, not just personal lifestyle tweaks.

One of Ali's favourite suggestions and the easiest to set up in any classroom across the globe, is a 'Climate Hero Board' – a simple celebration of small student actions that builds community momentum. It is about making environmental action part of the culture, not an occasional lesson.

Her message is clear: 'We are already trying. Please, meet us halfway'. Ali is not asking for miracles. She is asking for honesty, partnership, and action that matches the urgency of the moment.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Why don't we learn how to deal with big climate emotions, or even things like exam stress?

This might have been the hardest question for the room to sit with. Ali, like many young people, carries climate anxiety. Some days she feels hopeful; other days she feels overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge. Add in school pressures, friendship dynamics, and the general turbulence of growing up, and you have a heavy emotional load.

Yet schools still largely treat emotional wellbeing as an add-on. There might be a poster about kindness on the wall. There might be an assembly about resilience once a term. But what about daily practice? What about recognising that emotional health is as critical as academic success?

While Ali was thinking about the questions she wanted to ask she said: 'We have tests about grammar, but no one teaches us how to talk about our feelings or how we're supposed to deal with the constant exams, just that we need to study more'.

And when it comes to exam stress? We all nod and say, 'mental health matters', but when push comes to shove, results still rule. Students feel it. They know where the real priority lies. Ali spoke about the tension she and her classmates feel around exam times. The sudden shift in tone from 'learning is fun' to 'learning is a performance'. The pressure cooker atmosphere that builds, often without any meaningful strategies for dealing with stress apart from being told to 'stay positive'.

We all know the platitudes. But how often do we take real, practical steps to ease the pressure? In our session, we offered simple, actionable ideas:

- **mindfulness moments** at the start or end of lessons: two minutes to breathe, notice, reset – no special equipment needed, just permission to pause;
- **daily emotional check-ins**: even a quick 'weather report' lets students practise emotional honesty;
- **role-playing scenarios**: handling conflict, disappointment, celebration, apology;
- **expanding emotional vocabulary**: helping students name their feelings more precisely; and
- **decompressing exam culture**: reframing tests as one piece of a much bigger picture, not the whole story of who a student is.

One of the big questions we asked was: When was the last time you taught a student how to apologise properly? How often as a teacher do you tell someone to say sorry? But is that really looking at how we should apologise. Do we help our students understand that we should be celebrating each other's victories and aiming to be the best FOR the world, not the best IN the world?

Mindfulness is not a luxury; it is a survival tool. Emotional literacy is not optional; it is foundational. Until schools make space for this daily, not yearly, we are not really prioritising mental health. We are just saying the words. And young people know the difference.

Finding passions and strengths

What's the best way for teachers to help us find what we're good at?

This question came out of an after-school conversation. Ali had just completed another long week of worksheets and assessments. She flopped onto the sofa and sighed: 'They keep asking what I want to be when I grow up, but I don't even know what I like yet'.

How can we expect young people to plan futures when we do not give them time to explore who they are? At school, many students become skilled at following instructions, but that is not the same as finding a passion. Grades reward compliance, not curiosity. We shared ideas in the plenary for uncovering passions, not prescribing them:

- **passion speed-dating**: setting up mini-workshops where students sample coding, painting, debating, activism, baking, anything that sparks an interest;
- **passion portfolios**: an ongoing project where students record what lights them up, what frustrates them, what questions they have;
- **strengths spotting**: classmates acknowledging each other's unnoticed and unassessed skills, patience, leadership, creativity, empathy.

Ali loves creative writing and activism. But she would never have known it if she had not had the chance to step outside the worksheet cycle provided by a story-writing contest by Kids Against Plastic.

One day on our school run litter pick she talked about greatness. As a decent student in this school system, she's often pushed by her teachers. She's also asked what she wants to do when she's older. She still doesn't know, which is fine. She'd love to be great at something but doesn't know what. As we were walking along she said: 'If you want us to be great at something, you have to let us find it first and give us time to get better'.

Not every student will become a scientist or a writer or a footballer. But every student deserves the chance to discover what makes them feel alive. And that discovery starts with time, opportunity and trust. Passion is not a luxury; it is the fuel for lifelong learning, resilience and joy. School should not only prepare students for jobs; it should help them discover the spark that makes them want to get up in the morning.

Making school reflect real life

How can school prepare us for real-world challenges?

The insistence on making students do exams without the materials they've learnt

from seems a bit redundant. It led me to reflect when preparing the talk: 'In school, collaboration is cheating; in real life, it is called surviving'. This comment got one of the biggest reactions of the day. Because everyone knew it was right.

Schools are still built around individual competition: test scores, solitary essays, strict exam conditions. Yet the real world runs on teamwork, negotiation, creativity and problem solving. How often do we ask adults to sit in silence for three hours and recall obscure facts with no help? If we are preparing students for life, not just exams, school must look different. In our session, we imagined:

- **real-world challenges** tackled as group projects – solving local issues like pollution, food insecurity, access to green spaces;
- **skills for life**, where students learn budgeting, cooking, basic first aid, project management, teamwork dynamics;
- **external partnerships** – bringing in local businesses, charities and community leaders to offer authentic challenges and mentorship.

Ali has long dreamed of a week where maths is used to plan a charity event budget, English to write persuasive emails to sponsors, and science to measure the environmental impact of different choices. Because, as she said: 'We should not have to wait until after school to start living real life'. It is time to stop pretending academic silos reflect the real world. They do not. And young people know it.

Final reflections

As the plenary came to a close, I looked at Ali standing on that stage, speaking her truth with passion and I realised something powerful: This was not just about five questions. It was about an invitation – an invitation to all of us educators, leaders, parents, to stop talking *about* students, and start listening *to* them.

Ali made it clear that she does not speak for every young person. Her voice is one among many, and there are as many experiences of education as there are students. But it is precisely because there are so many voices that we need to make space for them at conferences, in classrooms, and in the decisions that shape their lives.

Throughout the session, it struck me again and again that the ELT community is uniquely placed to lead this kind of change. We are not bound by rigid national curricula in the same way some educators are. We already focus on communication, collaboration, empathy and cultural understanding. Our classrooms are spaces where language is not just grammar and vocabulary, but a living tool for building bridges and imagining better futures. We have the freedom, and the responsibility, to weave critical thinking, emotional resilience, real-world problem solving and environmental action into what we already do. If ELT cannot rise to this challenge, then who can?

The audience's reaction that day was overwhelming. There was laughter, there were tears, and there was a tangible sense that something had shifted. Ali turned to me afterwards, and said quietly: 'I think they really listened'. I believe they did. Now, the question is what we will do with that listening. Because if education's only goal is a certificate, we have already failed. Real education prepares students for a life worth living, not just a job worth applying for. It prepares them to discover who they are – to find their passions; to manage their emotions; to work together; to believe that their actions matter.

People often tell Ali she is going to change the world. But sometimes, she says, she does not even want to change her socks. And that is fine. Changing the whole world is not the goal. Changing *your* world, your community, your habits, your voice, is enough. Because when millions of young people change their worlds, real transformation happens. And when they know they are supported, believed in, and genuinely heard, the impact is greater than any exam score or gold star. Ali did not ask for miracles. She asked for honesty, partnership, and action that matches the urgency of the moment. That feels like a very good place to start.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank IATEFL for trusting me with the responsibility of the closing plenary, and for having the vision and courage to let a young voice onto the stage. Particularly, I would like to thank outgoing President, Aleksandra Popovski, whose belief in centring a child's perspective made this session possible. Without her vision, this moment of genuine intergenerational dialogue would not have happened. I also want to thank every member of the audience who listened, who nodded, who smiled, who teared up, and who stayed behind to tell Ali that her voice mattered. And most of all, I want to thank Ali, not just for standing up there bravely and speaking her truth, but for reminding us all why we do this work. Together, we are not just students and teachers. We are changemakers. And together, we can make a difference.

Plenary talk recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzMLyUfaNMM&

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1.4 Plenary: Big asks and uphill tasks: making a case for TBLT

Neil McMillan *University of Glasgow, UK, Serveis Lingüístics de Barcelona, SCCL, Spain*

Introduction

My plenary on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) at IATEFL 2025 began with several tips of the hat: to Steve Brown, Jennifer MacDougall and Ken MacDougall, who first showed me how to teach with tasks in Langside College, Glasgow in the early 2000s; to Geoff Jordan, whose talk on TBLT to the cooperative Serveis Lingüístics de Barcelona (SLB) in 2014 became a pivotal moment; to Mike Long, whose anarchist vision and seminal book on TBLT (2015) inspired Geoff and me to create our SLB training course (McMillan & Jordan, 2021); and to Aleksandra Popovski, who participated in the SLB course in 2024 and was brave enough to invite me to deliver this plenary.

Mike Long sadly passed away in 2021. His legacy as a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) scholar speaks for itself, but he also lives on in a small way through the SLB course, as well as through the final, polemical book he co-authored with Geoff, *English Language Teaching Now, and How It Could Be* (Jordan & Long, 2022). Geoff's achievement in getting that book over the line through Mike's illness and death is massive, and I encourage anyone interested in ELT as an industry to read it. Its compelling central image of a four-headed hydra – representing the intertwined, change-throttling forces of publishing, teaching, teacher-training and assessment – demands a response. My plenary and this report of it is the start of mine.

1 Making TBLT transparent

The remit Aleksandra gave for this plenary was to *make TBLT transparent to teachers*, but my first step was to point out those contexts in the world where it is already adopted. I did so by referring to a meta-analysis by Bryfonski and McKay (2019), which synthesises findings from several evaluations of TBLT programmes. It has since been pointed out to me that this source is suspect because most of the programmes included were not strongly task-based (e.g. see Boers et al., 2021). However, I can still point to numerous individual studies to back my contention that TBLT is transparent to at least some teachers, some of the time, and has a positive impact where it is adopted. For example, we have González-Lloret and Nielson's (2015) account of a Spanish programme in the US, Nielson's (2014) evaluation of an online Chinese course, and accounts of English courses in Thailand (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007) and China (Gong & Skehan, 2021).

However, most of the contexts in which TBLT has been evaluated are public educational institutions. The picture seems very different in private language schools in which, I argued, Jordan and Long's (2022) four-headed ELT hydra has a tight stranglehold on how languages are taught and learned. These are places where the choice of a commercially-published coursebook often dictates the syllabus, where teachers have been given minimum training largely focused on implementing such coursebooks, and where assessments may prioritise explicit linguistic knowledge over communicative competence – places, in short, where ELT is less of an educational endeavour and more of a profit-motivated one.

This is not to say that TBLT is never adopted in the private sector, nor that it is transparent to teachers everywhere else. I pointed to New Zealand, a country where TBLT has enjoyed considerable state investment in curriculum renewal and training (East, 2012). After a year's in-service professional development on TBLT – the quality of which we might be led to question – one secondary school teacher reported that she *still* wasn't sure what a task was (Erlam, 2016).

But my argument was that TBLT is not rocket science, and to illustrate this I presented an activity in which students research a famous person and design a poster about them. When asked whether this was a task or not, the audience broadly agreed that it was. We reviewed Skehan's (1998) definition of a pedagogic task and found that meaning in this activity was primary, it had a communication problem to solve, it was comparable to a real-life activity, task completion could be prioritised, and it could be evaluated in terms of its communicative outcome.

Then, however, we looked at the placement of this task in its original context in a commercial coursebook, where it appeared as a tiny element in a two-page spread following an explicit focus on participial clauses, and numerous gap-fill and substitution exercises to practise these forms. When presented in this way, I suggested, both teachers and students could be forgiven for thinking that the task should be evaluated not in terms of its communicative goals, but rather on the accuracy of students' production of pre-taught forms. In other words, this was a task, but it was deployed in the service of a synthetic syllabus – a syllabus in which students are expected to accumulate bits of language in the form of grammatical structures or lexical items, then synthesise these into a coherent system with which to communicate (Long & Crookes, 1992). Such a syllabus can be supported by tasks, but its principles are at odds with those of more holistic, *learning by doing* approaches including TBLT, Dogme, Project-Based Learning (PBL) and CLIL.

The difficulty for many teachers, then, was not that they didn't know a task when they saw one; the challenge was being able to see one in the first place, especially in contexts where synthetic syllabuses, exemplified by many popular coursebooks, dominate the ELT landscape.

2 Teacher resistance and its limits

I then argued that teachers can and should resist the methodological straitjacket coursebooks place them in by *taskifying* their materials. This involves giving air to the tasks that can be found buried there, avoiding at least some of the front-loaded language focus, and finding ways of developing and assessing task performance which keep the primary focus on meaning. Indeed, teachers can go further than this by introducing their own tasks, and tasks from other sources, into the wider syllabus. However, there are several difficult obstacles to overcome to achieve this.

The first is just the basic question of freedom, of the freedom not to dance to the tune that the synthetic, grammar-based, or lexical-based syllabus plays for us. It's the number one complaint of teachers taking the SLB course: 'I get TBLT, but where I work, I can't influence things. I'm forced to be the puppet master, or a kind of secondary puppet master for the learners – the book's pulling my strings, and I'm pulling theirs'. Teachers *can* let go of their centrality in the classroom and give the learners more space to dance to their own rhythm. But they need – *we* need – the freedom to do so.

Furthermore, we need knowledge, not only of TBLT methodology, but of the theories of language learning which inform it. As Geoff Jordan has been telling us for years, SLA theorists disagree about many things, but on one issue there is a strong consensus – that the 'bulk of language learning is implicit learning from usage', as Nick Ellis, an emergentist, puts it (2005, p. 306). Meanwhile, from a quite distinct theoretical perspective, it has been argued that 'Implicit knowledge is in fact "better" than explicit knowledge [... It] is automatic and fast ... and is assumed to be more lasting' (Whong et al., 2014, p. 555). Synthetic approaches focus overwhelmingly on developing conscious, explicit knowledge (of rules of grammar and pronunciation, of words and multi-word chunks), giving learners little opportunity to acquire language

by using it. TBLT places much more emphasis on our capacity to develop linguistically while focused on non-linguistic goals.

Thirdly, we need to couple that knowledge with a bit of belief. We have to believe that students are not going to suffer by not looking in detail at form and function of the second conditional – that they are not going to fail an exam because we spent more time on a task than on a gap-fill. We have to believe (a belief born of experience for many of us) that in the grammar-focused classroom, 'learners don't learn what teachers teach', but that they can learn at their own rhythm if we give them the opportunity to do so, and they get appropriate guidance along the way.

Most fundamentally, however, teachers need paid time and training to implement TBLT in more than a piecemeal way – time and money to develop professionally, to conduct needs analyses of target student populations, to design tasks and build them into a wider syllabus. And this is the greatest sticking point. Because why invest in developing TBLT programmes when we have all these ready-made grammatical ones? No need for much teacher freedom, apart from the freedom to tweak. No need for knowledge – you can get that from the Teachers' Book. Or belief – just go through the units, and the coursebook will do the believing for you!

This brought me to my most naive but perhaps most crucial point. The biggest barrier to the widespread adoption of TBLT – or of Dogme, PBL and other communicative approaches – is that it's not easily commodifiable into a coursebook format. It can't be censored in advance or neatly packaged, it's never one-size-fits-all, and, insofar as it taps into the messiness of authentic language learning, it offers no illusion of linear growth. In short, it doesn't suit capitalism – even though it might help oil its wheels by giving learners the language skills they need to do their jobs well. But even within corporate training, TBLT resists commodification because it requires us to treat learners' needs as unique to every individual and group, defying neat segments or aggregates. It requires us to rethink more radically how we do things, and to stop treating methodology as if it's been solved.

3 An aside about methodology at IATEFL

If we take IATEFL plenary talks as statements of what the organisation regards as issues of primary interest to its members, then methodology, at least in the last ten years of Conference, is far from a hot topic (there's been one talk on CLIL in 2019). We could say the same about language learning theories, with only one plenary on SLA. Meanwhile, I counted ten talks on social justice themes, five on poetry and storytelling, and four on the history or future of ELT (for my own poetic excursion, you'll need to watch the plenary video).

I welcomed the focus on social justice but pointed out that none of the plenaries had dealt explicitly with issues concerning teachers as workers. It has been several years since Paul Walsh first advocated for a Teachers as Workers SIG, but the issue has not gone away. I drew attention to headlines concerning the exploitation of precarious labour by the British Council, an institution once renowned for its pay and conditions but which is now being taken to task by the TEFL Workers' Union (Wall, 2025). I also mentioned the University and College Union, who are currently fighting the closure of EAP units in universities the length and breadth of the UK. Why

not invite representatives from these or similar organisations – people who dedicate themselves to defending language teachers and their co-workers – to take centre stage at the showcase event of the world's biggest language teacher conference? The excuse that IATEFL is an international organisation and so cannot give a platform to local concerns rings hollow. Teacher precarity is an international issue and the right speaker will be more than capable of connecting the dots.

What I didn't say was that the lack of prominence given to methodology by IATEFL is also a political issue. Acting as if methodology has been solved, or like we live in a post-method condition where *anything goes*, permits the reproduction of industrial ELT through coursebook methodologies, which are anything *but* 'anything goes'. Such approaches not only perpetuate precarity by keeping teachers undertrained and underskilled, but they may even be 'designed to produce failure' on the part of learners (Graddol, 2006, p. 86) – all of which serves to keep on feeding that profit-hungry ELT hydra.

4 The case for TBLT

I nowhere claimed that TBLT is the single privileged methodology, the Hercules to slay the hydra. But I had set out to make a proper case for it, and to do so I needed to get down to the level of the task itself. The one I chose was inspired by the Thomas Pynchon novel *V.* (1963).

In the 1950s in New York City, it became popular to give baby alligators as pets. However, being snappy, not too cuddly, and fast-growing, many parents repented and flushed the creatures down the toilet. Being hardy, they survived and proliferated in the sewer systems and abandoned subway tunnels of the city, where they became a mortal threat to children (who fall through open manholes with surprising regularity), the homeless and graffiti artists.

The task is firstly to gather vital alligator data, e.g. the quantity, dimensions or behavioural patterns of the animals, some of whom, born in the darkness, are albino and blind. This data collection informs stage two, the creation of an extraction plan in which no animals can be harmed: they are to be enticed out of the sewers and rehoused in the newly constructed NYC Zoo of Human Folly (home to a great variety of exotic but unwanted former pets).

I reported three solutions to this task, but not without confusing alligators with crocodiles, an error which upset some Antipodean members of the audience and which I deeply regret. The first solution was given by my then nine-year-old native speaker (NS) nephew, Marcus McMillan. It involves sending down a remote-controlled Lamborghini with a webcam attached to the top to count the alligators. In response to my objections, Marcus affirmed that the car would avoid getting trapped in sewage by speeding along the sides of the tunnel. The alligators could then be tempted out with food – 'any food, they're alligators'.

The second solution was put together by a group of NS and non-native speaker (NNS) (Chinese) English teachers who work at Glasgow College of the University of Electronic Science and Engineering of China (UESTC), a transnational partnership with the University of Glasgow. It comprised the following steps:

1 Send in drones with night-vision cameras to locate the alligators.

2. Research from the 1980s has shown that mutated, sewer-dwelling reptiles can become addicted to pizza; have drones drop pizza over a period of two months (flavour: meat-lovers) to develop addiction.
3. Withhold pizza for four days to create hunger and withdrawal.
4. Lure alligators to drop-zone with mildly sedative-laced pizza.
5. Extract at night to protect pale skin and for public safety, with professional Australian alligator wrestlers on hand in case of escapees.

Finally, one of the teachers from UESTC tried the task out with a class of first year NNS electronic and electrical engineering undergraduates. They came up with a highly elaborate solution involving drones equipped with electronic noses to sniff out, tag, monitor and track the alligators – and that was just for stage one. I was taken aback on hearing this, as up until that point I'd thought the task was just a fun way to illustrate TBLT to a group of teachers, but it was probably a poor example of a task for specific academic purposes.

In fact, this task had piqued the interests and provided a stage for the explorations of three quite distinct sets of participants. In retrospect, I considered it a *conduit* task, a task type that may help bridge the gap between English for general and more specific purposes. The specifics of what constitutes a conduit task are still to be worked out, but Richard Smith got us started on this process during the Q&A following my plenary. Fundamental to the conduit task is an appeal to the imagination and an openness to multiple interpretations and diverse solutions. It needs to provide a space for drawing in the interests, knowledge and communicative skills of whoever it is presented to. Such tasks, I contended, could form the backbone of a task-based syllabus for students studying English for No Obvious Reason (Abbott, 1980) – assuming, and perhaps we should not assume, that more specific reasons could not be uncovered by needs analysis.

However, identifying fun and interesting tasks is not enough to make a case for building programmes around them. We also need to address the number one criticism – that which asks what happens to the 'L' in TBLT. How on earth can students develop linguistically in the absence of a linguistic syllabus?

To answer this, I looked at the three stages of a task-based unit first suggested by Willis (1996) and taken up by Skehan (1998). The first, the pre-task, offers an ideal opportunity to expose learners to useful input. What is to be avoided, I argued, is the explicit front-loading of pre-selected items which learners are later expected to regurgitate, as this takes the focus away from meaningful communication. However, opportunities for implicit (without awareness) and incidental (without intention) acquisition can be offered through task and topic familiarisation (e.g. see Bui, 2014), or by working on rich, elaborated and/or multimodal input (Long, 2020). Furthermore, giving students time to plan their task gives them a chance to activate their linguistic resources in relation to the task topic and goals. All these pre-task approaches – and there are more (e.g. see Ellis et al., 2019, for a summary) – have been shown to impact on key linguistic measures of task performance, namely complexity, accuracy, lexis and fluency. To give one example from Skehan (1998), if learners are encouraged to be creative during their planning, this can lead to greater lexical range and more risk-taking with new language during task performance.

There are also several approaches to the main task performance stage which can encourage linguistic development. If we provide very structured tasks on familiar topics, this may push students' accuracy and fluency, but if tasks require complex decisions, interpretation or transformation, greater structural complexity is facilitated (Skehan, 1998). A rival cognitive theory to Skehan's, put forward by Robinson (2005, 2022), suggests that having learners work through progressively more complex versions of a task, e.g. by adding further elements or reasoning demands to each iteration, stretches and develops their linguistic resources (see Malicka et al. (2017) for a clear example).

Then there is the role of interaction as a driver of linguistic development through the negotiation of meaning (Long, 1981). Some task types may generate more opportunities for reactive peer and teacher feedback than others (Pica et al., 1993), but whatever the task, when students get quick responses to their difficulties, the feedback should be impactful as it is tuned to their immediate needs and internal linguistic development. This is what Long called Focus on Form (1998), a knitting together of implicit and explicit learning within meaning-focused communication. It is essentially equivalent to the recent interest in *emergent* language, in responding to "what comes up" when students interact meaningfully (Norrington-Davies, 2023).

Of course, large class sizes make on-the-spot reactive feedback unrealistic in many contexts, but delayed Focus on Form is surely a better option than none, and a post-task language focus on errors or imprecisions can play an important role. Other post-task options include reflecting on, evaluating and/or reporting task performance (Willis, 1996), or having students repeat the task, perhaps with different content but the same procedure. When the conditions of task repetition change from private to public, e.g. from small-group work to recording the task, the foreknowledge of this transition has been shown to push learners' linguistic accuracy (Ellis et al., 2019; Skehan, 1998). Nowadays, the ease of use of open AI tools such as Whisper permit rapid and accurate transcriptions of recordings which can then be mined for further language focus and/or reflection on task performance.

In short, the criticism of a lack of language focus in TBLT is not well-founded, and so I came back to the most pressing issue – the fact that many teachers lack the training and the resources to deal with language in this way, and that they lack a properly constructed task-based syllabus through which to develop these skills. TBLT is perfectly transparent to teachers, or can easily be made so, but the path towards it is littered with obstacles.

Conclusion: Big asks

Insofar as TBLT is needs-oriented and adapted to specific student populations, perhaps it should remain the province of individual institutions delivering English for specific professional or academic purposes, and outside of that, largely a bottom-up endeavour instigated by motivated groups of teachers or maverick directors of studies happy to swim against the tide. For if there is a future for TBLT at any kind of scale, the onus is undoubtedly on the source of most of the blockages, the ELT industry itself – which, for reasons I have already outlined, seems unlikely to move. However, I decided it was still worth laying out some demands for the hydra from a TBLT perspective.

Firstly, we need task-based assessment which is relevant to test-takers, and which washes back positively into test preparation. International exams such as Cambridge First *are* already task-based in the main, but when so many of the target candidates are teenagers, having candidates write emails to friends about their hometown is dubious in the extreme. In parallel, we need to move beyond the drill-and-kill, death by gap-fill approach to test preparation which still seems to dominate the market, despite its questionable utility in developing the communicative competence necessary to pass task-based assessments.

Regarding publishing more generally, the idea of rigidly structured TBLT course-books is somewhat contradictory, although there is surely room for commercially published task-based materials informed by the needs of students in popular academic or professional training contexts. However, for general English purposes at least, we need *taskbooks* not textbooks – banks of tasks, perhaps of the conduit type I have high-lighted, which can be selected from and adapted for a wide variety of student interests and needs. We already have an online task bank (Gurzynski-Weiss & IATBLT, n.d. https://tblt.indiana.edu/index.html) and the resource book *Activities for Task-Based Learning* (Anderson & McCutcheon, 2019) – is there no demand for more, bigger and better task repositories?

Of course, even with resources, we sorely need investment in curriculum renewal, in teachers and in learners. Integral to this is pre-service teacher education which does more than pay lip service to language acquisition research, but actually integrates theory with a practical perspective that moves beyond synthetic syllabus implementa-tion, and ceases to assess teaching in relation to pre-determined linguistic goals. For CPD, we have courses such as the University of London's MOOC on task-based read-ing, and both free and paid TBLT courses by SLB, but again we need more and better opportunities like this if we are going to combat the deskilling and underskilling of language educators.

For its part, TBLT as a research field has several issues to resolve. In particular, mov-ing beyond a pure language acquisition perspective when investigating the efficacy of the approach would be welcome. It has been an understandable obsession of the field to demonstrate that one can as easily acquire the past passive through TBLT as through PPP, but insofar as TBLT is a holistic methodology, we need to measure its benefits in more holistic ways. However, that TBLT researchers can achieve this is in little doubt; in recent years, the progress made on topics such as the transfer from needs analysis to task and syllabus design (Gilabert & Malicka, 2021), on new ways of assessing task performance (Kuiken & Vedder, 2022), on tasks and technology (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014) or on tasks beyond spoken interaction (Byrnes & Manchón, 2014), is striking.

While the outlook on industry-level transformation is far less optimistic, the plat-form given to me by IATEFL to pose my big asks is a step in the right direction. I encourage the Conference organisers to continue to provoke the hydra even as it depends on its benevolent sponsorship. Let's have more on methodology please, and – perhaps the biggest, most impossible ask of all – let's put the rights of teachers as workers centre stage.

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2 Maximising learning

The papers in this chapter consider how we can optimise language learning, offering approaches and strategies that teachers in diverse contexts can apply. We start with **Carolina E. Kuepper-Tetzel**'s plenary paper, which explores the science of learning and how it can inform teaching practice. Based on research findings from cognitive psychology, Caroline focuses on two particular learning strategies: *spaced practice* and *retrieval practice* (also picked up on by other papers in this section) – what they are, how they are investigated and how to apply them in the classroom. Our second paper by **Le Phuc Ha Tran** centres on optimising vocabulary retention using freely available technology tools. Next, **Seda Khachatourian** explores how brain-informed strategies can create conditions for genuine learning, while **Emine Demiroz** highlights the potential of mindfulness in enriching the learning environment. Neuroaesthetics, the science of how the brain responds to art, is the focus of **Sofia Iakovidou**'s paper, which offers examples from the implementation of a course entitled 'Art & Social Change'. Energising afternoon classes is the focus of **Julija Vaisviliene**, who presents a range of adjustments to effectively combat low energy and waning focus. To end, **Vera L. Cabrera Duarte** reports on a project titled 'Storytelling: engaging and learning' to illustrate how the use of storytelling – especially personal stories – can enhance language skills, motivation and peer relationships.

2.1 Plenary: Lessons learned: using the science of learning to inform teaching

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Before diving into the intricacies of the science of learning and how it can inform teaching practice, it is important to set the expectations for this topic. The aims of this contribution are to learn about research findings from cognitive psychology and how research is conducted in this area. Knowing more about the procedures used in the science of learning can help teachers contextualise the findings and make informed decisions for their classrooms. A further aim is to encourage reflection on current teaching practices on the backdrop of the science of learning. Which activities already align with research-informed recommendations and which ones could be tweaked accordingly? A final aim is to open bi-directional dialogues between researchers and teachers (Sumeracki et al., 2023a). The science of learning can offer a range of movements for teaching practice, but the expertise of teachers is needed to design sensible and meaningful implementations. Through those implementations, new issues or

questions may arise which can then be addressed by research. Hence, the importance of this bi-directional approach. Consequently, this contribution does not offer must-follow rules, neither can you expect a lack of overlap between current teaching practice and recommendations from research. In fact, there is an expectation that teachers will already be implementing the science of learning in some shape or form. Thus, this piece partly functions as a validation of current practice and partly inspiration for new ideas. At the same time, the science of learning cannot answer to all eventualities in the classroom. In my view, it is still the best bet, and I use the science of learning to inform my own teaching. However, the teacher's experience and knowledge of their classroom are crucial pieces in the puzzle that will allow for the most meaningful implementation of the science of learning. So, without further ado, let's start.

The term 'science of learning' is broad and can entail different disciplines and areas of expertise. For this piece, the 'science of learning' is defined as research conducted in cognitive psychology that can be translated into teaching and learning strategies. Cognitive psychology investigates topics such as memory, attention, judgement, decision-making, problem solving, etc., and it is easy to see how research on these topics can inform learning and teaching practice. The focus of this article will be on *spaced practice* and *retrieval practice*, which are two learning strategies that have lots of research from labs and classrooms behind them to back up their effectiveness (Carpenter et al., 2022; Pashler et al., 2007). For each of the two strategies, it will be outlined what it is and why it happens, how it is investigated, and, finally, how to apply it.

Spaced practice

The main idea of spaced practice stems from first experiments by Hermann Ebbinghaus in 1885 when he observed that learners remember more on a later memory test when a fixed amount of study time is distributed across various learning sessions instead of being crammed into a single learning session. To use his own words, 'With any considerable number of repetitions a suitable distribution of them over a space of time is decidedly more advantageous than the massing of them at a single time' (Ebbinghaus, 1885/1964, p. 89).

Thus, when revisiting previously studied material, the delay between the first study episode and the second one could be zero, which means that the material is studied and re-studied back-to-back. Alternatively, there could be a spacing between the first study episode and the second one of, for example, a day, a week, and so on. The spacing effect is the long-term benefit on memory performance of introducing breaks between study episodes (Carpenter et al., 2012). The benefits of spaced practice have been shown in different areas including foreign language learning (Wiseheart et al., 2019). For example, an early study on French vocabulary learning in high school students (grades 9–12, US) compared vocabulary retention in two learning conditions (Bloom & Shuell, 1981). In the spaced practice condition, students studied French vocabulary in three 10-min sessions on three consecutive days using an MCQ exercise, a fill-in exercise, and a cued recall quiz, respectively. In the massed practice condition, all three vocabulary exercises were completed in one 30-min session. Final vocabulary tests were given immediately after studying (immediate test) and four days later (delayed test). On the immediate test, there was no difference between the spaced and the massed learning conditions. However, on the delayed test, spaced practice

outperformed massed practice by 35 per cent. Namaziandost et al. (2020) investigated English as a foreign language learning in Iranian students (16–19 years old) over a period of 12 weeks. During this period, students studied 15 English vocabulary words per week using either a spaced practice schedule (3 x 20mins/week) or a massed practice schedule (1 x 60mins/week). In addition, there was a control condition that had no vocabulary-focused instruction. All students took a pre-test that was administered before the 12-week practice period, an immediate post-test one week after the practice period, and a delayed post-test four weeks later. On both post-tests, students performed better after having practised the vocabulary in a spaced practice fashion compared to massed practice (or control).

A recent meta-analysis by Kim and Webb (2022) analysed results from 37 spacing effect studies in foreign language learning and found:

a) medium to large benefits of spaced practice on second language learning;
b) an advantage of longer spacings between study sessions over shorter spacings for delayed tests;
d) that spaced practice helps young learners and adults; and
e) a benefit to learning of second language vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

A series of moderating factors such as frequency of practice or feedback provision were identified too, which shows that the strength of the spacing effect can depend on contextual factors and the teacher experience is invaluable when deciding on the practical implication.

Although the spacing effect has been around for a considerable period of time, researchers are still trying to understand why it occurs. Two theoretical ideas for spaced practice in the literature are *forgetting and reactivation* and *variation of context* (Küpper-Tetzel, 2014). The *forgetting and reactivation* idea suggests that spaced practice introduces forgetting between one study episode and the next. Consequently, when revisiting previously learned material, we engage in the reactivation and reconstruction of knowledge, and this process is assumed to strengthen memory for that information. The *variation of context* idea suggests that when we study target information (e.g. English vocabulary), the resulting memory trace contains the stored target information as well as context information that is stored alongside. Context information can be a range of different things that accompany the learning episode, such as the internal states of the learner (e.g. mood), external factors in the environment (e.g. surrounding noise, temperature), but also more subtle contextual factors. When we try to retrieve the target information in the future, we use the context information available at the time of testing to cue the correct memory trace. The larger the overlap between the context information at the time of testing and the context information stored in memory, the higher the likelihood that we retrieve the correct target information. Spacing between study sessions introduces more variable contextual information that is stored in memory alongside the target information (because the contextual variables will fluctuate between one session and the next), and the more variable the contextual information the higher the chance that the contextual cues during a future test will match the contextual information stored in memory. This higher overlap is assumed to result in more successful retrieval of the target information. Do not worry if this sounds a bit complex, it takes some time to wrap one's head around

these theories. The most important takeaway here is that successful memory retrieval is facilitated through cues that are sampled from the environment or internal states.

What does spaced practice look like in the classroom? Spaced practice is all about planning when to revisit previously learned material. This can be done through more formal activities in the classroom where older material is reviewed or through assigning homework strategically, e.g. by featuring exercises on worksheets that pertain to content covered 1–2 weeks ago. It can be done informally by asking students to summarise main points based on previous teaching and to explain previously taught concepts in their own words. Spaced practice can feel challenging to learners because it does introduce forgetting which can be discouraging. However, this process is key for the success of this strategy, and anticipating mild frustration in students can help teachers to plan better implementations of spaced practice in their classrooms.

Retrieval practice

At the Conference, I surveyed the audience and asked: What are quizzes for? What are the goals of quizzes? A total of 488 responses were submitted which can be categorised into four overarching themes:

a) formative assessment and feedback;
b) engagement and encouragement;
c) knowledge checking and understanding; and
d) revision and study support.

Indeed, these themes all highlight the various functions of quizzes. Retrieval practice is a learning strategy that specifically falls under the theme of revision and study support. The main idea of retrieval practice is the long-term benefit of retrieving previously taught material from memory as a way to study. Thus, instead of, for example, re-reading the material students would take a quiz on the material and engage in memory retrieval before checking their notes or re-reading it. A now classic study by Roediger and Karpicke (2006) demonstrated the benefits of retrieval practice on prose passage learning. Students studied the material either by studying only (i.e. re-reading) or by taking a practice test. They demonstrated that retrieval practice was particularly beneficial for tests taken after a delay (e.g. two days or one week later). When students were asked after studying how confident they felt about remembering the details of the text passage on a later test, they gave higher scores in the study-only condition compared to the condition that involved retrieval practice. This is interesting because the strategy that resulted in lower test performance on a delayed test felt to students as the more successful strategy after studying. This may explain why students may opt for less effective strategies (such as repeated re-reading). Goossens et al. (2014) conducted a study in a primary school with 60 young learners (8–11 years old, the Netherlands). Pupils practised 20 difficult English words and synonyms through a series of seven learning phases. In the first four learning phases, all 20 words and synonyms were practised through reading and presentation. In the fifth learning phase, 10 word-synonyms were restudied, and for the remaining 10 word-synonyms pupils were asked to retrieve the synonym for each word from memory. In the sixth learning phase, all word-synonyms were restudied and in the final learning phase, the words were again practised as in phase five, i.e. 10 using restudying and 10 using retrieval practice. (There was another layer to the study because the word-synonyms

were either presented in isolation or embedded in a story. However, we'll focus on the effects of retrieval practice here.) On a test one week later, pupils were provided with each of the words and asked to recall the synonym. They performed better on the words which were practised using retrieval practice during the fifth and seventh learning phases.

One practice in foreign language learning is imitation where the teacher pronounces words out loud and the students repeat after them. A study by Kang et al. (2013) wanted to find out whether imitation or retrieval practice is more beneficial for comprehending and producing foreign language words. Undergraduate students in the US studied 40 Hebrew nouns. In the imitation condition, the picture of the word was shown and the audio file pronouncing the word was played simultaneously. Afterwards, the learner was prompted to repeat the word aloud. In the retrieval practice condition, the picture was shown, and the learner was prompted to attempt to pronounce the word. Afterwards, the audio file was played. Final comprehension and production tests were given immediately after practice or two days later. On the comprehension test, students heard each of the words and had to pick the correct picture for them. There was no difference between the retrieval practice and the imitation conditions on the immediate test, but on the delayed test students performed better after having studied the material using retrieval practice rather than imitation. On the production test, students were presented with pictures and were asked to say the word out loud. Here, retrieval practice outperformed imitation on both immediate and delayed tests. Thus, next time you are practising pronunciation in your language learning app, try to stop the audio recording and attempt to say the words out loud first. In your classroom, embed activities that prompt students to attempt pronouncing words or reading out sentences first before offering them the correct pronunciation as feedback.

Several mechanisms have been suggested for the benefits of the retrieval practice effects (Yang et al., 2021), for example, that the effortful and successful retrieval strengthens memory representations of the material and/or creates multiple retrieval routes that makes the information more accessible. Another idea is that during retrieval practice the learner engages in mental operations that align with those needed during the final test. This alignment – also referred to as transfer-appropriate processing – leads to increased test performance. Finally, a more recent account emphasises motivation as a key role player for the retrieval practice effect. The idea is that integrating retrieval practice during studying has a catalysing effect on students' motivation to learn and do better, which results in them investing more effort that leads to better performance.

How does retrieval practice look in the classroom? Retrieval practice can be implemented in many ways either through more formal quizzes or through informal activities in the classroom, e.g. asking questions and prompting students to jot down answers from memory. The key is to get students to engage in memory retrieval. Bringing information to mind will feel more effortful than re-reading information or listening to the teacher explain content again, but that is exactly what makes this technique effective. Retrieval practice can be used for less or more complex material. If too much forgetting occurred and students cannot retrieve previously taught content, it can help to scaffold the process and provide them with hints to help them get to

the stage of retrieval from memory. Teachers know their students and can cater to different levels of support. Finally, making retrieval practice a regular activity in the classroom tends to decrease test anxiety (Agarwal et al., 2014).

Concluding remarks

The strategies discussed in this piece have one thing in common: The conditions that boost practice are not necessarily the ones that increase performance in the long run. Quick gains during practice may not often translate into long-lasting gains. Bjork (1994) coined the term *desirable difficulties* for this phenomenon. It is the idea that introducing effortful processes during practice – for example through spaced practice and retrieval practice – has a more beneficial effect in the long term, even though during practice they may feel less effective. The extra effort that is invested often pays off in the future. As teachers, we can support students in approaching these desirable difficulties and reassure them that learning – the acquisition of new knowledge and skills – is supposed to feel effortful.

At the end of the plenary, I prompted the audience to make a pledge for their own practice and asked: What are your takeaways? What would you like to try in your teaching? A total of 271 responses were submitted that can be categorised into six themes. Here are a few illustrative quotes for each of the themes:

Understanding the strategies

Spaced repetition is brain friendly learning.
Quiz is not just for assessment; it is also important to promote learning.
Repetition helps learning. Quizzes are a positive formula for learning.
Little and often. As with all good habits. Build up the muscle.
Forgetting is productive as it forces retrieval.

Concrete implementation of the strategies

Planning in spaced quizzes for recycling of vocab.
I already do retrieval practice, but I might try delaying doing it a few extra days.
Rethink about my academic calendar of tests :)
Reactivate knowledge by reviewing in pairs the following week.
Use the retrieval question to ask students about content covered in previous sessions.
Chat to my teachers about the importance of our weekly consolidation quizzes. They're not happening consistently.

Developing study skills in students

Experiment with retrieval practice and encourage this amongst my students.
I want to give students more authority in their learning process by letting them retrieve more themselves (if need be with scaffolding).
Explain to students that learning is hard!
To try: guide students on how/when to practice at home.
More scaffolding and helping students to schedule.

Recognising the role of effort

See effort as a positive sign of learning.
Remember that 'real' learning is effortful. Help students understand that.
Learning happens when we study repeatedly and spacedly; also there must be mental effort.
Remind students that struggling to learn is not a failure, but a sign that learning is happening
Embrace effort.

Overcoming challenges
Importance of reviewing language items. The challenge is to build in constant review to an already packed curriculum.
Try and persuade my university (again) to split the 4-hour lesson blocks into 2 of 2 hours.
I feel a bit sad. It's a lot of testing and "forced" recall.
Validating existing practice
I've been doing a lot of it without having the scientific background. Many thanks!
Takeaway is that what I do is backed by research.

Resources to browse

For anyone interested in finding out more about the science of learning and the work I am involved in, you are welcome to browse The Learning Scientists website. We are a group of four cognitive psychologists who disseminate the science of learning through our blog posts, podcast, books and free downloadable resources (e.g. posters, bookmarks, etc.). Together with my Learning Scientists colleagues, I have co-authored the book *Ace That Test: A Student's Guide To Learning Better* (Sumeracki et al., 2023b), which features chapters on spaced and retrieval practice, but also on other strategies. As the title suggests, this book is targeted to students in their final years of schooling or beginning of college/university. I also founded the Teaching Innovation and Learning Network (TILE Network) and run it as an online external speaker series and all are welcome to join. We also have blog posts from teachers and students sharing their best practice on our website. Finally, a collection of my projects, teaching, publications, open educational resources, and social media activities can be found on my Linktree.

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2.2 Utilising free technology tools for optimal vocabulary retention

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The problem with vocabulary retention

Vocabulary learning is one of the most time-consuming yet fragile aspects of English language acquisition. In my experience working with IELTS learners in Vietnam, two recurring challenges have emerged: students tend to forget vocabulary quickly, and teachers often struggle to implement a sustainable system for review. Many learners recall a word one day, only to forget it soon after. Meanwhile, teachers frequently lack

the tools or time to monitor learners' revision habits and vocabulary progress over time.

Evidence-based techniques: active recall and spaced repetition

Research in cognitive science has consistently validated the effectiveness of active recall and spaced repetition in enhancing memory retention. Active recall involves retrieving information from memory without prompts, while spaced repetition schedules review sessions at increasingly longer intervals to combat the forgetting curve. Studies by Ebbinghaus (1913), Karpicke and Blunt (2011), and Dunlosky et al. (2013) support the use of these techniques. Their findings are especially relevant in the field of language education, where learners are required to acquire and retain a large volume of vocabulary over an extended period.

Free and accessible tools for every classroom

Quizlet is a widely used flashcard tool that facilitates active recall; however, it lacks the necessary reminder of revision schedules based on spaced repetition, which hinders optimal retention. *Google Sheets* then appears as a flexible platform to support spaced repetition. This platform allows for easy adaptation of spaced review calendars that align with memory research without requiring students to install new software or manage multiple platforms. By combining these two tools, teachers can create an efficient and fully customisable vocabulary learning system that is entirely free.

Step-by-step implementation guide

To begin, teachers should first curate a vocabulary list tailored to the lesson's content or the learners' exam goals. This list can then be organised in *Google Sheets*, in three columns: English term, an example sentence in English, and its translation into the students' first language (L1).

Topic: Inventions and discoveries			
No.	**English words**	**Examples**	**Meaning in L1**
1	artificial (Adj)	The artificial intelligence system made predictions based on vast amounts of data.	nhân tạo
2	automatic (Adj)	The automatic doors at the store opened as we approached.	tự động
3	complicated (Adj)	Understanding the complicated theory required hours of study.	phức tạp

Table 2.2.1: *Sample vocabulary list created on Google Sheets for Quizlet upload*

The content is subsequently uploaded into *Quizlet* to create a flashcard set. Once the set is created, the teacher introduces a revision timeline based on spaced repetition:

Day 0 (initial learning), Day 1 (first review), Day 3 (second review), Day 7 (third review), and Day 14 (final review). This can be visualised in *Google Sheets* with names of vocabulary sets listed in rows. Teachers may colour code the boxes so learners know which sets are upcoming, completed or missed. Green could mean 'completed', yellow 'upcoming', and white 'not yet started'. Students are encouraged to tick off tasks as they complete them, offering both learner accountability and a clear method for the teacher to track progress.

VOCABULARY LEARNING SCHEDULE										
QUIZLET SET	START DATE	CHECK	1ST REVISION	CHECK	2ND REVISION	CHECK	3RD REVISION	CHECK	4TH REVISION	CHECK
Quizlet 1	01/03/25	☑	02/03/2025	☑	04/03/2025	☑	07/03/2025	☑	14/03/2025	☐
Quizlet 2	05/03/25	☑	06/03/2025	☑	08/03/2025	☑	11/03/2025	☐	18/03/2025	☐
Quizlet 3	10/03/25	☑	11/03/2025	☐	13/03/2025	☐	16/03/2025	☐	23/03/2025	☐
Quizlet 4	15/03/25	☐	16/03/2025	☐	18/03/2025	☐	21/03/2025	☐	28/03/2025	☐
Quizlet 5	20/03/25	☐	21/03/2025	☐	23/03/2025	☐	26/03/2025	☐	02/04/2025	☐

Figure 2.2.1: *Vocabulary learning schedule on Google Sheets, based on spaced repetition*

Practical outcomes from classroom application

In a recent classroom-based trial involving 44 IELTS learners at level B1 and B2 (CEFR), I compared the performance of two groups: one using *Quizlet* alone and the other using both *Quizlet* and the *Google Sheets* revision planner. While both groups improved in vocabulary retention, the group following the spaced repetition calendar demonstrated slightly greater gains and reported feeling more organised and motivated. Though the results were not statistically significant, the system's clarity and ease of use contributed to a more positive learning experience.

Addressing common challenges

A few practical concerns arise when implementing this model. One is the question of who curates the vocabulary sets. In my classes, I provide a core list aligned with students' level and vocabulary topics, while allowing students to contribute additional words they encounter independently. This blend fosters autonomy while ensuring targeted learning.

Another concern is how to adapt this system for multilingual classes where students have different L1s. One solution is to use Google Translate directly inside *Google Sheets*, with step-by-step instructions readily available online. Alternatively, *ChatGPT* or similar tools can be used to generate bilingual cards by translating the vocabulary into students' L1. This flexibility allows teachers to maintain inclusivity, especially in multicultural classrooms.

Concerns about over-reliance on L1 translations are valid. However, research on translanguaging suggests that L1 support can reduce cognitive overload, especially for abstract or academic vocabulary. The key is balance: context-rich English examples and follow-up tasks that encourage students to use the words in meaningful ways can prevent passive learning.

Conclusion: a low-cost, high-impact vocabulary solution

In conclusion, combining *Quizlet* and *Google Sheets* offers a practical, accessible, and

research-based approach to vocabulary teaching. It is easy to set up, free to use, and highly adaptable to different learner levels and teaching contexts. Most importantly, it puts memory science into action, allowing students to stop forgetting and start remembering.

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2.3 Harnessing neuroscience to cultivate joyful and engaged language learning

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Here's something that might surprise you: most teacher training programmes barely touch on how the brain learns. We spend countless hours on methodology and curriculum design, yet we skip over the fundamental question of what's happening inside our students' heads when they're struggling with irregular verbs.

Neuroscience – the study of how our brains learn, remember and process emotions – has become a practical toolkit for educators who want to design more effective and humane learning environments (Kandel, 2006). Kelly (2017) points out that teachers are realising something important: understanding brain function doesn't just validate their teaching instincts – it can actually deepen their impact in unexpected ways.

But let's be clear. This isn't about throwing out everything we know about language teaching. Instead, neuroscience helps us understand why certain approaches work so well, while others fall flat despite our best efforts.

How learning really happens

At its most basic level, learning is memory formation. When your students finally 'get' the difference between two similar tenses, their brains have successfully encoded, stored, and can now retrieve that information. These processes depend heavily on attention, emotional engagement, and whether the material feels novel and relevant enough for their brains to bother keeping it around.

This is where storytelling and personalisation become crucial as they're working with the brain's natural tendency to hold onto meaningful information.

Then there's spaced repetition. When we reintroduce material over time, we help students build stronger memory pathways. Those rotating word banks you might use? Spiral reviews? Even simple flashcards? They're all prompting the brain to revisit and reinforce content. Research by Pashler et al. (2007) found that students who review material at spaced intervals retain nearly twice as much as those who cram.

And here's something we often overlook: sleep. During deep sleep phases, students' brains are essentially doing homework – consolidating memories and connecting new learning to existing knowledge. Without adequate rest, even our most brilliant lessons can fade away. Kelly (2017) makes a striking observation: just one hour of quality sleep can equal one hour of active learning.

Putting these insights into practice

- *Novelty and personal connection:* Our brains are wired to notice change. Try introducing lessons in unexpected ways or through surprise activities. When students can choose customised writing prompts or create vocabulary lists based on their interests, they engage more deeply.
- *Making spaced repetition work:* Plan for spiral reviews where previous topics reappear in quizzes, games or conversations. Flashcards and rotating vocabulary banks keep students encountering words in different contexts over time. Even a brief recap session days after introducing new material significantly boosts retention.
- *Taking sleep seriously:* This might feel outside our typical responsibilities, but we can model good sleep habits. Share the science with students: memory consolidation literally depends on REM and slow-wave sleep phases. Even brief naps – as short as six minutes – can improve alertness and focus.
- *The power of stories:* Stories activate multiple brain regions simultaneously – emotional centres, motor areas, sensory processing zones. This makes them incredibly effective for learning abstract concepts or complex grammar rules. Students can create their own learning stories or act them out through role play.
- *Movement as learning:* Physical movement boosts brain function by increasing blood flow and triggering BDNF release – a protein critical for cognitive processing (Kelly, 2017). Simple strategies work well: stretch breaks every 30 minutes, walk-and-talk activities, gesture-based vocabulary review, or standing pair work instead of seated drills.
- *Strategic mild stress:* Short bursts through games, timers, gentle competition and even calling on students can enhance memory formation. Assigning slightly challenging tasks (Krashen's i+1) helps with focus and better comprehension. However, timing matters – stress sharpens focus during learning but can impair memory before or after stressful events.

Moving forward

Despite mounting evidence, neuroscience remains surprisingly peripheral in teacher training programmes. But waiting for official curricula to catch up isn't the best approach.

Teachers don't need neuroscience degrees to implement brain-informed strategies. An inquiry-based approach – where trainees explore brain-related topics and share insights – can be both accessible and empowering (Kelly, 2017).

We've adapted before. When digital tools emerged, teachers learnt to integrate them relatively quickly. The challenge now is embracing neuroscience not as an academic buzzword, but as a practical framework that genuinely enriches teaching practice.

Every time teachers build movement into lessons, allow time for rest, incorporate storytelling or use novelty, they're working with how brains naturally learn best. Understanding the research behind these instincts helps us move from intuitive teaching toward more intentional practice, and shift from improving test scores to creating conditions where genuine learning can flourish.

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2.4 Mindfulness-enriched foreign language classrooms

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Feelings are crucial and integral to language learning as they facilitate or interfere with the learning process. Positive feelings enable learners to engage deeply with what they learn, while negative feelings can hinder cognitive functioning, reduce motivation and impede memory retention. There is a need for strategies that address learners' emotional wellbeing. Mindfulness has emerged as a promising tool to support language learners in managing their emotions and feelings. Defined as the capacity to train one's attention to remain present with ongoing experiences while cultivating curiosity, openness and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004), mindfulness offers a practical approach to mitigating the emotional barriers in the language learning process. Through the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, mindfulness practices can induce the relaxation response, which helps to reduce negative emotions and foster focused mental state.

When applied in educational contexts, mindfulness practices have led to a range of benefits, including reducing test anxiety, increasing attention and focus, enhancing cognitive flexibility, improving memory, and increasing readiness for the learning experience. In the context of foreign language learning, integrating mindfulness practices can enrich the classroom environment by supporting vocabulary acquisition, creating a peaceful and focused learning atmosphere, and minimising affective barriers to learning (Jenkins, 2015). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that mindfulness

not only contributes to better academic performance but also fosters increased awareness of the foreign language learning process (Zeilhofer, 2023). A growing body of literature supports the notion that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with reduced foreign language anxiety, which makes it an effective tool to integrate into language curricula.

Implementation in the foreign language classroom

To investigate learners' experiences with mindfulness integration in foreign language classrooms, I conducted an action research study involving 24 third-year students enrolled in the department of Management and Information Systems at a public university in Türkiye. The participants, selected through convenience sampling, were engaged in an eight-week intervention that incorporated mindfulness practices into their English language lessons. Employing a mixed-methods research design, I gathered qualitative data through the instructor's reflective journal, students' reflective notes, and semi-structured focus group interviews. Quantitative data were collected via a validated mindfulness scale administered before and after the intervention to assess changes in mindfulness levels.

Results

The findings revealed a range of benefits associated with the implementation of mindfulness in the foreign language classroom. Mindfulness practices contributed to creating a more relaxed and receptive learning environment, which enabled students to grasp target language content more effectively by alleviating stress. Additionally, students reported shifts in their attitudes toward language learning, indicating greater willingness to participate, and reduced anxiety during communicative tasks. The practices also facilitated smoother transitions between classroom activities and served as effective warm-up exercises.

One student shared her experience by stating: *Before, I was afraid to speak in class, but now I take a deep breath and remind myself that learning takes time.* This comment reflects a significant transformation from anxiety and fear toward self-regulation, indicative of increased emotional resilience. Another student stated: *Instead of feeling frustrated when I don't understand a word, I pause and try to figure it out patiently.* This perspective illustrates a transformation in how the learner handles moments of confusion or difficulty. This statement also supports metacognitive strategies, encouraging the learner to reflect, infer and problem solve, which in turn deepens engagement with the language and reduces negative affective responses.

However, a notable limitation emerged. Several students reported difficulty maintaining focus during mindfulness exercises due to the distractions of their large and crowded classroom setting. Interviews revealed that mindfulness activities might be more effective when conducted in smaller groups, where environmental distractions are minimised.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this study suggest that mindfulness holds significant potential for enriching English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms by providing a more focused, emotionally supportive, and cognitively engaging learning environment. Mindfulness transforms foreign language learning from a stressful task into an enjoyable and immersive experience. By incorporating mindfulness practices, learners can reduce anxiety, foster confidence, improve focus and enhance retention, leading to a more effective use of the language. To maximise the effectiveness of these practices, it is essential that educators receive proper training in mindfulness and possess a solid understanding of its principles prior to classroom implementation. As the field of language education continues to evolve, integrating contemplative practices such as mindfulness represents a valuable step toward a more holistic and learner-centred pedagogical approach.

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2.5 Neuroaesthetics and language learning: rewiring the brain through art

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How can language lessons transcend grammar drills and vocabulary lists to truly transform learners? This talk explored how *neuroaesthetics* – the science of how the brain responds to art – can radically reshape language education by turning classrooms into dynamic spaces of cognitive, emotional and creative growth.

Our current educational models often treat the brain as a passive container, one to be filled with knowledge. But neuroscience offers a different picture. The brain is a complex, adaptable network, shaped by experience and capable of continuous rewiring – a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. In this context, learning is not just the transfer of information, but an experience that reshapes neural pathways. And this is where *art* comes in.

Art is not merely decorative or expressive – it is deeply cognitive. Through its power to evoke emotion, stimulate perception and activate imagination, art becomes a tool that engages learners on multiple levels. Multisensory learning – learning through sound, vision, movement and touch – has been shown to create stronger and more durable neural connections than traditional methods.

Magsamen and Ross (2023) note that creating or experiencing art can physically grow parts of the brain. Similarly, James Clear, in *Atomic Habits* (2018), reminds us that visual stimuli profoundly influence behaviour. With 70–85 per cent of our sensory input being visual, it's no surprise that visual learning accelerates understanding and memory retention. But the benefits of art in language learning go even deeper.

Art builds motivation by reducing anxiety and allowing space for ambiguity. It offers choice and personalisation, which, in turn, increase autonomy and engagement. It nurtures critical thinking, encouraging learners to interpret, infer and connect. Art naturally leads to interdisciplinary learning – history, culture, politics and personal narratives – all embedded in a single artwork or story.

In practice, this means we can do more than describe paintings – we can live inside them. Learners can:

- become the main characters in a painting and add their own voices, even if that means that they need to transform themselves into Van Gogh's sunflowers;
- rewrite visual narratives into different genres;
- curate artworks in class galleries;
- find hidden messages, deconstruct symbolism and reconstruct new meanings.

Each of these activities strengthens the same cognitive muscles used in reading and writing (skimming and scanning, identifying tone and mood, making inferences and understanding point of view and author's purpose). In essence, interpreting art parallels interpreting text. Language classrooms must be spaces not only for communication but also for thought.

To explore this idea, I showed examples of how we implemented our course 'Art & Social Change' with Greek learners of English as a second language, aged 13 to 15, whose proficiency ranges from CEFR B2 to C1.Through powerful artworks and big questions, we challenged students to reflect, imagine and take action. We looked at:

- Ai Weiwei and the refugee crisis: 'If a single image can expose injustice, why do so many look away?'
- Frida Kahlo and a growth mindset: 'Can pain become power?'
- Banksy and homelessness: 'Why do we walk past those who sleep on the streets?'
- Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*: 'If history teaches lessons, why does corruption persist?'

Inspired by JR's *Inside Out Project* (https://www.insideoutproject.net/en/), our students created their own exhibition on FOMO (fear of missing out) and technology. Their portraits spoke up for JOMO – the *joy of missing out* – and included installations like 'What's in My Head' collages and a pop art piece called *Social Media Cocktail*, complete with nutrition facts and playful language. This process made students feel, think and create. They were not just learners but artists, researchers, curators and campaigners. They moved from passive recipients to active meaning-makers.

In another project, C2 students explored the cognitive parallels between scientists and artists, comparing Géricault's methods with those of Edison, Darwin and Galileo. Using the *Eight Habits of Mind* – Develop Craft, Engage & Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch & Explore, and Understand Art Worlds (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2003) – they found surprising overlap: deep observation, persistence, willingness to break conventions and emotional engagement with their subject.

Finally, they applied these habits to a modern tragedy: the 2023 Tempi train accident in Greece. Through research, artistic expression and digital tools, they created *Raft 57*, a visual response to institutional failure and human suffering – just as Géricault did two centuries earlier.

In a world where creativity is often sidelined, integrating neuroaesthetic principles into language learning is more than an educational choice. By fostering an artistic mindset, we are not just teaching a language. We are teaching how to *see*, how to *think*, and how to *create meaning* in a complex world.

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2.6 Energising EFL afternoons: strategies for dynamic and engaging lessons

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Spotting the afternoon issue

A common challenge in EFL classrooms is maintaining energy and engagement during afternoon lessons. At Kings Brighton, this prompted a focused look at the energy and attention drop observed in afternoon sessions.

Exploring energy levels: a learner-centred study

Our approach began with data collection. We launched a school-wide investigation to explore how students' energy fluctuated throughout the day. Using student questionnaires, teacher feedback and classroom observations, we identified common signs of disengagement: yawning, frequent trips to the water dispenser and mobile phone distractions.

We also held a whole-school event titled 'How to reset your energy levels', where students were asked to draw graphs charting their personal energy levels throughout the school day and reflect on key questions: 'When do you feel the most and the least energetic? Why?' Students also received tips for boosting their energy.

The findings were striking: 63.3 per cent of 60 surveyed students – ages 17+ and representing a variety of countries such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Switzerland and Colombia – reported a notable dip in energy between 1 pm and 3 pm. Students attributed this to common factors such as: the biological post-lunch slump, academic workload, personal and health-related issues.

This research was a turning point. For students, it fostered self-awareness around managing energy: hydration, brief movement breaks and adjustments to daily routines were all strategies explored. For teachers, it offered a pathway to align lesson planning with students' natural rhythms. As supported by Miza (n.d.), learning is most effective between 10 am and 2 pm, and 4 pm and 10 pm – times that closely matched our students' experiences and helped guide more energy-aware lesson planning.

From awareness to action: rethinking afternoon instruction

To combat low energy and waning focus, we turned to movement-based pedagogy. Drawing on research from Liu et al. (2017), whose study demonstrated that physical activity enhances language acquisition, we began integrating low-stakes, easy-to-implement physical activities into our lessons to boost energy and focus.

Walking debates

This versatile activity gets students physically involved by asking them to move to different sides of the room to show agreement with a displayed statement or quote. It works well as a warm-up or a follow-up task, stimulating both energy and critical thinking. To enhance interaction, we added variations such as *Spies* – students who briefly join other groups to observe and report back – and *Traitors*, who join other teams to share what has been discussed in their group. These playful elements encourage peer collaboration, active listening and lively discussion, making the task particularly engaging for teens.

Speed friending

In this fast-paced speaking activity, students discuss a series of questions in rotating pairs. Every three minutes, a burst of music signals the time to switch partners. The music adds energy and a fun atmosphere, while the structure encourages short, focused conversations with a variety of classmates. It has been consistently popular with learners.

'Chip In' vocabulary activity

This activity is designed to encourage active use of target vocabulary in a meaningful, communicative context. I created a set of topic-based discussion cards, each featuring an engaging visual prompt (such as a photograph or illustration) aligned with the themes outlined in our schemes of work. On the reverse side of each card is a main discussion question, a follow-up prompt and an optional creative task (e.g. role play or mini-presentation). Learners work in groups, selecting an image that appeals to them – boosting engagement through choice and autonomy. As they respond to the prompts, they try to use words from a provided topic-specific vocabulary list. Each correct use earns them a 'chip' (e.g. a paperclip or sweet). The student with the most chips wins, adding a competitive element that reinforces vocabulary retention.

Vocabulary recall game – 'Ka-blab' variation

This fast-paced, energetic game is designed to reinforce vocabulary recall and spontaneous language production. Based on the original *Ka-blab* format, it uses category cards and a ticking 'bomb' timer to challenge students to quickly recall words or

functional language under pressure. Players take turns naming words or sentences related to a category before passing the timer. When it goes off, the holder gets a losing token. The fewest tokens win. It's fast, fun and excellent for spontaneous language production.

Reflections and moving forward

The benefits of these adjustments are tangible. Teachers report more responsive learners, improved group dynamics and better retention. Students, meanwhile, appreciate the variety and sense of play these activities bring to the classroom.

Afternoon lessons will likely never rival the peak focus of mid-morning. But with the right strategies – grounded in research, driven by student voice, and implemented with enthusiasm – they can become something more than just a sleepy afterthought. They can become a highlight of the school day.

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2.7 Storytelling and affect: bridging language learning gaps

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This paper, geared to teachers and teacher educators, explores the use of storytelling – especially personal stories – as a tool for English language learning. It is based on a project titled 'Storytelling: engaging and learning', conducted with first-year undergraduates in teaching and translation programmes at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil. The project draws from the concepts of affect and resistance to learning. The main idea is that students learning an additional language sometimes fear judgement and criticism, and first-year students, who are the ones involved in this project, may feel a sense of unbelongingness in a new academic environment.

According to David Heathfield (2023), 'stories can touch students' hearts before their minds, they are recognised as deeply appealing and motivating', and in my practice, storytelling has also been shown to enhance language skills, motivation and peer relationships by allowing emotional expressions.

Theoretical support

The project adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining English language teaching, drama and educational psychology. These areas converge in viewing the learner holistically, with educational psychology's focus on affect at the core of the discussion.

My practice is informed by the humanistic and person-centred approaches, which view learners as whole individuals with innate learning potential. Learning resistance

exists; it is human. Duarte (2015) believes that recognising resistance as normal can help teachers respond more constructively, and supports this view by identifying reasons that justify students' resistance to learning:

1. Learning involves personal and academic change, which can be challenging. Transitioning from a first language to a second or additional language requires taking risks that may threaten a learner's self-image. This often leads to fear of judgement, particularly in speaking, resulting in demotivation or withdrawal from learning.
2. First-year undergraduates may feel out of place in their new academic setting, experiencing anxiety, low self-confidence, discouragement or a sense of failure – particularly when speaking English in public. As a result, resistance sets in, and therefore it is essential to create a classroom atmosphere of trust and empathy. Carl Rogers (1969) proposes three facilitating attitudes that support meaningful learning: genuineness, acceptance, and especially empathy, which is vital for sharing and receiving personal stories (Duarte, 2015).

Empathy and storytelling

Storytelling can naturally promote and share empathy, aligning with the affective goals of the project. Empathy means listening attentively, and sincerely trying to understand someone's emotions and viewpoint – essentially, being in someone's shoes. In the classroom, sharing personal stories can lower barriers to learning and help build an accepting and empathetic atmosphere among students.

Hands on: bridging language learning gaps through storytelling

'The Fair of Life' event

Students are invited to share personal stories inspired by their own meaningful objects, guided by the teacher's example story, *The Bracelet*. Next, they take part in a classroom event called the 'The Fair of Life' to present their chosen objects and to tell their stories connected to them.

Three key phases structure the project: **1** The invite to participate; **2** The preparation of materials, language and displays; and **3** 'The Fair of Life' classroom event.

1 *The invite*

> *Dear Students,*
> *Over the next three weeks, I would like you to reflect on your interests, experiences and personal memories in preparation for a booth exhibition. Each of you will create a personal display with 5–10 labelled items that remind you of an important moment in your life, telling your story about them.*
> *The goal is to help you get to know one another better. You will set up your displays on desks and you can also use wall space to hang up your items. So, please start collecting your items early.*

2 *The preparation*

a) Sharing previous storytelling experiences with peers;
b) Reviewing story elements (setting, characters, plot, etc.);

c) Language practice;
d) Developing communication skills (voice, body language); and
e) Tutorials, rehearsals with the teacher.
3 *'The Fair of Life' classroom event*
A video of 'The Fair of Life' captures students presenting their displays (YouTube).

The students' voice

Student feedback showed the event enhanced peer understanding, respect and empathy. Also, by sharing personal stories they built stronger relationships and a caring environment where everyone felt more supported. On a personal level, storytelling helped students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Storytelling enabled them to improve their English and allowed for greater confidence in expressing themselves, making the process enjoyable and enriching for personal and classroom development.

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3 Tackling issues in the classroom

The papers in this chapter focus on issues faced in the classroom, with suggestions and strategies for dealing with them based on practitioners' experiences. Starting with a panel discussion on dichotomies in the classroom, **Eowyn Crisfield**, **Isabella Fritz**, **Sandra Kotzor**, **Rachel McIntyre** and **Jane Spiro** posit that teachers do not need to make polarised choices regarding issues of accent, pronunciation, vocabulary, correctness, appropriacy and translanguaging; rather they can take a both/and approach and thereby refresh their teaching and expand opportunities for learning. Then, **Gemma Archer** looks at why students can struggle with decoding authentic speech, and outlines a procedure which can help teachers to address this issue. While Gemma's context is the Scottish English language classroom, the process can be used with any unfamiliar variety of English. Reluctance to speak English, for whatever reasons, is an issue many of us have experienced. **Susan Abrill** explores how wordless graphic novels such as Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* can replace time-worn discussion prompts to inspire students to produce authentic, meaningful and compelling verbal output. In the context of business English, **Katarzyna Kowalczyk** explains how the use of scripted dramatic and real-world texts (rehearsal, reflection and refinement) can create a low-risk space where learners don't just speak English, but perform with confidence. Moving on to vocabulary, **Ulla Fürstenberg**, **Sophie Therese Thurner** and **Hanna Gottlieb-Zimmermann** describe how they integrate 'wonder' tasks into English language lessons with advanced learners to expand their vocabulary, enhance their language awareness and spur autonomous learning. And, finally, an issue that arguably all teachers face – how to create inclusive learning environments that cater to the varied needs of all students. After an overview of various neurodivergent conditions and their classroom implications, **Daiana Natalia Martinez** focuses on five proactive strategies for working with neurodiverse learners, while **Boelo van der Pool** presents strategies to support learners with dyslexia and ADHD, but more importantly, a positive and empowering shift in perspective.

3.1 Panel discussion: (Ir-)reconcilable differences: from either/or to both/and in ELT

Eowyn Crisfield *Educational Consulting, Oxford, UK,* **Isabella Fritz** *University of Oxford, UK,* **Sandra Kotzor** *LMU Munich, Germany & University of Oxford, UK,* **Rachel McIntyre** *LMU Munich, Germany, and* **Jane Spiro** *Oxford Brookes University, UK*

Introduction

The panel discussion aimed to look at dichotomies in the classroom, where teachers often feel they need to make an either/or choice. Each panellist considered one such dichotomy, covering issues of accent, pronunciation, vocabulary, correctness, appropriacy and translanguaging. Our premise is that teachers do not need to make polarised choices; rather, they might bring together apparent opposites to create classrooms in which both/and are possible.

A word about accents (Isabella Fritz)

The panel opened with a discussion on how psycholinguistic research findings on second language (L2) comprehension and production can be helpful in classroom teaching, particularly in relation to accents. While the focus in pronunciation teaching is now largely on intelligibility, the aspiration to sound 'native-like' has not completely disappeared, contributing to the ongoing debate about what constitutes correct and incorrect pronunciation.

This section focused on how the brain comprehends accents and produces L2 speech. In comprehension, the brain does not inherently differentiate between a standard variety and other varieties including foreign-accented speech. Instead, the brain adapts to accents over time. The more exposure to an accent, the easier it becomes to understand. In production, the brain interprets L2 sounds through the learner's first language (L1), namely through the L1 phonological system that includes not only the sounds of a language (phonemes) but also word stress pattern and intonation. In that way, accents are a clever way of using already existing resources (Wayland, 2021).

Such findings also have classroom implications. Teachers can raise awareness of why learners have accents and why certain phonemes in English are more difficult depending on a student's L1. The panel then advocated moving beyond a right-versus-wrong framework toward setting student-individual pronunciation goals and giving context-sensitive feedback.

Regardless of learners' goals, some research insights are relevant across all levels for both teachers and students. For example, perception and production are interlinked: students cannot produce sounds they cannot perceive. Therefore, teaching pronunciation should integrate both aspects to support effective language learning.

You can't say that (Rachel McIntyre)

Listeners were asked whether they had ever said 'You can't say that' to a learner or been told this themselves in a language-learning setting. The question of whether as teachers we are too quick to label spoken language as incorrect was explored. Perhaps

some language our learners use is simply unfamiliar to us. Should I, for example, correct learners for saying they're going to *search it up* online, when my teenage nephew and other first-language English speakers use this variation freely? Discomfort with the notion that the English of textbooks and exams is the only correct language to use was expressed, along with questions of ownership and power.

Rather than quashing learner creativity or labelling words and phrases as incorrect, are there not ways to embrace new language when it appears? A common issue is informality in a learner's choice of words, linking to Isabella's point about the brain not distinguishing between standard variety and other varieties. Perhaps our learners' language is in fact right, but they're using it in the wrong place.

An analogy of helping young people navigate the intensity of swearing highlighted the importance of appropriacy and context. Can we offer activities to help learners explore when and where they *can* say something (e.g. find alternatives, match to different contexts, etc.), building awareness of different ways of speaking to different people in different contexts.

Subsequent comments and responses included: wondering where we draw the line and the difference between seeing language as *wrong* or *not usual*; the importance of integrating cultural knowledge, helping learners distinguish contexts, and of understanding what we are equipping learners for; viewing the language classroom as a place where language is investigated together.

That's not a word! (Sandra Kotzor)

The third part of the panel continued the thread of what is acceptable to say or do for an L2 learner but was focused on the question of whether language learners can create new words in their L2. Most people in the audience had, at one point or another, been told 'That's not a word!' when they had creatively put together morphological units in English to form a word that would be perfectly acceptable but simply does not exist (e.g. *uglify*).

The focus in this section was on the potential benefits of allowing learners to manipulate the units of language below the word level (morphemes; Bauer & Nation, 2020). Recent ELT work on vocabulary learning has focused on units above the word level (chunks or phrases), but explicitly including morphology in language teaching remains rare, despite the fact that putting together morphemes in unconventional ways is a normal part of L1 development.

This was one reason why integrating explicit morphology instruction into the ELT classroom, and allowing learners to use their newly acquired knowledge of the patterns of English in creative ways, might prove to be beneficial. Creative language use is generally considered a high-level skill in L1 speakers and naturally this should also apply to proficient L2 speakers. However, the manipulation of morphological patterns can, and should, be encouraged at every level, and knowledge of morphology has been shown to improve literacy outcomes. Bauer and Nation (2020) provide a good starting point for morphology in the language classroom.

All writing is creative writing (Jane Spiro)

The fourth panel question asked: Is all writing the same? Is there really any difference between creative writing and more academic/professional writing? We answered it from both perspectives.

No, all writing is not creative writing. There are differences in the value attached to colourful and figurative language, the visibility of the author's feelings and beliefs, and the importance of argument and evidence.

Yes, in that writing of all types is improved when the author appreciates their own intentions and audience. The aware writer considers: which words to choose; in which order to present information; what information to withhold; and what to bring forward. All kinds of writing value the capacity to communicate in a principled and systematic way to their chosen audience.

For teachers, the takeaway message is that students could share the typical practice of poets, by exchanging their work with peers and asking these questions: Have I conveyed my ideas clearly? Is there more information you need, or less? What message do you take away, and is that the one I intended? Teachers worry that creative writing takes more time in class, but the questions and practices of creative writers as peer readers lead to mindful writers, and can save time by making students their own best editors (Spiro, 2022).

Translanguaging (Eowyn Crisfield)

The fifth panel section focused on the question of if, when, and how to use the students' first languages in class. This is a persistent issue of debate in the field, and leaves teachers to make decisions that relate to inclusion, scaffolding and exposure to the target language. We know that there are strong links between the development of the first language and the development of a new language at school (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). But we also know that students need maximum exposure to the target language in order to develop proficiency.

To align these positions, we can look to our particular context, and what research shows to be supportive practice. This would indicate that it is useful in language teaching contexts to tap into the students' first languages when teaching about syntax/structures to support contrastive awareness: How is the structure in English the same/different than in my language? We also find that connecting vocabulary to the first language is a way to ensure comprehension and 'root' the new words for learners by connecting to prior knowledge. In CLIL and English-medium instruction contexts, there is also value in using the first language to support understanding of complex content while students are still developing English. And connecting to the section on creative writing, we know that if students have strong literacy in their own language, their development of English literacy will be easier. In brief, making connections across languages has value for students, while also maintaining a high level of English input.

Our five panel discussions offer a challenge to include a both/and approach to the development of teachers and teaching materials. Practically, this would mean asking the question: What if unexamined rules were reconsidered, and what is usually excluded from the L2 classroom is instead included? In rethinking apparent opposites, such as L1 in the L2 classroom, creative vs academic writing, rules of correct vs incorrect language, teachers refresh their teaching and teaching materials and expand opportunities for learning.

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3.2 Decoding Scottish speech in the Scottish English language classroom

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A statement frequently heard in the English language classrooms of Scotland is: 'I understand you teacher, but I don't understand anyone outside of the classroom'. One of the main reasons why students may struggle with this authentic speech is because they expect to hear the controlled English of their coursebooks' listening exercises, but instead they are being exposed to one of Scotland's four official languages, Scots, as well as myriad features of fast, spontaneous speech.

Scottish English and Scots

Scots is an 800-year-old Germanic language which predates the use of English in Scotland by several centuries. Today, rather than speaking entirely in Scots, most modern Scottish speakers reside on a linguistic continuum where they drift and switch between Scottish English and Scots depending on who they are talking to, as well as mixing the two languages together (McColl-Miller, 2018). Despite this rich linguistic environment, teacher training in the phonology of English and Scottish speech is reported to be extremely limited among those working in Scotland (Archer, 2021). Due to this, teachers may be unsure how to support students with the authentic languages of Scotland beyond the confines of the classroom.

A step-by-step procedure

The following procedure can be used to support students' comprehension of authentic speech, allowing new phonological features to be highlighted in small, manageable chunks.

Step 1: Activate schemata
Choose an audio or video that is suitable for your class that is no more than two minutes long. It should contain a specific sound feature you wish to expose your students to. Before introducing the audio, provide simple questions or visuals linked to the topic which enable students to predict the content and activate their schemata. For example, before watching a video about a tourist being lost in Scotland and needing directions, I might show my class a picture of some tourists looking at a map and ask them to guess where they are, what the problem is and what language they might need to get help.

Step 2: Listen for gist and tune in to the speaker
Allow students to listen to 30 seconds of the audio or video to become accustomed to the speaker/s and check if their predictions about the content were correct.

Step 3: Listen in detail
Next, give students a simple question to answer while listening to the second part of the audio. The answer should contain the phonological feature you want to highlight to them. For example, in a video where a tourist asks for directions, students could listen and choose the bolded word they hear being used in the sentence 'Just go **out/ in** the way you came'. However, when they listen, instead of hearing 'out' /aʊt/ as it is pronounced in Standard Southern British English or General American English, they will hear a Scottish speaker using the Scots equivalent 'oot' [ʉt]. At this point, the teacher should highlight that the diphthong in 'out' can sometimes be pronounced as a single vowel [ʉ] in Scotland.

Step 4: Listen and apply new knowledge
Provide further listening comprehension questions for students to answer in the remaining parts of the audio or video. The answers should contain the same sound learners were introduced to in Step 3 in different words, providing additional exposure.

Step 5: Student observations and decoding
After listening, give learners time to ask questions about the selected sound or other features they observed. Project the transcript onto the board and address any tricky sections they struggled to understand. Often, these will contain connected speech, reduced vowel sounds, assimilation and other features of spontaneous speech. Annotate the transcript and allow learners to listen again, observing these features post-explanation.

Step 6: Reflection
Finally, allow students to reflect on this exercise. Encourage them to share their own experiences of being lost or struggling to understand local speakers, or any Scots words they already know that have [ʉ] in them. At this point, there is usually much laughter, and sharing of experiences, words and sounds, ending the lesson on a positive note as they relate to one another's stories.

Conclusion

Using this structure may help teachers to address authentic language in a slow, guided way providing support and answers in real time. This may help reduce overwhelm and the subsequent negative experiences that can come from struggling to listen to an entirely unfamiliar variety of English, or indeed, another local language, with no prior exposure, experience or knowledge to draw from.

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3.3 Wordless graphic novels as a medium for EAL speaking: classroom applications of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan

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We are familiar with a recurring challenge in intensive English language programmes: getting students to speak naturally about something known to them without overstepping into sensitive personal or cultural boundaries. Time-worn prompts abound. As teachers, we assign each discussion task, only to observe our students in pairs and small groups having awkward moments discussing things like travel, shopping, gender roles, love and dating, hobbies, their families ... or revealing unexpected sadness or even tears triggered by a recent breakup, trauma or the death of a loved one. By the time students reach an intermediate level, they have responded to the same prompts, or slight variations, many times. For many, these topics no longer feel like opportunities for self-expression but instead inspire dread and a sense of dutiful performance. To inspire students to produce authentic, meaningful and compelling verbal output, I find myself repeatedly turning to the arts. At their best, the arts function as crucibles of exploration and meaning-making, spaces where the viewer is transported beyond the everyday. Many graphic novels are considered art and can offer this immersive experience.

Over the past decade, graphic novels have gained a solid foothold in the canon of literature used in foreign language classes worldwide. Urged by Stephen Krashen more than twenty years ago to use 'comics as a bridge to further independent reading' (Krashen, 2004), teachers and librarians stocked up on comics, which have since leapt into the mainstream. Krashen's endorsement of comics as a way to build momentum toward independent reading is most widely associated with his 2004 book *The Power of Reading*, and I recall hearing him speak about it at a TESOL conference in the early 2000s.

Parents, too, recognise the power of comics; by the time students enter formal schooling, many have already read comics and graphic novels at home. In our IATEFL session, one participant posed this question: 'Do the students need to be taught explicitly how to read graphic novels?' Generally, no. As Boomer or Gen X teachers, we may not find comics or graphic novels intuitive, but our Millennial, Gen Z, and now Gen Alpha students often do.

There are illustrators whose work transcends traditional illustration and occupies the cultural space of fine art. One such artist is Shaun Tan. In the case of his wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*, the images alone draw in the reader and inspire a myriad of perceptions and questions which propel the story forward. This masterwork of detailed pencil drawings, which took five years to complete, is a dream prompt for

speaking, as its art is rich, evocative and ideal for eliciting spontaneous language.

Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* is well suited for classroom use for many reasons. First, the books are oversized, making them easy to share in pairs or small groups. Second, the sturdy cover protects the artwork, allowing the books to endure repeated use. At 128 pages, the story lends itself to in-class use over several days. Thematically, *The Arrival* explores immigration, loss, longing, new beginnings, and cultural shift and adaptation. In my experience, adult students from Latin America and East Asia with CEFR levels A2 to C2 have responded to this work with curiosity and enthusiasm.

My objective is that students collaboratively build a narrative as they 'read' the book aloud to one another. This approach aligns well with task-based instruction, as students strive to articulate the layered stories they perceive in each frame. Since there are no words, they describe the story page by page, frame by frame. At key moments, such as a flashback or a turning point, students are prepared to discuss events, reflect on characters' experiences or make predictions about what will happen next. To extend the activity, I ask students to choose a section of the story they particularly like and record a spontaneous, unprepared three-minute video in which they narrate to the camera. These videos are private. I provide feedback on interpretation, grammar and vocabulary. Another useful extension is journalling: students write about the section they narrated, reinforcing reflection and language practice.

This book can be used in many ways, but its greatest impact lies in the extended speaking it inspires – productive, expressive noise that fills the room with energy and purpose. I've had B1 students narrate for 40 minutes before I stopped them. I was pleased to share this approach at IATEFL, as it aligns with a range of curricula and carries universal appeal. Although certain scenes carry emotional weight, the content remains appropriate and intellectually stimulating for adult learners.

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3.4 Drama in the boardroom: functional business English meets modern English plays

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When teaching business English to B2+ learners, one of their biggest challenges is the fear of speaking up – a worry about making mistakes. We, as English teachers, can tap into the power of drama and modern English plays to unlock our students' confidence and communication skills in business contexts.

Blending business and theatre

I've been teaching English for 30 years, specialising in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and business English. I'm also a huge theatre fan. Some time ago, a spark

ignited: why not combine my passion with my teaching? This idea really took off last year when I led a 20-hour course for a government body. They needed to sharpen their negotiation, meeting and presentation skills ahead of Poland's EU presidency. That's when I fully embraced blending linguistic proficiency with functional dialogue rehearsal. My 'theatre in the classroom' concept focused on getting students to practise real-world dialogue.

'Perfectionism' and the power of practice

Learning should build confidence and a growth mindset, rather than trigger fear of ridicule or anxiety. I came across a line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that, to me, celebrates the learning process: 'We will meet, and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains, be perfect: adieu'. It's a powerful guide for language learning.

As Knowles et al. (2005) observed, pride, fixed mindsets and fear of ridicule can be major hurdles – especially where hierarchy stifles participation. At the B2+ level, students already have their 'English identity'. Our role is to help them strengthen it, not replace it. They may have strong views about what works for them or what they enjoy. It's about gently offering them a safer, more effective path where their ego isn't on the line.

From role play to scripted performance

My solution involves a 'theatre shift' – working with scripted texts. A script offers a protective 'mask'. Classrooms become 'low-stakes boardrooms', where mistakes are expected and structured repetition builds expertise. Many students feel self-conscious around colleagues, and there's often resistance to improvised role plays. Using prepared scripts lowers the pressure to be imaginative or extroverted. The lines are fixed, the sequence is clear, and it's easier to practise pronunciation or grammar excerpts until they're confidently rehearsed – in a conversational, but still structured and safe context.

Bringing play texts to life for business skills

Scenes selected from plays like *The Doctor* by Robert Icke provide rich, realistic material, grounded in familiar professional settings and authentic language. The key is choosing the right texts. *The Seagull* by Chekhov, for example, has been reimagined in modern English by Simon Stephens, Anya Reiss and more recently Macmillan and Ostermeier.

Scripts offer more than vocabulary – they embed pronunciation, grammar in context, tone, body language and facial expressions. These are essential for effective communication and also boost confidence and retention.

How do I know what they need? Let them discover

What functional language do your students need? Ask them. To build a coherent set of functional phrases, teachers need to know what to look for. In one course, we explored the functions lawyers need to master, inspired by *The Economist* (2024, June 27) article 'Why everyone should think like a lawyer'. We identified language functions such as inferring information, presenting analogies and strategic questioning.

Together, we pinpointed the group's most urgent needs.

Using real-world texts lets students 'reverse-engineer' their learning: What language do I need to function effectively? and Where do I fall short in real communication? This aligns with ESP needs analysis and Knowles' principle that adults value relevance in what they learn.

Beyond the classroom: making skills stick

Treat discomfort as a scripted dramatic moment. That's where memorisation techniques used by actors come in. Thomas (2024) highlights three core principles:

- Improvisation requires a solid foundation – this means rehearsing key phrases and structures.
- Live performance pressure mirrors real-life settings – like boardroom dynamics.
- Mastery comes through repetition, visualisation and association – repeating tricky lines until they stick.

As Swales (2009) points out, drama is all about collaboration, not competition. It helps people learn together creatively. This is perfect for business English, where teamwork is key. We're not just helping them speak English better, but also to be better leaders, ask for what they deserve, and handle themselves with confidence.

Ultimately, turning work into play is the surest path to mastery. By embracing drama – rehearsal, reflection and refinement – we create a joyful, low-risk space where business English learners don't just speak English, they perform with confidence and impact in any high-pressure professional setting. We're coaching an executive mindset through drama.

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3.5 'Wonder words': creative vocabulary building with advanced learners of English

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Introduction

Learners of English today are constantly exposed to 'extramural English' (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), i.e. English outside the walls of the classroom. This may seem ideal for language learning, but in addition to exposure to the language, learners also need

to actively engage with English in their environment to be able to learn from it. One way of motivating them to do so is to integrate 'wonder' tasks into English language lessons as an impetus for autonomous learning.

Defining 'wonder'

In a pedagogical sense, 'the state of wonder can be understood as an emotionally laden, rewarding mental state of pondering upon [one's] discoveries with astonishment and excitement about embarking on further deeper enquiry'; it can never be satisfied fully in that a learner's discoveries always generate new questions to wonder about (Bazhydai & Westermann, 2020, p. 151). While wonder pedagogy is quite common in science teaching, it is rarely applied to language learning (see, for example, Plutino, 2021). The following task sequence illustrates how wonder tasks can be used with advanced learners of English to help them expand their vocabulary and enhance their language awareness (see Figure 3.5.1).

The 'wonder words' task sequence

The task sequence comprises the following steps:

1 English language diary

The learners record their encounters with English outside their English lessons for a specific period of time (e.g. two days). They also make a note of their emotions when engaging with English (e.g. frustration when they struggle to understand something). This task raises their awareness of the different ways they are users as well as learners of English.

2 Wonder word list

To deepen their interest, learners keep a list of new words and phrases they encounter. They also ask themselves questions such as: *I wonder if this is a very common word?* or *I wonder what the origin of the word is?*, which they attempt to answer in a second step. This active exploration of words and phrases can also be shared with their peers online.

3 Word portraits

Learners now focus on one word in more detail. This can be done by exploring definitions or usage; however, learners can also decide to analyse literature or etymology. It depends entirely on the learners' interests which pieces of information they want to find out for a particular word or phrase, and how they want to present the outcome.

4 Posters

The learners choose an example of any type of media they would like to work with (e.g. a song or an episode from a TV series) and create posters that contain wonder tasks for themselves. In doing so, they draw from the categories and strategies they have explored in steps two and three. The aim of this task is to make students answer wonder questions that emerge while consuming media without, however, fully completing the process of wondering.

Each step in the task sequence has a different focus:

- Working on the language diaries raises learners' awareness of extramural English.
- Compiling lists of wonder words allows learners to explore different categories of language analysis (e.g. etymology, connotations, etc.).
- Creating word portraits gives them the opportunity to develop strategies for deepening their understanding of their chosen words (e.g. working with dictionaries

or corpora).
- Designing posters requires them to apply the categories and strategies from the previous steps to a piece of language they have chosen themselves.

As the learners progress through the sequence, the tasks gradually become more open. It is important to note that this is not a linear process, however, as learners often revisit previous steps.

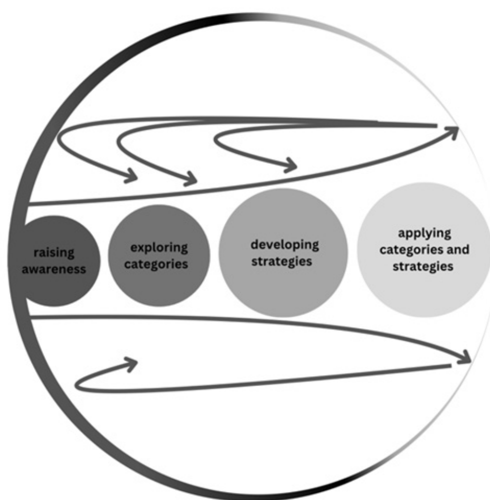

Figure 3.5.1: *The cycle of wonder: a visualisation of the cyclical character of the task sequence*

Conclusion

The tasks in this sequence were trialled with advanced (C1+) learners of English in a university ELT programme in Austria, and their reactions to the task sequence were very positive. However, there are some questions that should be addressed in future iterations of this approach. For example, wonder words and phrases tend to be quite specific and rarely used in our daily lives, which raises the question of relevance. However, maybe sometimes it is sufficient to have a little spark in a word or phrase without having to find a particular concrete use for it.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is to be hoped that the integration of wonder into English language teaching can indeed contribute to turning advanced learners into 'agents of their own learning' and 'eventually […] lifelong linguist[s]' (Plutino, 2021, p. 35).

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3.6 Empowering teachers: strategies for working with neurodiverse learners

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In an increasingly diverse world, creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the varied needs of all students is not just an ideal, it's a necessity. Inclusion goes far beyond simplifying content, it is a conscious, strategic commitment to designing learning experiences where all students, particularly neurodivergent learners, feel seen, respected and empowered to reach their full potential.

The foundation of inclusive education rests on understanding *neurodiversity*, a term that describes the natural variations in the way human brains process information. Around 15–20 per cent of the global population is estimated to be neurodiverse, including individuals with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism (McAllister, 2024). Importantly, many students may remain undiagnosed, making awareness and inclusive practices even more critical.

Neurodiversity is not a diagnosis; it is a framework for understanding and valuing different ways of thinking and learning. It recognises there is no singular 'right' way for a brain to operate since neurological differences are normal variations. The movement challenges the traditional deficit-based view of cognitive differences, advocating instead for the celebration of diverse strengths and perspectives.

Understanding neurodivergent profiles

The workshop delved into various neurodivergent conditions and their classroom implications (Delaney, 2016):

- *Dyslexia* affects reading, spelling and working memory. Students may reverse letters, forget recently read material, and struggle with organisation.
- *ADHD*, increasingly referred to as a 'difference' rather than a 'disorder', presents challenges with attention, impulse control and hyperactivity. Students may struggle to sit still, follow instructions or wait their turn.
- *Autistic Spectrum Condition* affects social interaction, communication and imagination. Students may have a literal understanding of language, resist changes in routine or exhibit intense focus on specific interests.
- *Dyscalculia* involves difficulties with numerical understanding, sequencing (order of days, word arrangement) and memory. It can also affect coordination and confidence.
- *Dysgraphia* impairs writing ability and motor coordination. Students may write slowly, have messy handwriting, or avoid writing altogether due to frustration or

fatigue.

- *Dyspraxia* affects motor coordination and spatial awareness. It may lead to challenges in physical tasks, organisation, following instructions and managing emotions.

Each condition may coexist with others, amplifying the complexity of student needs. Despite their differences, these learners often share common barriers: difficulties with processing, executive functioning, attention, literacy difficulties and motor coordination.

Inclusive strategies for the classroom

Recognising the rich diversity present in today's classrooms, the workshop introduced a comprehensive framework consisting of five proactive strategies designed to adapt both teaching materials and learning environments. These strategies include multisensory instructional methods, inclusive classroom environment, targeted support for reading and writing, social and emotional support, and tailored assessment practices with appropriate accommodations.

A key theme is the importance of clarity and flexibility in *instructions*:

- Use clear, step-by-step instructions supported by visual aids.
- Break tasks into manageable steps and allow extra processing time.
- Incorporate multisensory techniques, blending visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods.

The *classroom environment* also plays a vital role in supporting diverse learners. Creating predictable routines, minimising distractions, offering flexible seating, and using dyslexia-friendly fonts can significantly enhance students' focus and comfort. It is important to keep wall spaces uncluttered to avoid overwhelming students who may be sensitive to visual stimuli. In my context, we address this by dedicating specific corners of the classroom to support materials, posters and flashcards that students can access whenever they need them.

In *reading and writing tasks*, teachers should consider the impact of anxiety and fatigue. Scaffolding techniques – such as graphic organisers, writing frames and mind maps – can support structure and clarity when students need to develop writing pieces. Contextualised reading, chunked texts, and tools like reading rulers can make reading more accessible.

Beyond academic support, fostering *social and emotional wellbeing* is crucial. Strategies include encouraging a growth mindset, teaching self-advocacy skills, using positive reinforcement and facilitating peer partnerships. Understanding students' backgrounds and building trusting relationships help educators tailor support and recognise students' strengths.

When evaluating students' performance, it is essential to implement *inclusive assessment practices* that recognise diverse learning needs. This includes allowing extended time for tests and assignments, offering alternative methods of assessment – such as projects, oral presentations or visual demonstrations – and providing scaffolding to support students through complex tasks.

Conclusion

When educators recognise and embrace neurodiversity, they do more than adapt

materials – they reshape mindsets and classroom cultures. The goal is clear: to create spaces where every student, regardless of how their brain works, has the opportunity to learn, grow and flourish. After all, effective teaching practices that support students with neurodiverse needs are beneficial for all learners, i.e. good teaching for neurodiverse students is truly good teaching for everyone.

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3.7 From a packed room to a powerful shift: 45 minutes of reframing dyslexia and ADHD in language learning

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A room full of unicorns

April in Edinburgh brought more than just spring, it sparked connection, insight and change at the IATEFL Conference. I stood in front of a packed room of over 150 language teachers, some standing, some sitting on the floor, and many more unable to get in. The energy? Electric.

What drew such a crowd? A session on dyslexia and ADHD in language learning, topics that are becoming increasingly relevant in our classrooms. Topics most of us were never trained to handle, but are desperate to understand. After the talk, many teachers lined up to share personal stories, ask questions, and say: 'Finally, someone's talking about this'.

A story to start: Gillian the dancer

I opened the session with a true story. Gillian, a fidgety child in 1930s UK, couldn't sit still or focus. Her teachers gave up on her. Her mother took her to a doctor who simply observed. When music played, Gillian got up and danced. 'There's nothing wrong with your daughter', the doctor said. 'She's a dancer.' That little girl became Dame Gillian Lynne, choreographer of *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Her story shows what we miss when we misunderstand neurodiversity.

From SLD to ALO

That brings us to the term Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD), or worse, Disabilities. I'm not a fan. I have dyslexia and ADHD, and I don't see myself as disabled. Different? Definitely. But also creative, fast-thinking and full of ideas. So, instead of SLDs, which could also be interpreted as specific learning differences, what if we called them

ALOs, Amazing Learning Opportunities? Because when understood properly, that's exactly what they are. Opportunities for your student, and for you.

Dyslexia and ADHD in perspective

Let's look at the numbers. Dyslexia affects about 10–15 per cent of people, ADHD another 5 per cent. Add in other neurodivergent profiles, ASD, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, and with overlaps, roughly 20 per cent of your students are neurodiverse. That's one in five.

In my hometown of Breda, Netherlands, that's over 8,600 young people. I honestly think that is quite a niche market for any language teacher or language school. And yet, BBC research (2019) found that 80 per cent of dyslexic children go undiagnosed. That's a lot of kids thinking they're lazy or 'not academic'.

What can we do as teachers?

As a teacher, you're not expected to be a psychologist. But you *are* in a powerful position to make a difference, starting with empathy and awareness. The key message? These students don't learn worse. They learn *differently.*

Supporting ADHD students

- Write step-by-step instructions on the board – visuals help where spoken words vanish.
- Use analogue clocks – great for time blindness.
- Let them move – standing, stretching or doing simple classroom errands can aid focus.
- Build in brain breaks – every 10–15 minutes, pause to reset.

Supporting dyslexic students

- Use fewer words, more visuals. Keep slides and worksheets clean.
- Colour-code key concepts – one colour per idea.
- Be consistent – same layout, same symbols. Less is more.
- Teach holistically – use full texts, teach grammar in context.
- Chunk content – bite-size info, one chunk at a time.

Spotting the signs

As mentioned before, it's not your job to diagnose, but it *is* helpful to notice when something doesn't add up. The biggest red flag? A mismatch between what a student knows and what they can express in writing. If their written work doesn't sound like them, try an oral version. If they suddenly shine, that's a clue. It's not laziness, it might be undiagnosed dyslexia.

It's time to shift the culture

We've got to stop calling students lazy or careless. That kind of label sticks. Imagine being eight and overhearing your parents cry about your 'disability'. That becomes part of your story. But we can rewrite it. Shift from asking: 'Why can't they sit still?' to 'What's their brain telling them to do?' from 'They're not trying' to 'Are we teaching in a way that works for them?' It's not just about how we teach. It's about how they learn.

A room full of unicorns

A student once told me: 'Finding a teacher who knows about dyslexia is like finding

a unicorn'. To those of you who came to the session, or wanted to, you're becoming unicorns.

Let's keep asking, learning and adapting. When we see neurodiverse students for who they are, not broken, but brilliant, we can help them thrive. And that changes everything.

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4 Teaching and learning with AI

Once again, AI was a hot topic at the Annual Conference, but this year the debate has moved on from the *what* and the *why* to the *how*. So, in this chapter, we find a range of practical examples of AI integration from diverse geographical contexts, where AI supports but does not replace the essential role of human insight. We start with a focus on AI and writing with the Oxford University Press Signature Event paper, which explores emerging tensions and possibilities for the teaching of writing and assessment in the age of AI. While acknowledging that GenAI poses significant questions, the authors (**Sara Ratner**, **Kelly Webb-Davies**, **Donald Clark** and **Yordanka Kavalova**) argue for a reframing of risk that foregrounds equity, inclusion and human agency. Then, **Catherine Prewett-Schrempf** and **Linda Slattery** showcase how the human-driven *Triple AI* approach – a holistic framework that positions GenAI within an interdependent ecosystem – guided their design of a first-semester business English module, while **Ruby Vurdien** reports on a small-scale project designed to evaluate the effectiveness of Wordtune – an AI-powered tool to enhance writing skills – in assisting students preparing for Cambridge English exams. Realising how AI reading assistants (AIRAs) inhibit critical and higher-order thinking, **Noha Khafagi** outlines a practical technique to diminish students' dependence on them and encourage critical analysis and evaluation of information. The next four papers report on Higher Education projects that integrate AI while maintaining human agency. First, **Katherine Moran** and **Cristiana Dias** report on a project to creatively engage engineering students in a debate with ChatGPT to develop critical thinking and language proficiency. **Alexia Schemien** then outlines the revision of business English curriculum to reflect the realities of the AI era, with the aim of creating a learner-centred, future-oriented environment that integrates technology in meaningful ways. **Sue Ashley**, **Anna Szathmári** and **Jannie den Engelsman** report on how they employed AI to provide feedback to students on an undergraduate business administration programme and relieve teachers' workloads, and **Birte Horn** outlines the positive educational outcomes of employing AI tools through the lens of a business communication startup project. Focusing on academic research, particularly the literature review phase, **Maysaa Banat** presents a four-step framework of how AI can support each stage of the research process while maintaining ethical integrity and academic rigour. **Andrea Vinkler** then presents the preliminary findings of a Cambridge English research project which explores the opportunities and risks of AI for accessible learning with 15 'pioneer teachers' who are early adopters of AI tools. The chapter closes with the findings of a study conducted in the US by **Ilka Kostka** and **Rachel Toncelli** on instructors' use of and attitudes towards GenAI.

4.1 Teaching and assessing writing in the age of AI: reflections from the Oxford University Press Signature Event

Sara Ratner *University of Oxford, UK,* **Kelly Webb-Davies** *University of Oxford, UK,* **Donald Clark** *Freelance, Brighton, UK, and* **Yordanka Kavalova** *Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK*

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into educational practice presents profound opportunities for English language teaching, learning and assessment. Drawing on our panel discussion at the 2025 IATEFL Oxford University Press Signature Event, here we explore emerging tensions and possibilities for the teaching of writing and assessment in the age of AI. We argue for a reframing of risk that foregrounds equity, inclusion and human agency, examining both technological advancements and pedagogical implications. Through critical perspectives, practitioner insight and applied case studies, we outline a research-informed path for integrating AI tools in ways that support accessible and effective learning environments.

Introduction

Drawing on his theories in works such as *Act of Meaning* (1990), Jerome Bruner is widely cited as observing that by nature we are storytelling creatures, and as children we acquire language to tell those stories we have inside us. In a time when AI-generated language models now assist or even produce written outputs, educators are compelled to ask fundamental questions about authorship, learning and the future of writing instruction. This paper reflects on key themes from the Signature Event, 'Teaching and assessing writing in the age of AI', and brings together three perspectives on how GenAI is reshaping English language education. Webb-Davies provides a pedagogical and equity lens, Clark offers a technological analysis, while Ratner presents an institutional, policy-informed framing that is grounded in interdisciplinary collaboration.

Reframing the discourse on AI risk and writing

Webb-Davies proposed a critical reorientation in the discourse on GenAI and academic writing. Rather than centring debates on the potential misuse of AI tools, she called attention to the risks of exclusion associated with banning them. Writing, she argued, is not a neutral practice but a socially constructed and historically mediated technology – one that privileges specific linguistic and cognitive norms.

Particularly for students who speak non-standard varieties of English, those who are neurodivergent, or who live with learning differences such as dyslexia, writing can function as a barrier rather than a bridge to educational access. In this context, AI-powered writing tools offer more than convenience – they offer a mode of accessibility. As Street (1995) has long shown, writing must be understood in relation to broader sociocultural literacies. Webb-Davies aligns this view with the inclusive affordances of AI.

In her English for academic purposes (EAP) classroom, Webb-Davies operationalised these insights through a three-stage writing assessment: 1) in-class drafting to capture original thought; 2) AI-assisted revision for linguistic clarity; and 3) a metacognitive reflection where students justified their use of AI. Outcomes included

enhanced argumentation, reduced instances of academic misconduct, and improved marking efficiency. Most notably, the model shifted the focus of assessment from surface-level grammar to critical thinking and conceptual development.

This reframing invites educators to reconsider entrenched assumptions, such as the notion that writing is thinking. As Webb-Davies argued, privileging written expression as the sole marker of intellectual work risks marginalising alternative ways of knowing and communicating.

GenAI and the transformation of language learning technologies

Clark provided a complementary yet distinct perspective, tracing the evolution of AI in language learning technologies. From early rule-based platforms to today's generative models, the capabilities of AI in personalising, assessing and delivering English instruction have expanded dramatically.

Apps such as Duolingo and Babbel now use adaptive algorithms, speech recognition, and real-time feedback mechanisms to tailor learning experiences. Newer applications like ELSA Speak integrate advanced pronunciation analytics, while ChatGPT and similar models offer learners instant generation of grammar explanations, exercises, reading texts and writing prompts.

Clark also discussed emerging multimodal AI systems and tools that combine text, speech, image and video to simulate authentic language use. The development of AI avatars, such as Call Annie, enables users to engage in highly realistic spoken interactions. These innovations respond to long-standing pedagogical goals around immersion and feedback but do so at scale and with increasing nuance.

Supporting these claims, Clark referenced Xu and Wang's (2024) meta-analysis, which synthesised findings from 35 studies involving over 3,000 learners. The authors reported a substantial positive effect size (0.812) for AI-enhanced English learning outcomes. As Clark concluded, AI is no longer supplementary; it is now central to how language education is delivered, accessed and experienced.

Importantly, AI is also altering the landscape of assessment. Automated scoring of essays and speech, intelligent tutoring systems, and instant feedback loops are becoming not only feasible but reliable. These tools promise to reduce educator workload and expand feedback capacity, but they also raise new ethical and validity considerations.

Human agency and educator voice in an AI era

Ratner emphasised that institutional responses to AI must prioritise human agency, systemic inclusion and research-informed action. Drawing on her work as the founder of the interdisciplinary research hub, AI in Education at Oxford University (AIEOU), Ratner highlighted the need to position educators, students and policy actors as co-creators of AI futures in education rather than passive recipients.

AIEOU was established to convene a global, interdisciplinary community of practice focused on four pillars: the design, regulation, implementation and impact of AI in education. Informed by systems theory and participatory research methods, the hub engages with diverse stakeholders including teachers, learners, developers and policymakers to explore how ethical, equitable and effective AI use can be scaled and sustained (Ratner et al., 2025).

Ratner invoked Freire's (1994) concept of *critical hope* to articulate the importance of maintaining educator voice in the face of technological transformation. AI tools

in education must not render the human role redundant. Rather, they should be co-designed with educators, and embedded within pedagogies that value human judgement and creativity. To facilitate reflective decision-making, Ratner proposed a triadic framework to guide educators and institutions:

1 **Could** AI be used to support writing? If so, what competencies and digital literacies are needed?
2 When **Would** AI best be used? What contextual and pedagogical considerations shape its appropriate use?
3 **Should** AI be used? How do we assess the ethical and epistemological implications of its use in learning environments?

These guiding questions are now central to AIEOU's engagement across more than 100 countries. They invite not only compliance or caution but deep, informed reflection on the pedagogical, social and moral dimensions of AI integration.

Ratner's institutional and policy work demonstrates how critical hope, grounded in interdisciplinary collaboration, can shape a proactive, inclusive vision for AI in education. Rather than merely responding to change, educators can lead it, provided they are equipped with the tools, spaces and support to do so.

Redefining assessment and literacy in the age of AI

A key theme across all three presentations was the redefinition of assessment in an AI-enabled world. If AI can assist or even outperform humans in surface-level language accuracy, what remains the role of writing assessment? The panellists converged on a shared belief that assessment must evolve to value higher-order thinking, creativity and metacognition. This requires a shift from policing to partnering. Rather than attempting to detect or prohibit AI use, institutions should focus on building assessment formats that integrate transparency and reflection. This includes alternative formats such as multimodal portfolios, scaffolded writing processes, and AI-use disclosure statements.

In parallel, digital and AI literacy must become part of language curricula. In addition to technical proficiency with AI tools, they also need to develop critical awareness of the tools' affordances and limitations. As Warschauer (2006) has shown, digital literacies are not simply instrumental, they are deeply tied to identity, agency and social participation.

Implications for policy and practice

At the institutional level, AI challenges established frameworks for academic integrity, assessment and digital strategy. In response, initiatives like AIEOU have collaborated with policymakers and education ministries to co-develop responsible, inclusive AI policies (UNESCO, 2024; Ratner et al., 2025). These collaborations highlight the need to both mitigate risks and enable innovation, avoiding paralysis in the face of uncertainty.

Educators and administrators must engage in sustained professional development, critical reflection, and collaborative experimentation to develop robust AI strategies that promote equity, transparency and learner autonomy.

Conclusion

GenAI poses significant questions for the future of writing and assessment. However, as this panel demonstrated, it also opens possibilities for more inclusive, responsive and human-centred education.

While Clark asserts that resistance is futile and AI is destined to be the primary driver for the future of education, Ratner reminds us that educators are not powerless in this transformation. They remain essential guides, helping learners navigate the complexities of language, identity and communication. If integrated thoughtfully, AI can amplify rather than diminish these roles.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Oxford English Assessment at OUP for identifying the topic and for inviting three distinct perspectives to participate in this Signature Event at IATEFL, enriching the conversation on AI in teaching and assessment.

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4.2 A 'Triple AI' approach to business writing

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An evolving ELT landscape

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping the English language teaching landscape. While many educators express concern about potential job displacement and declining critical thinking and academic integrity among students, recent research suggests a more nuanced perspective. Studies emphasise the key role of human agency in effective GenAI implementation, highlighting the importance

of 'keeping humans-in-the-loop' (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023). This approach positions human teachers not as obsolete figures but as essential guides in GenAI-enhanced learning environments. Our role is key to upholding academic integrity, preparing students for workplace demands, and cultivating a culture of trust, responsibility and reflection.

A human-driven Triple AI instructional model

Figure 4.2.1 shows the *Triple AI Model for Instructional Design Competence*, a holistic framework that reconceptualises the role of GenAI in education. Rather than viewing generative AI as a standalone system, our model positions it within an interdependent ecosystem of three interconnected components – *Artificial Intelligence*, *Authentic Instruction*, and *Academic Integrity*.

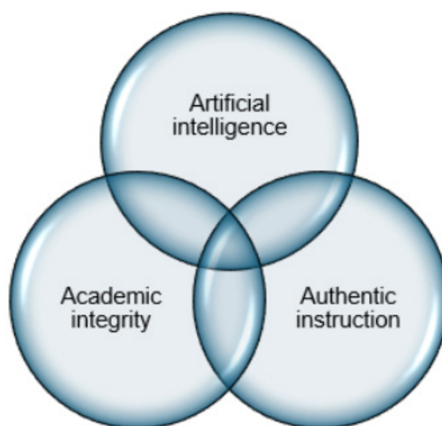

Figure 4.2.1: *Triple AI Model for Instructional Design Competence* © *Center for Business English, 2024*

Our presentation showcased how the *Triple AI* approach guided our instructional design for a first-semester business English module rolled out across ten BA programmes. We discussed the underlying principles behind the three AIs. First, in line with our institutional mandate to meaningfully integrate GenAI into teaching and learning, we aim to emphasise the role of *Artificial Intelligence* as a supportive resource that enhances, rather than replaces, human engagement. Second, *Authentic Instruction* centres on creating learning experiences mirroring real-world relevance, designed to prepare students for the complexity and unpredictability of contemporary professional environments. It also emphasises the development of critical thinking and collaborative competencies. Third, the component of *Academic Integrity* ensures that GenAI usage is governed by transparent guidelines, supporting ethical academic practices.

Rethinking writing tasks and assessment

GenAI presents a transformative opportunity to shift the pedagogical focus from text production skills to the critical evaluation and refinement of AI-generated content,

thereby fostering higher-order thinking skills. To demonstrate how this can be implemented in instructional design, we presented our *Adaptation Skills in E-Mail Communication* framework (see Figure 4.2.2), which provides a structured methodology for developing contextual awareness in written digital correspondence. This framework helps students identify and navigate the varying degrees of conciseness and emotional intelligence required across diverse professional contexts while developing the discernment needed to adapt communication appropriately to different audiences and purposes.

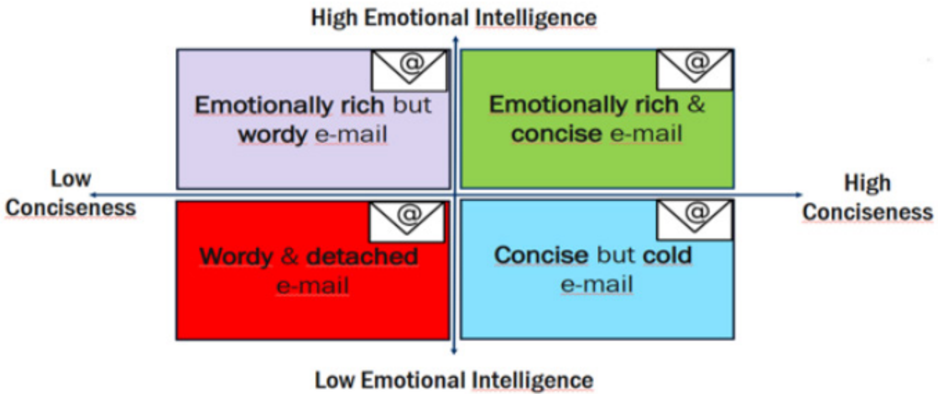

Figure 4.2.2: *Adaptation Skills in Email Communication* © *Center for Business English, 2024*

A Triple AI approach to e-mail communication

The instructional approach constituted a three-step sequence of learning activities designed to integrate authentic instruction, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and academic integrity. The *AI Assessment Scale* (Perkins et al., 2024) provided clear guidance to students on *how* and *why* GenAI should or should not be used in the tasks assigned.

First, students engaged in asynchronous self-study through interactive modules on e-mail communication conventions. Scaffolded tasks supported the development of clarity and emotional nuances in writing. In Step 2, students built on the self-study content through in-person classroom activities emphasising human interaction. Pair work and plenary discussions encouraged peer-to-peer learning and critical reflection. Instructors offered formative, personalised feedback on students' adapted e-mail drafts, supporting iterative improvement and reinforcing the relational and reflective dimensions of learning. In Step 3, students completed a summative assessment without access to GenAI, demonstrating their ability to revise and adapt e-mails generated by GenAI using critical thinking skills.

The importance of humans-in-the-loop

The results of a post-class survey conducted with 79 students reinforced the relevance

and impact of the *Triple AI* approach. Moreover, they also reflected students' belief in the importance of developing skills that remain distinctly human, even as GenAI writing capabilities advance. A significant majority (89 per cent) believed that AI-generated emails do indeed require human adaptation, while 80 per cent affirmed the essential role of human intelligence in effective workplace communication. Notably, 91 per cent of respondents reported having learned to critically evaluate AI-generated texts, and 94 per cent gained a deeper understanding of how to balance the human touch with AI outputs. These insights suggest that when *Artificial Intelligence* is paired with *Authentic Instruction* and grounded in *Academic Integrity*, students are not only equipped to use GenAI tools but also to engage with them thoughtfully and ethically.

Conclusion

Student performance and post-class survey feedback validate the *Triple AI* model as an effective framework for integrating GenAI into writing instruction. By emphasising reflective engagement over product-oriented outcomes, this approach promotes deeper learning and responsible technology use. Crucially, it preserves human agency by positioning GenAI as a support tool rather than a replacement for human insight, judgement and creativity.

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4.3 Wordtune: AI-powered tool to enhance writing skills

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Introduction

Writing can be a daunting activity for many EFL students, since they often face language barriers. However, it has been found that digital writing tools can have a positive impact on the quality of students' writing. Artificial intelligence and technology have emerged as valuable instruments to improve students' English writing skills (Hasnah, 2024), allowing for the integration of new tools, such as digital writing assistants, which are AI-powered tools that increase writing assignments' quality and efficiency (Shi et al., 2022). Writing with digital assistants involves utilising AI-powered tools and software to help students enhance their English language proficiency (Winans, 2021). These tools employ advanced algorithms to analyse and assess students' writing, offering them immediate feedback and suggestions for enhancement. Nevertheless,

the focus of most online writing tools is on revising and editing the written text by providing, for example, grammatical correction, and only a few digital writing applications assist students across the full spectrum of their writing process. Wordtune is one of these AI- powered technologies that can help students to formulate their ideas into sentences by offering rephrase options. Consequently, students are allowed to paraphrase their original text to improve the quality of their writing, thereby enhancing their writing skills.

The project

The present research was conducted for one semester (January–June 2024) on a group of 24 participants (levels B2 and C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference) at a private language school in Spain. Three classes were involved, of which one comprised eight students of a B2 level and the other two eight C1-level participants each. Their common goal was to enhance their writing skills for their Cambridge English exams. They were all requested to write eight specifically designed tasks for their Cambridge exams on a bi-weekly basis, which entailed two discursive essays, two reports, two reviews, one letter and one article. For task completion the participants had to copy and paste their original writings on Wordtune, followed by making appropriate changes to their texts based on Wordtune feedback, prior to submitting the two copies (original and modified versions) of each writing task to their teacher, who did the final editing.

Results and discussion

The general overview of the students' perceptions of their novel learning experience was positive, since they considered Wordtune to be effective in assisting them with their writing, a finding emergent in both their questionnaire and interview responses. They reported that they felt satisfied with the feedback they received from Wordtune, which motivated them to endeavour to be more focused on not repeating the same errors in subsequent writings, and that they had improved their writing skills, because Wordtune's useful instantaneous feedback on grammatical and lexical structures helped them to build their confidence in writing. However, some students at a low level of both B2 and C1 competence continued to make the same grammatical or lexical errors. They mentioned that they were either unable to concentrate on correcting their own mistakes or that they would have preferred their teacher's feedback, which tends to be more meaningful to them. Therefore, careful attention is necessary for learning to take place, and teacher feedback is considered crucial. Furthermore, in the pre- and post- tests a slight improvement, in terms of a mark ranging from 0.5 to 1.0, was noted in the participants' performance, suggesting that Wordtune is a convenient writing-assistance tool. However, two drawbacks indicated were that, firstly, editing options are limited if students do not upgrade to the premium version, which is not free, after using Wordtune for some time. Secondly, rephrasing alternatives suggested to the contexts of their writings were inappropriate at times or their meanings were changed.

Conclusion

Despite certain drawbacks, Wordtune, through its feedback, can be deemed an

effective tool to assist students with enhancing their writing skills in terms of both grammatical and lexical resources as well as content. Its capacity to provide instantaneous feedback and personalised services can help students enhance their potential in writing. However, the findings in this research have shown that teacher feedback is valuable for learning to take place. Additionally, for students to benefit fully from this learning tool, some improvements can be made. For example, the price of the premium version should be made more affordable or a free version should be offered to students. Teachers are, therefore, encouraged to use Wordtune to facilitate their students' learning process.

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4.4 A critical reading technique to reduce dependency on AI

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Introduction

This talk addressed the growing use of AI reading assistants (AIRAs), which many students currently use. AIRAs negatively impact the use and development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), potentially inhibiting the development of reasoning. When students read critically, they are interacting with the text and challenging assumptions, which allows them to reach a higher level of critical thinking. In contrast, their use of a generative summary of a text could result in superficial engagement with the author's ideas.

Currently, when assigned a reading text, students can easily resort to AIRAs to find a summary. This shows that AIRAs are one of the most significant inhibitors of critical thinking and the application of HOTS. This use of AIRAs therefore potentially stunts the development of specific skills needed for an academic career.

Critical reading technique

To address this problem, I presented a practical technique for approaching reading texts using critical reading strategies to encourage ESL freshman students, both native and non-native speakers, on an English for the Liberal Arts course. During this course, they practise analytical thinking through close examination of a text. This technique requires students to reflect thoughtfully and critically on the text, thus learning to

approach more confidently new tasks using their problem-solving skills. These sessions are repeated once a week throughout a 15-week semester in order to ensure the inculcation of the target skills. These weekly sessions are planned as follows.

The students are divided into five groups and given a contentious article of 1,200–1,500 words, which is part of their assigned reading. Each group assumes one of the following roles: a reporter, a detective, an interpreter, an author, and a librarian. The groups are given 30 minutes to respond to their individual prompts which are presented on a Google Slides deck. The groups read the text from their own perspective and then discuss their responses according to their assigned roles, as preparation for their group presentations at the end of the session. Typically, the detectives analyse the different viewpoints and identify inconsistencies and hidden meanings. They dig deeply into the layers of textual meaning. The reporters gather the salient information from the text and identify any different viewpoints. They must ensure accuracy and objectivity in their reporting. This means they must understand the ideas in the text very well, so they can convey them accurately to the rest of the groups. The librarians critically evaluate the text's authority, purpose and potential biases. The interpreters work on accurately conveying the understanding of the meaning of the text. Finally, the authors create works, challenge assumptions, and craft and develop ideas by telling stories that enrich the text. Each group's deliberations are entered on a Google Slides deck. For educators adopting this technique, each role needs to be carefully explained, so students can respond effectively to the questions.

This technique is implemented in one reading class (75 minutes). At the end of the class, one student from each group shares the group's findings that were written on their slide on the Google Slides deck. For example, in one reading about Machiavelli, the group assuming the role of the librarian prepared a convincing piece about the assigned article. Their slide showed the following: 'A knowledgeable person/student/scholar should read the article as it gives a realistic view of power, lessons in leadership and how leaders manipulate politics to gain and show power'. This conveys the students' grasp of the role assigned to them in recommending resources by giving reasons why the text should be read.

This approach diminishes students' dependence on AIRAs. The different roles encourage them to challenge assumptions, dig deeper, uncover truths, and make connections, thus becoming more proficient readers and thinkers.

Conclusion

There are two key benefits to the critical reading technique. Firstly, it advances engagement in class activities by encouraging students to ask questions and participate in discussions, which promotes enthusiasm for learning. This active involvement fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills**,** as students learn to analyse and evaluate information critically. Secondly, it leads to an improvement in reading comprehension, equipping students with the necessary skills to tackle complex texts. As a result, students become better prepared for subsequent courses, particularly in college-level reading and writing, where they face higher demands. Overall, this technique not only enhances academic performance but also nurtures lifelong learning habits, little of which, as supported by Zhai et al. (2024), is achieved by dependence on AIRAs.

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4.5 The great debate: could your students beat ChatGPT?

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Context

The use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the classroom has divided educators. While some fight its use, others compare its emergence to the Internet, viewing GenAI not as a threat but as a useful pedagogical tool. In the context of ESL courses at a French engineering school, this exploratory project seeks to creatively engage our students in a debate with GenAI, as debate is often used as a tool for developing critical thinking and language proficiency (Bellon & Williams, 2008; Nurakhir et al., 2020). Building on prior research in language education and GenAI (e.g. Laio et al., 2023), this project integrates GenAI within the framework of structured debates, aiming to teach students the critical importance of using this technology responsibly as they develop their English skills.

With this goal in mind, the Efrei Languages Department explored the use of ChatGPT as a debate opponent with first-year engineering students (B2–C1 level) in the 'Issues in the English-speaking World' course. We know that GenAI may give learners the illusion of language mastery, but that it cannot, at least for the time being, enable future engineers to effectively engage in spontaneous spoken language exchanges. For now, GenAI cannot replace demanding language training. At best, it might support learning, but it cannot substitute sustained effort and high-quality instruction.

Throughout the course, students learn rhetorical tools and techniques, and practise public speaking as they explore controversial topics in the English-speaking world. Scheduled at the end of the semester, this GenAI activity helps students consolidate knowledge, develop competencies, and sharpen critical thinking as they navigate ethical dilemmas. They are even encouraged to self-evaluate their performance compared to GenAI, and to consider the strengths and limitations of this new technology as they prepare to become ethically-minded engineers in a rapidly changing society.

Structure of the GenAI activity

Drawing upon action research, active pedagogy and reflexive learning, the two-hour activity engages students in a dynamic battle against ChatGPT. The debate activity follows a student-led structure, allowing learners to develop language skills as they collaborate toward a shared goal of defeating ChatGPT in a formal debate. One student is appointed chairperson to oversee the session, and the class is divided into two teams: Team ChatGPT and Team Human. After a coin toss determines which team supports the proposition, both groups enter a ten-minute brainstorming phase. Team Human researches and prepares arguments, anticipating counterpoints, while Team

ChatGPT crafts prompts to use during the debate.

During the debate, teams alternate presenting and countering arguments in English, under strict time limits. Team ChatGPT uses AI-generated responses, while Team Human collaborates live. After 3–5 arguments per team, each side delivers a 60-second closing statement.

To conclude the activity, students reflect through collaborative T-chart analysis and group discussion. The teacher facilitates feedback and shares language notes, reinforcing learning outcomes and rhetorical awareness.

Feedback and reflections

In the age of GenAI, it is useful for educators to understand how students feel about working with these tools and whether they still believe in the importance of their personal abilities. When it came time to vote on the debate outcome at the end of the activity, the majority of students voted for Team Human as the winner. This result suggests that the work done throughout the academic year successfully reinforced learners' self-confidence and the belief that developing their own skills will continue to be of value, even in the age of digital technologies.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, we created an optional online questionnaire. Student feedback offered valuable insights into how well the learning objectives were met and how the activity might be improved.

What students seemed to find most meaningful was that they were able to share their personal experiences within a collective and collaborative environment, which is something that GenAI systems cannot accommodate. What's more, they also appreciated the challenge of 'prompt engineering' and the way they had to think carefully about their prompts to circumvent ChatGPT's built-in ethical code. The activity highlighted AI's limitations, including its inherent biases and reliance on stereotypes, issues students were quick to recognise and fight against. As for their suggestions for improvement, students recommended allocating more time to Team ChatGPT during the debate to manage their prompts, as they had not been able to test them during the brainstorming phase.

Overall, the students appeared to appreciate this opportunity to sharpen their intellectual, critical and linguistic skills in this unique 'duel' against ChatGPT.

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4.6 Redefining business English tasks in the AI era

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a permanent feature of higher education, and increasingly influences how students approach language learning. While many learners rely on tools such as ChatGPT for writing and editing, this trend has raised concerns about passive and disengaged learning (Freeman, 2025). Consequently, some teachers respond by banning AI entirely from their classrooms. However, a more constructive approach would be to integrate AI critically into teaching and to guide students in using it to enhance, rather than replace, their learning processes.

In response to these developments, the curriculum of two business English courses within a dual studies Business Administration programme was revised to reflect the realities of the AI era. The aim is to promote critical, creative and active AI use while maintaining a strong focus on the core language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The tasks developed in this context are flexible and can be adapted to other language courses across various levels. Two strategies were applied: 1) limiting AI where (written or oral) language production is central; and 2) integrating AI for creative tasks and grammar or vocabulary revision.

Varying language levels (B1–C1) in these first and second semester courses require differentiated instruction and assessment. Final grades in the first semester are based on active participation in class (30 per cent), a group presentation (20 per cent), and a final pen-and-paper exam, including listening, reading and writing (50 per cent) to ensure engagement, reflection and applied learning. Greater emphasis is now placed on active participation, as the shift toward AI-assisted learning increases the importance of formative assessment and in-class performance.

To counter passive reliance on AI, students are introduced to it as a creative and reflective tool. In the task 'Roast my presentation', they engage with ChatGPT as a feedback partner after learning key presentation strategies. Students simulate a PR event following a fictional company crisis and upload their drafts to ChatGPT one week before the final presentation by adding the prompt „roast my presentation". The chatbot provides humorous yet constructive critique, helping them improve content and delivery. This activity supports language and presentation skills, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness. It exemplifies Garner's (2012) model of cognitive apprenticeship, where learners apply new knowledge in real-world contexts while receiving scaffolded guidance and opportunities for reflection. All presentations are developed in class with teacher guidance to prevent AI over-reliance.

Another classroom activity involves students designing a company logo using the AI-supported platform Canva for the fictional business they develop throughout the semester. After studying logo creation strategies and the colour psychology in marketing, they input their company's name, slogan and preferred colour scheme into the design tool. The resulting logos are presented in class without explanations, prompting classmates to guess the company's purpose, target audience and identity. This leads to discussions that enhance business vocabulary, speaking skills and digital literacy, while also connecting with broader themes like branding and marketing.

In a related task, students create a market research survey for their fictional company using Canva. This task reinforces newly acquired vocabulary, promotes authentic communication, and encourages peer-to-peer feedback. Such projects make language learning more interactive, relevant and engaging while also building students' digital competencies.

A further innovation is the integration of a Custom GPT, designed specifically for the course and accessible only through teacher-provided materials. To prepare for an oral exam the students are taking in the second semester (instead of a presentation), they are trained in prompt writing and encouraged to use the Custom GPT to generate personalised study activities and revise vocabulary. This approach fosters learner autonomy (Little, 2007) and digital literacy, as students learn to craft effective prompts and critically evaluate AI responses.

Across all AI-integrated activities, the focus remains firmly on language acquisition. AI is not at the centre of the course but functions as a supportive tool that helps personalise and enrich the learning experience. Core language skills continue to be taught and assessed in traditional formats, such as in-class discussions, group work and a written exam. The AI elements are embedded in ways that promote active engagement, critical reflection and creative exploration, rather than passive reproduction.

These course adjustments aim to create a learner-centred, future-oriented learning environment that integrates technology in meaningful ways. Students not only improve their English but also gain transferable skills such as critical thinking, digital communication and self-directed learning. AI is viewed not as a threat, but as a valuable opportunity – one that enriches the learning environment when embedded in a sound and ethically informed teaching framework.

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4.7 The effectiveness of AI in developing international business undergraduates' communication skills

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The integration of generative AI in education presents both opportunities and challenges for enhancing student learning and reducing teacher workload (Sandhu et al., 2024). One potential affordance for teachers is to employ AI to provide valuable feedback that helps improve students' autonomy in learning (Riapina, 2024). Another potential affordance is to relieve teachers' workloads involving formative assessment (Khlaif et al., 2024). Our presentation aimed to share how we have been using AI to achieve these goals.

Context

We teach international business undergraduates at a university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. During a four-year Bachelor of Business Administration programme, students follow a course called Business Communication, with a workload of 140 hours (5 ECTS). This course is crucial for developing essential skills in writing business emails, reports and proposals. Students submit formative assignments for feedback, which help them develop the skills needed to pass the written exam conducted at school without Internet access. For the past two years, we have required students to use AI prompts when writing these formative assignments. They use Microsoft Copilot, the generative AI tool our university employs to ensure data privacy and security. We expected that the extra writing steps would enrich students' learning.

AI prompts

Students write the first draft of a formative assignment, such as a proposal, after instruction in a lecture. To help students improve their first drafts, we provide them with AI prompts. First, students are instructed to upload the following all-in-one prompt:

> Question: Improve the proposal that I have written based on certain criteria. First, I will provide you with a document containing specific instructions on the assignment. Second, I will share two documents, one with tips for writing proposals and one with a sample proposal.
> Context: I am a first-year International Business student at a University of Applied Sciences. I want you to take the role of a teacher.
> Parameters: Improve the proposal based on content, writing style, structure and language at Cambridge C1 Business higher standards. More details are in the documents with the proposal structure and example that I will upload.

Students are instructed to click 'enter' after each prompt. The following four prompts each require the inclusion of documents or copy-pasted text:

Here is the assignment description.
Here are the tips for writing proposals.
Here is a sample proposal.
Here is the proposal I have written.

If students are not satisfied with the AI version of their proposal, they are instructed to write more prompts to fine-tune changes.

Outcome of AI prompting

Our experience with students using AI prompts is mixed. Despite comprehensive written instructions on the course site, and step-by-step oral explanations in class, not all students copy and upload all the prompts properly to Copilot. For instance, many fail to upload the rules or good examples, resulting in unsatisfactory improvements to students' assignments. In these cases, AI only tends to improve grammar, spelling, formality and clarity.

On the other hand, students who do copy and upload all the prompts properly benefit from receiving improved versions of their assignments. In these cases, final products are much more aligned with the criteria and standards expected.

Teachers vs AI

We asked the students to report back to us through a questionnaire on what they felt helped them improve their writing skills. Most (90 per cent) of those who responded agreed that Copilot was user-friendly, and most (70 per cent) agreed that AI had helped them improve the quality of their assignments. However, only half agreed that AI feedback had helped them prepare for the exam.

Surprisingly, only half the students agreed that a combination of teacher and feedback was an effective way to prepare for the exam. The majority (80 per cent) felt that teacher feedback alone was effective.

AI use in teaching

Currently, our university is working on an AI lab with tutor bots for future educational use. Potentially, teachers will be able to upload criteria and prompts themselves to the system, and students will just need to upload their own work for AI feedback. However, although improvements are forecasted, our experience suggests that teacher instruction and feedback will still be very necessary. Students seem to prefer to interact with an actual teacher. AI has educational affordances, but it is, at least for now, no replacement for the human experience.

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4.8 Student-centred learning with AI – a recipe for success!

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Introduction

The landscape of education in general, and EFL in particular, has been significantly transformed by the introduction of computer-supported programs over the years. This transformation reached a pivotal moment with the advent of ChatGPT in November 2022, marking a new era where artificial intelligence (AI) became a ubiquitous presence in professional and personal environments. This sudden surge in AI utility, particularly in academia, raised several concerns. Students began leaning on ChatGPT for assignments, causing unease among educators about the potential rise in academic dishonesty and the threat to students' creative and critical thinking abilities. Despite these concerns, there is a compelling case for the strategic use of AI as a catalyst for enhancing problem solving, creativity, and critical-thinking skills within a student-centred learning paradigm. This text aims to illustrate the positive educational outcomes of employing AI tools through the lens of an exemplary class project.

The class project

The 10-week course 'Business Communication' at a university of applied sciences provided students with a substantial challenge: to simulate the launch of a startup company. This multifaceted project required them to engage in comprehensive business planning, including tasks such as recruitment, conducting interviews, and devising marketing strategies, including a short video commercial. To facilitate these tasks, students were encouraged to use AI tools responsibly, preceded by guidance on ethical considerations and awareness of the potential biases and limitations within AI technologies. This instructional approach was intended to bridge technology with creativity, urging students to harness AI capabilities while maintaining a commitment to originality and critical engagement with content.

Student-centred learning

The concept of student-centred learning, while not novel, is still considered a challenge to implement in many teaching environments. At the same time, it is a crucial approach to empower learners and focus on their needs. Barr and Tagg's influential work posited a foundational principle, which has guided student-centred strategies, that, 'a college's purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves,

to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems' (1995, p. 15). This educational philosophy emphasises tailoring learning experiences to the diverse needs, abilities and interests of students, inspiring them to take an active role in their learning journey. Adopting this approach requires educators to transition from traditional lecturing to acting as guides and facilitators, a change that, while demanding, fosters a dynamic and interactive learning environment where lifelong learning skills are paramount. Of course, this shift also presents challenges, including the increased preparation time for educators and the need for students to adapt to a more autonomous learning style.

Results and discussion

The business plan assignments revealed a notable level of creativity among students, who skilfully incorporated their unique voices into AI-generated content. Contrary to initial expectations regarding texts created with Large Language Models (LLMs), students demonstrated a commendable level of originality in their business plans. This outcome confirmed the students' ability to transcend the potential similarity of AI output through personalised and innovative thought processes. Additionally, the commercial production was evidence of the empowering potential of AI in creative tasks. Even students with no prior experience in video production were able to leverage AI tools to design compelling commercials. They navigated copyright considerations with a critical eye, ensuring their creations remained within ethical bounds. This project underscored the versatility of AI as an educational tool, capable of enhancing student communication, creativity and problem-solving skills when used thoughtfully and ethically.

Conclusion

Observing the outcomes of this course, it is clear that integrating AI tools within a student-focused approach can significantly enhance the educational experience. This aligns with Barr and Tagg's (1995) view that learning outcomes are the true measure of educational success, stressing the importance of integrating learning technologies. This project demonstrated the ability of AI to enrich learning, emphasising the need for adaptive, forward-thinking educational strategies in today's digital era. Learners developed a nuanced understanding of AI technologies, preparing them for a future where such tools will likely play a prominent role in most professional contexts. Engaging with AI in projects like this not only equips students for the technological demands of the modern workforce but also fosters critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. Nevertheless, while this project illustrated the versatility and potential of AI in creative tasks, it also reinforced the importance of guided, reflective use of such technologies in educational settings.

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4.9 Enhance research with AI: tools and a four-step literature review

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Introduction

This interactive workshop introduced a practical, AI-enhanced approach to academic research, focusing particularly on the literature review phase. Designed for educators, researchers and postgraduate students, the session offered both a conceptual and hands-on exploration of how artificial intelligence can support each stage of the research process while maintaining ethical integrity and academic rigor.

Framing the research process

The session began by laying out foundational principles of effective research. Before introducing any tools, I emphasised the importance of framing a research problem clearly, understanding the cyclical and iterative nature of research, and maintaining ethical standards throughout – particularly when using automated tools. Participants were reminded that while AI can accelerate and support the process, the responsibility for critical thinking, source evaluation and interpretation remains with the researcher.

Suggested AI tools for researchers

I then transitioned to introducing a series of AI tools, not as replacements for human decision-making, but as recommended supports that can aid researchers at each phase. These tools were framed as suggestions that participants could explore further after the workshop. For instance, platforms like *Scite.ai, Connected Papers* and *Elicit.org* were suggested to support literature discovery and analysis. Tools such as *ResearchRabbit* and *Semantic Scholar* were recommended for tracing research networks and visualising emerging themes. In the context of writing, participants were encouraged to consider tools like *Zotero* for citation management, and AI writing assistants like *Copilot* to support drafting and revision – while being mindful of authorship integrity and institutional guidelines.

The 4-step framework for AI-assisted literature reviews

1 Finding relevant literature

I demonstrated how to use AI tools to efficiently locate peer-reviewed and credible sources aligned with a defined research problem. Instead of relying solely on traditional database queries, participants explored how generative AI or AI-augmented databases can suggest relevant studies, cluster them thematically and visualise citation relationships.

2 Evaluating and selecting sources

Here, I introduced strategies for critically assessing source quality. Participants used AI tools that offer evidence-based metrics (e.g. *Scite*'s 'supporting' *vs* 'contrasting' citations) to determine the strength and relevance of sources. However, I emphasised that final evaluation must be guided by human judgement and alignment with the study's framework.

3 Identifying themes and gaps
One of the most time-consuming aspects of literature reviews is synthesising findings across studies. AI can assist by clustering papers into conceptual themes and helping identify under-researched areas. I walked participants through how to extract recurring patterns, compare methodologies, and surface research gaps with the help of NLP-powered platforms.

4 Structuring the review and drafting
The final phase focused on how AI can support outlining and initial drafting. Participants explored tools that generate logical outlines based on the collected literature, and suggest coherent flow and transitions. I also discussed how to integrate citations and paraphrase responsibly, avoiding plagiarism and ensuring transparency.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the session, ethical considerations were interwoven into each step. Participants reflected on questions such as: What are the limits of AI support in academic writing? How can we ensure the sources recommended by AI meet academic standards? How do we retain a researcher's voice in writing that is assisted by intelligent tools? These questions underscored a broader discussion on the evolving researcher identity in the age of AI and the importance of digital literacy as a foundational research skill.

Hands-on engagement

The workshop was intentionally designed to be participatory. Attendees worked on short hands-on tasks using suggested tools, discussed challenges they face in their own research, and considered how to adopt the four-step framework in their institutional contexts. They were also provided with a curated handout listing AI tools for various stages of research, along with links to usage guides and ethical policies from major publishers and academic institutions.

Key takeaways

By the end of the workshop, participants left with a clear and replicable process for conducting AI-assisted literature reviews, grounded in ethical use and critical thinking. More importantly, they gained an expanded view of how AI can act as a collaborative partner in the research journey – supporting, but not replacing, the essential role of human insight.

AI tools for research suggested in the workshop

Scite.ai – https://scite.ai
Connected Papers – https://www.connectedpapers.com
Elicit – https://elicit.org
ResearchRabbit – https://www.researchrabbit.ai
Semantic Scholar – https://www.semanticscholar.org
Zotero – https://www.zotero.org
Copilot (Microsoft) – https://copilot.microsoft.com

Further exploration

Participants were also encouraged to explore the following platforms:
https://www.researcher-app.com/
https://www.chatpdf.com/
https://www.jenni.ai/

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4.10 AI in ELT: opportunities and risks for accessible learning

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping education, offering both opportunities and challenges. While it can exacerbate inequalities in under-resourced contexts, AI may also hold the potential to democratise education by enabling personalised learning and improving accessibility. This paper presents both the benefits and risks of AI – particularly Generative AI (GenAI) tools – in the context of accessible learning. It explores the role of AI in English language teaching (ELT), drawing on recent literature, as well as classroom examples and preliminary findings from a Cambridge English research project. This study is being built on qualitative data from interviews with 15 'pioneer teachers' who are early adopters of AI tools in their teaching.

Opportunities for accessibility: AI as an enabler

When used carefully, AI can serve as a bridge leading to more inclusive and personalised learning. However:

> … without any scaffolding, current versions of GenAI chatbots might have harmful effects on learning outcomes due to inaccurate responses and ready-made solutions for user questions. … Teacher guidance is crucial while learning with technology: as an essential way of maintaining engagement and preventing negative experience. (Macinska & Vinkler, 2024, p. 11)

Several pioneer teachers in our study shared examples of supporting their learners' use of AI through strategies grounded in sound pedagogical principles. For instance, a university teacher in Australia used an AI chatbot to demonstrate the type of feedback students could receive on their writing. While the tool generally provided accurate grammar feedback, it occasionally referred to incorrect referencing styles. This prompted students to critically evaluate AI-generated content, thereby fostering digital and AI literacy skills. In Türkiye, a university teacher created a custom AI bot to simulate real-life communication scenarios for A1-level learners. The bot corrected errors and followed a curriculum-aligned pattern, enabling students to engage in meaningful interaction with minimal initial language input.

AI tools can also adapt materials to be more inclusive, addressing the needs of students with mixed language levels and specific requirements. A pioneer teacher of preschool to high school students in Mexico emphasised the benefits of planning specific

details for classes with students who may have visual or auditory impairments, using AI to create exactly what they want for the class. Additionally, a teacher at a bilingual high school in Cameroon highlighted the importance of culturally relevant materials, using AI to associate the letter 'a' with a Cameroonian meal, *Achu*, instead of an apple, making the learning process more effective for local primary school students.

Risks and limitations: AI as a barrier

Despite its potential, AI can also deepen existing inequalities. Limited access to digital tools remains a significant barrier in many low-resource contexts. A pioneer high school teacher from Kenya reported that most of their students are not familiar with AI and mostly use technologies (e.g. mobile phones) for basic communication via messenger apps, and for social media. Similarly, a teacher from Cameroon noted that some university students they are working with are not aware of AI tools like chatbots and image generators, and have never used them for educational or other purposes.

Bias in AI tools remains a concern, both in their training data and design. As Macinska and Vinkler (2024, p.13) note, 'AI algorithms are only as good as the data they are trained on'; and without careful oversight they risk perpetuating stereotypes or producing culturally insensitive content. Yet even with high-quality data, inclusivity is not guaranteed. A teacher at a bilingual high school in Cameroon reported that an AI-based lesson planner failed to accommodate class sizes typical in their context – while 50 students may be considered large in the UK, it is standard in Cameroon – highlighting a lack of contextual sensitivity in AI design. Moreover, speech recognition-based chatbots have struggled to accurately process non-standard English pronunciation, often resulting in discriminatory outcomes for speakers whose first language is not English (Hockly, 2024). This raises concerns about fairness and inclusivity in AI-driven speaking practice, too.

Conclusion

To harness the benefits of AI while mitigating its risks, a balanced and critical approach is essential. Teachers must evaluate AI outputs carefully to ensure that materials are contextually relevant. Transparency in data collection and algorithm design is crucial to address bias concerns. Furthermore, developers should diversify their teams and training data and conduct regular reviews to ensure fairness.

AI offers significant promise for enhancing accessible learning in ELT, but its dual nature requires thoughtful implementation. By acknowledging both its potential and its pitfalls, educators and developers can work together to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

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4.11 Faculty attitudes and integration of AI: insights from research

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While there seem to be countless tips for teaching with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), there is far less empirical research in the field of English language teaching. This is the gap we aimed to fill with a study we conducted in spring 2024 about instructors' use and attitudes towards GenAI. The attendees at our presentation included English language instructors, a journal editor in the field of TESOL, and graduate students who are researching GenAI in teacher education. We began the presentation with a quick poll to ask attendees whether they had mixed feelings about AI; the majority raised their hands and said 'yes'. This result was not surprising as it mirrored what we had heard both from participants in our study and from numerous conversations with educators at other universities.

To frame our presentation, we highlighted the urgent need for AI literacy in educators, noting that as 'frontline users and pedagogical decision-makers' (Al-khresheh, 2024, p. 2), their knowledge of GenAI is critical for ethically and effectively integrating it into teaching and learning (Liu & Bates, 2025). We then described our study, which examined English language teachers' use of GenAI in three different language programmes at two US universities, focusing on how they both learn about and integrate AI into instruction. Our qualitative narrative inquiry was grounded in experiential learning theory to illuminate educators' process of learning by doing. Data included field notes we took during classroom observations, post-observation interviews with each instructor, one focus group interview with all participants, and teaching materials collected from class visits (e.g. handouts, readings).

As we discussed our findings in the presentation, we showed how participants learned to implement a balanced approach to evaluating and integrating GenAI tools, apply experiential learning practices to their professional development, and manage the change caused by the GenAI disruption. We included participant quotes to make the data come alive and showcase their authentic voices. One quote that we especially like and feel represents the larger data set comes from a participant who likened her relationship to GenAI as a 'love-hate relationship', as she struggled to reconcile the possibilities for innovating teaching with her serious concerns about academic integrity and assessing student learning.

We then described four major shifts that we identified when analysing the data. First, we found that participants realised that they now needed to prepare their students not only for academic study, but also for the workplace post-graduation, an area which they saw as a change to their traditional roles. Second, they felt a sense of urgency to protect students' critical thinking in the learning process. Third, participants recognised the value of involving students as thought partners in GenAI experimentation in class. Finally, there was broad agreement that educators have to rethink how they assess learning when so much can be easily produced by GenAI.

To conclude the session, we shared the implications of this work, which include carefully managing change, leading with empathy, collaborating with fellow teachers, and engaging in learning by doing. We also showed attendees where they could read more about this study (Toncelli & Kostka, 2024). We then answered questions from the audience. One graduate student asked whether we would follow up with these same participants to see how they continued to integrate GenAI in their teaching. Another attendee

appreciated how we acknowledged all attitudes towards AI rather than taking a prescriptive approach that argues teachers *must* use AI for everything they do. Indeed, this presentation brought the importance of a balanced approach to AI integration into sharp focus for us and gave us insightful questions to continue thinking about.

In sum, sharing our research at the Conference and talking with attendees confirmed the importance of continuing to contribute to the academic conversation around GenAI. We are now conducting a new research study that explores how a book club composed of English language teachers and administrators can foster supportive communities of practice to drive professional learning around teaching and learning in an AI-enhanced world.

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5 Teacher education and training

This chapter, dedicated to teacher education and training, opens with three contributions from South America. To begin, **Auramarina Lazarde** reports on a case study to explore the impact of the British Council's national English language teaching training programme in Venezuela, focusing on how it has empowered women teachers in the Amazon state. **Marina González** discusses the pedagogical dimensions of access and trajectories to teacher education in an analysis of the EFL Teacher Education programme at Universidad Nacional de José C. Paz, using Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy. And, **María Eugenia Ianiro** explores how embedding metacognitive strategies in teacher education can foster deeper, self-directed learning among pre-service teachers. In our next paper, **Robyn Stewart** looks at the process of newly qualified teacher identity, arguing that this should be at the forefront of language teacher education, and puts forward three lessons learnt that may be of help to other teacher educators. Next, **Matthew T. Ellman** argues that focusing on the ways in which teachers deal with feedback to learners is potentially a very useful method of evaluating teacher effectiveness. **Cristina Manea Gultekin** puts forward the case that digital literacy, especially AI literacy, is now a key competency for teacher educators, who not only have to use technology in their own teaching but also model responsible and ethical digital literacy to their students, the teachers of the future. And finally, **Anna Hasper** outlines a framework for post-observation feedback that takes into account the affective dimension to help manage emotions.

5.1 Impact of training English women teachers from the Venezuelan Amazon

Auramarina Lazarde *British Council, Caracas, Venezuela*

This case study explores the impact of the British Council's national English language teaching (ELT) training programme in Venezuela, focusing on how it has empowered women teachers in the Amazon state. While implemented nationwide to address the shortage of English teachers in public education, this study responds to the unique, transformative impact observed among female educators in Puerto Ayacucho, Atures Municipality, and surrounding Indigenous communities. It explores how access to English training has supported their professional development, personal empowerment, cultural engagement and wider social participation.

Context and programme background

Since 2014, the British Council has collaborated with Venezuela's Ministry of Education to provide teacher training in public schools. With a lack of specialist English

teachers, the National Advance Training Programme (PNFA) was introduced in 2016 to train primary school generalist teachers with limited or no prior knowledge of English or ELT methodology. In 2021, during the pandemic, the initiative expanded to secondary teachers through the National Training Programme (PNF), which was delivered entirely online despite widespread issues with electricity, Internet access and technology infrastructure (Hutchinson & López de D'Amico, 2020).

Together, these initiatives trained over 10,277 primary and 4,461 secondary teachers, benefiting more than 402,490 students across all Venezuelan states. The project was innovative in its approach – equipping generalist teachers to integrate basic English into their classes, and integrating inclusive pedagogical strategies and digital tools despite the country's infrastructural challenges.

During the programme's monitoring and evaluation phase, qualitative data from Amazonas revealed a deeper, more complex impact on women teachers, particularly those from Indigenous backgrounds. In response, this study was developed to understand how the training influenced their lives *beyond* the classroom, enhancing personal agency, cultural pride and socio-economic participation. This study was therefore conducted to assess the extent and nature of that impact in a region with twenty recognised Indigenous communities. Despite their rich cultural heritage, many women in these communities face structural barriers, including patriarchal norms, poor infrastructure, and limited access to higher education or stable employment. Language, in particular, is central to their identity and community leadership. This made the acquisition of English not only a professional asset, but a symbolic and practical tool for inclusion.

Methodology and findings

The study used a mixed methods approach. A survey was conducted with 128 generalist teachers, 77.3 per cent of whom were women. Of these, 66 per cent identified as members of Indigenous communities and 49.5 per cent live in the Amazon. In-depth interviews, participatory observations and contextual analysis were conducted to capture their experiences. The study measured several dimensions: prior access to training; use of programme materials; professional and personal growth; gender roles; and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in pedagogy (Moncada, 2018).

Teachers described how they used the methodology in settings beyond the school: leading workshops; helping young people apply for university; and creating learning spaces and community centres. Some linked their knowledge of English to raising awareness about global issues, such as climate change, in their communities.

Participants reported improved competencies in English vocabulary, oral expression, classroom management and creative lesson planning. Beyond professional gains, the programme also fostered personal development: greater self-confidence; improved digital literacy; and enhanced participation in community initiatives. Teachers also described how they adapted materials to their context – creating handmade games, bilingual resources and playful strategies that resonated with students and their families.

Broader gender and cultural impact

The programme's influence extended into the cultural and domestic spheres. In Indigenous traditions, women play essential roles in teaching values, language and customs. This training enabled them to strengthen those roles while participating more actively in the public education system. Women now contribute to promoting Indigenous identity through inclusive pedagogy and intercultural teaching practices.

By bridging language learning with cultural heritage and gender equality, the programme supported Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 (*quality education* and *gender equality*). Teachers reported feeling respected and recognised as professionals for the first time, with one noting: 'Knowing English has helped me explore other cultures, grow my skills, and support others. Learning about different cultures has broadened my view and deepened my appreciation of diversity'.

This study demonstrates that the English training programme had a profound and distinctive impact on female teachers in Amazonas, beyond their immediate teaching responsibilities. It fostered personal growth, professional confidence and a strengthened cultural identity. By enabling these women to access tools, skills and knowledge, the programme contributed not only to improving English education but also to promoting gender equity, cultural resilience, and building stronger and more inclusive communities.

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5.2 Democratising access to teacher education: the case of PUI-UNPAZ

Marina González *Universidad Nacional de José C. Paz (UNPAZ), José C. Paz, Argentina*

The case under analysis is the EFL Teacher Education programme at UNPAZ, designed five years ago. The curriculum contains 44 subjects, which should be covered in four and a half years. At present, it hosts around 900 students, and it is constantly analysed and internally assessed to improve and adjust the pre-service training. UNPAZ is a young university, and was created with five others in the territory of the province of Buenos Aires to grant access to first generation university students in the region, while decentralising higher education and expanding access to less privileged populations in the area. For this presentation, we chose to discuss the pedagogical dimensions of access and academic trajectory, using Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy.

Pedagogical dimension 1

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and therefore bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970, p. 34)

Using this quotation, we introduced the first challenge of our programme – whether to perpetuate the understanding that EFL was a choice of study for a privileged few who had already mastered the language, or whether universities should strive to question such assumptions, and work towards opening up opportunities for people in our territory who wanted to study but who had experienced poorer EFL learning paths. We chose the latter, and the response was huge: over the past few years, we have enrolled around 300 applicants per year, and 70 per cent of them fall below the traditional entry level. As a result, our programme offers different entry paths: start the full programme if your EFL level is B1+; if it is A2 or A1, we offer two one-year differentiated intensive language preparation courses. In the case of A2-level students, they can also take one general subject in Spanish in parallel with the EFL intensive training. Students assigned to the A1 path, however, focus on only English until they complete the first semester. In this way, we have created another opportunity to enter higher education, which is inclusive in nature and responds to the needs of our people.

Pedagogical dimension 2

But has inclusion for access been enough? As our education programme developed, new challenges arose: teacher of teachers (ToT) selection, and internal discussions and training for ToTs to decolonise our assumptions and practise what we preach. Identifying gaps between ToTs' expectations and ToTs' demands placed on students who have started from different trajectories revealed our next challenge: 'Granting access demands supporting trajectories if we want to be consistent in our actions' (internal meeting).

Sometimes we focus so much on what applicants and students need or lack, that we do not focus enough on the extremely difficult task of rethinking our accepted practices. To us, this meant working together in discussing issues that we had either taken for granted or had not had time enough to discuss before:

- The role of plurilingualism in our course of studies: were we focusing on working on only one foreign language forgetting all others? Which were those other languages and how did they come into play?
- Our preconceptions on being ToTs: What preconceptions did we have about who our students were and the circumstances in which they lived? How much did we give and how much did we demand in return?
- The responsibility of public universities in educating future teachers: Did we agree with the accepted notion that students know nothing before arriving at university? What would that imply in terms of universities being part of the educational system? What about informal learning, particularly in the field of modern languages in times of technological advancement? Is it enough for universities to grant access to

higher education? What about reinforcing trajectories towards graduation?

A SWOT analysis of the present situation poses one important challenge ahead, among various combinations: Students are hired as early as their first year in the course of studies. Even though it can be seen as positive in terms of labour demand, it institutionally poses challenges as regards knowledge building, moving away from undesired school practices, and delayed or no graduation.

We intend to continue working on minimising threats and expanding strengths and opportunities with the strong belief that, 'knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other' (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

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5.3 Teaching from the inside out: metacognition in teacher training programmes

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In today's rapidly evolving educational world, there is a growing need for teacher training programmes to move beyond content delivery and foster deeper, self-directed learning among pre-service teachers. This paper explores how embedding metacognitive strategies in teacher education can support this shift, empowering pre-service teachers to become reflective practitioners capable of navigating complex teaching contexts with confidence and autonomy.

The session reported on a classroom-based project implemented with a group of pre-service teachers taking Foundations of the Learning and Teaching of English I, a subject in their second year of the English teacher training programme in Argentina. The aim was to promote metacognitive awareness and strategy use among pre-service teachers through structured intervention. The approach was grounded in Flavell's (1979) model of metacognition, which differentiates between metacognitive knowledge, awareness of oneself as a learner, understanding of tasks, familiarity with strategies, and metacognitive regulation, the ability to plan, monitor and evaluate one's learning. Since the beginning of the 20th century, metacognitive processes have been studied (Schraw, 1995) and, nowadays, supporting metacognition has proved beneficial for students as it helps them succeed in their academic studies and in life in general. However, there is little evidence of its use at teacher training college (Öz, 2015).

The intervention was designed in response to two key challenges observed among trainees: a tendency to focus only on performance outcomes (such as midterm tests and final exams), and a limited capacity to reflect on their learning processes. These issues were compounded by the absence of explicit references to metacognitive strategies in both national and provincial regulations, which left little institutional support for developing these crucial skills.

To address this gap, we designed and implemented a set of materials with four core components:

1. *Explicit instruction on metacognition*: what it is, why it matters, and how it supports effective learning;
2. *Metacognitive-friendly vocabulary*: to enable more precise reflection;
3. *Thinking time activities*: aimed at incorporating reflective practices and supporting engagement with the subject content; and
4. *Reflecting guide*: a structured tool to help students plan, monitor and evaluate their learning before, during and after assignments and activities.

Initially, students expressed discomfort and resistance to the set of materials, as reflection was not a familiar or frequent practice. However, over time, they engaged more consistently with metacognitive strategies, and the results revealed significant changes in their attitudes and feelings.

Firstly, students reported increased awareness of the concept, reflecting upon how they learned and which strategies worked best for them. Secondly, those who had initially viewed reflection as an external requirement began to value it as a tool for personal and professional growth. As one participant noted, 'Now I don't just do tasks. I stop and think: Why am I doing this? What am I learning? What could I do differently next time?'

Moreover, there was evidence of a shift in mindset from performance orientation to learning orientation. Many students reported reduced anxiety about examinations and an increased sense of ownership over their academic journey. Crucially, several participants expressed their intention to implement similar reflective strategies with their future students, being vital for their long-term impact on teaching practices.

Although this was a small-scale, context-specific initiative, the findings highlight the value of embedding metacognitive development in teacher training programmes. Beyond fostering academic and reflective skills, the investigation encouraged trainees to see themselves as teachers capable of continuous self-improvement.

The session concluded by inviting attendees to share their own experiences related to the topic. Many participants contributed examples of their practices, which created a supportive and engaging atmosphere. They were also encouraged to reflect on their teaching by considering key questions: Are we equipping our trainees with the tools to understand and manage their learning? Are we modelling metacognitive strategies ourselves? And how might these approaches support the development of more thoughtful, resilient and effective teachers?

By placing metacognition at the centre of teacher education and integrating it into our teaching sequences, we can do more than just teach content, we can transform the way future teachers learn, think and teach. This 'inside-out' approach, beginning with the development of the teacher as a reflective learner, paves the way for cultivating a generation of educators who are not only academically well-equipped, but also intentional and thoughtful. In doing so, we lay the foundation for more resilient and effective teaching practices that can adapt to the dynamic nature of today's educational landscape.

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5.4 Shaping newly qualified teacher identity: lessons for teacher educators

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Introduction

'Who am I?' is a question many people ask themselves. The answer may change depending on the time of day, the month of the year, or the place that surrounds us. A teacher may identify as a learner, a mentor, a researcher, a friend, an imposter or any other number of identities. When we step into a classroom, we do not drop our other identities, but rather, one becomes prioritised with the others taking a supporting role. The development of a language teacher identity (LTI) is an important step for newly qualified members of our profession. How LTI is constructed is a process that interests me as a teacher educator. From my recent dissertation research, I have taken away three main lessons that may be helpful to other teacher educators.

One model of language teacher identity

There is extensive literature which attempts to define LTI and visualise the various factors which contribute. One of the clearest I found was published by Barkhuizen and Mendieta (2020). In this model, a smiley face represents the teacher, surrounded by circles representing professional and personal identity, featuring a clear overlap. This model shows some influences on the professional identity, and that all of this takes place within a local and broader context. The graphic could be amended to demonstrate that it is not only the teacher telling the world their identity, but the world also telling the teacher who they are, considering the various expectations a teacher encounters when they first enter the classroom, from parents, administrators, students, themselves. Therefore, I proposed to add dual 'speech bubble' icons, which would indicate identity generating from both the teacher and from the context as well. The lessons presented below are situated within the adapted model.

Lesson 1: Do not underestimate the role of context

The first school, institute or classroom in which a newly qualified teacher finds themselves is hugely influential in shaping LTI. From first colleagues to first students to first administrators, the level of support or critique provided to new teachers changes how they see themselves. One teacher I interviewed talked about how he saw himself as a teacher who prioritised student-centred speaking tasks in his lessons. That stopped after the first week in his new job, where the head teacher stopped by to check on his

noisy, 'out of control' classroom. Even after explaining that the students were doing exactly as instructed, he was criticised for not having authority. As teacher educators, we should prepare our trainees for contexts that challenge their beliefs, and direct them to support from other like-minded teachers through communities of practice, for example.

Lesson 2: Be a model of an ideal possible self

In her chapter on teacher development, Kubanyiova (2009) discusses the importance of having a model of an ideal teacher self, that is, what the teacher aspires to be in the classroom. Classroom teachers are often in the position of being the model of a successful language learner for their students, and possibly the only model the students have, depending on their context. Teacher educators should prepare their trainees for this role by providing an example and talking about the importance of possible selves.

Lesson 3: Model the dedication to trying

The final lesson, from Fairley (2020), is to model the dedication to trying. Making mistakes in the classroom, reflecting and learning from them, is a cycle that will serve teachers well for many years to come. The earlier that it becomes part of our practice, the more we can learn. Perfection is out of reach, but the quest to better ourselves is a more useful lesson to demonstrate. Modelling the process may be uncomfortable as it requires vulnerability and transparency. We need to voice our shortcomings in front of trainees and model reflection that leads to action. Witnessing the process is a valuable introduction to the importance of continuous professional development and creates lifelong learners.

Conclusion

The creation of a LTI should be at the forefront of language teacher education courses, and teacher educators need to keep in mind that the created identity will be changed by the context in which newly qualified teachers work. To set newly qualified teachers up for success, we should prepare them for various contexts, encourage them to imagine their ideal teacher selves, and model a dedication to continuous improvement.

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5.5 Feedback as the barometer of teacher effectiveness

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Evaluating teaching, whether for its own sake or to support subsequent teacher development, is a difficult task. Traditional methods of evaluating teaching, such as classroom observation or evaluation using test results can be unreliable and impractical. There is a need, then, for methods of evaluating teaching that are quick, reliable, and accessible to individual teachers as well as institutions and education systems. I argue that focusing on the ways in which teachers deal with feedback to learners is potentially one such method.

The unique case of feedback

For ecologists, mayflies are well known as an 'indicator species', because their presence in aquatic ecosystems signals low levels of water pollution. In this way they offer a *shortcut*, preventing the need for more onerous tests of water purity. When evaluating teaching, feedback can perform a similar role. Feedback may be defined as 'a response to a learner's performance, understanding or behaviour' (Salamoura et al., 2025, p. 13). As a teaching skill, it is uniquely positioned to act as an 'indicator practice', potentially signalling where teachers are in their developmental journeys, and offering clues as to how they can improve their classroom practice. There are several reasons for this:

1. Feedback is closely linked to many other teaching practices, such as the setting of learning objectives and the monitoring of learner performance. Successful feedback depends on the successful implementation of these practices. This is encapsulated in Cambridge's four pillars of integrated learning and assessment:

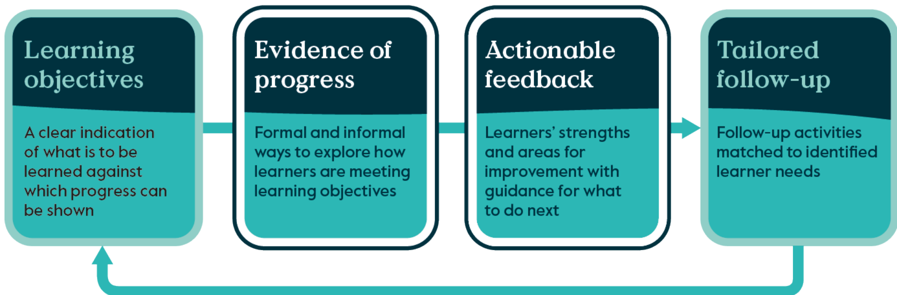

Figure 5.5.1: *The four pillars of integrated learning and assessment (Salamoura et al., 2025, p. 8)*

2. Feedback is recognised for the significant positive impact that it can have on learning outcomes (Coe, 2015).
3. It is a recurring feature of expert teacher practice (Anderson & Taner, 2023).
4. It is a practice that is relatively easy to identify, including for non-expert observers.

Put simply, it seems reasonable to conclude that where there's effective feedback, there's effective teaching. We can therefore look at how teachers manage feedback in the classroom, and draw preliminary conclusions about how effective their practice is likely to be.

Degrees of effectiveness in giving feedback

Based on my own observations of teachers in a wide range of teaching contexts, I identified what appeared to be prototypical stages in the development of teachers' feedback practices.

Level	Description	Teachers at this level...
1 No learner output	Feedback is a response to learner performance, so learners must be required to perform a task of some sort in order to then receive feedback. At this level, learners are not given such tasks, or the tasks do not elicit meaningful performance data.	• lecture learners, who are not invited to respond. • have learners read aloud in lieu of genuine spoken interaction. • fail to generate interaction between learners.
2 Learner output but no feedback	When learners are given appropriate tasks, there is often no feedback provided. Nevertheless, teaching can appear effective because learners are engaged and enjoying the lesson.	• may be unaware of the need for feedback. • may not plan time for feedback in lessons. • plan time but do not get to feedback stages because other stages overrun.
3 Weak feedback	Feedback can have a negative effect on learning outcomes if managed poorly. At this level, feedback takes place during lessons, but it may be hindering learning rather than helping it.	• typically employ counterproductive feedback practices: • indiscriminate praise. • feedback on errors before content. • feedback unrelated to lesson aims/focus.
4 Focus on error correction	For many teachers, feedback and error correction are synonymous. At this level, teachers deliver feedback that has a positive effect on learning outcomes, but it is disproportionately weighted towards correction of errors, which are probably grammatical in nature.	• create a classroom climate that fosters openness to feedback. • often, but not always, deliver feedback in line with their learning objectives. • focus on correcting errors.

5	Holistic, actionable feedback	The most effective feedback is actionable, clarifies what learners did successfully as well as what can be improved, and is focused on achievement of clear learning objectives (Salamoura et al., 2025). Teachers at this level create the conditions for such feedback and deliver it in ways that help move learners forward.	• foster and refine self/peer feedback. • deliver feedback on communicative achievement, a range of language skills and systems, metacognition. • ensure that feedback is actionable.

Table 5.5.1: *Stages in the development of teachers' feedback practices*

In reality, these levels of development are likely to be exhibited on a spectrum, rather than in discrete stages. However, I suggest that they offer a shortcut to understanding how effectively language teachers may be performing, as well as signposting how those teachers may be able to improve.

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5.6 Cultivating digital literacies in teacher education

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Introduction

In an AI-driven world, digital literacy is now a key competency for teacher educators who have to use technology in their own teaching but also to model responsible and ethical digital literacy to their students. Digital technology is now prevalent in every aspect of educational practice, including language assessment, feedback and even curriculum development. AI literacy is one of many subdomains of digital literacies. For educators to navigate this rapidly changing digital landscape, the challenge is not

about implementing new technology, but about developing a critical, ethical, inclusive and reflective approach to digital technology use.

Defining our terms

AI literacy can be defined as the critical understanding, evaluation and application of educator and student engagement with AI tools in educational contexts (Ng, 2021). This definition implies the complexity of evaluating AI literacy as it is far more than a technical competence; it embraces ethical awareness that encourages educators and learners to reflect on issues surrounding identity, authorship and learning outcomes associated with AI use. A useful construct for educators is the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) that describes 22 competences, along six dimensions of educator competence: professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, empowering learners, and facilitating learners' digital development (Redecker, 2017). The benefits of this framework include a comprehensive scaffolded structure for describing and developing digital competence in educators.

Integrating AI literacy into teacher education

The development of AI in education has been rapid from very early chatbots like ELIZA to the sophisticated tool, ChatGPT OpenAI, 2023. For educators in English language teaching (ELT) the implication is enormous, as teachers are now using chatbots to scaffold speaking tasks, using AI-developed platforms to provide real-time feedback on grammar and writing, and using analytic tools to create adaptive learning experiences.

In educator education contexts, the discussion needs to shift away from tool awareness to fluency. That means that educators need to teach trainees not just how to use AI, but more importantly, when and how to use it to its fullest potential. However, this type of practical application and awareness can only occur through concrete classroom activities.

One activity that can facilitate this awareness would include comparing human-written and AI-developed texts. Students are asked to find differences in voice, tone and authenticity. The task might prompt students to appreciate their own voice, and facilitate discussion of the appropriate use of generative tools.

As another strategy, where students co-construct an AI code of ethics, students are asked to reflect on when AI tools are or are not appropriate to use in their academic lives. This could include extending the task in scenarios where they construct ethical boundaries for the use of AI tools during their coursework, e.g. checking grammar vs creating entire pieces of work. These activities support ownership, ethical reasoning and good digital citizenship.

Personalisation and assessment with AI tools

Digital literacy also includes the pedagogic uses of AI for improving learning outcomes. With a range of tools such as Quizizz, Diffit, and Google Forms, teacher educators can demonstrate how their use of AI-enabled platforms can aid their formative assessments and personalising learning for their students. For example, the AI tools can modify the question depending on the students answer, and the formative nature of the assessment can provide different support. Teacher educators can also use initial diagnostic assessments

to highlight learning gaps for students, with follow-on activities and resources tailored to each student. Using data from their use of these tools also develops the data literacy of pre-service teachers, the ability to interpret and respond appropriately to learning analytics to better the quality of their instructional decisions. When the use of these tools is fostered in teacher education programmes, both student learning outcomes will improve and they will enable the pre-service teachers to differentiate their instruction, monitor progress and encourage self-regulated learning (Selwyn, 2019).

Conclusion

As AI becomes a regular part of education, developing digital literacies, especially AI literacy, is essential for teacher educators. It's not just about using tools, but about preparing future teachers to think critically, act ethically and guide learners with confidence. By using frameworks like DigCompEdu, designing meaningful, reflective activities, and integrating adaptive technologies, we can help shape educators who are both digitally capable and ethically aware. Ultimately, teacher education should model thoughtful, people-centred technology use, helping educators stay grounded, curious and committed to equitable learning in a digital world.

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5.7 Giving post-observation feedback with the head *and* the heart

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Introduction

Feedback is one of the most powerful performance moderators (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). While positive feedback on teacher observations validates pre- or in-service teachers' efforts, anyone delivering oral post-observation feedback knows the challenges of dealing with feedback on less effective lessons.

Empathetically communicating areas for improvement requires observers such as teacher educators not only to consider what aspects of the lesson to comment on, but also to take into account *how* to deliver feedback thoughtfully to manage the teacher's emerging emotions during the post-observation discussion, as well as their own.

The context

Ideally post-observation feedback should encourage teachers to make changes in their teaching, leading to more effectiveness in their practice and growth, but while this constructive feedback is crucial for further growth, learning from feedback cannot be forced.

According to Lipnevich and Smith (2022), people react to feedback based on *who they are*, which is composed of individual characteristics such as their beliefs, their expectations of their abilities as well as their openness to feedback. For feedback to be effective, a certain degree of openness and willingness is required. This is essential since feedback is only effective when positive actions are taken because feedback is taken on board.

The challenge

While constructive feedback should encourage development, it can also challenge teachers' self-perception and competence and lead to emotional reactions such as denial, defensiveness, diffusing, deflecting or simple shutting down.

The way feedback is delivered affects how feedback is received and processed. Consequently, effectively communicating oral post-observation feedback requires observers to be aware of this sensitivity and to have some understanding of how emotions may affect the feedback discussion. However, when developing feedback skills and strategies as an observer, attention seems mostly given to *what* to give feedback on, the cognitive dimensions, while *how* to convey feedback, the affective dimension, receives little attention. This bring us to a crucial question: what is it that observers can do to create conditions that may better enable teachers to take post-observation feedback on board?

Creating the conditions

Even though well-intended feedback can be perceived in unintended ways, there are several steps observers can take, proactively and during feedback, to consider this affective dimension, as the EASE framework below introduces.

Establish clear expectations

Before observations, make expectations clear. Elicit teachers' expectations of feedback and co-construct a feedback definition, highlighting your feedback aims: to empower and not to defeat. Invite teachers to think about their past feedback experiences, and encourage them to explore what qualities they believe make them effective at dealing with constructive feedback, and observers effective at providing this. Discuss the role of the observer and the teacher and emphasise the importance of two-way communication.

Actively create the conditions

Raise awareness of the concept of a growth mindset: the belief that feedback is an opportunity for growth, instead of a judgement. Also, prior to the observation, establish a safe feedback environment: showing trust and empathetic communication so teachers feel safe enough to take risks and ask questions. Be aware that feedback norms and beliefs may differ between different cultures. Finally, consider the effect language can have on how feedback is received: exploratory language (e.g. *what was the impact of…*?) evokes less emotion than judgemental language (e.g. *why did you…*?).

Self and social awareness is key

Having self-awareness enables observers to offer purposeful self-disclosure during post-observation feedback discussions. Observers sharing their past struggles helps normalise challenges and reduce defensiveness. At the same time, having social awareness helps to recognise teachers' reactions. Skilful monitoring of teachers' body language, facial expressions and tone during feedback allows you to adjust your approach.

Emotions: be prepared to deal with them
Observers must be emotionally attuned: be present so you can be agile enough to respond to how a teacher is feeling. Acknowledging emotions without judgement and showing empathy and compassion creates a safe space for open dialogue. Listening attentively, asking reflective questions and inviting the teacher's voice shifts the conversation away from emotions to growth. When you remain calm, post-observation feedback can truly become a space for connection and collaborative growth.

Conclusion

Giving constructive feedback isn't easy. It is context-sensitive and requires skills that grow and strengthen overtime. Even then, reactions to feedback can be unpredictable and outside the observer's control. What you can control, however, is how you act and respond, and your willingness to create the above conditions that may help EASE future post-observation feedback discussions.

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6 Approaches to teacher development

This chapter presents different approaches to teacher development which may be useful to a range of contexts. The chapter opens with **Daniel Xerri**'s plenary paper, in which he argues for a shift from externally-driven models of inquiry to more participatory, practice-based approaches that recognise teachers as legitimate knowledge producers. He addresses three fundamental questions to explore how classroom research can become a more inclusive, relevant and transformative practice. **Ana García Stone** and **Richard Smith**'s paper reports on the mentoring of teachers engaged in exploratory action research, and more specifically the inherent challenges faced and the strategies that mentors implemented to address these. Cooperative Development, a dialogic and non-judgemental framework, is the topic of our next paper by **Khoa Do**, who argues that it fosters more meaningful professional learning than traditional professional development models. **Jennifer Schumm Fauster** and **Mia Schweighofer** describe how the collaborative redesign of a writing course proved not only developmental for teachers and their teaching, but even more so for their teaching team. Writing from personal experience, **Elizabeth Demine** describes how she turned negative learner feedback into action to develop a personalised teaching improvement plan. She presents three practical strategies that can be adapted to various professional contexts. **Beatrix Price**'s focus is on the role of teacher associations (ELTAs) in professional development, and the need for partnerships and collaboration, both within and among ELTAs to help ELT professionals continually adapt and innovate. We close with two papers which report on professional development projects. First, **María Alejandra Soto** reports on a project carried out with primary school teachers in Argentina to raise awareness of the importance of implementing context-appropriate pedagogical practices. **Erica Lindley** then reports on a collaboration between a UK language institution and the Angolan English Language Teachers Association to co-develop tailored resource packages for secondary English language teachers.

6.1 Plenary: Teachers and classroom research: ownership, relevance, and conceptualisations

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Introduction

In contemporary education, a persistent chasm divides academic research from classroom practice. While the production of educational research continues to expand, its influence on teachers' daily pedagogical decisions remains limited (McIntyre, 2005; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). This disconnect is not simply logistical

but conceptual: research is often perceived by teachers as inaccessible, irrelevant or imposed from above (Cain, 2015; Drill et al., 2013). My plenary at the IATEFL Conference in Edinburgh sought to confront this disjunction by reframing research as a professional practice that belongs in the hands of language educators (Xerri, 2025b). In it, I argued for a shift from extractive, externally-driven models of inquiry to more participatory, practice-based approaches that recognise teachers as legitimate knowledge producers. The three pillars of this discussion – conceptualisations, ownership, and relevance – form the analytical backbone of the ensuing piece. Inspired by Carl Sagan's (1980, p.193) reminder that 'We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and by the depth of our answers', this paper is structured around three guiding questions: *What is research? Who owns research? Why do research?* Each of these questions serves as an anchor for exploring how classroom research in ELT can be reimagined as a more inclusive, relevant and transformative practice.

The paper begins by interrogating dominant definitions of research, proposing more inclusive conceptualisations that reflect the complexity of language teaching. It then explores questions of ownership, examining how teachers, learners and school communities can be repositioned as active participants in the production of knowledge. Building on this, the paper considers why research matters for teachers and how it can become a meaningful, empowering and sustainable dimension of their professional lives. Through this progression, the paper supports a cultural and structural shift toward teacher-driven inquiry that is ethically grounded, contextually relevant and pedagogically transformative. This vision culminates in a discussion of the PRACTICE Framework, which offers a set of guiding principles for embedding research meaningfully within the lived realities of classroom life.

What is research? Definitions and misconceptions

Research has traditionally been conceptualised through a scientific lens, often emphasising systematic inquiry, hypothesis testing, objectivity and generalisability. These features, rooted in positivist paradigms, have long dominated academic discourse across disciplines, including education (Kerlinger, 1973; Martell, 1988). This technical-rational model views research as a linear process: identifying a problem, formulating hypotheses, collecting data, analysing results and drawing conclusions. While effective in many fields, this model often appears detached from the practical concerns of language educators. As Hanks (2017a) argues, such definitions rarely reflect the lived experiences of teachers or the complexity of classroom dynamics. When these narrow conceptualisations are imposed on teachers, they risk marginalising valuable forms of knowledge that emerge from day-to-day pedagogical practice. In doing so, they uphold a research culture in which only certain methodologies and outputs, usually those published in academic journals, are seen as legitimate.

This dominant framing has contributed to a widespread perception among educators that research is inaccessible, irrelevant or intimidating. Teachers frequently express scepticism toward academic research, citing barriers such as theoretical language, paywalled publications, and a lack of applicability to their classroom contexts (Cain, 2015; Drill et al., 2013). Borg (2009) found that many language teachers equate research with large-scale, quantitative studies conducted by university-based experts, reinforcing a belief that research lies beyond their professional remit. Such

perceptions are further entrenched by education policies that privilege externally produced evidence over practitioner-generated knowledge (Mills et al., 2020). This dynamic fosters a sense of alienation from research and creates a research–practice divide that stifles collaboration and innovation. Rather than engaging with research as a transformative and empowering process (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021), teachers may perceive it as an external mandate, disconnected from their professional identity and autonomy. While academic research plays a vital role in advancing our understanding of language education, it is equally important to recognise that, for many teachers, the value of research lies in its entanglement with practice, where generating knowledge and achieving a practical end are inseparably linked (Pritchard, 2002).

In contrast to the narrow paradigm that is at times adopted in academia, some scholars in education and applied linguistics have advocated for more inclusive conceptions of research, ones that align more closely with the professional realities of teaching. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, p.27) describe teacher research as 'systematic and intentional inquiry about teaching, learning and schooling carried out by teachers in their own school and classroom settings'. This definition emphasises research embedded in context, driven by practitioners' questions and informed by their experiences. Rather than seeking generalisable truths, such situated inquiry prioritises relevance and responsiveness to local needs. Babione (2015) frames teacher research as an approach that not only deepens pedagogical knowledge but also strengthens professional agency. It stems from teachers being encouraged to conceive of research as consisting of reflective, situated practices (Banegas, 2018; Darwin & Barahona, 2021). These conceptions view research not as a separate endeavour but as embedded in everyday teaching and learning.

Adopting this broader perspective necessitates recognising the political and relational dimensions of research. As Mayed (2025) cautions, 'without reciprocity, research is just another form of exploitation masked as inquiry and knowledge production'. This statement underscores the ethical implications of extractive research practices, where data are mined from classrooms with little benefit returned to teachers or learners. Instead, research must be reconceived as a collaborative, dialogic activity, one that values trust, mutual learning and shared ownership. Roulston et al. (2005) support this shift, suggesting that research is not inherently about universal claims, but about uncovering meaningful, context-specific insights. In the absence of broader conceptions of research, there is a risk that teachers' voices are marginalised and their professional knowledge devalued. Hiebert et al. (2023) further reinforce this view by describing scientific inquiry as a continuum, with varying degrees of systematicity and rigour. In classroom contexts, even small-scale, exploratory inquiries can yield powerful understandings when grounded in reflective practice and driven by curiosity (Xerri, 2025c).

Despite efforts to democratise research, many teachers remain excluded from the processes of knowledge validation and dissemination. Epistemic injustice, a concept explored by Fricker (2007), helps explain how teachers' contributions are often devalued due to structural barriers within academic and policy-driven hierarchies, with educators being wronged in their capacity as knowers. Xerri and Pioquinto (2018) argue that institutional definitions of research frequently disregard the legitimacy of experiential and practitioner-based knowledge. Such exclusion has significant

consequences: it not only diminishes the status of teacher inquiry but also narrows the field's epistemological diversity. Teachers may internalise the belief that they are not 'real' researchers, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of disengagement. Yet as Brew (2001) and Brew et al. (2016) observe, individual conceptions of research are fluid and context-dependent. When teachers are supported in developing their research identities, they can reconceptualise inquiry as both meaningful and accessible, ultimately contributing to a richer, more inclusive knowledge base within education.

In sum, conceptualising research in a way that resonates with teachers' experiences is fundamental to bridging the research–practice divide. Definitions rooted in academic abstraction must be complemented by more relational, practice-oriented models that validate classroom inquiry. Recognising teaching itself as a form of inquiry and the classroom as a legitimate site of research challenges traditional hierarchies and empowers educators to become knowledge producers rather than passive consumers (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2017). By broadening the epistemological scope of research to include reflection, dialogue and situated action, ELT moves closer to a model of inquiry that is not only rigorous but also relevant, ethical and transformative.

Who owns research? Expanding research participation

The question of research ownership is central to ongoing debates about educational inquiry. Historically, research has been the preserve of academics and policymakers, with teachers positioned primarily as subjects rather than producers of knowledge. This asymmetrical relationship reflects broader power dynamics in education, where theoretical knowledge is often valued over practical wisdom (Gore & Gitlin, 2004). As a result, research is frequently 'done to' teachers and their classrooms, not conducted 'with' or 'by' them. This tradition has reinforced a deficit model that views practitioners as passive recipients of externally validated knowledge. Yet, as De Costa et al. (2022) argue, failing to involve teachers in shaping research agendas perpetuates a research–practice divide that undermines both educational relevance and impact. The assumption that research expertise resides solely in universities excludes diverse forms of practitioner knowledge and impedes the development of a genuinely collaborative research culture.

In recent years, alternative models of research ownership have gained traction, particularly those advocating for teacher-led inquiry. Action research, exploratory practice and other forms of practitioner research have emerged as powerful frameworks for reclaiming the agency of language educators in the production of knowledge (Borg, 2013; Hanks, 2017a; Smith, 2022). These approaches challenge the notion that research must conform to academic standards of validity and instead validate context-sensitive, practice-informed insights generated by teachers themselves. When teachers engage in research that they design and implement, they develop deeper understandings of pedagogy, learner needs, and classroom dynamics (Borg, 2010; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015). Such engagement also enhances teachers' professional identities, shifting their roles from implementers to reflective practitioners and change agents. Anderson (2024) suggests that this kind of situated inquiry can disrupt hierarchical structures and contribute to more democratic forms of knowledge production in language education.

A particularly promising development in the democratisation of research is the

formation of research–practice partnerships (RPPs). These collaborations, typically between schools and universities, aim to co-construct research questions, methodologies and outcomes that serve both academic and practical purposes (Friesen & Brown, 2023; Hadar & Baharav, 2025). RPPs are characterised by mutual respect, shared power and sustained engagement, distinguishing them from one-off consultancy models (Korhonen et al., 2024). They also prioritise problems of practice identified by educators, ensuring that research is rooted in classroom realities (Xerri & Block, 2024). Tiippana et al. (2024) argue that if implemented properly such partnerships not only foster teacher autonomy and collaboration but also generate findings with greater pedagogical relevance. However, sustaining RPPs requires institutional support, including time allowances, professional development, and recognition of research as legitimate professional work. Without these supports, the promise of shared ownership may remain aspirational rather than transformative.

An even more radical reimagining of research ownership includes learners as co-researchers. Building on traditions of participatory research, scholars such as Pinter (2023) advocate for child-inclusive inquiry models where learners take active roles in identifying issues, collecting data and interpreting findings. This approach acknowledges the epistemic contributions of learners, fosters their agency, as well as nurturing their cognitive, affective and social engagement (Angelöw & Psouni, 2025). Even though the approach can also be successfully implemented with adult learners (Hanks, 2020), teachers' inclusion of children in classroom inquiry challenges the adult-centric norms of traditional educational research, proposing instead a continuum of participation that includes learners as consultants, collaborators or co-investigators. When children are positioned as legitimate knowers, the boundaries between teaching, learning and research begin to blur, creating a more holistic educational experience. While logistical and ethical challenges must be carefully managed (Schweiger, 2024), the inclusion of learner voices in classroom research signals a broader commitment to equity and relational responsibility when forging research partnerships (Popa et al., 2023).

Expanding the ownership of research requires more than methodological innovation; it demands a shift in the cultural values that underpin educational inquiry. Recognising teachers and by extension their learners as credible knowledge producers involves rethinking who counts as a researcher and what counts as research. As Kathleen Graves (as cited in Xerri, 2018) points out, the core elements of research – curiosity, criticality and the pursuit of understanding – are accessible to all educators, not just those with advanced degrees or university affiliations. Extending research participation thus involves creating inclusive infrastructures: accessible training, mentorship, institutional support and recognition, and dissemination channels that elevate teacher-led inquiry (Li & Li, 2025; Xun & Barkhuizen, 2025). When teachers are trusted to lead classroom research projects, when their insights are disseminated alongside academics' publications, and when their work is valued within professional development systems, the field moves closer to a genuinely participatory research culture. Such a transformation not only redistributes epistemic power but also enriches ELT with diverse perspectives and contextually grounded knowledge.

Why do research? Relevance, impact, and empowerment

Understanding why language teachers engage in research or why they refrain from it

requires attention to both the perceived relevance of inquiry and its potential impact on their professional lives (Xerri, 2021). Although policy and academic discourse often promote research as essential for evidence-informed practice, many teachers find it disconnected from the realities of their classrooms (Cain, 2015; Medgyes, 2017). Research outputs are frequently written in abstract or technical language, which limits their accessibility and practical applicability (Bartels, 2003; Rosman & Merk, 2021). In addition, tangible barriers such as time constraints, limited institutional support, and restricted access to resources further discourage teacher involvement (Drill et al., 2013; Luu et al., 2017). Consequently, research is often perceived as a theoretical endeavour, lacking immediate relevance to classroom challenges. This perception not only reduces teachers' engagement with research but also deters them from conducting their own inquiries. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: when research is viewed as irrelevant, it is less likely to be read, used or undertaken, thus widening the gap between research knowledge and everyday educational practice.

Despite these obstacles, research can be a powerful tool for teacher learning and professional development. Practitioner inquiry enables educators to interrogate their assumptions, make sense of classroom challenges, and develop contextually relevant solutions (Babione, 2015; Borg, 2013). When conducted from within the classroom, research becomes a reflective practice that fosters deeper awareness of learner needs and pedagogical effectiveness. Leuverink and Aarts (2021) found that teachers who engaged in research experienced shifts in professional identity, becoming more autonomous and confident in their decision-making. Similarly, Andrew (2020) observed that action research in TESOL programmes enhanced teacher agency and instructional responsiveness. Rather than positioning teachers as passive consumers of evidence, practitioner research frames them as producers of knowledge, professionals capable of critically shaping their practice through inquiry (Xerri, 2025a). In this way, research becomes not only relevant but essential to effective teaching.

Research engagement also contributes to broader institutional and systemic impact. Teachers who share their findings through presentations, publications or peer collaboration help build a knowledge base rooted in authentic classroom experiences (Cárdenas, 2025; Mertler, 2024). This form of knowledge mobilisation enhances the relevance of educational research by grounding it in practice (Anwaruddin, 2018). Moreover, it disrupts the hegemony of top-down policy interventions that often fail to account for local conditions. As teachers document and disseminate their inquiries, they challenge dominant narratives about what constitutes valid knowledge and whose voices matter. Banegas and Consoli (2021) illustrate how initial teacher education programmes that integrate practitioner research foster a sense of purpose and criticality in early-career educators. These benefits extend beyond individual teachers, strengthening professional communities and creating spaces for collective learning. When teachers see that their research can inform not only their own practice but also contribute to institutional improvement, their engagement with research becomes both more meaningful and sustainable.

Importantly, engaging in research empowers teachers to act as advocates for change. By systematically examining issues such as learner inequity, curriculum limitations or assessment practices, educators can generate evidence that supports pedagogical

reform and social justice goals (Feldman, 2025; Lammert, 2023). Research thus becomes a form of activism, enabling teachers to resist deficit-based narratives and contribute to educational equity (Merino & Holmes, 2006). Kaçaniku (2024) highlights how a problem-solving approach to research in teacher education empowers preservice teachers to tackle real-world challenges with confidence. This aligns with the broader conception of inquiry as a values-driven and transformative endeavour, one that connects professional growth with a commitment to improving learners' educational experiences (Dana et al., 2025; Xerri, 2017). Through inquiry, teachers not only learn about their practice but also reimagine what that practice could be. This vision positions research not merely as a technical activity but as a moral and relational responsibility embedded in the daily lives of schools (McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Pierre, 2024).

To realise this potential, research must be designed and disseminated in ways that speak to the needs and capacities of language teachers. Practical relevance must trump theoretical abstraction; collaborative methods must replace extractive designs; and professional learning must be integrated with inquiry processes (Cordingley, 2015; Darwin & Barahona, 2021). As Mercer and Xerri (2018) argue, when teachers voluntarily investigate their own questions, research becomes a process of discovery, not compliance. Creating time, space and institutional recognition for research activities is essential if teacher inquiry is to flourish. So too is building a culture of trust and dialogue where diverse voices are respected and supported. This applies as much to institutions as it does to ELT as a field. Ultimately, the question is not whether language teachers should conduct research, but how educational systems can better support them to do research that matters to them, to their learners and to the communities they serve.

Practical pathways: enabling classroom research

To make research truly empowering for educators, it must become practical, participatory, and woven into the fabric of professional life. The PRACTICE Framework proposed in my IATEFL plenary – describing classroom research as practical, relational, accessible, collaborative, teaching-driven, integrated, community-oriented, and empowering – offers a blueprint for institutional, cultural and professional change (see Figure 6.1.1).

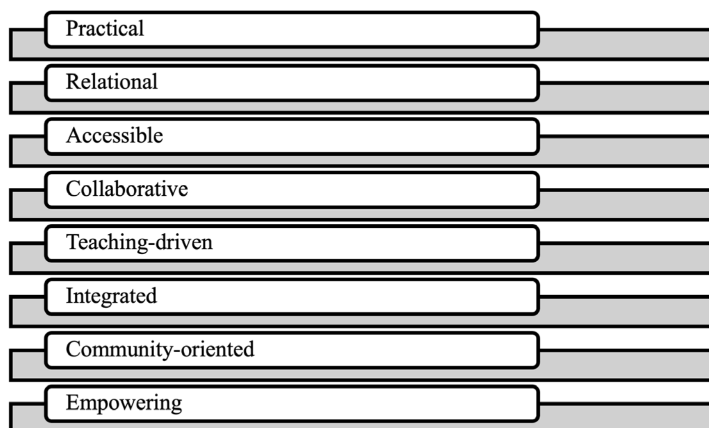

Figure 6.1.1: *The PRACTICE Framework for classroom research*

The PRACTICE Framework begins with a recognition that research should address real-world challenges encountered by teachers in their unique contexts. This requires supporting teacher autonomy in defining research questions that emerge from practice rather than from external agendas (Bahrami & Gao, 2025; Webb & Mumford, 2025). When teachers investigate issues such as learner motivation, language development, or assessment fairness, the outcomes are not only more meaningful but also more actionable. Such relevance reinforces the view of research as a practical means to understand and improve teaching and learning, not as an academic exercise detached from the classroom.

A second key dimension of this framework is relationality. Research cannot be reduced to the mere collection of data; it is an ethical process grounded in relationships, with learners, colleagues, communities and knowledge itself (Allwright, 2003, 2005). Teacher inquiry thrives in environments that foster trust, mutual support and respect for practitioner wisdom (De Costa et al., 2022; Gutierez, 2019). Research communities within schools, teacher education programmes, or teacher associations can provide spaces where educators engage critically and collaboratively with each other's work. These spaces not only enhance research capacity but also challenge epistemic hierarchies that traditionally marginalise practitioner voices (Fricker, 2007; Xerri, 2022). When teachers and learners co-construct knowledge in trusting, dialogic environments, the outcomes are more inclusive and representative of the realities of educational practice (Hanks, 2025).

The accessibility of research is another vital consideration. Research language, formats, and dissemination practices often alienate teachers, reinforcing the perception that research is not for them (Rosman & Merk, 2021; Williams & Coles, 2007). Making research accessible involves using clear, jargon-free language and offering diverse modes of engagement, such as podcasts, infographics, blogs and collaborative workshops. Platforms like TESOLgraphics demonstrate how simplifying research findings without diluting their rigour can help bridge the gap between scholarship and practice (Sato et al., 2024). Moreover, access must be literal as well as conceptual: open-access

publishing and publicly funded repositories should be promoted to ensure teachers are not excluded by paywalls. Accessibility also implies that teachers themselves have the tools, training and support needed to conduct and disseminate research, requiring investment in professional learning and mentorship (Dikilitaş & Bostancıoğlu, 2019; Fürstenberg, 2024). When these factors are present, classroom research is a more accessible practice for language educators (Marsh & Deacon, 2024).

Effective classroom research is inherently collaborative, thriving on shared inquiry and dialogue among educators, learners and other stakeholders. When teachers engage in research alongside colleagues, learners, school leaders or families, they co-construct knowledge that reflects multiple perspectives and addresses real educational concerns (Donohoo, 2013). Collaboration fosters professional dialogue, reciprocal learning, and collective responsibility for improving practice and learner success (Dyantyi & Gqoli, 2025; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Wullschleger et al., 2025). It also enables a more holistic understanding of teaching and learning by drawing on diverse voices and lived experiences. At the same time, classroom research is fundamentally teaching-driven. It emerges from the questions, dilemmas and goals that arise in day-to-day classroom practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Borg, 2013). This form of inquiry is motivated by a desire to improve specific aspects of pedagogy, whether related to learner engagement, assessment strategies, or instructional techniques. Because it is shaped by teachers' own professional knowledge and contextual understanding, it remains highly relevant and responsive to classroom realities (Dana et al., 2025).

To realise its full potential, classroom research must also be integrated into the broader professional structures of educational institutions and into teachers' existing practices. When inquiry is embedded in professional development, curriculum design, teaching and learning, and school improvement initiatives, it becomes a sustained and valued aspect of professional life rather than an added burden (Cordingley, 2015; Hanks, 2017b). Institutional support such as mentoring, protected time, and formal recognition reinforces its legitimacy and impact (White, 2020). Importantly, classroom research is also community-oriented, grounded in the social, cultural and linguistic contexts in which learning takes place (Gibbons et al., 2021). By involving learners, families and local stakeholders in the research process, teachers promote a more democratic and inclusive form of inquiry (Hanks, 2025). This orientation ensures that research responds to collective needs and fosters educational transformation that is both context-sensitive and socially meaningful (Groothuijsen et al., 2019; Vermunt et al., 2023). In this way, classroom research not only enhances individual practice but also contributes to broader, community-rooted change.

Finally, for classroom research to be truly transformative, it must be empowering. This entails trusting teachers to shape educational knowledge, valuing their expertise, and creating opportunities for them to influence policy and practice (Oancea et al., 2021; Shieh, 2021). Empowerment also involves confronting systemic inequalities that exclude certain teachers, especially those in under-resourced or marginalised contexts, from participating in research (Anderson, 2023). Equity-oriented initiatives must ensure that all teachers, regardless of location or institutional affiliation, have access to the support and infrastructure needed to engage in inquiry if they are willing to do so. Empowerment means seeing research not only as a process but as a stance, one that affirms the professional dignity of teachers and their right to

make informed, reflective and just decisions about their work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Through such a vision, the PRACTICE Framework becomes more than aspirational: it becomes a practical agenda for reimagining the role of research in ELT.

Conclusion

Reclaiming research as a teacher-owned, context-sensitive and transformative practice is not simply a pedagogical adjustment; it is a political and epistemological reorientation. The discussion across this paper has shown that redefining research in ways that resonate with language educators' lived experiences is key to bridging the gap between theory and practice. Dominant definitions must be challenged by more inclusive, relational and reflective conceptions of inquiry. Ownership must extend beyond university academics and policymakers to include language teachers and learners, so that doing research is also appreciated as a form of in situ knowledge co-construction that serves the purposes of professional learning, improved learner outcomes and social justice.

The PRACTICE Framework offers a viable pathway for embedding research meaningfully into everyday teaching. If research is to genuinely support language education, it must be made by and for those closest to the learning process. This means trusting teachers, investing in their capacities, and creating structures that validate and amplify their insights. Ultimately, classroom research should not be viewed as a supplementary activity or elite pursuit but as a fundamental aspect of teachers' professional identity. By reimagining research in this manner, we move closer to an educational landscape in ELT where inquiry is not the exception, but the norm, and where every teacher can choose to be a researcher in their own right.

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6.2 Challenges in mentoring teacher-research, and how to overcome them

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Introduction

Teacher-research (TR) is increasingly recognised as beneficial for teachers and learners, but specialised *mentoring* to introduce teachers to such research is also important. A teacher-research mentor (TR-mentor) may be a teacher educator but can equally well be a fellow teacher who has themselves benefited from TR in the past. However, it's important to acknowledge that TR-mentoring can be challenging and that relatively little guidance exists for new mentors in this area. In our workshop we aimed to offer such guidance by inviting discussion of authentic accounts of issues faced by TR-mentors, together with some of the strategies they have implemented.

Mentoring Exploratory Action Research

The particular kind of TR that we focused on was Exploratory Action Research (EAR), in which teachers explore a particular issue of concern to them and, based on what they find, decide whether, and, if so, how to change their teaching. This approach was developed originally for projects with schoolteachers in Global South contexts (2013 onwards) and has by now been quite widely implemented (see British Council, n.d.). This has given rise, in turn, to an increasing focus on how mentors can be effectively trained and supported. Experience in South Asia, in particular, has informed the development of an innovative framework for EAR-mentor training (Smith, 2020) and of an international online support network of teacher-research mentors, 'MenTRnet' (http://mentrnet.net). MenTRnet has been partnering with IATEFL's Research SIG (ReSIG) to offer training and to showcase EAR-mentoring experience, in events and a recent publication (Smith et al., 2024).

Illustrative challenges – and strategies implemented by mentors

In Table 6.2.1 are some of the EAR-mentoring challenges that have been shared by MenTRnet members together with strategies they have implemented. The examples are authentic ones from difficult situations in India, Iran and Pakistan.

Mentor	**Challenge**	**Strategy successfully implemented**
Based in the UK, mentoring a university teacher in Iran	The mentor felt the mentee was *over-reliant on her for solutions and suggestions*.	Withdrew gradually from answering all her mentee's questions and instead started to *ask more questions, to foster self-reliance*.
Based in India, mentoring 30 primary school teachers	Teachers went straight ahead into developing action plans, not planning to explore the existing situation. The mentor thought the plans *did not include the learners' points of view and reflected too many assumptions*	Decided to *carefully consider and write questions for her mentees to lead them to re-evaluate their action plans*. She asked mentees about the reasons behind their intended actions and the assumptions they had about their learners.
Based in India, mentoring a large group of secondary school teachers	Teachers were enthusiastic at first but after about a month they *struggled to meet deadlines* and *found it difficult to write reflections on the work they were doing*.	Created *shared online documents that allowed him to maintain contact and keep records*. These streamlined communication, data collection and project management, saving time and resources.
Mentoring a group of nine teacher educators at a College of Education in Pakistan	Most have already completed research projects in the past for postgraduate degrees. At first *they thought EAR is 'very simple' or 'not rigorous enough' for undertaking research*.	Emphasised again that *EAR is a practitioner research approach* and doesn't necessarily follow norms of relatively positivistic research Also, *held one-to-one sessions*, reining in the more ambitious ideas and focusing attention on ideas arising from practice rather than gaps in the literature.
Mentoring a cohort of 110 teachers in a face-to-face in-service programme in India	Teachers complete the exploratory phase of EAR but *only a few complete the action research phase* after they return to their schools.	*Suggested that teachers carry out just one or two activities from their action plan and share what happened informally* in a structured template using Google Forms.

Table 6.2.1: *Illustrative challenges and responses by mentors*

Final thoughts

Authentic situations and strategies actually experienced and implemented by EAR-mentors can form a useful addition to the still-limited knowledge base for training in the field of TR-mentoring, complementing existing experience-based prescriptions (e.g. Smith, 2020). Such situations and strategies will continue to be documented within MenTRnet, which all interested are invited to join, for further knowledge sharing.

Acknowledgements

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6.3 Dialogic reflection for professional development: all for one

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Introduction

Professional development in English language teaching continues to grapple with how best to support reflective, responsive and context-sensitive teacher growth. This paper argues for *Cooperative Development* (CD), a dialogic and non-judgemental framework proposed by Edge (2002), as an alternative approach to teacher development alongside traditional approaches such as going to a workshop. Based on practical implementation and personal reflections, this paper explores how CD fosters meaningful professional learning through structured, empathetic dialogue.

Limitations of traditional professional development models

Lortie (1975) characterised teaching as an 'egg-carton' profession – suggesting the isolating nature of teaching environments where educators work side by side but

seldom interact meaningfully. This pattern persists even today, where development opportunities are typically limited to brief and often superficial encounters: informal conversations, mandatory workshops or evaluative post-observation sessions.

Early in my teacher-training career in Vietnam, I observed a recurring disconnect between the design of professional development workshops and the actual concerns of practising teachers. Many sessions were repetitive or theoretical, with minimal relevance to classroom realities. While post-observation feedback sessions held more contextual relevance, they often introduced a hierarchical, judgemental tone. This underscored the need for a developmental model that is both reflective and non-directive.

Cooperative development: a dialogic framework

CD, as developed by Julian Edge in 1992, proposes a radical rethinking of how teachers can learn through dialogue. It centres on two roles: the *speaker*, who articulates a professional concern, and the *understander*, who listens, reflects, and facilitates deeper thinking without offering direct advice. The goal is not to diagnose or correct, but to help the speaker explore their own thinking.

This approach is grounded in *dialogic learning*, in which knowledge emerges not from transmission but from articulation.

The Non-Judgemental Dialogue Project

In 2023, the 'Non-Judgemental Dialogue Project' (funded by the Hornby Trust) was initiated to apply CD in practice. It lasted four months and included weekly online and face-to-face group meetings, each involving one speaker and up to five understanders. The project operates on the principle of 'all for one', in contrast to the typical group work ethic of 'one for all'. Rather than pooling ideas for group benefit, the group collaboratively supports one individual's reflective process. Participants commit to listening deeply, asking clarifying questions, and guiding reflection through structured conversational strategies – known as *understanding moves*. These include:

- *Attending*: physically and verbally presenting a non-threatening presence;
- *Reflecting*: paraphrasing key points to confirm comprehension;
- *Focusing*: prompting deeper engagement with selected ideas;
- *Relating (thematising/challenging)*: highlighting possible connections (thematising) or inconsistencies (challenging) across a speaker's discourse; and
- *Goal-setting and trialling*: helping the speaker move from insight to concrete, actionable steps.

Conditions essential for a successful CD session involve the three 'pillars': empathy (attempting to see the world through the speaker's perspective); respect (non-judgemental acceptance of the speaker's choice of topics, opinions and evaluations); and sincerity (being genuine in showing respect and empathy).

Dialogic practice in action

CD practice is both simple and demanding. It requires deliberate restraint from the understanders, who must resist the impulse to offer quick suggestions. Instead, they

engage in reflective prompting, echoing and encouraging elaboration. The speaker, meanwhile, gains clarity by articulating thoughts that may otherwise remain unspoken or fragmented.

One challenge that emerged in implementing CD was the difficulty of shifting from everyday talk to a non-judgemental, dialogic stance. The principles of sincerity, empathy and unconditional positive regard – core to CD – require conscious effort and emotional labour. However, once internalised, these principles enable a depth of understanding rarely achieved through standard professional development formats.

Conclusion

By offering a structured yet open framework for reflective dialogue, CD positions professional development as an ongoing conversation, not a checklist. It challenges institutions to reimagine professional development not as a product to be delivered, but as a space to be held – where teachers are heard, understood and empowered to make sense of their own practice.

CD represents a move away from top-down models of development toward more egalitarian and transformative practices. It provides teachers with tools for self-directed inquiry, grounded in empathetic engagement and dialogic clarity. In a profession often marked by fragmentation and half-understandings, CD offers a means to listen ourselves into understanding. As Mann (2002, p. 391) observes, we can either persist in 'mutual misunderstandings', or choose to 'talk our way into fuller understandings of ourselves, our discourses and our possibilities'.

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6.4 Redesigning a writing course collaboratively: the benefits for teaching teams

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Introduction

'Redesign is an invitation to think about what is happening in the classroom as compared to what you would want to happen' (Skene et al., n.d., p. 13). This quotation inspired our teaching team to redesign a tertiary-level EFL academic writing course that we had been teaching in the same way for several years. The challenges posed by

AI were an additional reason for course revision. We applied a four-step framework for course redesign over three semesters in three classes, which met for one and a half hours weekly and focused on writing critical reviews. During this process, we also conducted practitioner research in which we collaboratively reflected on the redesign and the impact of the changes on us as teachers, our teaching and our team of three.

Course redesign: a cyclical 4-step model

We implemented a four-step framework outlined by Skene et al. (n.d.) which suggests various aspects instructors can consider during course redesign. We decided to focus on the following:

- In the first step, *evaluate existing course*, we analysed course structure and areas of improvement.
- In step two, *examine options*, we focused on best teaching approaches, particularly active learning techniques, and forms of assessment.
- Step 3, *assemble the pieces*, involved combining existing materials with new ones.
- In Step 4, *launch the course*, we reviewed the course redesign by exchanging weekly reflective pieces and conducting focus group discussions.

This cyclical redesign model provided us with a sustainable framework that could be used repeatedly to support our reflective teaching practice.

Practitioner research study

Before launching the revised version of the course, questions arose that we were interested in answering:

1. How did redesigning the course affect us as teachers?
2. How did redesigning the course affect our teaching practice?
3. How did redesigning the course collaboratively affect the team?

To answer these questions, we conducted practitioner research. The study involved collaborative reflection during the same three semesters of redesign in which we exchanged weekly diary entries via email, and held focus group discussions at the end of each semester. Collaborative Thematic Analysis was applied using MaxQDA to identify common themes in the data.

Findings

Regarding the first research question, how the course redesign affected us as teachers, the findings fluctuated over time. During the first redesign cycle, we had positive reactions linked to increased student engagement and the impression that students' perceived needs were met. However, after consequent redesigns, our reactions were more mixed; we were pleased with the course changes, but new challenges such as student use of AI caused feelings of frustration and lack of control.

Findings for the second research question, concerning the effects of redesign on teaching practice, fluctuated as well. The most significant changes during the first redesign were eliminating other text types to focus more on the critical review, as well as reducing the number of topics and exams. This freed up time and enabled us to experiment with new methods and materials in our classrooms. During the second redesign, our findings showed that our teaching became more restrictive, and our

instruction became more teacher-driven in response to the use of AI by our students.

Interestingly, for the third research question, concerning the effects of collaborative redesign on our team, findings remained constant. Throughout the entire redesign process, collaboration strengthened the team cohesion despite fluctuations we experienced as teachers and in our classrooms. Furthermore, reflecting on the changes together during the redesign launch (step 4) enabled us to decentre ourselves from our individual teaching experiences while working towards a common goal.

Lessons learned

Presently, we are in the third redesign cycle, and four lessons stand out from our team's experiences:

Lesson 1: re-design is an ongoing process, especially with the dawn of AI which requires adapting to rapid changes in teaching and learning writing.

Lesson 2: collaboration pays off. It may be time-consuming and work-intensive, but it lightens the load if the team commits equally, suspends judgement and seeks to learn from each other.

Lesson 3: student creativity and involvement are non-negotiable. When this is limited to control students' use of AI, the effects can stifle their intellectual curiosity.

Lesson 4: agile thinking is imperative for teachers and students alike when coping with uncertainty and today's ever-changing world (Fürstenberg & Schumm Fauster, 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, when thinking about making changes to a course, redesign can be useful not only for a teacher and their teaching, but even more so for the teaching team when carried out collaboratively and consistently.

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6.5 Turning feedback into action: developing a personalised teaching improvement plan

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Background

In my presentation, I shared a personal anecdote from a few years ago that served as the inspiration for this talk. The narrative began the moment I opened my laptop and reviewed the student feedback from one of my classes, which was predominantly

negative. This candid feedback profoundly impacted me and marked a pivotal moment in my teaching career.

Initially, my response to the feedback received was defensive. However, this reaction soon evolved into self-doubt. I began to contemplate the transformation of my perception of feedback. Instead of viewing it as a potential criticism, can I reframe it as a valuable instrument for personal and professional development? This significant change in my perspective originated from a fundamental shift in my mindset.

During the session, I presented three practical strategies that have proven beneficial to me and offer valuable insights that can be adapted to various professional contexts.

Key strategies

The first strategy is a thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The process involves the regular systematic collection of student feedback. Upon gathering this data, it is essential to identify recurring themes rather than focusing solely on individual comments. After recognising several key themes, you should prioritise them accordingly. Once a theme has been selected for further examination, it is advisable to take one clear and manageable step forward. For example, if the feedback indicates that instructions could be clearer, you might seek advice from a colleague, engage in relevant continuing professional development or record and review your own classes. The objective is not to resolve all challenges simultaneously but rather to make consistent and thoughtful progress.

The second strategy emphasises the importance of self-reflection and the acquisition of targeted feedback (Gibbs, 1988). After each lesson, it's important to take time to document what was successful, what wasn't, possible reasons for the outcomes, and alternative approaches for future implementation. Over time, patterns will emerge, allowing for the identification of specific areas requiring development. Once a particular focus area has been established, it is beneficial to seek targeted feedback from a colleague, mentor or the students. The critical aspect of this process is maintaining focus, seeking feedback exclusively on that singular area of concern. Afterwards, it is important to create a development plan that could include participating in a workshop, watching a tutorial or trying out new approaches in the classroom. After executing the intended changes, it is essential to reflect on their effectiveness and, if necessary, seek further feedback. This establishes a practical and personalised cycle of professional growth.

The third strategy involves the GROW Model, an acronym representing Goal, Reality, Options, and Will (Passmore, 2010). This coaching framework is designed to facilitate the transition from receiving feedback to implementing meaningful change. The process starts by explicitly defining the goals you aim to accomplish. Following that, it is important to assess the larger context, which includes the existing state of affairs, any external pressures, and possible factors that may impact the feedback obtained.

It is essential to carefully investigate all available choices without rushing; evaluate the resources at hand, the duration needed, and if the feedback can be acted upon in the short term. Finally, select the next steps based on what is most practicable at that moment. The GROW model emphasises intentional, sustainable development grounded in real-world challenges.

Final reflections

Improvement does not necessarily require significant changes. It commences with small, intentional steps that arise from genuine self-reflection and concentrated efforts. I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on your response to feedback. Do you perceive it as a criticism or an opportunity for growth? Consider how your professional practice might evolve if you approached feedback as a guiding tool rather than as a form of criticism. When you next receive feedback – whether it is positive or challenging – consider what it truly conveys. How might you leverage it to enhance your practice? With the shift in mindset, feedback transforms from a moment of evaluation into a pathway toward becoming the most effective educator you can be.

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6.6 Connecting English language teacher associations, strengthening global collaboration

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Introduction

In today's multifaceted international educational landscape, not only is the educational scenario changing, with learners' needs, educators' responsibilities, fluctuating curricula, the modes of methodology and so on, but also the roles of English language teacher associations (ELTAs), as they seek to adapt to continuous change and evolution. English language teaching (ELT) professionals try to seek new avenues for continuing professional development, and while previously ELTAs were the main providers for keeping up with professional growth, today a plethora of online resources provide alternative avenues for teachers. This results in decreasing numbers of ELTA members within associations, and consequently a decline in in-person conference participation. ELTAs and their members often turn to collaborative practices in order to tackle the challenges of globalisation, commercialisation, teacher precarity, and a rapidly shifting linguistic and technological context, especially the fast-paced rise of artificial intelligence. The need for collaboration within ELTAs and among ELTAs is becoming an ever-more vital phenomenon to help ELT professionals continually adapt and innovate.

Collaboration within smaller communities of practice

The officially organised top-down teacher training sessions for ELT professionals served their purpose for a while, yet genuine collaboration thrives when it is initiated by participants themselves and fostered in a safe, trusting environment. These affordances are provided by various communities of practice (CoPs), in both institutional contexts and more importantly formal learning organisations offered by ELTAs. They offer members tailored opportunities to engage deeply with shared concerns while reinforcing the association's broader objectives. Other substructures, or grass-root initiatives, can manifest in the form of monthly events, either online or in-person, which are often the first steps for opening up, sharing one's expertise and a lead-in to volunteering. Leaders of ELTAs often refer to these learning environments in their initial volunteering, where professional growth and collaboration are encouraged, nurtured and supported (Price, 2023).

Inter-ELTA collaboration: regional and global impact

Partnerships among ELTAs are rooted in a history of sustained cooperation. Both strong and light partnership agreements have been signed by leaders of ELTAs, and representatives of the organisations have served as delegates at each other's national conferences. Externally-funded ELTA collaborations have also been nurtured in various regions, including the Global South or certain African countries. While these initiatives often aim to support capacity-building, some have been critiqued for aligning with the interests, values or strategic aims of funding organisations, or even reflecting broader geopolitical interests. As a counteraction, the Hornby Trust started decentring initiatives according to the needs of local contexts, and encouraging collaboration among ELT professionals and ELTAs, especially in developing countries (Padwad & Smith, 2023). ELTA leaders have also been more aware of the power imbalances in international partnerships and have focused more on inclusive, locally informed planning. ELTA collaboration has also fostered global mentorship programmes, such as the Africa ELTA Female Leadership Mentoring Program or the Equal Voices in ELT (EVE), aiming to address both gender equality and local representation at ELT events. A new generation of female leaders has entered the profession, empowering colleagues in local contexts and on a global palette. The outcomes of these initiatives include enhanced volunteer engagement, expanded outreach, and significant professionalisation within participating associations.

Objectives, challenges and potentials

The primary objectives of collaboration within and among ELTAs include resource sharing, dissemination of best practices, innovation adoption and the nurturing of new or developing ELTAs. Events like the online conference organised by the IATEFL Associates, or the gathering at the Associates' Day before the Annual IATEFL Conference, provide ample opportunities for strengthening relationships and encouraging collaboration. These goals are most effectively achieved when collaboration is rooted in reciprocity, trust and long-term relationship building (Knight et al., 2018).

However, challenges abound. Addressing differing institutional goals, navigating time and spatial constraints, fostering open dialogue and questioning deeply held

beliefs require critical reflection and a willingness to compromise. ELTA leaders hold a mirror to each other in their collaborative work; they compare each other's work, best practices, strengths and weaknesses. The quality of collaboration is shaped less by formal structures and more by interpersonal dynamics, communication skills and leadership qualities.

Despite the challenges, the potential of collaboration is undeniable. ELTAs offer unique ecosystems, where ELT professionals can interact across cultural and institutional boundaries, stimulating innovation and motivation.

Conclusion

Collaboration within and among ELTAs strengthens both the members and the learning organisations through sustained engagement, mutual support and shared vision. It becomes evident that ELTAs are not simple service providers but dynamic communities, where the collective voice of educators shapes the future of language learners and the whole educational scenario.

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6.7 Context-appropriate primary ELT practices: challenges and opportunities in Argentina

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My talk was based on an A.S. Hornby Educational Trust-funded project carried out with primary school teachers in Entre Ríos, Argentina. The project sought to raise awareness of the importance of implementing context-appropriate pedagogical practices.

Local realities in primary ELT

Although English is compulsory in most secondary schools in Entre Ríos, this is not the case at primary level. A recent survey by the provincial Ministry of Education

(MoE) shows that 76 per cent of the 1,302 primary schools are in rural areas, where access is hindered by distance, poor roads and limited transportation. Many of these schools are multigrade with few staff and students, requiring teachers to teach learners of different ages and levels simultaneously. In this context, EFL is taught in 342 primary schools, typically as a single 40-minute weekly workshop starting in Grades 4–6.

These prevailing conditions have contributed to a teaching workforce entering classrooms via non-traditional pathways, often without formal pedagogical training. According to a November 2022 MoE survey, only 66 of the 327 primary EFL teachers hold teaching degrees. The rest are designated *idóneos* – non-graduate teachers, licensed by the MoE, with English proficiency mainly acquired at private schools of English, and with no formal training in pedagogy, curriculum, learner development or assessment.

Consequently, TEFL in local primary schools often centres on grammar and vocabulary as presented in off-the-shelf materials, contrasting with the aims of the national curricular guidelines (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación Argentina, 2012). These guidelines stress developing young learners' communicative competence through integrated teaching of the four macro-skills, language awareness and intercultural competence. They also promote learner-centred approaches like Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Learning, interdisciplinarity, and formative assessment. This creates a persistent mismatch between curricular goals and classroom realities, as many teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge to implement these methodologies.

Reframing practice through a local lens

The project's five in-person workshops supported teachers in reflecting critically on and adjusting their classroom practices to better fit local needs. A key aim was to foster a collaborative space for exploring context-sensitive pedagogy grounded in professional dialogue and curricular understanding. The workshops also encouraged communication and collegiality, allowing participants to share experiences, articulate challenges and refine strategies collaboratively.

The sessions offered opportunities for teachers to: a) engage with the national curricular guidelines and unpack key underpinning principles; b) reflect on their classroom practices to identify alignment and divergence with the guidelines; c) discuss tensions between curricular expectations and their school contexts; and d) revise lesson plans and materials to introduce feasible pedagogical changes responsive to their learners and school communities.

As part of the project's final stage and assessment, teachers redesigned or developed lesson plans or activities based on the workshop concepts, and submitted brief reflections on the process. This task consolidated learning, encouraged innovation, and fostered critical reflection on adapting new practices to their contexts. Teachers were thus supported in interpreting curricular demands while exercising agency to align these with classroom realities.

Key takeaways and future directions

The initiative was successfully completed as planned and, although final attendance numbers were modest, participants engaged deeply with the content and process.

Overall, the project had a highly positive impact, evidenced by teachers' final assessment tasks, their reflective pieces and post-project survey responses.

Final tasks demonstrated participants' clear understanding of the workshop goals and willingness to implement changes. Teachers emphasised the value of pausing to reflect on pedagogical decisions and the need for ongoing professional development to meet curricular demands, which was especially significant given that most participants were non-graduate teachers with limited training. Reflections were uniformly positive, highlighting both the relevance of workshop content and the opportunity to rethink practice.

The post-project survey confirmed high satisfaction levels: all respondents were satisfied with the workshops, appreciated the topics and materials, and expressed strong interest in future training. Four teachers volunteered for follow-up interviews and further professional development, suggesting potential for a second project phase to deepen and broaden the work.

A significant institutional development was the commissioning, at the request of the Ministry of Education, of a preliminary curricular document for primary English education in Entre Ríos in 2024. Drawing on the project's outcomes, the document was submitted in March 2025 and is currently awaiting a decision regarding its implementation. These developments underscore the initiative's relevance, its responsiveness to local needs, and its potential to guide broader, sustainable teacher professional development in the region.

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6.8 PRELIM 3: Materials creation as a catalyst for teacher development

Erica Lindley *St Giles International, Brighton, UK*

Teacher change

Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) model of professional growth suggests that sustainable change occurs through a sequence of interrelated domains: personal (knowledge, beliefs, attitudes); external (stimulus); practice-based (professional experimentation); and consequence-based (noting salient outcomes). The PRELIM 3 project shows how context-sensitive materials development projects have the potential to provide an external stimulus that can ultimately spark meaningful change in teachers' practices and beliefs.

PRELIM 3 change environment

The British Council's Partnered Remote Language Improvement project (PRELIM 3) paired UK language institutions with national teaching associations to co-develop

tailored resource packages for English language teachers. Over 16 months, St Giles International partnered with the Angolan English Language Teachers Association (ANELTA).

A focus group of Angolan secondary school teachers reported limited resources/ equipment, little access to professional development, and concerns about low student motivation and communicative competence. Partners therefore developed guiding principles for the resource package to be practical, communicative and motivating, aligned with the national syllabus, relevant to the Angolan context and supportive of teachers' needs.

The resource package focused on three key areas, addressing gaps in existing materials:

- *Lesson Plans*: speaking, 'live' listening, and grammar lessons which prioritised interaction and language activation;
- *Games and activities*: to motivate, review and build fluency; and
- *Teaching techniques videos*: mini-demonstrations of core teaching techniques such as elicitation, starring ANELTA teachers and St Giles trainers.

After creating and disseminating the resource package, follow-up evaluation was carried out via video observations, student and teacher interviews and surveys. This showed teachers referring to the resource package on their mobiles and students participating more fully through elicitation and pair/group work. Students reported enjoying 'dynamic' lessons with more peer interaction. Teachers noted increased student engagement and understanding: 'The resource package is much more interesting. It easily helps students to understand the lesson… They feel more engaged'.

Teachers also described a methodological shift, towards a more interactive approach: 'Since I decided to incorporate the techniques … the way I teach is different. I feel more confident… They feel free to participate and motivated to learn'. 'The resource package has reinforced the importance of student-centred learning, where students take an active role … shifting my focus to more dynamic methods [and] real-world language use.' 'The games and activities changed my perceptions about teaching English. Now I understand that teaching and learning should bring joy… When I use it with my students, they all get confident. They share knowledge among themselves and it builds cooperation among students.'

Factors supporting teacher development

The following features of PRELIM 3 helped maximise the resource package's potential as a catalyst for teacher growth:

1 Motivation through community

Focus group teachers joined a WhatsApp community of practice, which encouraged participation and professional experimentation, built trust as they piloted materials, and provided project coordinators with essential feedback.

2 Cross-cultural collaboration

While St Giles brought expertise in pedagogy and confidence with materials development, ANELTA's teachers contributed invaluable local knowledge of teaching context and culture, and of learners' affective and linguistic needs. As materials were produced and piloted, multiple feedback loops (via WhatsApp chat, lesson recordings, surveys and online meetings) helped catch incorrect assumptions early and deepened design-

ers' understanding of context, offsetting the dangers inherent in cross-cultural materials development. These cycles of stimulus (new materials), experimentation (using the materials in class) and reflection boosted motivation and prompted a sense of ownership. Teachers' feedback led to significant revisions: simplifying instructions/staging, giving more methodology tips and support for speaking.

3 Embedding training

The St Giles design team, which included three trainers, aimed to provide built-in professional development by embedding methodology tips, ideas to make activities harder/easier, to review/extend lessons. Supplementary teaching techniques videos aimed to bridge the training gap by demonstrating key techniques in action.

4 Peer-led dissemination

Eleven enthusiastic focus group teachers were trained as workshop leaders. They delivered 20 workshops across the 18 regions of Angola, decentralising dissemination and sharing the resource package with 347 participants. Participants reported enjoying the collaborative nature of workshops, and workshop leaders described newfound confidence. Most importantly, uptake was excellent: two months after the workshops, 86 per cent of participants surveyed had been using the resource package.

5 Time

The 16-month timeline enabled partners to work around other commitments and allowed space to rework and refine materials.

As ELT materials development continues to evolve, projects like PRELIM 3 suggest a promising direction. When designed collaboratively and grounded in local realities, resources can both lower teachers' affective filters while nudging them towards professional growth: materials feel usable and relevant, giving teachers the confidence to experiment with them and notice their impact, sparking a sequence of change and development.

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7 ELT in higher education

In this chapter, we find papers from a range of higher education (HE) contexts, starting with a question: Are you teaching HE students the skills they really need? **Fleur Yerbury-Hodgson** proposes that in order to prepare students for life both in HE and a precarious job market, transition skills are vital, and not only to students but also to HE teachers. In addition to discussing what transition skills are, Fleur also proposes how they should be assessed. **Aude Hansel** argues that by selecting cross-disciplinary themes that can be explored across various subjects, both the academic and professional needs of HE students can best be met. Reporting on a Faculty of Law initiative, the *Fil Rouge*, Aude also demonstrates how students begin to see themselves as future actors of change when they engage with real-world issues and understand the societal relevance of what they are studying. Next, driven by a desire to move away from the standard assessment format of PowerPoint presentations, and a desire to engage learners through hands-on creativity, **Michelle Hunter** presents an oral sustainability themed assessment task, successfully employed with German university students on an international business degree programme. In our next paper, **Donald Richardson** explores the use of location-based educational games to support engaging, immersive language learning. After a brief introduction to gaming, Donald outlines three activities reports on learner feedback and responds to practical considerations. Working with international students on a Foundation programme, **Joshua Mason-Goodall** reports on how he implemented academic reading circles to support student engagement with academic texts, his observations and insights, and how these inform his teaching. Moving on to academic writing, **Iona Dawson** and **Tracie Mac Kenzie** describe a paper and scissors task that promotes increased awareness of the steps necessary for successful paper revision, while familiarising learners with the nuances of the reading and writing process. To end this chapter, the focus shifts to the urgent need for structured ESP programmes in nursing education in Europe and our final paper – **Lorena Priscila Dantas de Luna** and **Ana Alexandra Silva**'s study of the design and pilot of an English course tailored to the professional and academic contexts of nursing students in Portugal.

7.1 Are you teaching higher education students the skills they really need?

Fleur Yerbury-Hodgson *Oxford University Press*, *Oxford, UK*

Introduction

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the power of soft skills, and employers in particular are becoming more vocal about the need for potential employees to hone these skills. The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2025* highlights that most of the top skills desired by employers are skills such as flexibility, creative thinking and motivation, and this is echoed by UNESCO's 2023 report. As higher education (HE) students enter a very uncertain job market, they need to be able to demonstrate strong core skills in order to be successful in their chosen career. While many teachers already include such skills (they might call them global skills, 21st century skills or life skills), it is possible that they might not be completely suited to this transition stage when students move from school to HE and then from HE to the world of work.

Transition skills

Fürstenberg and Schumm Fauster (2024) use the term 'transition skills' for the set of skills that are intended for this time of great change, and they consist of the following.

1 Communication, collaboration and mediation

Communication is clearly a key skill and at HE level, students should focus on *how* they communicate in English, considering register, formality and certainty. In HE and the world of work, students will need to collaborate with others on a regular basis, and here it should encompass persuasive skills, debating views, resolving problems and using linguistic strategies like hedging. Mediation is a highly desirable skill in today's world because it helps students communicate effectively in multilingual or unfamiliar situations, adapting to their interlocutor's language abilities and comprehension levels.

2 Creativity and critical thinking

Employers increasingly stress the need for creativity, especially in the era of GenAI, and here creativity manifests as intellectual curiosity and encouraging students to find novel solutions to problems. Creativity links with critical thinking, which is essential for assessing situations, making judgements and drawing conclusions. Students should be encouraged to analyse texts and take a stance, which involves evaluating, agreeing, disagreeing and reporting.

3 Cultural intelligence

With increased mobility and virtual communication, students need cultural intelligence, which includes openness, curiosity, empathy and the ability to see the world through others' eyes. Role playing realistic situations and discussing cultural representations can enhance this skill.

4 Self-leadership and collaboration

Linked to emotional intelligence, self-leadership involves managing one's emotions and understanding the emotions of others. Students should engage in autonomous learning activities, such as project-based group work, to develop self-assessment,

self-regulation and self-awareness. Collaboration is closely allied to self-leadership and mirrors the world of work where employees are required to work on their own and also as part of a team.

5 Digital literacy

HE students are likely to have basic digital skills at the very least, so at this level they should be encouraged to: consider the benefits of different platforms; think about ethical considerations around using GenAI; and become aware of the risks of plagiarism.

Assessment of transition skills

Formative, qualitative assessment is best for assessing transition skills and this can be achieved by using rubrics, portfolios, learner diaries and peer feedback.

- *Rubrics* measure students' attainment against a consistent set of criteria which are linked to learning objectives. Using clear descriptors makes progress transparent for students and teachers.
- *Portfolios* (digital or paper-based) are an excellent way of recording students' work. They provide a useful means of showing progress over a period of time, which is motivating for students.
- *Learner diaries* can be very beneficial for students, so that they can focus on their learning experiences.
- *Peer feedback* can be especially validating for students, and if it refers to the rubrics for the task, it has the potential to be relevant.

Conclusion

By teaching students transition skills, HE teachers are preparing them for life both in HE and for work. These students will be entering a precarious job market where part-time jobs; 'gig' jobs and zero-hour contracts are increasingly common. Those students who can demonstrate strong, transferable skills will stand a much greater chance of success at job interview than those students who cannot do so.

Arguably, these skills are vital not just to HE students but to HE teachers themselves. The past few years have seen a time of great transition in this sector with increasing internationalisation, a changing student profile, and a move to hybrid or fully online teaching. Doubtless, there will be more changes to come but with strong transition skills students and teachers will be ready to face the challenge.

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7.2 Sparking law students' interest in the language class through cross-disciplinary topics

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Context

Teaching English for specific purposes in higher education entails addressing both the academic and professional needs of students (Anthony, 2018). One of the most effective ways to achieve this is by selecting cross-disciplinary themes that can be explored across various subjects. Law students are required to take English as part of their curriculum. These students did not choose to study languages and often associate English classes with artificial tasks carried out in secondary school; it is therefore challenging to engage them meaningfully. Moreover, the relevance of English may not be immediately apparent to them – much like philosophy or even constitutional law – depending on the career paths they envision.

A cross-sectional topic

In response, the Faculty of Law implemented an initiative to spark students' interest in broader societal issues. Each academic year, a common theme – the *Fil Rouge [common thread]* – is chosen by the students and explored throughout their main courses, including criminal law, contract law, but also in philosophy, English or Dutch. Past topics have included migration, which centred on a high-profile case involving a migrant child fatally shot by police. This allowed students to engage with lawyers from both sides of the case, attend theatre performances, simulate a trial, compete in an eloquence contest, or even interact with NGO representatives. They met legal professionals, artists, victims' families and other young people. Such encounters offered a vivid demonstration of the power of law as a tool for changing society.

Implementation in the English class

This year's *Fil Rouge* theme was inclusion. In an English class, we invited a film specialist to speak about the representation of women through the lens of the male gaze in Hollywood cinema. The session highlighted how law can be a vehicle for challenging and transforming such representations. This cross-curricular approach gave coherence to the students' learning experience by reinforcing the connections between different disciplines. For instance, they also explored the role of women in society on their 'Law, Gender and Society' course, as well as women's rights in international conventions on their 'International Law' course. As is well known, establishing links between new knowledge and prior learning supports long-term memory retention.

Benefits for the teaching staff

The *Fil Rouge* initiative also benefits teaching staff, as the entire faculty aligns around a shared topic. This fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and enriches teaching practices. Guest speakers are often invited to contribute across multiple courses, as was the case with the guest invited for the English class, who spent a full week on campus. During her stay, she not only addressed law students on different courses but also engaged with students from other faculties.

Pedagogical preparation

Regarding the English course, the preparation was multifaceted: prior to the event, a survey assessed students' expectations and concerns, including their apprehension about listening to a native speaker and taking notes. A two-hour preparatory session addressed their preconceptions on the topic, introduced key vocabulary, and encouraged critical discussion.

Simultaneously, the invited speaker was met by the English lecturer via videoconference to tailor the content to the audience. The guest shared her materials for feedback, and her talk was co-constructed to ensure language accessibility. This preparation proved essential for student comprehension.

Recognising that evening lectures often require additional motivation for student attendance, the event was incorporated into their exam content to ensure active participation. During the post-talk Q&A session, students were encouraged to ask questions prepared in advance. A feedback form was distributed afterwards, with 70 students (approximately 50 per cent of attendees) responding. Of these, 53.3 per cent rated the activity 3 out of 4, and 24.24 per cent rated it 4 out of 4. A large majority (78.46 per cent) felt well-prepared for the session. The coordination with the speaker paid off: 55.71 per cent of respondents reported that the English was clear and intelligible, while 35.71 per cent stated they understood everything.

Student comments included:

> I thank the speaker for coming and talking with such passion. [Je la remercie d'être venue et d'avoir parlé avec autant de passion.]
> Thanks for taking the time to make sure we understood everything. [Merci d'avoir pris le temps de s'assurer que nous ayons compris.]
> Thanks for this very interesting lecture. It was accessible and easy to understand. [Merci pour cette conférence très intéressante. Elle était accessible et facile à comprendre.]

In conclusion, motivating students requires both collaboration among teaching staff and meaningful engagement with real-world issues. Initiatives like the *Fil Rouge* demonstrate that when students are shown the societal relevance of what they are studying, they begin to see themselves as future actors of change.

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7.3 Forget PowerPoint. Let's go analogue

Michelle Hunter *Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria [IATEFL BESIG Facilitator Scholarship]*

This summary of my workshop focuses on the *what* and *why* behind the ideas presented, and closes with delegates' reactions to their involvement in the session. The overarching theme explored how both language teachers and learners can take a break from technology and be engaged through creating something by hand. This proved a welcome antidote to the AI-focused nature of many other Conference talks.

I began by presenting an oral assessment task successfully employed with German university students on an international business degree programme. Starting with my specific context – knowing that our teaching profiles differ – I explained how the task developed, how I scaffolded it, how students were assessed, and shared sample posters. I also shared my personal motivations, which I shall detail later.

The what

Beginning with the assessment task, the initial iteration of this task-based learning project required student pairs to choose a company and investigate its sustainability compliance along the supply chain. Their findings were presented on a poster which they then presented in an informal group setting. I created a conference-like atmosphere with posters displayed around the room where each group learned about corporate issues with supply chain sustainability.

Over time, the task evolved from researching supply chain activities to investigating companies' track records on compliance with their own ethics and sustainability policies, or to focusing on how a specific UN Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) was (not) being implemented. Using the example of Dyson's dubious activities in Malaysia via a Channel 4 news item (Soni, 2022), students were encouraged to look beyond corporate self-presentation and uncover cases of misconduct and cover-up. Figure 7.3.1 shows how one pair focused on accusations about Nike not upholding ethical employment standards.

Students were assessed on three key areas:

- Task fulfilment, e.g. company published policies versus actions; evaluation of compliance and/or solutions; implementation of an identified SDG.
- Language accuracy, e.g. speaking quality: clarity, conciseness, register, lexicogrammatical accuracy.
- Poster impact, e.g. structure, organisation, visual impression.

To help students with this medium, we examined different types of poster presentations in class. A number of delegates noted that they, too, use this format in their contexts, but not usually for assessments. I like to show examples from academic conferences with the reassurance that they are not expected to produce such complex posters or have them professionally printed. As explained in the *why* section next, the intention was to move students away from digital work toward creating something by hand.

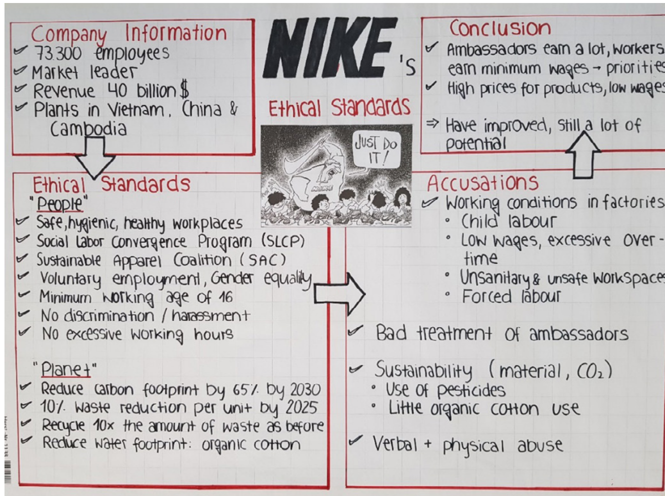

Figure 7.3.1: *Student poster: Nike's ethical standards*

The why

The drive for a different assessment format stemmed from wanting to move beyond standard PowerPoint presentations – a tedious exercise that students seemed as bored with as I was. The sustainability focus emerged from discussions with colleagues about encouraging young business students to think beyond typical corporate views of big business, flashy brands and maverick CEOs. I had previously tested in-class TBL activities where students explored non-traditional companies like gandysinternational.com and learned about socially-minded leaders such as Anita Roddick. Encouraged by their positive responses, I expanded on these ideas for the assessment task.

My other motivation was engaging learners through hands-on creativity. Since the explosion of GenAI tools, it has become more imperative that we leverage the cognitive benefits of handwriting (e.g. Smith, 2025). The poster creation process fosters this, while also employing multimodality, whereby 'spoken language combines with multiple visual images and arm movements' (Dressman, 2019, p. 39); and online research, pair discussion, and paper-based output via the poster convey an overall message.

The audience reaction

The workshop element of the session became a tale of two groups: one reflected on applying my task to their contexts; the other discussed alternative analogue tasks. Through reflection, discussion and idea-collection on giant post-it notes, each group gathered thoughts to share: ideas for expanding vocabulary, and for exploring specific business processes and tasks – all can be depicted, discussed and potentially assessed via the poster presentation format. While different from my original plan to have teams recreate posters, this collaborative reflection worked well. The most gratifying feedback was hearing how refreshed and awake many felt afterward. The prevalent

and ongoing need for human-based activity and hands-on creation was never more evident than in that last session of the day.

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7.4 Engaging learners of English with location-based educational games

Donald Richardson *St Andrews University, Scotland, UK/Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany*

Introduction

This talk explored the use of location-based educational games to support engaging, immersive language learning. Three activities used successfully with advanced level university students were outlined, along with the results of various research projects evaluating how mobile technology and game-informed pedagogical design can be used to boost learner motivation and aid learning.

Theoretical background

The session began by exploring three broad approaches to educational gaming, drawing on the framework introduced by Jonathan Reinhardt (2018). *Game-enhanced learning* is when existing commercial games such as *Minecraft* or *Dungeons & Dragons* are adapted for classroom use. *Game-informed learning* incorporates game design principles into teaching methods, for example through the use of platforms like *Kahoot! Game-based learning*, which employs games explicitly created for educational purposes, is the framework most closely connected with the location-based games discussed in the talk.

Alien anthropologists

The first activity involves students exploring the local area while assuming the role of alien anthropologists on a research trip to Earth. Working in groups, they explore this new, unfamiliar planet using their smartphones to collect photographic and video data of living things, objects and places. In the videos, students are asked to speculate

about what they see using phrases provided in a handout. This is followed by a written, speculative report done at home. In the next class, students re-join their groups to plan and deliver a presentation of their findings at an alien conference with the rest of the class acting as rival delegates.

Mission not really impossible

In this game, learners spend some time exploring games and game-based learning before being introduced to the *EyeJack* augmented reality app, which allows digital prompts to be accessed by scanning pre-selected trigger images at various locations in the centre of the city. After classroom preparation, students are sent on their mission to save the city from imminent destruction at the hands of a madman. They do this in small groups by locating the trigger images with the help of a map, and submitting a series of short videos to cloud storage within an hour. As a class, they need to make a total of 25 videos, so teamwork is essential. These videos are reviewed in a later classroom-based session for feedback and language analysis (Richardson, 2016).

The p-team

The third activity involves a story-based mission delivered via the *TaleBlazer* app. As in the previous game, learners work in teams to solve challenges based on a fictional 'hunt the bad guy' scenario, requiring them to navigate physical spaces, collect clues and communicate with other groups to solve riddles. A video briefing introduces the narrative, after which participants use the app to receive prompts and record responses, all triggered by GPS as they approach the various locations.

This game aligns with the collaborative and interactive competencies emphasised in the Cambridge Proficiency Exam. Learners are required to negotiate meaning, solve problems and manage tasks – all in English and under time constraints.

Learner evaluations

Feedback from participants across the various activities has been largely positive. The location-based games are frequently described as enjoyable and motivating, with many participants highlighting their novelty and the contrast they offer to more traditional classroom formats. Overall, the activities are seen to support not only language development but also engagement, collaboration and a greater sense of ownership over the learning process.

Questions and practical considerations

The session prompted a number of audience questions, particularly around the practical implementation of such games. It is important to note that the games are not an extra, tagged on as a reward on a Friday afternoon. They are all anchored in a package of lessons in a particular course thus giving them more credibility. Concerns were raised about the time and preparation required to design the activities, especially when integrating digital tools like *TaleBlazer*. Although setup requires an initial time investment, subsequent iterations are quicker and can be adapted for different groups or contexts.

Clarification was provided on how the *TaleBlazer* app uses GPS to trigger tasks based on a learner's physical location, and examples were shared of how tasks can be scaled down or simplified for teachers with limited tech access or time.

Concluding insights

The key message of the session was that innovation in language teaching need not be overwhelming. With careful planning and a willingness to try something new, teachers can create memorable experiences that extend language use beyond the classroom.

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7.5 Academic reading circles on an International Foundation Year

Joshua Mason-Goodall *Queen Mary University of London, UK*

Working with international students on an International Foundation Year (IFY) in the humanities and social sciences has highlighted how complex and varied academic reading challenges can be. Consequently, I explored the use of academic reading circles (ARCs), a structured, collaborative approach developed by Seburn (2016). My aim was supporting student engagement with academic texts while creating a more inclusive learning environment. My IATEFL talk, in a forum on academic reading, explained how I implemented ARCs in my teaching, my learning from observation and feedback, and how these insights are informing my classroom research.

The IFY prepares international students from diverse national, linguistic and educational backgrounds for undergraduate study in the humanities and social sciences. I had 13 students from 13 different countries, with IELTS scores ranging from 5.5 to 7.5. Many had 'jagged profiles', e.g. strong speaking skills but lower reading proficiency. Both students and colleagues identified academic reading as particularly challenging, citing dense language, abstract ideas and unfamiliar cultural references. These barriers undermined students' confidence and their ability to critically engage with readings and apply them in writing.

I introduced ARCs to address these challenges. They break the reading process into rotating roles (e.g. summariser, connector and highlighter), with students focusing on one aspect of the text and completing a role-specific handout before a group discussion. Ideally, this structure makes reading more manageable, promotes peer accountability, and helps students co-construct understanding, while accommodating varied levels of motivation and confidence.

I used ARCs on a course that had seven parallel classes. While all groups followed the same curriculum, mine was the only one using ARCs. One of our four-weekly sessions was dedicated to the activity. Each week, students received a new academic text and completed their handouts. In class, they peer-checked these before taking part in student-led discussions, while I observed and offered support as needed. After each session, students completed a brief reflection and a short 'handover' task, during which they met with the peers who would take on their role in the next ARC cycle

(for example, the next connector met with the current connector). These brief handover meetings allowed students to share what they had found challenging, easy or useful in their role, and to offer suggestions for how it might be approached differently next time.

The impact on engagement was clear. Handout submission was high (92 per cent) and students came to class prepared. Several said they enjoyed hearing others' perspectives. One student commented they enjoyed 'gaining ideas from other people I wouldn't otherwise think of', while another said, 'exchanging ideas and perspectives in a verbal form is helpful and fun'. Attendance was also higher than in other groups, and some students creatively designed their handouts with colour and illustrations. One told me he felt guilty for submitting weak work and was determined to improve next time. This peer-driven accountability became a key motivator.

There were, however, challenges. Some struggled with the length and complexity of the texts, which limited participation. The handover task didn't always work as intended, especially when vocabulary was a barrier. A more serious issue emerged around inclusivity. One student with a lower reading score arrived unprepared and was excluded by her peers. She did not return to ARC sessions. This reminded me that while peer-led activities can boost engagement, they can also unintentionally marginalise already vulnerable learners.

Another challenge was the uneven quality of group discussions. Some took the initiative as leaders, while others hesitated. One student said: 'Sometimes some people may be too shy to speak up. It takes additional effort to make them speak or make up for their absence in a conversation'. This highlighted the need for better scaffolding of group management and for building students' confidence in leading academic discussions. This point was echoed by several other speakers in the IATEFL forum, suggesting that developing students' interpersonal and organisational skills for group work is a widespread concern.

At the end of the semester, I distributed a short questionnaire. Most students felt that ARCs helped them understand texts more deeply and boosted their confidence. However, they continued to struggle with vocabulary, argument identification and group dynamics. These reflections led me to three research questions:

- How can I better support students in leading ARC discussions?
- What strategies build confidence and participation, especially among quieter students?
- How do ARCs influence students' academic writing, particularly in synthesising sources and constructing arguments?

At a time when EAP is increasingly under pressure from external providers, I believe practitioner-led research is essential. ARCs provide a principled, practical way to respond to student needs while developing my own practice. Despite some challenges, they show strong potential for promoting inclusivity, accountability and deeper engagement with academic texts. I look forward to continuing this work and sharing future findings.

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7.6 Paper and scissors rock: reframing essay revising skills

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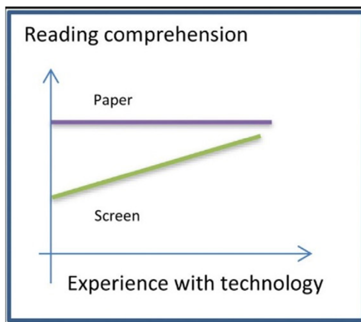
Why paper and scissors?

In teaching academic writing, it is essential to help learners understand that writing is a process, consisting of numerous steps and elements. Learners must become aware of the writing process itself so that they can develop their own approach. A key element in developing academic writing skills is critical and analytical reading.

Nowadays, our students prevalently work from screens. Various meta-analyses of research indicate this results in shallower information processing, partly from how we physically interact with the on-screen text and the mental resources allocated (Clinton, 2019). Furthermore, learners demonstrate poor 'calibration accuracy' (Clinton, 2019, p. 317), frequently misjudging the effort needed to successfully perform a task, especially on screens as compared to paper. They are often unaware of the micro-distractions of constant miniscule eye movements on screens, which make it harder to reach the focus needed for higher-order critical thinking. Medium matters, as students perceive paper as being harder to read. Moreover, being used to using screens for leisure, they habitually process digital information more shallowly (Sidi et al., 2017, as cited in Clinton, 2019).

Yet we frequently assume that young people are digital natives and have learnt from an early age how to process digital information, and that therefore this discrepancy between paper and screen should diminish with future generations.



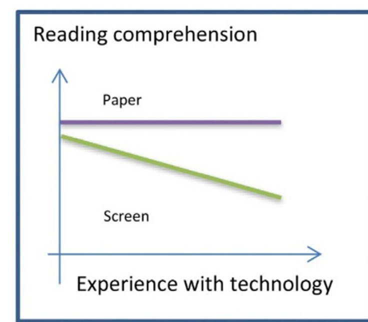


Figure 7.6.1: *'Hypothesis that the paper advantage over digital media increases with time' (Delgado et al., 2018, pp.25–26)* Note: Reprinted with permission

However, in their study, Delgado et al. conclude that 'mere experience with digital technology does not improve students' comprehension skills, but instead has a detrimental effect' (2018, p. 25).

As teachers, we must address these issues, starting with busting the digital native myth. Szpunar et al., (2014, as cited in Clinton, 2019) found less mind wandering in lectures with activities designed to increase calibration accuracy. We should therefore use tailored in-class activities which train students to increase their attention and focus, especially when reading and writing academic texts. The haptics and physicality of paper play a vital and often overlooked role in encouraging deeper student processing and learning: for effective writing and editing, learners often need the navigational cues that paper provides to stimulate their deeper thinking processes.

The task

This paper and scissors task aids editing for textual organisation, coherence and noticing, while promoting learner autonomy. Teaching these thinking and editing skills is essential, especially with the advent of AI; we should not assume our students are automatically familiar with them. As Delgado et al. explain: 'We cannot idly wait for screen inferiority to disappear... [it] is a major challenge across age groups that becomes more severe as the presence of technology increases' (2018, p. 34).

Adapted from a task found in Bruce Ballenger's *The Curious Researcher* (2004), this cut-and-paste workshop, used in the final research paper drafting stages in our academic writing course, helps the learner to actively interact with the text. Through a series of steps that entail close reading of the text, the task focuses attention on one aspect of the paper at a time, which naturally increases the learner's calibration accuracy.

For the in-class workshop, students bring a hard copy of their research paper, printed on one side only. Step 1 entails cutting the text into individual paragraphs and mixing them up to enable focus on each individual paragraph. This also helps the reader to step back from the overall text, which is much harder when revising on screen. The next several steps involve identification and marking of elements of the paragraph such as topic, metacommentary, incorporation of sources, unity, organisation and coherence (or lack thereof) with the thesis statement. Once the critical reading of the individual paragraphs is complete, the next steps focus on reconstruction of the paper, using only those paragraphs previously identified as developing the thesis, into a revised, and often much different, version, with which they continue to work.

Extremely flexible and adaptable to various levels, this task helps the learner to internalise essential editing skills. The cutting up of the text into separate paragraphs enables the reader to see each element of the text as an independent entity, promoting increased focus on the task highlighted in each step. The haptic approach therefore facilitates noticing and critical analysis. Overall, the task promotes increased awareness of the steps necessary for successful paper revision, while familiarising learners with the nuances of the reading and writing process.

If you are interested in a file with four versions of the task we have used, and with the steps spelled out clearly, please contact one of the authors via email.

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7.7 English training programme for nurses in Portugal

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In recent decades, the growing demands of international mobility and academic engagement have increased the need for English language proficiency among healthcare professionals in Europe. In Portugal, nursing students are expected to read scientific literature, participate in exchange programmes and interact in multicultural environments. However, English courses in undergraduate nursing programmes often fail to meet these specific needs.

Aligned with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), our study aimed to design and pilot an English course tailored to the professional and academic contexts of nursing students at the University of Évora, Portugal. As defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is an approach to language teaching that focuses on learners' specific goals and their communicative demands. ESP courses are built upon needs analyses, which guide the selection of linguistic content, skills and methodologies.

Needs analysis

Our study followed a mixed-methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The needs analysis will be conducted in two phases, of which the first phase has already been completed, during which a pilot questionnaire was distributed to 100 undergraduate students at São João de Deus Nursing School. The survey explored students' self-reported proficiency in English, their frequency of English usage in academic tasks, and their previous experiences with language learning. These proficiency levels were self-assessed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). A second round of data collection, including follow-up questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, is currently in progress.

Although the questionnaire was distributed to 100 students, a small number of participants did not answer all items, so the percentages reported here refer to valid responses for each question. Initial results confirmed a significant gap between the students' language needs and their prior exposure to English for healthcare contexts. While many students demonstrated intermediate proficiency in reading and listening,

only 6 per cent reported a C1 level in speaking, and most had never taken a healthcare-specific English course. Significantly, 94.1 per cent of participants indicated that they had never studied medical English, despite recognising its importance for understanding technical vocabulary and communicating with patients and colleagues.

Figure 7.7.1 summarises the students' self-reported proficiency levels. In listening, 32 per cent reported reaching C1, while in reading skills the majority fell within A2 to B2 levels. Speaking proficiency was considerably lower, with 45 per cent at A2 and only 6 per cent at C1. When asked about their use of English in academic tasks, only 27 per cent frequently read texts in English. In contrast, 50 per cent used English more often for research tasks such as preparing for exams or presentations, indicating that English is essential for academic purposes but underused in day-to-day learning.

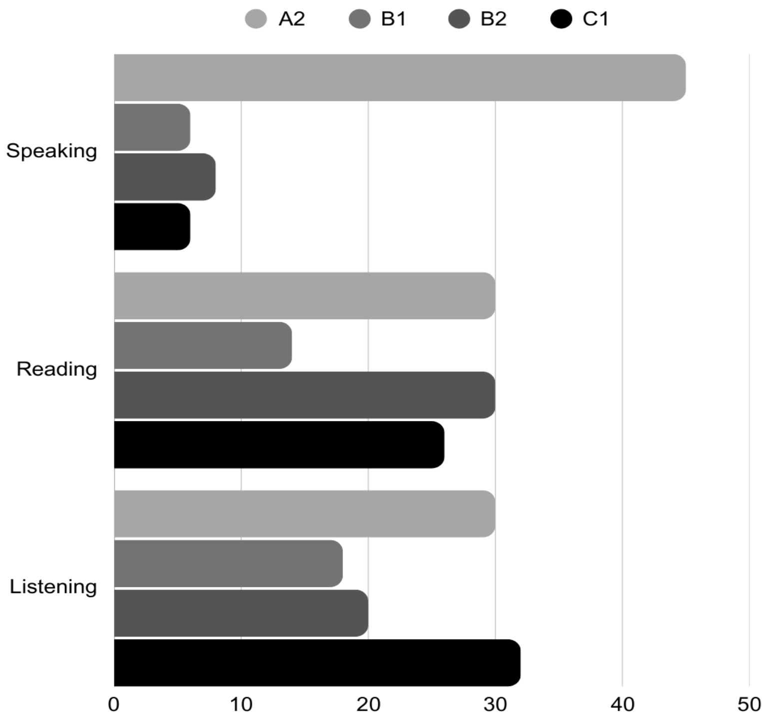

Figure 7.7.1: *Students' self-reported proficiency levels*

Students also expressed a preference for hybrid course models, combining in-person and online instruction, as well as the availability of self-study materials. Based on these findings, we defined two core priorities for course design: the acquisition of technical vocabulary (49 per cent) and the development of speaking skills (38 per cent). Given the time constraints (16-hour course), we adopted a focused strategy to address these areas.

The course was structured around real-world themes and materials relevant to nursing. We used adapted excerpts from the *Cambridge English for Nursing* coursebook,

TED-Ed videos for listening and speaking activities, and *Kahoot!* games to reinforce vocabulary learning. The games were organised around key topics such as hospital equipment, injuries and types of medication delivery systems. Students also participated in structured discussions using prompts related to their professional experience, values and challenges as future nurses.

This approach resonates with Hidayati and Haryati (2018), who emphasise the importance of contextualised ESP instruction in health-related fields. Their research highlights that nursing students engage more actively and perform better when language materials are aligned with clinical settings and academic requirements. Following their recommendations, we prioritised relevance, authenticity and learner autonomy in our materials.

Our pilot course represents an initial but meaningful step toward integrating ESP into the nursing curriculum. Grounding the course in a thorough needs analysis allowed us to tailor the content to the students' academic and clinical realities. This approach focused on nursing-related topics and technical vocabulary, addressing the concrete demands faced by nursing students in both educational and professional healthcare settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings confirm the urgency of structured ESP programmes in nursing education. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest, learners are motivated when the content is directly connected to their field, and this motivation can lead to more effective language acquisition. Our experience also reinforces the value of using data-driven methodologies to inform course design. The results of the second phase of our study, including interviews and post-course feedback, will provide further insight into the programme's long-term impact.

Acknowledgement

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8 Teaching young learners and teenagers

This chapter is dedicated to the teaching of young learners and teenagers, offering both insights and practical techniques. To begin, faced with common challenges related to young learners' creative writing, **Unnati Ved** turns to GenAI for support, and discovers that when carefully integrated, it can not only scaffold creativity, deepen engagement and foster learner autonomy, but also turn writing into a playful and fun activity. Moving on to multiple literacies, **Ellen Setterfield** provides an overview of essential literacies that young learners need to navigate and shape the world, together with practical suggestions on how to integrate these in the primary classroom. Reporting on a project to foster pre- and in-service primary teachers' competences regarding virtual exchange, **Annika Kolb** and **Nurjona Pinguri** describe and exemplify how they developed quality criteria for virtual exchange projects, while empowering young learners to address real-world issues. **Melisha Robinson** recounts how she implemented a plurilingual approach in India, and shares techniques arising from classroom research with young learners that can be used in both multilingual and monolingual contexts. **Josianne Block** also reports on classroom research regarding own language use, this time in the context of adolescent migrant learners. Seeking to better understand how learners use languages during interactive group tasks, she concludes that caution is needed when advocating for a multilingual approach in the classroom. Turning to a focus on speaking, **Nobuo Yuzawa** examines the adequacy of spoken models used in textbook audio materials in Japan's elementary school English education, identifying various issues and offering suggestions to address these. Nobuo concludes that reforming audio materials is both necessary and urgent to support long-term communicative development. Next, to explore secondary students' apparent reluctance to express themselves in English, **Nino Sturua** undertook classroom research. Nino's findings provided valuable insights into underlying reasons for this, from which she was able to create an action plan to build confidence and improve oral communication skills. In another small-scale study in a Scottish secondary school, **María Inés Vallejo** explores how learners construct their language learner identities and discovers that by intentionally fostering investment, we can help learners move beyond extrinsic motivators and connect more deeply with the language and the people who speak it. Focusing on materials, **Rieke Dieckhoff** and **Jan-Erik Leonhardt** report on insights from a pilot study with English language teachers into how series and serials to address gender and LGBTQIA+ are used in secondary classrooms. **Sylvie Doláková** then describes how she introduced a creative, hands-on, child-centred educational technique – lapbooks, or 'project books' – to Czech, Slovak and Polish teachers. Sylvie explores the educational value and challenges of the method, describes how it can be adapted for both individual and group activities, and offers guidelines for implementation. Finally, we end this chapter with a Signature talk paper by **Liam**

Anderson of Express Publishing – *The ABCs of ELT: introducing values through English language teaching*, in which he addresses the question: What is the purpose of education if it doesn't help shape kind, thoughtful and responsible citizens? Liam offers a practical yet principled roadmap for embedding values into everyday language instruction, inviting educators to see themselves not only as language teachers, but as facilitators of deeper human development.

8.1 Enhancing creative writing among young learners (ages 8–12) using AI tools

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Constraints often spark creativity in classrooms (Boden, 2001; Tan, 2024; Tromp & Sternberg, 2024). In my young learners' writing classroom in Hyderabad, India, I was confronted with challenges common to many English language teachers: learners were reluctant to write, their stories lacked figurative language and vivid descriptions, and they rarely engaged in proofreading. These constraints compelled me to explore innovative ways to reignite learner interest in creative writing.

One such innovation was the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Generative AI refers to systems capable of producing new content autonomously – including text, images and audio.

Methodology: creative writing challenges and AI-driven interventions

Each challenge was addressed through targeted activities using AI tools such as DALL·E and ChatGPT, designed to enhance different aspects of the writing process.

1 Overcoming reluctance to write: AI-generated visual prompts and sensory mapping

To address reluctance and increase relevance, I used DALL·E to generate an image of an Indian neighbourhood on a rainy day. The image was projected in the classroom, and placards representing the five senses – *What do I see? What do I hear? What do I taste? What do I smell? What do I feel?* – were placed around the room. Working in pairs, learners wrote related sensory details on post-it notes and stuck them on the corresponding placards.

This scaffolded, kinaesthetic approach not only encouraged idea generation but also reduced the cognitive load typically associated with open-ended writing tasks. Learners then used these ideas to compose a paragraph, incorporating at least one sensory detail. Sentence prompts helped them get started, ensuring all learners could participate meaningfully.

2 Integrating figures of speech through AI-generated imagery

Despite the emphasis placed on figurative language in India's National Curriculum Framework, my learners struggled to include similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech in their writing. I once again turned to DALL·E to generate fantastical scenes (e.g. a tranquil lake). I modelled a paragraph rich in sensory detail and figures of speech. Then, learners identified examples of similes, metaphors, personification and onomatopoeia in the paragraph, using the table below:

Figure of speech	Example
The tree looked as grand as a mountain.	simile
Leaves rustled, birds chirped.	onomatopoeia

Table 8.1.1: *Figure of speech examples*

Students were then offered a choice of AI-generated images – *Candy Land, A Teenager's Messy Desk, Enchanted Forest* or *A Metropolitan City*. Working in groups, they completed a similar table with original figures of speech inspired by the image. These were used to craft a vivid setting paragraph, with the teacher's model used as a mentor text.

3 Enhancing character development through AI-generated prompts and avatars

Character development often felt superficial in student writing. To enrich this, I used ChatGPT to generate quirky, imaginative character prompts suitable for 8–10-year-olds, such as a fearless explorer, a brilliant scientist, a retired pirate captain. Learners worked in pairs with a graphic organiser featuring scaffolded questions, e.g. *What is the character's job? What do they wear? How do they look? Where are they now? What are their likes and dislikes?* This structure encouraged them to elaborate on each aspect of their character. A mentor text that mirrored the organiser's format was shared to model vivid description and effective use of detail. Students were then tasked with composing their own character descriptions, ensuring each element from the organiser was woven into their writing. These descriptions were then entered into DALL·E, which generated AI avatars of their characters. This visual output greatly boosted learner motivation. Teachers could extend this activity by laminating the avatars or turning them into bookmarks or mini character cards. If DALL·E asked follow-up questions before generating avatars, such as, *What colour is the outfit?* or *What kind of shoes does the character wear?*, it could serve as a formative tool, highlighting missing details in the learners' descriptions. This would not only encourage richer character development but also promote self-reflection and revision in the writing process.

4 Encouraging proofreading with AI-assisted self-assessment

Proofreading was an overlooked step in my learners' writing process. Rather than correcting errors myself, I used ChatGPT to analyse student writing and report back general error statistics, for example, *This paragraph has four spelling mistakes and three punctuation errors.* Instead of correcting each error, I presented the feedback to students and asked them to locate potential errors themselves before final submission. This raised awareness of common mistakes and encouraged reflective editing.

Conclusion

While Generative AI is still new to many classrooms, its thoughtful integration into ELT settings can scaffold creativity, deepen engagement and foster learner autonomy. These tools are not replacements for teachers but powerful companions in enhancing writing pedagogy. For young learners, the combination of playfulness, structure and visual reinforcement created a writing environment that felt less like a task and more like a fun activity.

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8.2 Preparing for the future: exploring multiple literacies with young learners

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What are multiple literacies, and why do they matter?

Have you read anything today? Perhaps a message from a friend, or this book. However, written texts are only part of the picture; there are many other ways that we can 'read' and understand the world we live in. As we engage increasingly with technology, literacy has evolved to include a larger set of skills including 'digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship' (UNESCO, 2025). This is reflected in education, where students today may use videos, infographics and AI to research and present their ideas.

The world we live in today is amazing, beautiful and diverse – but it comes with challenges. Generation Alpha children (those born between the early 2010s and the mid-2020s) are expected to spend over 37 years of their life online (Grange, 2024). While digital content is engaging, it can be overwhelming and misleading if we lack the skills to interpret it.

The skills our learners need

There's no single list of essential literacy skills for young learners, but it's important to focus on those that are useful both now and in the future, and that are transferable across contexts and media. The good news is we can include these skills in our classes without needing separate 'multiple literacies' lessons. Let's consider some example activities for primary-school aged students.

Textual literacy

Students use written material to learn new things, form opinions and make appropriate decisions, as well as to communicate with others.

One way to build these skills is by using images to scaffold a reading task. Ask learners to make predictions about the text based on accompanying pictures. For younger or lower-level students, provide more support by eliciting what they can see in each picture before making predictions about the text.

Visual literacy

Visual literacy helps students interpret and evaluate the messages they encounter in images, charts, signs and videos. A simple classroom activity to integrate these skills is to have learners compare a picture (e.g. children at school) with their own experience. Answering questions such as, 'What do you see in the picture?' and 'Is it the same as your classroom or different?' practises students' observation and description skills, as well as building cultural awareness.

Social literacy (SEL)

When we are socially literate, we understand our emotions and those of others. We are empathetic and tolerant, and can adapt our behaviour to be able to communicate, collaborate and problem solve in different situations.

Reading texts or comic strips can provide a great opportunity for young learners to explore and develop their social skills. For example, discussing the facial expressions or postures in illustrations can help learners practise recognising others' emotions. We can also discuss other social skills as they relate to a text, for example how the characters help each other.

Media literacy

Media (from TV and the internet to video and music) shapes our understanding of the world. It's essential that our students learn to critically evaluate what they see and hear, and reflect on the messaging and impact of their own communications.

A key media literacy skill for children and teenagers is to be able to research a topic and evaluate the information they find. Before setting students a research task, it can be beneficial to discuss where and how they can find accurate, reliable information. Even young learners can ask questions such as: Who created this? When and where was it published? Why was it made?

Global literacy

Global literacy connects to sustainability and global citizenship, helping students understand their role in the wider world.

Use a simple graphic organiser of concentric circles to help your young learners think globally and understand how they are part of a greater whole. Consider a topic (such as recycling) or an inquiry-based big question, and ask what this would look like:

- Within their inner circle? (their family, friends, and people they know)
- In their middle circle? (their community, school, or neighbourhood)
- In their outer circle? (in their town, their country, or the wider world)

By nurturing multiple literacies in young learners, we equip them to both navigate the world and to shape it. These skills empower students to think critically, communicate effectively, and act responsibly in an ever-changing, interconnected world.

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8.3 Virtual exchange in the young learners' language classroom

Annika Kolb *and* **Nurjona Pinguri** *University of Education Freiburg, Germany*

Virtual exchange offers valuable opportunities for language learning in the primary and pre-school classroom. Through engagement in authentic communicative situations, even young learners can develop linguistic, intercultural and digital competences (Pennock-Speck & Clavel-Arroitia, 2022). Despite this potential, virtual exchange is still underutilised in early language education, partly due to a lack of teacher training. This paper presents activities of the Erasmus+ project INVITED (Integrating primary and pre-school virtual exchange projects into language teacher education) as well as an outcome of the project – quality criteria for virtual exchange projects with young language learners.

The INVITED project

The INVITED project seeks to foster both pre- and in-service teachers' competences regarding virtual exchange. Four European universities develop training material on virtual exchange to include in their curriculum, and aim to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience virtual exchange projects with children during practice phases as part of their studies. At the same time, a professional development course is being developed for in-service teachers to be published on the European School Education Platform (ESEP). After a survey with pre- and in-service teachers on their experiences with and their needs regarding virtual exchange (INVITED consortium, 2024), the project is building a community of teachers interested in virtual exchange with young learners. The community is promoted through the project website as well as an eTwinning group on ESEP (European Commission, 2024). It provides opportunities to exchange experiences and materials, displays good practice examples and short how-to-do videos, and hosts a series of webinars by experienced teachers.

Quality criteria for virtual exchange projects with young learners

Given the specific requirements of virtual exchange projects with young learners, the project consortium set out to develop quality criteria for virtual exchange in the early language classroom, based on a variety of sources: 1) existing research on virtual exchange in primary school; 2) a questionnaire survey with in-service teachers; and 3) criteria for the eTwinning quality labels.

1 Research on virtual exchange projects in early language classrooms almost exclusively focuses on primary education, with no studies in pre-school contexts. Key factors for successful virtual exchange projects that are highlighted in various projects are language scaffolding, classroom management, task sequencing, good communication between partners and a balance between guidance and learner autonomy (Pennock-Speck & Clavel-Arroitia, 2022).

2 A questionnaire survey involved 309 in-service primary and pre-school teachers from the project countries. The results showed that teachers emphasised the importance of authentic communication (95.1 per cent), as well as pre-planned and structured tasks (79.7 per cent).

3 The criteria that are annually awarded for outstanding virtual exchange projects by the Twinning initiative furthermore informed the criteria development. They emphasise collaboration, appropriate use of technology, student-centred learning, curricular integration and documentation of project results.

Drawing on these sources and with the participation of experienced practitioners in the field, quality criteria for virtual exchange projects in early language education were grouped into five categories: *content*, *teaching methodology*, *communication*, *use of technology* and *outcomes* (see full criteria and definitions here: https://invited-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Criteria-and-Definitions.pdf). It goes without saying that no virtual exchange project will fulfil all the criteria. They are designed to help evaluate projects and identify good practice examples.

Sample project: reducing plastic pollution

To illustrate this set of criteria, here is a sample virtual exchange project that took place between two primary school classes from France and Germany. The children had been learning English for three and two years respectively. The reducing plastic pollution project focused on plastic consumption. Through hands-on activities, such as collecting plastic waste and clean-up days, and collaborative tasks between the partner classes, students explored alternatives to plastic and developed a shared understanding of plastic pollution through both synchronous and asynchronous activities.

The project addressed a relevant topic for the children. It followed a cross-curricular approach since it included science teaching as well as maths when the children compared the weight of plastic waste they had collected. Students jointly developed videos with the app ChatterPix, in which animals suffering from plastic pollution asked for help, highlighting the impact of plastic on the environment. The videos were sent to the partner class, which was tasked with finding a solution for the different animals' problems, thus making the videos a collaborative product. Technology was creatively used to communicate and develop a multimodal product since the app allowed the children to animate photos with voice over. The project empowered students to address real-world issues, producing visible outcomes that impacted both their classrooms and the wider community.

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8.4 A plurilingual pathway for children learning English

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A plurilingual approach to learning new languages does not develop language skills in isolation but involves learners drawing upon previously known languages and experience to help mediate meaning (Council of Europe, 2001). This natural process can be seen with young learners, who often do not make distinctions between languages but rather focus on who they are speaking to and how they can be understood. Inclusive practices like this highlight linguistic diversity and challenge English-only perspectives, which have dominated classroom practice for decades. This article shares some ideas based on classroom research with young learners in India. These techniques can be used in both multilingual contexts and monolingual contexts.

Why is a plurilingual approach necessary for young learners?

The linguistic, cognitive and affective benefits of a plurilingual approach to language learning are well-documented. Piccardo and Galante (2018) explain how it provides learners with more choice and ownership over their learning, builds their confidence and improves metacognition, pluricultural awareness and competence. Most importantly, using a plurilingual approach from an early age promotes an inclusive mindset.

How can you implement a plurilingual approach?

Create a linguistic profile: Documenting learners' other languages makes teachers aware of the linguistic resource available in class and lets learners know that their languages are valued. Learners could list the languages they know and indicate their proficiency on a scale of 1–5. They could add when they use different languages and with whom. The teacher can use this knowledge to provide targeted linguistic support and group learners with similar languages for tasks.

Give options to use other languages: Learners could have the option to use their first language for tasks such as self-reflection or planning for a writing task. If a learner self-reflects in the language they are most comfortable with, they can be more critical and accurate, and recall is often higher. Planning this way for a writing task can also help them access information better and bring it together to share in English. This often gives them more confidence and clarity when sharing.

Contrastive analysis: Learners could start off doing a task in English and repeat it in other languages. The teacher can help them reflect on what they did additionally when they repeated it. For instance, if the task requires young learners to discuss, design and draw their inventions, they could repeat the discussion in other languages to expand their ideas further.

Using translation: Translation is a useful skill for language learning in social, academic and professional contexts. Setting up translation tasks makes learners feel freer to ask questions and express doubts, creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. Asking students to summarise a reading text in their language or respond to a listening text in other languages helps break the English-only barrier and emphasises the value and role of their languages as a resource in the English classroom.

What to keep in mind when implementing?

My primary learners were initially scared to use other languages in the Indian context because they are often forbidden from using them in school. Only after I used Tamil in class, did my learners attempt to use it. But once they got started, their level of engagement and confidence was very high. So, teachers can use other languages in class to start them off. If a teacher does not know learners' languages, they can invite a more confident learner to translate, thereby breaking the ice.

Secondary learners in the same context were more hesitant than their primary counterparts. Lower-level (A2) secondary learners appreciated using other languages more, as they found it useful and engaged with meaning more deeply, whereas students at B1 level and higher felt less comfortable using other languages and sometimes looked down on other languages, including their own. So, teachers should be ready to facilitate conversations about valuing linguistic diversity to promote a more positive learning environment.

About 60 parents at a workshop I conducted had mixed beliefs. Most agreed that there were benefits of using other languages and that children should value other languages, too. However, some parents shared concerns about their child's English-learning goals being impacted if we were to encourage the use of other languages in the classroom.

Conclusion

While a plurilingual approach celebrates linguistic diversity, it is pivotal to prioritise the learners' goal of learning English. So, while teachers should plan mini-tasks that allow learners to engage with their full language repertoire, judicious and timely use of plurilingual tasks will ensure that the learners' goal of learning English is not impacted.

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8.5 'A muzzling prison cell': understanding migrant interactions through teacher research

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Implementing a multilingual approach in our classrooms offers several benefits, especially for ESOL learners. Not only can it facilitate their meaning negotiation and serve as a scaffold for language learning, but acknowledging students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds also enhances their confidence. However, several academics argue that such approaches might be overly ambitious. After all, several societies still value linguistic separation, dismiss minoritised languages, and ignore discourses of conflict (Sah & Guofang, 2022; Tupas, 2024).

Embarking on a classroom research project

These contrasting approaches to multilingualism motivated me to undertake a classroom research project to better understand what really happened during the interactions among my migrant learners. My classroom comprised ten adolescent ESOL students hailing from different countries, all of whom had been learning English for less than a year. Over a period of three months, I conducted a set of 14 interactive activities in small groups, during which learners were given an open instruction to use any language (not just English) if it helped them complete the task. These activities aimed to mirror real-life interaction and to encourage collaboration. As a teacher-researcher, I wanted to investigate how learners used languages fluidly and strategically during these group tasks.

To do this, I recorded and transcribed the activities, wrote reflections in a journal after each lesson, and collected exit tickets from learners. I hoped that my continuous reflection would help me adapt my teaching practices to better suit the learners' needs but soon found myself questioning whether using learners' own languages in the classroom was always empowering.

One significant finding was that learners used their own languages to exclude group members, whether intentionally or not. Power dynamics, shaped by factors like personality, group formation and task type, often created tension as some students asserted dominance through language choice. Some students attempted to assert dominance by using a language which was not understood by the whole group, and consequently, others felt that their existing authority in the group was undermined. These power imbalances became a barrier to reaching task objectives, as languages were misused, and on certain occasions use of English became minimal. For instance, in one activity, students exclusively used their own languages to complete the task. While the task was completed, this undermined the goal of practising English. Moreover, speakers of minority languages were often excluded during task completion, leaving them feeling marginalised. This, in turn, led to diminished confidence in speaking English, as some students feared being mocked. One student even expressed this feeling in an exit ticket: 'I like the lesson because it's funny, but I don't like the other students talking in a weird way because I don't understand English very well. I don't want to be in the same group as them anymore'. This prompted an internal struggle for me: Where should I promote the use of learners' own languages, and where should I restrict it to prevent its misuse?

Confronting the truth and identifying a way forward

In my classroom, knowing the dominant language of the group gave more power. This aligned with literature claiming that linguistic capital does not necessarily mean being multilingual but rather knowing the languages of power (Sah & Guofang, 2022). This realisation was unsettling and challenged my beliefs. As I wrote in my reflective journal: 'It's as if my classroom has turned into a muzzling prison cell where you can't voice opinions in a language that's not in power'. To address this, I incorporated more collaborative tasks, rather than focusing merely on games, while taking into consideration students' feedback from their exit tickets and experimenting with group formation.

This was the first step toward transpositioning, which Li and Lee (2023) define as the process by which language users foster empathy and negotiate their identities to effectively participate in equitable interactions. Although I am by no means advocating for a return to monolingual approaches, classroom research made me realise the importance of caution when advocating for the use of learners' own languages in the classroom. As language teachers, we should focus on challenging instances in our classroom where speakers of certain languages are favoured. This happens and will probably continue to happen, despite our celebration of multilingual approaches, because ultimately, as Tupas (2024, p. ix) aptly states, 'We are all translanguagers, but not equally empowered ones'.

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8.6 A desirable spoken model for primary school EFL learners in Japan

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Introduction

In 2020, English was formally introduced as a subject for 5th- and 6th-graders in Japan, prompting seven companies to publish new textbooks and accompanying audio materials. By 2024, six of these companies had released revised editions, with electronic textbooks optionally available across districts. A key benefit of these electronic

versions is the ability for pupils to listen to audio outside the classroom. However, questions persist regarding the adequacy of the spoken models. This paper examines audio materials from the first edition produced by all seven publishers, and the second edition from two of the six companies. Since there were no notable differences among the 2020 materials, only the two most popular publishers were selected for detailed comparison in the 2024 edition. Although the content in the second edition differed from that of the first, several recurring problems were identified in both versions.

Problems

Eight primary problems were identified, including those previously raised by Yuzawa and Fraser (2024). First, intonation patterns were often inconsistent, with the same sentence rendered differently in similar contexts. Second, the speech rate was too slow – typically 85 to 95 words per minute (wpm), well below the natural conversation rate. Third, unnatural prominence was placed with rising pitch at the beginning of sentences, especially on the first-person singular pronoun. Although this may be partly caused by the slow speech rate, the same pattern is commonly observed among Japanese university students, who may be unaware of its pragmatic meaning. Fourth, exaggerated pronunciation distorted natural intonation, with one example being a casual question that sounded like an interrogation. Fifth, tonic syllables were sometimes misplaced. In one case, old information was given prominence instead of being downgraded. Sixth, natural features of connected speech were insufficiently realised, possibly due to the overly slow rate. Seventh, intonation patterns did not always follow standard rules, particularly when listing items. Eighth, strong Japanese-accented pronunciation was observed in the articulation of both vowels and consonants. These problems may hinder the development of listening comprehension and natural speech production.

Speech rate

My Conference presentation also addressed how speech rate can affect listening development. Hayati (2010) argues that prolonged exposure to unnaturally slow input hampers learners' ability to develop authentic listening skills. This suggests that continued reliance on such speech may impede long-term listening development. Huang and Gráf (2020) report that the average speech rate in British English radio broadcasts is 150 to 170 wpm, with even higher rates in interviews and conversations. These findings highlight the significant gap between real-world English and the classroom recordings currently in use. One Conference participant also noted that similar problems with slow speech rates are found in Korean primary school English materials.

Proposals

To address these problems, seven key proposals are offered. First, the speech rate should be increased so that neither natural intonation nor features of connected speech are disrupted. Second, narration should avoid exaggerated articulation and aim for more natural delivery. Recordings should simulate authentic speech as closely as possible. Third, features of connected speech – such as linking and elision – should be explicitly taught through comparison with careful speech. Understanding these features helps pupils become more accustomed to natural spoken English. Fourth, intonation

patterns should follow standard rules during early instruction. Just as athletes start with proper form before competing, language learners benefit from mastering basic intonation before exploring variation. Fifth, exposure to varied accents should be introduced gradually. In primary education, non-standard accents should not exceed 10 per cent of audio materials. Sixth, AI technology should be used effectively. AI-powered applications offer flexible, realistic interaction and allow pupils to practise both listening and speaking anytime, anywhere. Seventh, the production process for educational audio materials should be revised. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) should establish clear guidelines to promote effective collaboration between textbook authors and narrators, and implement more thorough review procedures. Involving applied linguists and phonetics experts would help ensure the quality and authenticity of the audio content.

Conclusion

With the understanding that Japanese 5th- and 6th-graders can handle more complex input than typically assumed, this paper concludes that frequent exposure to authentic spoken English will boost their confidence and ability to engage in real-life communication. Reforming audio materials in Japan's elementary school English education is both necessary and urgent to support long-term communicative development. It is also worth considering collaboration with other EFL countries in producing audio materials that address shared challenges, such as slow speech rate.

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8.7 How to improve speaking skills in learners: exploratory action research

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Teaching context

I work at Samtredia Public School N1 in the west part of Georgia. Our school is one of the largest schools in Samtredia, accommodating approximately 900 students from elementary to secondary levels. I cater to learners across various proficiency levels within this diverse student body. The research I conducted pertains to a Grade 10 class, comprising 22 students.

Research focus

In light of my observations, I chose to focus on my students' apparent reluctance to express themselves freely in English. They exhibited a notable lack of confidence when making presentations, participating in discussions or engaging in dialogues. Consequently, I undertook this research to delve into the root causes of this issue, since despite their ongoing learning of grammar and vocabulary, a deficiency in their speaking abilities persists.

To initiate my research, I formulated exploratory questions aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the situation:

1 What kind of fluency activities do my students find most engaging and preferable?
2 How do my students prefer to practise and consolidate new vocabulary?
3 What types of fluency activities do my colleagues implement in the classroom?

Tools

To answer the questions and collect data, I used the following tools:

- a reflective journal;
- a student questionnaire; and
- an interview with colleagues.

Throughout the process of observation, for four weeks, I maintained a reflective journal for documenting my students' interactions. The central focus of my reflections centred on my strategies to actively engage and support students during various speaking activities, as well as my approach to providing pertinent feedback.

For the student questionnaire, I formulated ten questions. These questions were precise, concise and straightforward to reveal the reasons for students' reluctance to participate in speaking activities.

I also conducted two interviews with my colleagues to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives on the topic. Additionally, I seized the opportunity to observe one of my colleague's lessons, specifically focusing on activities geared toward fostering students' courage and confidence in speaking. This first-hand observation provided valuable insights into effective instructional approaches that promote student engagement and participation in speaking activities.

Findings

After analysing the data collected in relation to the fluency activities, the findings suggested that most learners (13 out of 22) preferred role plays. One student articulated this preference by stating: *I like taking part in role plays because I feel more confident.* Six students enjoyed providing personal information and only three preferred making presentations. However, reflective notes indicated that making presentations was the most challenging for learners due to shyness while speaking in front of a large audience. One student confirmed this by saying: *I feel a little bit shy when I stand in front of my class and make a presentation, as I am not confident if I use my words correctly.* Furthermore, it emerged that many students encountered challenges, particularly in engaging in debates, preferring instead to utilise newly acquired vocabulary in written form. Despite being comfortable with using target vocabulary in writing, learners found it challenging to incorporate new words into spoken language.

During interviews, most of my colleagues used storytelling, as they thought

students could create stories that helped them use new vocabulary. Additionally, they also used personalisation as a fluency activity. They said: *Some students feel free when they speak about themselves.*

Action plan

Based on the findings, it appears that my students' hesitance to engage in speaking activities is not primarily due to a lack of vocabulary, as initially presumed, given their proficiency in written tasks. Rather, it seems to be related to difficulties when attempting fluency exercises, as well as their shyness and insecurity, indicating a need for more practice and support. They can also benefit from a wider variety of speaking activities.

To address this issue, I will diversify the activities I implement in the classroom with fluency exercises:

1. Increase debate practice: create low-pressure debate activities to build confidence and improve argumentation skills.
2. Expand vocabulary use: encourage speaking activities to help students actively use new vocabulary in real-life situations.
3. More role plays: provide students with varied role-play scenarios to practise vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

By offering a wide range of speaking tasks, I aim to build their confidence and improve their oral communication skills. Furthermore, providing personalised assistance and encouragement will foster their progress in this area.

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8.8 Fostering investment for enhanced language acquisition

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In 2019, I conducted a small-scale qualitative study in a Scottish secondary school in Edinburgh, working with advanced higher students of Spanish. These students were considered successful language learners within their context, and I sought to understand what contributed to their sustained motivation and progress. Specifically, I explored how these learners constructed their language learner identities and what role their imagined identities played in their language learning experience.

The core questions guiding this research were:

1. How do successful language learners in a secondary Scottish school construct their language learner identity?
2. How can a successful language learner identity be perceived in such a context?
3. What role does this identity play in their learning experience?

Language identities and imagined communities

The concept of *imagined communities,* coined by Benedict Anderson (1983) and introduced in the context of ELT, particularly regarding identity, by Norton (2000), became central to my analysis. The idea that learners are not just acquiring a language but are imagining themselves as part of future communities of use proved crucial. My

participants frequently referenced how they saw themselves in future roles involving the language: living abroad, studying or working internationally, or forming relationships with speakers of the language.

This imagined community was not uniform. Even though the participants shared a common educational context, their visions of the future varied greatly. Some imagined themselves as fluent professionals working in Spain or Latin America, while others pictured casual travel or cultural immersion. Regardless of the specifics, the key point was that these imagined futures helped shape their current identities as language learners – and this identity in turn sustained their investment in the language.

My findings showed that participants who had a stronger sense of their imagined community also developed a clearer, more resilient identity as second language users. They demonstrated greater persistence, took more initiative in their learning, and sought more opportunities to engage with the language outside the classroom. In short, their investment was higher.

Investment: a core concept

The concept of *investment*, as distinct from simple motivation, provided a useful theoretical lens. Investment involves an emotional, social, and sometimes economic commitment to language learning. It reflects how much of the self the learner is willing to put into the process. A student who is invested doesn't just want to do well in class – they are, in a sense, already living part of their imagined identity.

This finding has important implications. If investment enhances language acquisition, then fostering investment should be a central concern for language educators. But how exactly can we do this?

Two pathways: learner autonomy and teacher investment

Based on both the research and my experience as a university-level language teacher, I propose two key areas of focus: learner autonomy and teacher investment.

Learner autonomy is not about leaving learners entirely on their own. Rather, it's about giving them structured opportunities to take ownership. This can involve letting students select topics or materials based on personal interests, encouraging goal-setting and self-monitoring, and promoting self-directed learning habits. These actions support not only linguistic growth but also identity formation – students begin to see themselves as legitimate users of the language.

Teacher investment, on the other hand, refers to the emotional and intellectual energy teachers bring into the classroom. I've observed that when teachers demonstrate genuine commitment – through consistent communication, responsiveness and emotional presence – students often mirror that investment. Students are more likely to engage when they sense that their teacher cares deeply about their learning journey.

Even small gestures can make a difference. Allowing time for informal conversation, incorporating humour or games, or giving students short mental breaks can reduce anxiety and build rapport. These practices create space for a more human, emotionally resonant experience with the language – one in which learners feel safe to try, to fail and to grow.

Concluding reflections

The challenge of sustaining engagement in language learning is one that resonates far beyond Edinburgh or Spanish classrooms. Across contexts, educators face the task of not only teaching content but also nurturing the inner worlds of learners – their identities, aspirations and imagined futures.

By intentionally fostering investment, we can help learners move beyond extrinsic motivators and connect more deeply with the language and the people who speak it. Whether through supporting learner autonomy or modelling passionate, caring teaching, we can open the door to more meaningful and lasting language acquisition.

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8.9 Popular series in English language education focusing on gender and LGBTQIA+: concepts and research

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Why work with TV series in English language education?

TV series are immensely popular among teenagers. More than 80 per cent of pupils in Germany's secondary schools watch series at least once a week, and 60 per cent watch films and series in English (Leonhardt, 2024). However, it is also their content and design that make series an asset in English language education. Contemporary series cover meaningful topics, ranging from love, friendship and family to critical and potentially sensitive issues such as racism, drug abuse, religion or mental health.

Our contribution focuses on one of these topics, namely gender and LGBTQIA+. Series are particularly well-suited to discussions of gender because they are characterised by prolonged narration and story time. Thus, the audience gets to know the characters and their development in detail, which may benefit a representation that is less prone to stereotypical and simplified narrative patterns. Also, films and series combine the narrative structure with visual and auditory cues that reveal how gender is expressed (König, 2016). The multimodal format thus facilitates the observation of gender expression through appearance, voice, intonation and patterns of interaction – elements less accessible in written texts.

Series_serials literacy as an objective for English language education

Series_serials literacy describes the 'learners' ability to use audiovisual series and serials … critically and autonomously in the context of English language education' (Leonhardt

& Viebrock, 2025, p. 25). The underscore between series_serials indicates different formats of serial narration. Both series and serials present narratives that are published on recurring patterns, e.g. characters and settings. While series are distinguished by self-contained episodes that can be watched in any order, serials have a continuous plot that develops across multiple episodes or seasons, and hybrid formats contain characteristics of both.

When dealing with series and serials in English language education, the following competence areas of series_serials literacy can be addressed:

- *Communicative competences:* focused on functional language use for comprehending a series or serial and communicating about it in English using correct technical terminology;
- *Narrative competences:* analysis of plot, characters and setting;
- *Aesthetic competences:* analysis of dramatic (e.g. costumes, set) and cinematographic design (e.g. camera angles, editing, music); and
- *Critical competences:* critical reflection of a series or serial, e.g. from a feminist or queer perspective; requires learners' awareness of series and serials being commercial products that promote a certain perspective and are not an immediate representation of reality.

To foster series_serials literacy, it is important to take the dynamic interrelation of these competence areas into account. The story that a series or serial tells is always related to how it is told through camera, editing and sound effects (Leonhardt, 2024). Moreover, it is important to address the specifics of serial composition that, for example, show in the use of cliff-hangers, outlooks or recaps, and thus distinguish series and serials from other audio-visual formats such as feature films.

A research project on the use of serials to address gender and LGBTQIA+

While there is empirical evidence regarding film-based English language education (Leonhardt, 2024), there are only sparse empirical insights on how series and serials are used in classrooms. Dieckhoff's ongoing dissertation project aims to address this issue by researching the in-class use of serials that make gender and LGBTQIA+ topical.

The ongoing project aims to contribute to a better understanding of how serials like *Heartstopper* (Netflix, 2022–2024) and *Sex Education* (Netflix, 2019–2023) can be employed to foster critical competences in particular. To achieve this aim, interviews with teachers and lessons in which a serial is employed to address gender and LGBTQIA+ are audiotaped and transcribed. So far, two secondary teachers and their three TEFL classes (pupils aged 15 to 17 years) have participated in the project. The transcripts as well as the products and texts created during these lessons are analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Preliminary insights from the pilot study of interviews with English language teachers indicate that they perceive watching serials on gender and LGBTQIA+ as enjoyable for students but struggle to reconcile their entertainment value with their conception of educational teaching. In addition, there seems to be tension between teachers' beliefs that gender and LGBTQIA+ should be regularly addressed in language teaching, and the German curricular guidelines, which only require these topics to be covered occasionally.

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8.10 The power of lapbook art in language education

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This paper presents a creative educational technique – lapbooks, or 'project books' (Doláková, 2024). The method, which emphasises active engagement, creativity, and emotional connection to content, was introduced to educators through a workshop aimed at connecting learning across subjects. Through crafting individualised mini-books that are later compiled into large thematic books, students are encouraged to explore, understand and retain educational content. The technique supports both individual and collaborative work and has been applied successfully in early childhood to secondary education.

Educators and parents alike often feel frustrated when students fail to recall facts presented only recently. While such failures may appear as inattentiveness, they realised that learners process information differently from adults, and passive exposure – whether visual or auditory – is often insufficient for long-term retention.

To address this issue, a hands-on, child-centred method known as the 'project book' (or lapbook) technique was introduced to Czech, Slovak and Polish teachers, drawing inspiration from American home-schooling families. These families often teach without textbooks or peer support, relying instead on individualised and reflective learning strategies.

The core of the technique involves students actively selecting and processing essential information from a topic and creatively capturing it in mini-books. These are small, colourful, folded paper formats tailored to the nature and structure of the content. Once created, these mini-books are assembled into a large project book, which serves both as a personal learning portfolio and as a visual summary of the topic.

The creative process fosters deep engagement. Students enjoy making their own educational artefacts, which strengthens memory retention. Students construct their knowledge through experiences and reflection.

The method can be adapted for both individual and group activities:

- **Individual work:** Students create autobiographical books, describing their physical features, family background, hobbies, dreams, and more, collecting them in long-term periods. Each element is illustrated using a different mini-book format,

providing a tangible and personalised outcome.
- **Group work:** Students collaborate on a shared theme, dividing responsibilities (e.g. drawing, writing, fact-checking). They develop organisational and communication skills, leading to a presentation to peers.

Teachers reported that both methods significantly increased student motivation and learning outcomes. Children developed presentation skills, took ownership of their work, and were eager to revisit and expand their books.

A project book combines three essential dimensions of learning:
- **Visual input** (organised information, diagrams, pictures).
- **Auditory exposure** (discussion, explanation over a chosen topic).
- **Kinaesthetic activity** (cutting, folding, assembling miniature formats for recording the facts).

This multisensory integration not only fosters deeper understanding but also supports differentiation, allowing learners to engage according to their strengths.

Some implementation guidelines, introduced at the workshop:
- **Topic selection:** Choose themes aligned with curricular goals (e.g. narrative structure, historical periods, scientific processes). For younger learners, story elements and vocabulary acquisition are particularly effective entry points.
- **Structure and design:** Topics are segmented into manageable sections. These can be represented through formats such as flap books, turning wheels, or accordion folds – chosen based on the nature and number of content parts. The presentation of such contributions emphasises reflection, while group projects foster research, organisation and peer-to-peer learning.

Educational value

The use of lapbooks offers a number of educational benefits. They:
- enhance retention through active creation;
- develop fine motor skills and planning;
- foster learner autonomy;
- encourage teamwork, communication and presentation abilities; and
- promote intrinsic motivation and ownership of learning.

Challenges and solutions

The technique might seem a bit time-demanding but this obstacle can be solved by using a limited number of formats or integrating their production into other lessons. Teachers' feedback was positive. They reported examples of improved engagement, creativity and retention. Some extended the method into subjects beyond language instruction, including science, history, civics and mathematics. Based on the presented examples, teachers reactions included: 'The children would absolutely love it.' 'They will remember much more and better.' 'They must be incredibly proud of their book.' These responses suggest that the method has the potential to transform traditional teaching by making learning more experiential, personalised and joyful.

With all these facts being presented to them, participants eagerly tried to make their own simple formats and agreed that the lapbook technique is more than a classroom novelty – it is a pedagogically grounded, emotionally rich and highly adaptable learning tool. It fosters independent thinking, collaboration and deep understanding.

Though it requires a time investment, the educational benefits, student enthusiasm and improved retention make it a valuable addition to modern teaching practices.

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8.11 Express Publishing Signature Event: The ABCs of ELT: introducing values through English language teaching

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We are living in fractured times where educators are increasingly faced with a critical question: What is the purpose of education if it doesn't help shape kind, thoughtful and responsible citizens?

In my Signature talk in Edinburgh, I explored this question from a deeply personal angle – both as a teacher and as a parent – fighting for a renewed focus on values education in ELT, especially with young learners. At a time when social, political and cultural divisions seem to grow wider by the day, the classroom remains one of the few spaces where seeds of empathy, fairness and ethical understanding can still be sown meaningfully.

My session offered a practical yet principled roadmap for embedding values into everyday language instruction. But more than that, it served as an invitation for educators to see themselves not only as gatekeepers of grammar and vocabulary, but as facilitators of deeper human development.

The ethical imperative in education

We began by asking three guiding questions: *What's the point of education if it doesn't help us become empathetic and responsible individuals? If it doesn't challenge injustice and promote equality? If it doesn't empower us to make a positive difference?*

These questions are not rhetorical, they are a moral call to action. Values are not peripheral to learning; they are foundational. And yet, too often in ELT, they are treated as add-ons, rather than integrated into the core of what and how we teach.

In our roles as teachers, we often act as mediators, mentors, and, whether we like it or not, models of moral behaviour. Particularly for young learners, who are still forming their understanding of the world, our classrooms are a microcosm of society, one in which values must be developed.

Nature or nurture?

Like language, values are both inherited and cultivated. Regardless of background, education serves as a levelling space where values can be consciously shaped. When values education is embedded intentionally into our teaching, it enhances not only student wellbeing but also the quality of learning, the strength of teacher-student relationships, and the moral fabric of the classroom community (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013).

Conversely, neglecting values education can result in learners who struggle with ethical decision-making, who lack empathy, who find it hard to resolve interpersonal conflicts, and who may suffer from poor mental health, often manifesting as bullying, exclusion and disconnection, which in turn inhibits learning.

Can values be taught?

The short answer is yes, but not through lectures or preaching. Values should not be 'occasional lessons' but rather embedded into the daily rhythm of classroom life. As teachers, we can:

- *Promote awareness* and make values explicit. Talk about *why* we say thank you, not just that we do.
- *Enable critical and creative thinking* and let learners explore 'what if' questions that promote deeper ethical judgement.
- *Apply values* and help children transfer classroom values to real life, on the playground, at home or in their communities.
- *Recognise* and celebrate when children demonstrate values, not just when they get the language 'right'.

Teaching values effectively involves a multi-layered approach: socialisation, modelling, explicit instruction and experiential learning. These are not separate from language instruction; in fact, they enrich it.

Teaching the language of values

Language is the vehicle through which values are understood, negotiated and enacted. Young learners benefit enormously from being given the vocabulary of values, words like *fairness, honesty, kindness, courage*, not just to memorise, but to begin internalising them. Simple expressions like *Let's share, Thank you, You're a good friend* are more than just polite phrases; they are linguistic building blocks of ethical behaviour.

Socialisation

Children learn values partly through reinforcement by encouraging kindness, discouraging selfishness and praising cooperation. These everyday interactions matter. For example, consistently reinforcing the importance of saying *please* and *thank you* is not merely about etiquette; it's about reinforcing respect and gratitude.

Modelling positive behaviour

As teachers and adults, our actions speak louder than any vocabulary set. When we show patience, admit mistakes or treat every child with dignity, we are modelling ethical behaviour. For many children, especially those who may not experience this consistency at home, the classroom becomes a vital place of moral learning.

Opportunities for reflection and action

Critical thinking about values is essential. When learners are encouraged to reflect, question and make ethical choices, they become active participants in their moral development. Classroom activities that involve moral dilemmas, ethical reasoning or reflective storytelling help children practise empathy and logic simultaneously.

Practical strategies for values integration

Shifting from theory to practice by outlining accessible strategies for values integration in ELT classrooms, we explored a variety of activities that could be implemented in the classroom. These included:

- *Stories and literature*: Stories are powerful tools for moral exploration. By discussing characters' actions, choices and dilemmas, students can safely engage with difficult topics without making it too personal.
- *Drama and role play*: Acting out values-related scenarios (e.g. offering someone a seat, resolving a conflict, standing up for someone being bullied) allows learners to experience ethical decision-making viscerally.
- *Philosophy for children (P4C)*: This method uses guided questions and ethical dilemmas to encourage learners to explore values intellectually. For example, *Is it ever okay to lie?* might lead to deep, nuanced conversations, even with young learners.
- *Songs and rhymes*: Music embeds ideas emotionally and mnemonically. A song about kindness or cooperation followed by a classroom activity can leave a lasting impact.
- *Games and classroom routines*: Even simple games like 'The Pencil Case Game', where children must identify who a lost item belongs to, can reinforce values like honesty and responsibility.

Reflections as a parent and a teacher

This conversation was not theoretical for me. As a parent, I see daily how values are expressed and reciprocated. My child mirrors my tone, my actions, my judgements. As a teacher, I see how easily learners internalise fairness, compassion or perseverance when they are given the right environment. And I also see the heartbreak when children enter classrooms already burdened by prejudice, fear or exclusion.

It's not about turning the classroom into a moral boot camp, it's about recognising that every interaction we have with learners – every story we tell, every time we intervene in conflict, every rule we explain – is an opportunity to nurture a value. And these values, when layered into language instruction, don't detract from academic rigour, they enhance it.

A collective commitment

The challenge before us is to view values education not as an extra burden but as part of the very fabric of ELT. Language is about connection, and connection is grounded in respect, understanding and shared human values. As educators from around the world, we have a unique opportunity, and responsibility, to support our learners not only to learn English, but to become better humans.

This isn't always easy. It requires courage, consistency and compassion. But the payoff is profound. In nurturing these values, we don't just teach children how to ask for directions or describe their hobbies – we teach them how to stand up for a friend, how to include someone who's different, how to listen with empathy. And perhaps, in doing so, we make a small but meaningful contribution to a more connected, compassionate world.

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9 Assessment

In this chapter on assessment, we find papers on formative assessment practices, exam preparation strategies and national test result analyses. Starting with the implementation of student-centred assessment as learning, **Bárbara Duarte** and **Juliana Azevedo** recount how they involved students in co-constructing rubrics to assess the final project of a unit of study in a private English language institute in Brazil. From Ukraine, **Violetta Panchenko**, **Natalia Dmitrenko** and **Olena Hladka** describe how they have responded to their stressful and challenging educational context to integrate SEL strategies into regular formative assessment practices, which have proved valuable in catering to individual needs, contributing to mental wellbeing, and enhancing students' academic performance and motivation. **Annie Altamirano** explores alternative feedback strategies that prioritise engagement, learner autonomy and holistic development, synthesising insights from recent research and practical classroom applications, and arguing for a shift from error-focused correction to a more dialogic, learner-centred approach. Moving on to exam preparation, **Sharon Acton** addresses the teacher workload challenge of evaluating TOEFL speaking and writing while maintaining the quality and frequency of feedback and enhancing learner autonomy. Sharon presents practical strategies that can also be applied to other exam preparation and English teaching contexts In the first of our two papers reporting on national test results, **Chisato Saida** presents an analysis of national test scores to evaluate the effectiveness of the national curriculum and challenges in English language education in Japan. And finally, turning to Palestine, **Mohammed Matar** and **Yaffa Jumah** describe a research project designed to uncover factors that contribute to the disparities in English language achievement among 6th-graders. As a result of their findings, they make a number of short-, mid- and long-term recommendations.

9.1 Co-constructing rubrics: infusing student language assessment literacy into TBLT

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Introduction

Our Conference presentation detailed a classroom activity for upper-intermediate students at a Brazilian English language school, focusing on the co-construction of rubrics for oral presentations. Participants gained practical strategies to integrate Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Assessment as Learning (AaL) into their

teaching practices, enhancing student engagement and ownership of learning.

The session began with the course designer, Bárbara, introducing the context of the language school, including its academic pillars, and the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT with its focus on form, following Rod Ellis' (2018) ideas. Although widely discussed in academic literature, the use of TBLT in private English language institutes remains relatively rare. The 'Classic Expert' course, designed for B1+ to B2+ learners preparing for the Cambridge B2 First for Schools exam, centres on meaningful tasks that promote language acquisition through authentic communication.

TBLT with a focus on form is structured in three phases: pre-task (introduction of language forms); task (authentic use of language with incidental focus on form); and post-task (reflection and targeted feedback). Course materials, adapted from Cengage's *Reflect* series, support the school's academic pillars – communicating, making, and being – by integrating maker-centred and productive tasks.

The unit in question had a clearly defined communicative goal: students were to present a public space in Brasília. As the teacher, Juliana designed classroom procedures in line with the 'making' pillar; students also created physical models of these spaces, adding a reflective, creative dimension to the task.

The activity

The unit spanned five weeks and was scaffolded through weekly milestones. After completing the first two, the teacher, Juliana, invited students to reflect on how their final projects should be assessed. This initiated the co-construction of a rubric. Together, students and the teacher identified three assessment dimensions: content, language use, and presentation skills. They created descriptors for each and agreed on point distribution.

When it came time for presentations, students used the rubric they had co-developed to assess one another. Because they helped design the criteria, they had a strong grasp of expectations and provided more meaningful peer feedback. This process enhanced motivation and accountability.

It's important to note that this project was one part of a broader assessment framework that included tasks across all four language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary.

This collaboration between students and teacher illustrated how co-construction fosters critical thinking and language development through negotiation and reasoning. The activity concluded with a full task cycle and reflected principles from the teacher's master's research on student language assessment literacy. She observed that when students are involved in defining assessment criteria, they focus more closely on linguistic development and engage more deeply with the learning process.

Reflection

Following the activity overview, we connected the experience to the concept of AaL, emphasising the growing importance of student language assessment literacy (LAL). This area of research promotes self-assessment and self-directed learning (Earl, 2013; Lam, 2016). Student-centred LAL benefits from both formal and classroom-based research, enriching global academic dialogue and pedagogical practice.

CEFR-informed scaffolding further supported student learning through this

authentic task. While not an explicit goal, the CEFR was used to align students' performance with international standards in a context-sensitive way. A key connection between the CEFR and this project was the emphasis on mediation skills – a dimension so essential to communicative competence that the CEFR has published a dedicated Companion Volume.

In the classroom, students demonstrated mediation competencies such as group collaboration, peer interaction, and meaningful negotiation. They also showed leadership in managing group dynamics and facilitating conceptual discussions. These practices map directly onto CEFR descriptors. These benchmarks helped shape both the design of the task and the rubric co-construction, tying classroom learning to international standards in a practical and relevant way.

This activity has clear potential for transferability across diverse teaching contexts. Projects, presentations and other tasks that require critical thinking can be enriched by incorporating structured reflection on success criteria – an approach that actively cultivates students' assessment literacy. When learners move beyond simply analysing rubrics to actively co-constructing them, they engage in deeper cognitive processing that links language development with higher-order thinking. This metacognitive engagement – thinking about thinking – naturally invites the use of more sophisticated language structures in authentic, meaningful ways. As a result, students become more motivated, develop a stronger sense of agency and take greater ownership of their learning. In this way, assessment becomes not just a tool for measuring progress, but a transformative element of the learning journey itself.

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9.2 Social-emotional learning in formative assessment in the English language classroom

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Recently, educators in Ukraine have been confronted with unprecedented challenges, first due to the Covid-19 pandemic and later as a result of the war with Russia. This shift has prompted a re-evaluation of teaching practices adapted to suit students' needs. Traditional methods designed for face-to-face instruction often prove ineffective in an

online environment. Moreover, both students and faculty have faced significant personal and academic stress, intensifying the need for strategies that not only reduce this pressure but also promote the development of essential competencies and a supportive educational community. In response to these realities, the authors have explored various applications of social-emotional learning (SEL), with a particular emphasis on integrating SEL principles into formative assessment practices.

Assessment is a systematic process of collecting information, crucial for understanding students' progress and needs. However, many students perceive assessments as daunting, often experiencing anxiety. To address this, integrating SEL strategies into regular curriculum and formative assessment practices can significantly benefit learners. SEL fosters emotional wellbeing, enhances academic performance, and boosts motivation for language learning. Incorporating SEL in teaching involves modelling behaviours and creating emotionally supportive classroom environments. Preparing future EFL teachers to implement SEL requires practical application during their practicum and professional activities.

Formative assessment does not have a specific standard to follow. Hence, instructors have the flexibility to try different strategies. The commonly used types of formative assessment in higher education include: short quizzes, pre-class open-ended questions, end-of-class polls, word clouds, concept maps, peer assessment, and class discussions. Interestingly, formative assessment not only draws on SEL skills, but can build SEL skills as well. So, incorporating SEL strategies into their regular curriculum and formative assessment procedures allows language instructors to cater to their learners' individual needs, ensure their mental wellbeing, and thereby enhance their academic performance and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to language learning.

In our teaching practice, we used different SEL techniques to conduct formative assessment (Dmitrenko et al., 2025). Students responded especially well to a variety of SEL strategies integrated into classroom activities. One of the most appreciated techniques was the use of *exit tickets*. These brief reflective prompts typically invited students to explore their emotions, self-awareness and relationship-building skills. Many found them not only helpful for processing the lesson but also personally meaningful.

Reading logs offered another engaging format, encouraging students to respond to literary texts in creative ways – for instance, by copying a short excerpt on one side of the page and reflecting on it emotionally on the other. This allowed students to connect intellectually and emotionally with what they had read, deepening both comprehension and empathy.

Dialogue journals became a space for informal but purposeful written conversations between students and their teacher. Initially structured with teacher-suggested prompts, these journals gradually allowed students more freedom in choosing topics and expressing their thoughts, which promoted greater autonomy and strengthened teacher-student relationships.

Pilgrim's journal emerged as a class favourite. Each day, students responded to a unique prompt with a thoughtful, 6–8 sentence entry. Over time, this daily habit nurtured self-reflection and expressive writing skills, while fostering consistency and engagement.

Assessment rubrics were another valuable SEL-enhanced tool. Not only did they bring transparency to evaluating oral and written tasks, but when tailored to specific assignments, they also provided more meaningful feedback. Students came to

understand expectations better and felt more in control of their progress.

A particularly memorable *reflection-based activity* asked students to share a photo that brings them peace or happiness and to describe it orally or in writing. The task aimed to develop both communicative competency and emotional intelligence. Before presenting, students used a checklist to guide preparation and later assess themselves and peers, which made them feel more confident, focused and responsible.

Finally, *the inside/outside circles activity* added an energising, interactive element. Students formed two concentric circles and paired off, taking turns to respond to prompts and share ideas with rotating partners. It created a dynamic setting for peer interaction, encouraging active listening and meaningful discussion.

Taking all the above-mentioned into consideration, it is worth highlighting that the primary goal of the whole educational system today is to motivate, support, and create a peaceful learning environment where each participant feels appreciated and valued. The foremost aspect of the process of study – assessment and formative assessment in particular – is to be 'reformed' with the help of SEL techniques to really perform its function in modern-day reality, and to provoke students' desire to get deeper into the subject and their feeling of wellbeing despite any hardships on the way.

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9.3 Beyond the red pen: effective formative feedback

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Introduction

Feedback is a cornerstone of language learning, yet traditional methods often rely heavily on error correction – symbolised by the ubiquitous *red pen*. While corrective feedback has its place, an overemphasis on accuracy can stifle creativity and demotivate learners. Moreover, the overuse of the red pen as a symbol of error correction can create negative associations with writing, leading to student anxiety and disengagement. This article explores alternative feedback strategies that prioritise engagement, learner autonomy and holistic development, synthesising insights from recent research and practical classroom applications.

The limits of traditional feedback

The conventional approach to feedback – marked by exhaustive error correction and still deeply ingrained in many classrooms – often fails to achieve its intended outcomes. Studies show that students frequently ignore or misunderstand teacher

corrections, particularly when feedback is overly prescriptive. Moreover, excessive focus on accuracy can lead to anxiety, discouraging learners from experimenting with language or developing fluency. Research suggests that many students perceive red-pen corrections as punitive rather than constructive, which undermines motivation (Ferris, 2018).

Levels of feedback

Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework identifies four feedback levels, with the most valuable occurring at the process and self-regulation levels. Task-level feedback identifies correct/incorrect responses and is common but limited. Process-related feedback focuses on how students arrive at responses, prompting rethinking and modification. Self-regulated feedback develops students' self-assessment abilities, while self-related feedback (praise/criticism) is least effective for learning.

Implementation framework

Walsh (2018) offers a four-stage feedback cycle:

1. Focus on learning targets: Make goals visible and transparent.
2. Elicit needed information: Use thoughtful questions to stimulate thinking.
3. Process feedback from students: Interpret responses against expected outcomes.
4. Make decisions about next steps: Determine appropriate interventions.

Effective implementation requires thoughtful planning: identifying information needed to assess proficiency; determining optimal feedback points; establishing response criteria; and supporting students' use of feedback.

Rethinking feedback: key strategies

Taking these frameworks into account, effective feedback should not only address errors but also encourage critical thinking, self-reflection and engagement. Below are three key strategies to transform feedback practices:

1 Dialogic feedback: a two-way conversation

Instead of merely marking errors, teachers can engage students in a dialogue about their writing. The move toward dialogic feedback represents a significant departure from traditional correction methods. Rather than simply marking errors, teachers engage students in conversations about their writing. This might involve:

- Asking guiding questions (e.g. *How could you strengthen this argument?*) rather than providing direct corrections.
- Highlighting strengths (e.g. *Your use of vocabulary here is excellent!*) to build confidence.
- Encouraging revision by allowing students to respond to feedback in subsequent drafts.

This approach shifts the responsibility for improvement onto the learner, fostering deeper engagement and ownership of the writing process.

2 Peer- and self-assessment: empowering learners

Peer feedback helps students develop critical evaluation skills while reducing reliance on the teacher, complementing rather than replacing teacher guidance, with clear

training and modelling provided. Structured peer review activities – using rubrics or checklists – can guide students in providing constructive comments. Similarly, self-assessment encourages metacognition, helping learners identify their own errors and set personal goals.

3 Technology-enhanced feedback: beyond the red pen

Where appropriate, digital tools offer dynamic ways to deliver feedback. Platforms like Google Docs allow for real-time comments, while audio or video feedback can convey tone and nuance more effectively than written notes. Automated tools (e.g. Grammarly) provide instant suggestions, allowing students to revise independently.

Practical classroom applications

Four high-impact techniques deserve consideration. First, the 'message on a strip' technique: instead of writing comments directly on students' work, prepare individual feedback strips for each student. Divide the class into groups of four, and give back the four assignments for each group with the messages. Students match the messages to the assignments and make corrections, which stimulates thinking and creates psychological distance, enabling students to absorb constructive criticism more effectively. Second, the 'pre-flight checklist' creates accountability through peer review before submission. Third, the 'I-You-We checklist' enhances group work reflection by prompting students to evaluate their contributions, others' input and overall group performance. Finally, the T-A-G approach (Tell something you like, Ask a question, Give positive suggestions) provides a structured framework that balances validation with improvement opportunities.

Conclusion

Moving *beyond the red pen* requires a shift from error-focused correction to a more dialogic, learner-centred approach. We need to help students see feedback not as judgement, but as conversation. By integrating strategies such as dialogic feedback, peer assessment and technology-enhanced methods, educators can create a more supportive and effective feedback culture. This not only improves language accuracy but also fosters confidence, creativity and lifelong learning skills.

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9.4 Take a load off! Skill building and evaluation hacks

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Teachers of exam preparation courses know the challenges of evaluating speaking and writing sections. After nearly 20 years of teaching Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation courses, I've explored ways to reduce the workload while maintaining the quality and frequency of feedback. At the Conference, I shared practical strategies that can be applied not only to TOEFL but also to other exam preparation and English teaching contexts.

Teaching context

I work at the Centre de Langues (CDL) at the Université de Lausanne in French-speaking Switzerland. In a country boasting three national languages, most Swiss high school graduates earn a B2 certification in English and German or French. As a result, over 90 per cent of our English courses are for students with levels between B1/B2 and C2.

English courses at the CDL range from general to skills and academic preparation to staff training and specialised modules, such as English for biologists. These run on 13-week semesters and are free for enrolled students. Class sizes are limited to 16. Due to the popularity of exchange programmes, there is strong demand for TOEFL, IELTS, CAE and CPE preparation, making efficient feedback strategies essential for managing teacher workload.

Teacher challenges

Teachers of test preparation courses face several significant burdens. Chief among them are:

- managing and tracking large volumes of student submissions;
- providing individualised, constructive feedback in both speaking and writing;
- ensuring students rapidly build the necessary skills within short timeframes; and
- maximising authentic test practice and meaningful evaluation opportunities.

Five evaluation 'hacks'

To address these challenges, I propose five main 'hacks' designed to optimise teacher effectiveness and wellbeing, as follows:

1 Keep track of student work

The first strategy involves establishing a centralised digital depository for student work. Platforms such as Moodle, Google Drive and Dropbox streamline file collection, ensuring better organisation and reducing administrative chaos.

2 Give efficient feedback

To make feedback as impactful and efficient as possible, I use a combination of strategies that promote clarity and student engagement. For speaking test feedback, students submit both audio recordings and written transcriptions of their responses. This dual format encourages self-reflection, often allowing students to catch and correct their own errors, while also helping teachers understand unclear speech more easily. I also use colour-coded annotations linked to an error key, which make feedback visually

accessible and help students identify recurring issues across assignments. Standardised rubrics, such as those from TOEFL, are employed to align feedback with actual exam expectations, increasing its practical relevance. When multiple assessment systems are in use – such as institutional grading and exam rubrics – I consolidate them into a single, unified feedback document. This streamlines the process and ensures students receive consistent, coherent guidance that supports their progress and exam readiness.

3 Skill up students with 'noticing' activities

Based on Schmidt's (1990) theory that learners must consciously notice language forms to internalise them, I use consciousness-raising activities to build student awareness of language features. Online platforms like LearningApps and Kahoot! support this by offering gamified exercises that highlight language patterns in both classroom and homework settings. Additionally, spot-the-difference activities comparing academic and informal examples help students recognise appropriate stylistic choices and vocabulary for formal contexts, reinforcing their understanding through contrast and analysis.

4 Increase feedback opportunities without overloading

Employing reflective tasks and AI tools can reduce teacher workload while increasing the frequency and quality of feedback. Peer feedback, facilitated through platforms like Moodle's workshop tool, allows students to evaluate each other's work using guided rubrics, fostering mutual learning and accountability. Self-feedback encourages students to analyse their errors using an error key, reflect on underlying causes such as L1 interference or knowledge gaps, and plan strategies for improvement. AI-assisted tools like Grammarly, ChatGPT and Perplexity offer free, instant feedback on writing, expanding evaluation opportunities without adding to the teacher's marking load.

5 Increase authenticity

For speaking and writing tests, projecting an online countdown timer during class sessions – whether in-person or on Zoom – helps replicate real exam conditions and makes students conscious of time management.

Benefits of these strategies

By implementing these strategies, teachers can expect several positive outcomes: reduced stress and workload; enhanced student autonomy; improved productivity; and greater perceived value of feedback. The cumulative effect is a more sustainable teaching experience and better-prepared students.

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9.5 Japanese EFL learners' English ability in the national survey

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The revised national curriculum for foreign language education in Japan, implemented in junior high schools since 2001, focuses on improving the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking by introducing a range of communicative activities in English classes (MEXT, 2017). To evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) has been conducting a National Assessment of Academic Ability (NAAA) since 2007. The 2023 NAAA examined the English ability of 3rd-year junior high school students (15 years old) (National Institute of Educational Policy Research, 2023) and the number of test takers was 923,981. These students were in their third year of studying English as a foreign language under the new curriculum. The English examination consisted of four skill sections with short answer items, essay writing, and oral presentation in writing and speaking, as well as multiple-choice items in listening and reading. We analysed the raw data of the 2023 NAAA to understand the current situation and challenges in English language education in Japan (Yokohama National University, 2024).

The results showed that there existed an unbalanced level of receptive skills and productive skills in English. The average correct response rate for listening was 58.9 per cent, 51.75 per cent for reading, 24.15 per cent for writing, and 12.45 per cent for speaking. The distributions of listening and reading scores were close to normal distribution, but the distributions of writing and speaking scores were skewed toward low scores, with zero scores being the most common. The statistical analysis using Item Response Theory found that the item difficulty and ability levels increased in the order of listening, reading, writing and speaking. The score distributions by socio-economic status (SES) level revealed that those in the lower SES group tended to score lower than those in the higher SES group, especially in speaking.

It was also found that the average non-response rate of writing and speaking items was relatively high. The non-response rate of the multiple-choice items in listening and reading was almost zero. In contrast, the non-response rate exceeded 10 per cent for short answer writing items, and 20 per cent for essay and oral presentation items. The highest non-response rate was 28.9 per cent for the integrated-skills item (read to write). Although the non-response rate for speaking was higher than for writing in the higher English ability group, it was lower in the lower English ability group.

The items with a correct response rate below 20 per cent were integrated-skill items (listen to speak, read to write), and essays, in which students expressed their opinions with reasons and evidence. The correct response rate of the grammar items relating to the past tense were low, at less than 30 per cent, suggesting that 3–4 out of 5 Japanese junior high school students have not acquired the past tense. Even where students fulfilled the conditions for a correct answer in writing and speaking, vocabulary or grammatical errors interfered with communication or did not fulfil one condition. This applied to 40 per cent of the students.

Finally, we investigated factors affecting English ability using a student questionnaire. Hierarchical regression analysis found that the strongest predictors of average correct responses in listening, reading and writing were: 'I understand English classes'

and ‘I like learning English’. The strongest predictors of average correct responses in speaking were: ‘I understand English classes’ and ‘I have an opportunity to use English every day’. We found that having opportunities to use English daily, studying English at home using ICT, and participating in communicative activities in the classroom had greater impact on improving English ability than SES levels.

In conclusion, based on our 2023 NAAA analysis, we found that the four English skills of Japanese 15-year-old EFL learners are not well-balanced; listening, reading, writing and speaking abilities fall in this order. The non-response rates of performance items in writing and speaking are about 20 per cent. The items requiring integrated skills, writing coherent sentences, and discussing one’s ideas with evidence are complicated. Positive attitudes toward English learning explain a higher English ability, and students with more opportunities to use English daily tend to demonstrate a higher English ability in speaking items.

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9.6 Reading between the lines of national test scores

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Context

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in Palestine recognises English language learning as a vital skill for students’ futures. Accordingly, English has been taught as a foreign language from the first grade since the year 2000, with the implementation of the National Palestinian Curriculum. (Previously, it was taught from Grade 5.) National Assessment Tests (NATs) were launched systematically in 2008, tackling core subjects and pivotal grades in the Palestinian education system, and English was officially included as one of the core subjects assessed within this national assessment in 2018.

Research methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used for this study (Rowlands et al., 2024). It included analysis of existing national assessment contextual data collected from 150 school principals, 150 English language teachers and 4,800 students, as well as English language scores for 6th-graders (Centre for Educational Research, 2022). Classroom practice was assessed using an observation tool, which provided insights into teacher performance inside the classroom. Quantitative and qualitative data were also collected from multiple stakeholders (314 teachers, 22 teacher supervisors, 3 teacher trainers, 5 ELT curriculum developers and 5 MoEHE seniors) via questionnaires, focus groups and round table discussions.

Research questions

The main question of the research was: What factors contribute to the disparities in English language achievement among 6th-graders in Palestine? Sub-questions were:

- To what extent does the learning environment (school and community) impact English language learning?
- To what extent do classroom practices (teaching and assessment) support English language learning?

Key findings: NAT results

The findings show high disparities in learning outcomes among study strata, which raise crucial questions about the issues of equity, quality and equality. These include:

- disparities based on student gender: girls outperformed boys (by about 10 points);
- disparities based on school gender: co-ed schools scored the highest, followed by girls' schools, and boys' schools (about 11 points);
- disparities based on supervising authority: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school scored the highest, then private schools, and then public schools (about 14 points);
- disparities based on region: southern governorate schools (Gaza) outperformed northern governorate schools (West Bank) (about 9 points); and
- the highest performing school scored 73/100, while the lowest performing school scored 18/100 (about 55 points).

Percentage of students at the mastery levels

Regarding the distribution of students across the mastery levels, 9 per cent of 6th-graders reached the advanced level (70 out of 100 or higher). However, 75 per cent were low level (fewer than 50 out of 100). This poses a big challenge for overall 6th-graders' performance.

More research findings

Findings regarding teacher-related factors reveal that teachers who have a bachelor's degree in educational methods and years of experience do not have a significant impact on English language achievement. However, there are factors that positively influence student achievement, such as a high level of teacher job satisfaction. Conversely, focusing more on knowledge acquisition than practical application during pre-service training negatively affects student outcomes.

With regard to teaching practices, creating a clear context, effective use of learning resources, and using audio equipment are all classroom practices positively associated with high-performing schools. Conversely, limited teaching strategies, limited classroom time devoted to understanding spoken and written texts, and limited use of formative assessment practices were negatively associated with low performance schools. It is also worth noting that factors such as teacher qualifications, years of teaching experience, and the frequency of projector use have no association with student performance in either high- or low-performing schools.

Turning to student-, school- and family-related factors, parental engagement in helping children with homework is positively associated with learning outcomes. In contrast, parental help with exams has no association with students' learning outcomes.

Regarding school discipline, violence and bullying at school have no direct impact on student learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this research, these are some practical recommendations:

- Quick fixes: designing supplementary resources and remedial materials that enhance student-to-student interaction; training teachers to select activities and texts that resonate with students; shifting grammar-focused activities to homework to maximise classroom time for communicative practice; and optimising the use of digital catalogues created with the British Council (n.d.).
- Medium-term: improving parental engagement, and initiating research to evaluate the quality of pre-service teacher education programmes.
- Long-term: developing a refreshed ELT education strategy for Palestine and revising the current EL curriculum.

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10 Materials development

The chapter opens with **Bingjie Liu** and **Meng Zhu**'s paper, in which they argue that ELT materials must facilitate a two-way interaction between young students' own culture and that of others. They share three practical approaches they have used to bridge local culture with global perspectives in material design. **Philippa Davies** then presents a collaborative project to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in culturally sensitive materials to support secondary teachers in diverse educational settings, highlighting lessons learned. Two papers focused on reading follow. First, **Muying Li** explores AI's ability to create effective reading comprehension activities, while simultaneously considering the essential competencies material writers need to remain irreplaceable in the AI era. Then, **Christopher W. Collins** explores the integration of AI-generated texts into an extensive reading curriculum for CEFR B2–C1 learners to overcome traditional implementation challenges and enhance student engagement. Turning to accessibility, **Derek Philip-Xu** discusses the inclusion of protected characteristics, specifically writing alternative text descriptions for images, outlining key considerations to bear in mind to ensure inclusion and diversity. And to end, **Soraya Alves Lacerda** and **Patrícia Villa da Costa Ferreira** present a freely available classroom resource – the SEL Deck – a practical tool to support the social-emotional development of children and adolescents, foster healthy relationships and build balanced, meaningful lives.

10.1 Bridging local and global: practical approaches in ELT material design

Bingjie Liu *and* **Meng Zhu** *Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, China*

Background

How can we better prepare our young learners for a world of changes and challenges? The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framework (Howells, 2018) provides a shared vision that every learner has the potential to grow into a 'whole person' and gives us educators a mission to foster learners' ability to understand themselves and others, and interact meaningfully for collective wellbeing. Yet there is a tendency that learners' own culture is not addressed in ELT materials, and this absence may cause problems. As Brown and Nanguy highlighted in their research (2021, p. 58), it denies 'students' opportunity to learn useful language to express their own views on identities and lifestyles' – a challenge equally relevant in China's ELT education.

Through years of practice, it is crystal clear to us that ELT materials must facilitate a two-way interaction between one's own culture and that of others. In our talk, we shared three practical approaches that we use to bridge local culture with global perspectives in material design.

Approach 1: Representing local culture with global perspectives

In our *English Journey for Teens* series, designed for Chinese learners aged 13–15 and used as a supplementary English resource beyond the core curriculum, 43 per cent of the reading materials focus on Chinese culture, connecting closely to teenagers' daily lives. While showcasing the cultural tradition in a global context, we ensure the material is engaging for teens, and, to achieve this, we follow three key principles:

1. **Show modern China.** We highlight contemporary stories and events. Our young learners probably know these stories, so it will be easy for them to relate to and feel involved in their learning.
2. **Link cultural traditions with teens.** When representing our cultural heritage, we present it through young learners' perspectives. For example, we tell stories about how teenagers enjoy practising the ancient art of Tai Chi. By doing so, we create a living connection between today's teens and the past.
3. **Involve others' perspectives.** We purposefully present our own culture from other cultures' viewpoints, such as showing an English girl's blog about her thoughts on Chinese food. By engaging with more perspectives, teenagers can go beyond the limitations and gain deeper insights.

Approach 2: Showing the world with cultural roots and values

We focus on connecting young learners to the world while grounding their learning in their cultural context with meaningful values. To accomplish this, three key principles are emphasised:

1. **Tell inspiring stories of others.** We select stories of teens from other countries, such as a boy working hard to build a charity for children with cancer. Such stories showcase qualities like compassion and creativity, helping our young learners to develop a positive attitude toward other cultures.
2. **Introduce cultural comparisons.** By comparing similar phenomena or figures like Socrates and Kong Zi, we encourage cross-cultural thinking and mutual respect.
3. **Emphasise cultural diversity.** We foster a sense of humility and a learning mindset with the representation of cultural diversity, for example, exploring festivals from more than ten countries in just one unit. This helps learners view themselves as one part of the cultural mosaic of the interconnected world.

Approach 3: Deepening cultural identity with drama

Expanding our focus on strengthening learners' cultural identity and English proficiency, we identify drama as an effective medium. To implement this, we develop 'English Journey: Chinese Culture Series', a drama series for young learners aged 9 to 12:

1. **Leverage Chinese textbook classics.** The stories are drawn from fables and historical stories in Chinese language textbooks. This provides a culturally grounded starting point, ensuring the content feels familiar and age-appropriate for learners while allowing a natural extension into English.

2 **Native-to-foreign scaffolding.** The learning structure follows a 'first native, then foreign' approach: learners first engage with the stories in Chinese before expressing them in English through drama performance. Rather than introducing new cultural material in English, we reframe familiar stories in a new linguistic context. Each fable script includes an optional ending, encouraging learners to view traditional tales with fresh perspectives and respond creatively.
3 **Express in an engaging format.** To bring the scripts to life on stage, native English-speaking drama experts adapt them with rhythm, chant and expressive English, making the language natural and stage-ready. This integration of local cultural content and dramatic form shows how familiar stories could evolve into powerful tools for both language learning and cultural expression in the classroom.

Conclusion

Helping young learners navigate a changing world may not have a single solution, but grounding their learning in their own culture while bridging it with global perspectives is an essential and meaningful first step. By integrating local culture, global perspectives and innovative methods like drama teaching, educators can foster deeper connections, broader understanding and more balanced growth – for both learners and themselves.

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10.2 Lessons on inclusion: piloting secondary EDI materials around the world

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The British Council's TeachingEnglish is committed to providing free, globally relevant teaching materials for English teachers that promote values of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Yet, there are challenges involved. This paper outlines a practical initiative to embed EDI in TeachingEnglish (Smith & Steele, 2025) materials development *process* and *product*. It highlights lessons learned from this project to create free, flexible and culturally sensitive materials that support teachers across diverse educational settings, and shares findings from piloting the materials in secondary classrooms worldwide.

Challenges

First, since some regions are reluctant to use or promote certain resources, it means that truly open-access materials – ones that can be used safely, regardless of context

– need EDI to be integrated in a way that is culturally respectful. Second, when lessons focus on marginalised groups and their issues as something to be debated, they risk making learners or teachers from those groups feel less safe. Finally, to ensure global relevance and appropriacy, the materials development process must be inclusive, particularly if the development team itself lacks diversity. In other words, there should be a consideration of *process*, as well as *product*.

The project

To address these challenges, TeachingEnglish set out not only to develop materials that embed EDI themes, but also to seek feedback and input from our target audience of secondary school teachers throughout the process. The outcome was ten listening lesson plans for secondary which integrate EDI themes like kindness, empathy and respect for difference, without singling out marginalised identities or focusing on potentially controversial topics.

Content

The lessons aim to raise awareness that 'norms' are socially constructed. For example, the notion of 'family' is broadened as learners consider whether family can include friends, pets or anyone who makes us feel loved or safe. Other lessons include different challenges faced by teenagers such as starting a new school, managing stress or future expectations – topics relatable to teenagers from diverse backgrounds.

Representation

We include a range of authentic global accents to build awareness of the diversity of English speakers. Hearing real voices humanises the content, and working on active listening skills helps build empathy. We also normalise marginalised identities through images, e.g. a family as two women and a child, and through language, e.g. use of they/them pronouns. Embedding these identities as unremarkable helps to reflect the diversity of real-world experiences and make inclusion feel normal, not exceptional. Additionally, we designed the lesson plans to be adaptable, encouraging teachers to extend and differentiate with their learners in mind – recognising that representation is context-dependent.

Process

The development process was intentionally iterative, bringing in perspectives from different stakeholders at different stages. At inception, regional colleagues reviewed the initial content plan, steering certain topics and giving valuable input. At the piloting stage, 32 secondary teachers from 14 countries taught a lesson. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with teachers from very different contexts echoing similar reflections: that embedding EDI themes sparks curiosity, challenges assumptions and fosters acceptance. For example, one teacher in Nigeria told us that despite initial scepticism that a dog could be part of a family, learners concluded that 'there are different kinds of families'.

Takeaways

Focusing on these different elements of the materials development process can help

identify areas that require greater attention. In our experience, involving different perspectives as co-creators throughout not only shaped the content to be more contextually appropriate, but also revealed the need for more structured support for teachers exploring EDI themes. For example, though the aim of the materials was to help normalise marginalised identities, rather than single them out to be debated or force teachers to become spokespeople for a particular group or cause, one teacher found that a photo in the materials provoked debate among learners about whether you can have 'two mums'. The teacher said that she would like more guidance on dealing with such questions. This example highlights the need for further training and support for teachers and prompted a review of this aspect of the materials. Other teachers pointed out that some images did not reflect their local contexts, highlighting the need to offer signposting and scaffolding on when and how to adapt materials appropriately. One teacher also misidentified a speaker's accent, suggesting that including speaker descriptions with protected characteristics might build better awareness of diversity.

Responding to these challenges is an ongoing process. But with thoughtful collaboration, embedding EDI in both *product* and *process* is not only possible – it's essential.

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10.3 Creating effective reading activities with AI: limitations and suggestions

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With the rapid advancement of AI in recent years, I have been experimenting with various language models over the past two years and this led me to ask: What essential competencies should material writers and developers have to remain irreplaceable in the era of AI? With this question in mind, I focused on AI's ability to create effective reading comprehension activities, in order to explore how much AI can contribute.

My approach

I first reviewed some mainstream classifications of reading comprehension activities. The frameworks I referred to are Christine Nuttall's (1996) classification of five types of reading comprehension questions and three extra activity types, and Nunan's (2001) classification of reconstruction and analysis activities.

After that, I started experimenting with and training ChatGPT (model 4o). At first, I asked ChatGPT to choose the most suitable activity type based on the features of a given text, and to design reading activities. I also included the language proficiency and cognitive level of target learners as well as the teaching objective. Below is a sample prompt.

• Design a reading activity. First, analyze the passage's language, theme, content, structure, and genre, and decide the most suitable 1-2 activity types.
• The activity should have the same difficulty level of the passage and be suitable for G7 students with A1+ English level.
• The reading objective is to help students develop extracting key information from reading.
• The activity is engaging and includes less than 10 questions.

Figure 10.3.1: *Sample prompt from experiment stage 1*

The first result that ChatGPT produced was always unsatisfactory, so I had to continuously provide detailed step-by-step instructions for modifications, for example, specifying the activity type with terms from the classifications above. Sometimes, I changed my prompts to see if different wording would yield different results, or repeated the same prompt multiple times to encourage ChatGPT to produce more satisfactory responses. Below is a sample prompt.

combine the same time period togther, and simplify the sentences in the table. Use phrase in the table.

Figure 10.3.2: *Sample prompt from experiment stage 2*

Key findings

Here are some of the strengths and limitations of AI in creating reading activities that I have found, using Millin's (2023) competency framework for materials writing as evaluation criteria.

Strengths of AI

I found that AI is good at analysing texts, selecting appropriate activity types to meet the teaching aims, writing clear activity rubrics and writing appropriate answers, distractors or example models.

Limitations of AI

However, AI also has some limitations. In terms of activity design, AI is not always good at identifying key information in a text. For instance, an activity produced by GPT includes content absent from the original text. Nor is AI good at providing appropriate reading stimuli, partly due to a lack of cultural awareness. One example is a GPT-generated activity which asks students to match Chinese tofu dish names with descriptions – a minor detail from the text. This activity is too simple for Grade

7 Chinese students, who are already familiar with these dishes and can complete it without reading the text, but AI produced this activity despite the target learners being clearly described in the prompt. Other problems with AI include its repeated failure: to effectively match texts with suitable activities; to create activities which are meaningful to learners; to identify when to create original texts and when to use pre-existing texts; to create questions with clear aims; and to design activities so that one flows logically into the next.

When it comes to meeting learners' needs, AI struggles to create activities that match the cognitive level of the target learner, and understand learners' potential difficulties with target language or skills.

Conclusion and implications

To conclude, considering AI struggles to design activities tailored to different genres, create truly effective exercises, and meet the specific needs of learners, I think these are key competencies for material writers and developers.

1. *Pedagogical expertise.* Specialised knowledge is still difficult for AI to replicate effectively. So, we need to specialise in theories about learning and teaching to be able to identify the problems in AI-generated materials and give feedback accordingly.
2. *Creativity.* AI lacks truly innovative and original ideas, but humans can think beyond specific domains and make connections between different fields. For example, our writers creatively came up with the idea of using a Venn diagram to compare two things while all the comparison activities generated by AI were in the form of a simple table.
3. *Cultural and contextual awareness.* AI-generated content often lacks sensitivity to specific learners, but writers can tailor materials to different learners, cultures and real-world contexts, and ensure the content is inclusive and culturally appropriate.
4. *AI literacy.* I must admit, writers who can effectively integrate AI into their workflow will be more productive and efficient. So, AI should be seen as a tool or collaborator rather than a competitor; it is important for writers to develop skills in giving feedback and learn how to push AI to generate more satisfactory content.

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10.4 Using AI to develop an extensive reading curriculum

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Reading proficiency is crucial for second language learners, particularly for those in academic contexts. However, language-learning curricula typically emphasise intensive reading (IR), characterised by careful analysis of shorter, teacher-selected texts. In contrast, extensive reading (ER) involves faster-paced reading of self-selected texts at a comfortable difficulty level, aiming to develop reading fluency. Put simply, IR emphasises careful comprehension, whereas ER emphasises exposure to reading itself. This paper explores the integration of AI-generated texts into an ER curriculum for CEFR B2–C1 learners.

Understanding extensive reading (ER)

ER is defined by its focus on quantity, ease, enjoyment and learner autonomy. Research (Nation & Waring, 2019) emphasises that ER contributes to improved fluency, vocabulary, general comprehension, learner autonomy, enjoyment and confidence. However, common challenges in ER implementation include motivating students, ensuring student accountability, assessing progress, managing text resources and overcoming curricular constraints. This paper explores the researcher's experience addressing two specific challenges:

1. Balancing ER with IR and curricular constraints: I taught on an intensive English programme (IEP) as part of a team, where colleagues predominantly assigned IR tasks, making it challenging to incorporate ER without overwhelming learners.
2. Limited suitable materials: ER resources are often designed primarily for lower proficiency readers, creating difficulties in sourcing appropriate materials for higher-level learners, who can still benefit from developing reading fluency.

Integrating AI into ER: implementation experiences

The initial motivation for integrating AI-generated texts into the curriculum was to provide thematically relevant, linguistically appropriate, and engaging materials that would give students additional reading practice. The study addressed three research questions:

1. How can AI-generated texts be used as part of an ER curriculum?
2. How do students perceive the effectiveness and engagement level of AI-generated texts?
3. How does the use of AI in creating ER materials influence students' motivation and attitudes toward reading?

First implementation (2024)

Initially, in a CEFR C1-level course with diverse reading proficiencies (B2–C2), students engaged with thematic texts – authentic, AI-adapted and AI-generated – supplementing primary IR texts. Using ChatGPT (model 4o), AI-generated texts were specifically crafted to maintain thematic relevance, linguistic accessibility and learner engagement. Students read these materials in class and participated in peer discussions to reinforce comprehension and exchange insights.

Summative student feedback indicated high satisfaction with the texts: learners particularly appreciated text relevance and linguistic appropriateness, and many reported increased reading confidence, fluency and vocabulary development. They also noted that post-reading peer discussions significantly enhanced understanding, deepened comprehension and fostered valuable communicative practice.

Second implementation (2025)

The second phase involved students in a CEFR B2-level course with more uniform reading proficiency levels. AI-generated texts, created using ChatGPT (o1), aligned more closely with course themes and allowed greater student autonomy through reading at home and self-selection of one of four thematically-related texts. Texts were slightly shorter (approximately 1,700 words) than in the first implementation and post-reading discussions were more formally structured. Surveys were simplified to remove metalinguistic language, making the feedback collection process more accessible to students.

Feedback from students consistently highlighted ease of reading, topic relevance and improved reading skills. Students specifically noted enhanced vocabulary acquisition, increased reading speed and greater enjoyment and persistence in reading. They also valued the connection between class topics and reading materials, indicating deeper engagement and motivation.

Lessons learned

Key insights from these implementations highlighted several elements crucial to effective ER integration:

- Students highly valued texts that were relevant, engaging and linguistically accessible.
- A variety of topics and manageable language complexity enhanced vocabulary growth and reading fluency.
- Providing choices and thematic connections significantly increased student motivation and engagement.
- Structured post-reading discussions reinforced comprehension and developed speaking skills.
- AI-generated texts emerged as valuable resources for supporting overall language development.

Practical recommendations

Here are suggested guidelines for integrating AI based on this experience:

- Explore various AI models, but specialise in one to optimise outcomes.
- Treat AI-generated texts as drafts that require refinement rather than finished products to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.
- Experiment with AI prompt development to generate more tailored and engaging texts.
- Foster learner autonomy and motivation by providing choices and accessible, engaging reading content linked to course themes and real-world contexts.
- Utilise structured classroom discussions to deepen comprehension and support linguistic practice.

Conclusion

Integrating AI-generated texts within ER curricula represents an innovative solution to traditional ER implementation challenges, significantly enhancing student engagement and motivation, despite concerns regarding authenticity. Ultimately, as Grabe and Yamashita (2022, p.358) note, '"authentic texts" are whatever texts help students and teachers achieve authentic teaching and learning goals, as well as maintain students' motivation for learning'.

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10.5 Including protected characteristics in alternative text descriptions for images

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Writing alternative text descriptions for images is one area of accessibility that has been keeping materials developers very busy. Alternative text enables visually impaired users to hear the description being read out by their screen reader. One question I have often been asked is whether protected characteristics should be included in all alternative text descriptions. As always, it depends.

Protected characteristics

In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010 defines protected characteristics as the specific attributes of a person that are legally protected from discrimination (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011). The characteristics of age, disability and race/ethnicity were considered for this workshop. One way that published content can increase inclusion and diversity is through imagery and, therefore, alternative text descriptions.

Key considerations for inclusive alternative text

In order to write inclusive alternative text, there are three key considerations to keep in mind. These are respect, context and relevance.

Respect

How do you think someone would like to be described or portrayed? Is it potentially offensive? Is it accurate? You may not know the people in the images being selected for online courses, so take care not to misrepresent them.

Context

Why is a particular image being used? If an image is purely decorative, then no alternative text is necessary. However, if an image is contextual, is there a reading text or audio related to it that might influence how you describe the image in the alternative text?

Relevance

Having considered both respect and context, is it relevant to include any of the protected characteristics in the image's description? Ask if it would be overkill to include, for example, information about race and ethnicity if the image is of a large and diverse group of people. Are you going to describe each person's ethnicity (can you accurately do that)? Or would it be acceptable to describe the image more neutrally?

Assuming it is appropriate to include details of protected characteristics, these key considerations can also be considered when thinking about the language to use in your alternative text descriptions.

Appropriate language

During the Conference session, participants looked at words and phrases that can be used to describe age, disability and ethnicity (see Wishart, 2023). They decided which of the words or phrases they would be happy to use. Tables 10.5.1–10.5.3 show the appropriate words and phrases alongside those that should be avoided.

Appropriate	**Avoid**
people over/under x years of age	youth/the youth the elderly
elderly/young/older people	seniors

Table 10.5.1: *Age*

In Table 10.5.1, the appropriate phrases for age are statements of fact. While 'elderly people' was not a preferred term during the workshop, it is acceptable as long as it is not used in a patronising or homogenising manner, which is the case with those phrases to avoid.

Appropriate	**Avoid**
person with a disability	normal able-bodied
person using a wheelchair	wheelchair-bound confined to a wheelchair
lives with …	suffers from …
hard of hearing/hearing impaired visually impaired	the deaf/Deaf the blind

Table 10.5.2: *Disability*

Disability (Table 10.5.2) is an area where care needs to be taken not to misrepresent someone in an image. Not all disabilities are visible so take care not to make assumptions. The appropriate terms typically foreground the person rather than the disability, for example, 'a person using a wheelchair'. Similarly, saying that someone 'lives with' a condition places the focus on the person and avoids suggestions of helplessness.

'Deaf' refers to someone who has had severe or complete hearing loss since birth and uses sign language as their first language. Therefore, writing 'He's Deaf' may not be accurate. 'Hard of hearing' and 'hearing impaired' acknowledge there is a spectrum of hearing loss.

Appropriate	**Avoid**
Black white	White
multiracial biracial mixed heritage	mixed race

Table 10.5.3: *Race and ethnicity*

With race and ethnicity (Table 10.5.3), it is essential to promote authentic representation and ensure that language positively reflects the diversity of ethnicities and cultures.

There is an ongoing debate about 'Black' vs 'white'/'White'. 'Black' is seen as the righting of a historic wrong and giving dignity and equity to that specific community. Therefore, capitalising 'white' is seen by many as being inappropriate. 'Mixed race' is to be avoided as it promotes the idea of there being a pure race.

Conclusion

The inclusion of protected characteristics like age, disability and race/ethnicity depends on your assessment of the key considerations of respect, context and relevance. If included, avoid inaccuracies and misrepresentation, and use language that is positive and avoids homogenising or patronising a particular group.

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10.6 SEL Deck: making social and emotional learning visible in basic education

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Motivation for creating the SEL Deck

Shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers and educators at Casa Thomas Jefferson (CTJ) – a binational centre in Brazil – found themselves facing many students who no longer knew how to interact or function in groups. Children and adolescents returned to the classroom unable to recognise or name their emotions, let alone self-regulate them. We must remember that some of these children even began their formal education at home and only entered traditional school environments after the pandemic.

This is why the SEL Deck was developed: to support educators – from early childhood education through high school – in their classrooms. It also serves as a useful tool for teachers, therapists and educational psychologists in their practice.

Conception and development of the SEL Deck

The focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) in education is not new, with foundations in research like Goleman's (1995) and CASEL's (2024) Framework, which outlines five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. However, the SEL Deck was designed to prioritise two of these pillars: *self-awareness* (recognising emotions, strengths and limitations) and *self-regulation* (managing emotions and behaviours to achieve goals). These skills were selected as foundational for fostering a balanced learning environment, and helping students navigate personal and academic challenges more effectively. By focusing on these critical areas, the SEL Deck provides educators with a practical, accessible tool to support students' emotional wellbeing.

Psycho-pedagogical aspects and educational strategies

Neuroscience does not label emotions as positive or negative, but rather by their *valence* (Moreira et al., 2012). Positively valenced emotions are those we seek to experience, while negatively valenced ones cause discomfort – even when essential (e.g. fear, which can lead to positive outcomes). With this in mind, the SEL Deck was designed with cards for each emotion, featuring: 1) a front side with the emotion's name and an expressive illustration, and 2) a reverse side with three practical strategies, developed by school psychologists, to address them in educational activities (see Figure 10.6.1).

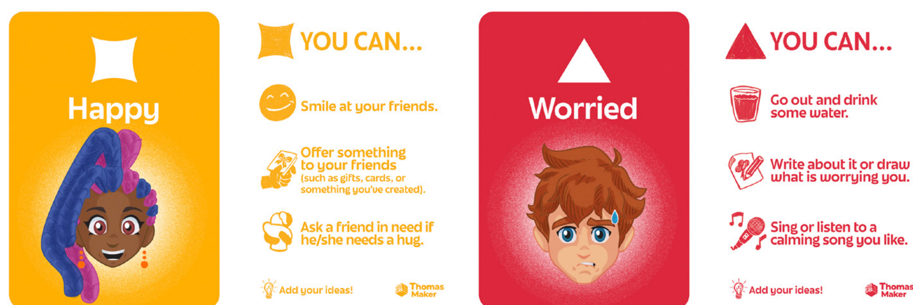

Figure 10.6.1: *SEL Deck Cards – front and back*

The emotions and feelings represented in the SEL Deck cards were grouped by colour, similar to a Mood Meter, with pleasantness on the X-axis and energy on the Y-axis (see Figure 10.6.2). Red is associated with high energy and low pleasantness (frustrated, angry, worried, nervous); yellow with high energy and high pleasantness (happy, focused, motivated, proud); blue with low energy and low pleasantness (disappointed, sad, tired, bored); and green with low energy and high pleasantness (calm, sleepy, safe, grateful).

Figure 10.6.2: *SEL Deck Mood Meter*

It is suggested that the initial use of the cards be accompanied by daily activities such as check-ins or storytelling. The idea is always to ask students how they are feeling and why. The professional using the deck can start with a few cards of each colour and gradually add more as students become more adept at identifying and regulating their emotions.

However, we know that not every strategy will work on the first attempt. Consistency and routine are essential for students to become familiar with the cards and naturally turn to the strategies whenever needed. Teachers and educators must remember that regular use of a strategy can help manage a specific emotion in their students more quickly and effectively.

The SEL Deck website (scan the QR code to access) features our pedagogical approach, the *I-Feel-Pedia* glossary, high-resolution files for free download, and a

dedicated page with usage suggestions. We also invite users – particularly teachers and educational psychologists using the resource – to develop and share new application methods to expand its educational impact.

Final considerations

SEL skills play a pivotal role in fostering healthy relationships and building balanced, meaningful lives. We developed the SEL Deck as a practical tool to support social-emotional development, designed for educators and professionals dedicated to their students' holistic growth. This resource helps users: recognise, regulate and express emotions; resolve conflicts; and strengthen interpersonal connections – empowering children and adolescents to develop self-awareness and understand their impact on others.

Nurturing these skills represents a transformative, lifelong investment, creating a foundation for a more empathetic, cooperative and resilient society. By applying these principles daily and inspiring others to join this journey, we recognise that true personal growth extends beyond the individual – its positive effects ripple outward to uplift entire communities.

During the Conference, some participants volunteered to translate the SEL Deck into their native languages. As a free and open educational resource, we welcome translated versions and would be delighted to feature yours on our website with full credit. For more information, please contact us at makerspace@thomas.org.br.

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11 Global issues

In this final chapter of our 2025 edition, a range of global issues are presented and discussed, together with implications and practical suggestions. **Steve Brown** begins with the evolution of the concept of empowerment and its role in ELT, discussing how it perpetuates social injustice and limits capacity for systemic change. This year's 11 **Hornby Trust Scholars** then present a range of decentred initiatives from diverse classroom contexts in the Global South, maintaining that it is essential to address the disconnect in ELT for contextually relevant language education despite the potential challenges and consequences. The four papers which follow recount the experiences of educators working in conflict zones. **Awad Alhassan** and **Holi Ibrahim Holi** explore the challenges and coping strategies of Sudanese TESOL educators, and the implications for educators, managers and policymakers. **Nataliia Krynska** reports on a project to support Ukrainian English lecturers' resilience, trust and professional agency through collaborative reflection, while also promoting engagement in micro-research during wartime. Reporting on a language-for-resilience project supported and funded by British Council Palestine, **Haneen Khaled Jadallah** describes how young people write, exchange and perform each other's personal narratives across borders, fostering intercultural understanding, emotional resilience and creative expression. Next, **Samiha Salem** outlines trauma-informed strategies to support refugees, while **Neale Gardiner** and **Sarah Donno** evaluate the impact of ESOL for employability courses for refugees and asylum seekers in Edinburgh. The final papers in this section address education for sustainable development. In the first, **Urbashi Raha** examines the role of language in society and how it shapes worldviews, arguing that TESOL must critically examine and transform its practices by challenging dominant educational frameworks, and embrace alternative worldviews that promote ecological consciousness and social equity. To promote environmental stewardship and global citizenship in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, **Mohammed Salim Alharbi** outlines a project with sustainability themes to improve students' critical thinking, language proficiency and ecological awareness. And to end, **Anna Soltyska** demonstrates how different dimensions of sustainability – teaching for sustainable outcomes, designing courses in a sustainable way, and making sustainability a central topic – can be integrated into English language teaching.

11.1 Emancipation for transformation: why empowerment in ELT is not enough

Steve Brown *University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK*

Introduction

At the 2022 IATEFL Conference there were five talks that included the words 'empower', 'empowerment' or 'empowering'. There were seven such talks in 2023, then a dramatic jump to 23 in 2024. A further rise in 2025 to over 30 implies an increasing interest among ELT professionals in the concept of empowerment, but it also raises questions about how the term is used and understood. This paper aims to conceptualise empowerment, its role in the context of ELT, and its limitations in terms of developing capacities for real systemic change.

Conceptualising empowerment

The term 'empowerment' was first popularised in the 1960s in contexts related to social and international development, and was widely associated with grassroots, bottom-up activism that aimed to improve the circumstances of groups and communities who were marginalised, disenfranchised or otherwise disadvantaged. It was often used to describe development projects that were concerned with giving a voice to such groups, with a focus on giving power to people rather than power over others. This conceptualisation of empowerment found its way into ELT through various humanistic and communicative approaches, methods and techniques that first became popular in the 1970s: innovations such as the negotiated syllabus, student-generated materials, and the prioritisation of self-expression over structural accuracy all allowed the student's voice to inform various aspects of the teaching and learning process.

Problematising empowerment

However, during the 1980s and 1990s the ideology of neoliberalism, most notably popularised by the governments of the United States and United Kingdom, started to influence practice and thought in the fields of social governance and education. Individualism and competitiveness were valued over community and cooperation, repackaging learning and language as commodities, or forms of capital that can be used to gain advantage in the global marketplace. Within this new paradigm, empowerment was re-interpreted as a means of creating opportunities for individuals to achieve success – within existing social structures. The neoliberal conceptualisation of empowerment has removed any drive for social change, allowing existing structural inequalities to remain intact.

This switch towards neoliberal empowerment is visible in the ELT profession, through the rise in popularity during the 1990s of exam preparation courses, one-to-one business English classes, English for academic purposes and study skills courses to support academic success, and the idealisation of 'native-like' proficiency. Such measures aimed to promote the success of English learners in an increasingly globalised world in which English plays a prominent role. Of course, the aim of my talk was not to criticise English teachers who are concerned with developing their students' individual capacities for success, but rather to point out that achieving this does nothing

to address the many problems, inequalities and injustices that exist in the world today. This limitation effectively means that empowerment becomes a way for people to be more adept at perpetuating unequal power structures. As Freire (1996, p.55) pointed out, 'the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated'.

Emancipation and social justice language education

Having explored the limitations of empowerment, the talk went on to propose an alternative goal for ELT – that of *emancipation*. Rather than focusing on the individual, emancipation is concerned with 'critically analysing, resisting and challenging structures of power' (Inglis, 1997, p. 4). This re-purposes education so that the aim is not to create individuals who can meet the needs of the global economy, but to develop capacities to engage critically with existing structures and systems, with a view to making the world a better place. Such an approach draws heavily on the principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996), and finds its way into ELT through social justice language education (Ortaçtepe Hart, 2023). Emancipation is achieved by: exploring and exposing the role of language as a hegemonic tool; challenging models of governance that promote inequality, such as neoliberalism and neoliberal fascism; decolonising the language curriculum through co-creation of content and materials with students; and developing critical consciousness through social justice-oriented topics, tasks and projects.

Conclusion

The talk ended by re-stating the limitations of empowerment as an end goal, as it only perpetuates existing social injustices. A more transformative goal would be one of emancipation – a social phenomenon that seeks to make power structures more equitable. Those who attended the talk were encouraged to explore the potential for social justice-oriented pedagogies to be implemented in their own contexts.

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11.2 The Hornby Scholars' Panel Discussion: Jeopardy, disconnect and sacrifice: decentred initiatives in diverse classroom contexts

The A.S. Hornby Scholars at IATEFL 2025: **Agustina la Porta** *Argentina,* **Ahsan Chandio** *Pakistan,* **Bekzod Khayitov** *Uzbekistan,* **Canan Köse** *Türkiye,* **Estelle Ejoh** *Nigeria,* **Janitha Ekanayake** *Sri Lanka,* **Manuel Bueno Caro** *Mexico,* **Marilia da Silva Correa Lemos** *Brazil,* **Melusi Ncube** *Zimbabwe,* **Mozhgan Ramezani** *Iran, and* **Tusa Yamagu** *Papua New Guinea*

Introduction

The A.S. Hornby Educational Trust supports English teachers in low- and middle-income countries through a range of initiatives. We are English language teachers from across the Global South, recipients of the Hornby Trust scholarship to study an MEd in TESOL at the University of Exeter, a Russell Group institution renowned for its research and scholarship. Drawing on our varied teaching experiences, during our Conference presentation we shared stories of taking initiative in our classrooms, and reflected on the implications of these initiatives.

Teacher initiative within local contexts is a topic that resonates deeply among language educators. Many teachers have experienced moments when their students seem unmotivated or when the curriculum, syllabus or materials fail to address the real and evolving needs of learners. These situations often reveal a disconnect between what is officially prescribed and what is truly needed in the classroom. In facing this disconnect, teachers may choose to take the initiative by creating new materials, adapting teaching approaches, listening to student voices or involving other stakeholders. Such efforts are rarely easy – they require innovation, persistence and often a degree of sacrifice. However, by stepping into this role, teachers reclaim their agency and reconnect with the passion that brought them to the profession.

Our presentation emerged from a collaborative inquiry undertaken by eleven scholars. Our process involved sharing our diverse initiatives within our respective contexts. From this sharing, four illustrative stories have been selected for discussion in this paper. Each of these chosen stories highlights initiatives implemented by our peers within their specific contexts. Following the presentation of each case, we offer an interpretation, reflecting on key insights and discussing the implications of the respective initiative.

Disconnect and personal initiatives

Ahsan (Pakistan) shared his experience of working at Shah Abdul Latif University in Sindh with final-year students, who seemed to have minimal environmental awareness despite their first-hand experience of the 2022 floods. He reflected on his own time as a student, recalling how his teachers neglected environmental issues during the 2010 floods. He argued that another contributing factor was the representation of climate-induced problems in educational materials, which often presented Global North perspectives, such as references to dying polar bears. Recognising this disconnect, Ahsan collaborated with an NGO to localise climate change discourse. He emphasised local environmental issues, such as the preservation of critically endangered blind dolphins,

and conducted a series of workshops to promote environmental awareness. During these workshops, prospective teachers engaged with educational materials to adapt and supplement them, thereby integrating environmental themes into English language classrooms. Despite facing resistance from colleagues, Ahsan continued the initiative by introducing 'Green Routines' to sustain the eco-friendly effort in the classroom. In this activity, students shared three environmentally friendly actions with their peers, such as saving water or minimising food waste. By encouraging everyday environmental responsibility, this green initiative aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action. From Ahsan's story, we can argue that teachers can act as agents of change by contextualising global goals through small, localised and sustainable classroom practices.

Manuel (Mexico), a university lecturer, also identified a disconnect between the curriculum, teaching materials and the needs of his students. In response, he supported a student-led initiative in which motivated learners from the International Relations department designed listening comprehension activities and developed a subject-specific corpus to expand relevant vocabulary. His collaborative project challenged traditional classroom dynamics, where teachers often maintain an authoritative role. Instead, this reversal of traditional power dynamics empowered students to become stakeholders in their own learning. Working in pairs, students added new vocabulary related to international relations to the corpus, transforming learning into an ongoing process rather than a final product. A highlight of such evolving projects is that they enhance learner experiences and reshape their roles as co-creators of knowledge, turning language learning into a collaborative process. Therefore, Manuel's project can serve as a model for how existing materials can be improved through adaptation and improvisation without requiring drastic changes. His story illustrates that when teachers act as facilitators in a democratic classroom environment and support student initiatives, they can challenge entrenched power dynamics and foster a culture of collaborative learning. For example, there was initial hesitation from students who were not willing to spend time taking responsibility for their own learning. Additionally, not every teacher seemed interested in making changes to the syllabus or materials, as such changes might be unwelcomed by the school administration. However, over time, many students not only adapted but also began to expect and initiate activities related to their field of study, having seen the positive outcomes of such initiatives.

Sacrifice and passion

Melusi (Zimbabwe) shared an inspirational story from his time volunteering in the multilingual Tongogara refugee camps, which host refugees from French- and Portuguese-speaking countries. In Melusi's case, the challenge was twofold: he not only needed to adopt a trauma-informed teaching approach, but also had to ensure that his mixed-ability learners could integrate into the local education system, where English is the official language. Failure to do so would limit access to other subjects and potentially exclude them from broader society. Driven by passion and supported

by the administration, Melusi recognised the risk of long-term exclusion and partnered with high-achieving students from local secondary and primary schools. These students volunteered to assist refugee learners by sharing their own educational experiences. His efforts created an inclusive and equitable learning environment, connecting high-achieving peers with learners needing additional support. Despite limited resources and language barriers, the initiative achieved measurable success, reflected in the improved national exam pass rate in 2022. Additionally, some mentees later became mentors themselves – evidence of a sustainable, peer-driven model rooted in passion and empathy. Perhaps most powerfully, Melusi's efforts fostered genuine friendships across cultural and linguistic divides. He observed that mentors and mentees frequently spent time together beyond scheduled sessions, sharing personal stories and exchanging words from their native languages.

Tusa, a teacher trainer from Papua New Guinea, shared her initiatives aimed at addressing the significant challenges posed by the country's complex sociolinguistic landscape, particularly the limited access to professionally trained teachers. Tusa collaborates with in-service primary school teachers to teach children's literature. Furthermore, she trains teachers to preserve local oral traditions and folklore. Given the scarcity of resources, Tusa encourages teachers to engage with literature to improvise, supplement and adapt materials, thereby creating contextually relevant reading resources. Unlike the three other initiatives, Tusa has institutional support to officially encourage teachers to develop their own materials suited to classroom needs. To make this initiative practical, she tasked participants with creating a portfolio that included local stories, poems and folklore from their respective communities. This initiative demonstrates how teacher training programmes can empower educators to have a direct and positive impact on their classrooms. Despite facing personal challenges and bureaucratic hurdles, Tusa's story illustrates how committed educators can promote a sustainable community of practice, particularly in low-resource contexts. Notably, some teachers from her programme continue to collaborate, connect and inspire each other through a WhatsApp group, embracing teaching as a team effort.

Conclusion

As Hornby Scholars from the Global South, we have shared narratives highlighting the persistent disconnect between prescribed English language teaching (ELT) practices and the contextual realities of our educational environments. This gap manifests in various forms, including misaligned curricula or syllabi, inadequate materials, limited teacher training, and a disregard for learners' specific needs. For instance, Ahsan's experience underscores the lack of training and contextually relevant resources in rural areas. Manuel emphasised the mismatch between learners' needs and the general English courses offered, particularly where English for Specific Purposes (ESP) would be more appropriate. Melusi illustrated how policy-driven pedagogies often neglect the socio-psychological complexities of displaced learners. Tusa highlighted the practical challenge of teachers being expected to deliver curricula without sufficient resources. It is essential to note that, in all four stories, a common thread exists in agency, collaboration, and a profound commitment to equitable and relevant education.

These experiences underline the necessity for ELT practitioners to initiate context-sensitive practices that address this disconnect. However, as we proposed in our

presentation, the process of decentring ELT is neither utopian nor straightforward. It demands significant personal and professional sacrifices. For example, Ahsan sought external support from a foundation, Manuel and Tusa revised student materials independently, and Melusi extended teaching hours as a volunteer. Practitioners face multiple challenges, including colleague resistance, learner criticism, unpaid labour demands, emotional labour, and potential threats to job security when proposing significant curricular changes.

Despite these risks, decentring efforts can enhance teacher identity and professional fulfilment, particularly when they result in learner success. Moreover, they offer opportunities to apply theoretical insights from teacher development programmes in real-world contexts. Ultimately, we argue that addressing the disconnect in ELT through decentring is essential for contextually relevant and practical language education. Yet, these initiatives must be approached with critical awareness of the potential challenges and consequences they may entail.

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11.3 Challenges and coping strategies of TESOL educators in war and conflict zones

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Background

TESOL educators operating in war and conflict zones experience several challenges which negatively impact their lives and continuing professional development (CPD). Little research, however, seems to have been devoted to the investigation of such challenges and the coping strategies employed by teachers to address them (see Nelson & Appleby, 2015, for further discussion). The present study aims to fill this gap by

exploring the experiences of Sudanese TESOL educators' academic mobility, challenges and coping strategies during the current war in Sudan, sharing implications for educators, educational managers and policymakers.

In recent years, Sudan has witnessed a devastating armed conflict between a paramilitary armed militia and the national army, causing wide-scale destruction with over 12 million citizens internally displaced and forcing more than 1.5 million people to leave the country. This study draws on the literature, albeit scarce, from war and conflict areas such as Ukraine, Syria and Yemen (see, e.g. Lavrysh et al., 2022), and addresses three research questions on the impact of war on TESOL educators, coping strategies, and suggestions for how to prepare effectively for working during exceptional times of war, conflict and emergency education.

Research design

Fifteen TESOL professionals from different Sudanese higher education institutions (HEIs) voluntarily took part in the study. A qualitative methodology was adopted with an open-ended survey being used as the main method of data collection. In line with qualitative research design, data were analysed thematically and inductively (Mason, 2017).

Findings

Participants described the war as an abrupt and severe disruption to the continuation of their professional development. Following the eruption of the war, some participants turned to teaching online despite the challenges, but several difficulties were reported regarding this, whether run from inside or outside Sudan. Participants also painfully reported their experiences of how the war suddenly affected the norms of their professional life and isolated them from the world. In addition to the professional challenges related to teaching and research, participants also experienced psychological and mental health difficulties, and their overall health, safety and wellbeing were severely affected.

To cope with such challenges, participants reported some strategies that they employed to help them effectively operate in such exceptional circumstances. These include the establishment of communities of practice (CoPs), where they connect virtually with colleagues and other professionals from different parts of the world to exchange ideas, obtain teaching tips, engage in collaborative research projects, and generally keep abreast of latest developments in the field. However, participants believe that HEIs should be better prepared for such exceptional situations. Given the lack and inadequacy of existing risk management, contingency policies, and teacher support programmes in Sudanese HEIs throughout the war, participants believe that institutions should create new policies and develop existing ones to provide appropriate technical, professional, psychological, social and financial support for their staff during wars and conflicts.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study focuses on a single context using only one method of data collection with a limited number of participants; therefore, the findings are not intended for generalisation. Nevertheless, some recommendations can still be made which may be applicable

and transferable to other similar educational contexts. HEIs should provide TESOL educators in war and conflict zones with the necessary support to help them operate effectively and continue with CPD. HEIs should also build joint partnerships with other national and international HEIs to host and support educators at risk from wars and conflicts. These HEIs can provide access to their teaching platforms, resources and facilities, thereby helping such educators to continue with their teaching and research CPD activities. Additionally, educators should engage in more CoPs to network and connect with colleagues from all over the world to sustain CPD both during war and beyond. Moreover, as we have seen from the findings, educators' psychological wellbeing is essential for the sustainability of their lives and careers; thus, HEIs should also provide their staff with appropriate and timely support, such as counselling to help them maintain good mental health and wellbeing. And finally, social and financial support are also important in ensuring that teachers remain able to operate in such exceptional and difficult circumstances.

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11.4 Engaging Ukrainian lecturers in research: building trust and resilience

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Introduction

This paper reports on s project designed to support English lecturers from Ukrainian universities during the second year of the full-scale war in Ukraine. The aim of the project was to provide a safe, reflective space to reconnect, build resilience and reflect on the experience of teaching during the war. As a project coordinator, I share my experience of coordinating the project and my insights into how engaging lecturers in micro-research enhanced trust and resilience among the participants.

Background: why research matters

Teacher research as a means of professional development can often be misunderstood. In Ukrainian universities, lecturers sometimes view it as something distant or overly academic; it is often linked with the pressures of publishing or meeting institutional metrics. For this project, I framed the notion of 'research' as 'a way of collecting information in order to enable us to reach decisions about future actions, in ways

that are appropriate and relevant to these decisions' (Paran, 2017, p. 501). Though it is reportedly stated that teacher research develops critical reflection, addresses classroom challenges, and strengthens our ability to make informed and evidence-based decisions (Smith, 2020), teacher engagement *with* and *in* research is still hindered by many factors. Apart from a lack of time and institutional support (e.g. in Ukrainian academia research, activities are imposed on a lecturer as part of their academic duties), there is still the question of research accessibility and its relevance to teachers' everyday work (Hall, 2023).

Context of the project

In March 2023, I invited 23 colleagues from three Kharkiv-based universities to join a Hornby alumni project, 'Cooperative development practices in teacher associations as a means of supporting teachers and developing resilience for Ukrainian EFL lecturers'. By that time, most of the lecturers had been displaced and were teaching remotely from different parts of Ukraine and Europe. We were all struggling with fatigue, stress and uncertainty. Continuing professional development provision in universities was minimal and traditional training programmes were not feasible, because many lecturers did not have the time, energy or mental space to commit. In such conditions, the project introduced lecturers to the reflective framework of Cooperative Development (CD) to promote peer support and to build trust within the group, since it could provide a means to continue professional duties, cope with challenges and explore solutions. The CD sessions were recorded and transcribed to allow deeper reflection and post-session analysis.

From practice to micro-research

Over the year, we held 12 online meetings, where participants learnt and practised using CD techniques for articulating and sharing professional thoughts and concerns with colleagues. Thereafter, lecturers were invited to analyse the transcripts of CD sessions, questioning the effectiveness of techniques and their impact on the group and individuals. We called this analysis *micro-research*, as it was a small-scale, practitioner-led inquiry focused on real-life interactions among lecturers during monthly meetings. Participants could use pre-formulated research questions, and were encouraged to develop their own and present their findings informally to the group. For 10 of the 23 participants, it was their first engagement in research. To help less experienced researchers navigate particular methods and tools, colleagues with more experience volunteered to mentor their peers.

Outcomes and impact

The result was that project outcomes extended beyond mere professional development to encompass reflection and sharing. Project meetings became a space to build resilience for learning, development and research. Lecturers who once felt isolated and overwhelmed regained their agency to explore, collaborate and support each other. By the end of the project in 2024, seven lecturers presented the findings of their micro-research, with two being mentored by more experienced researchers.

After the project, the participants continued engaging with and in research. One participant wrote a blog post on the Lexical Approach, another co-authored an article

on teaching during the war, and three lecturers organised a webinar presenting CD techniques to members of Professional Association of English Language Teachers (PAELT).

Conclusion

This project helped support Ukrainian English lecturers' resilience, trust and professional agency through collaborative reflection, while also promoting engagement in micro-research during wartime (findings which I believe are applicable to other contexts characterised by crisis or conflict).

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11.5 Performing personal narratives interculturally: revealing self and playing the other

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Introduction

This workshop explored the project 'Voices Across Worlds', a language-for-resilience project supported and funded by the British Council Palestine. The project, which ran from April to October 2024, aimed at enabling young people (aged 10–17) to write, exchange and perform each other's personal narratives across borders – fostering intercultural understanding, emotional resilience and creative expression.

The project connected 8 teachers and 47 learners from Palestine, Greece, Malaysia and Cameroon and one refugee based in the UK. After orientation and teacher training, participants engaged in cross-cultural storytelling and online rehearsals via Zoom. They wrote and performed each other's stories, producing over ten recorded plays now available online.

Drawing on my experience with Zoom-based and intercultural theatre, my Conference session explored how scripted playback can enhance language learning and human connection – especially for learners in conflict zones. It showed how performing personal stories can transform trauma into connection and foster resilience, identity and solidarity.

Online playback theatre: a brief overview

Online theatre refers to the use of digital platforms, such as Zoom, to stage live or recorded performances for remote audiences (McLennan, 2021). Playback theatre, traditionally an improvisational form in which audience members share personal stories that are enacted on the spot by performers, fosters empathy, emotional expression and community connection (Fox, 2015).

In this project, playback theatre was thoughtfully adapted into a scripted format to support language development among learners experiencing difficult life circumstances. This approach offered a structured, safe space for students to explore their identity while building both linguistic and performative skills. The digital Zoom platform provided new creative possibilities – camera framing, virtual backgrounds, object-passing effects, and sound sharing – transforming Zoom into a performative stage. Performers also became audiences for one another, watching their own personal stories performed back to them via Zoom by peers in another country. Additionally, remote viewers – whether attending live events or watching recorded performances – were drawn into the narratives through visual engagement and cultural resonance, creating a shared, immersive experience across borders. This intercultural playback theatre approach enabled personal narratives to travel across borders, connecting people through shared humanity.

Workshop structure and stages

Stage 1

Participants were first introduced to the project and its implementation stages. They then took part in an improvised playback activity. Divided into small groups, they were asked to share a story about a good day in their lives. One participant from Palestine told a story of a joyful day at her grandmother's house. Her colleague from Egypt retold this story through performance on the stage. Both participants expressed how the re-telling deeply resonated with their cultural memories, evoking a strong emotional connection to childhood and social warmth.

Stage 2

Participants were walked through the project's phases:

1. Orientation session.
2. Teacher training (June–July).
3. Rehearsals and feedback (July–September).
4. Submissions and author reflections (September).

A video was then shown, featuring a personal narrative by a Gaza-based educator, performed back to her via Zoom by colleagues in Greece, Cameroon and Palestine (currently based in Egypt). The group was moved by the cross-cultural care and empathy embodied in the re-performance of a story rooted in the lived experience of Gaza.

A standout exchange was *Recovered Hopes*, a story written by a Cameroonian student and performed back online by three students in Gaza. This story was about rediscovering a love for literature through the support of a caring teacher. Despite the unstable conditions in Gaza, the performance prompted deep reflection on identity, cultural memory and the transformative power of collaborative storytelling. It also demonstrated how learners from both contexts used English to tell and perform each

other's personal stories – expressing empathy, care and the ability to see the world through someone else's eyes. This experience not only strengthened their emotional resilience but also helped them develop the communicative and cultural skills essential for navigating life's challenges in a broader global context.

Stage 3

The workshop concluded by inviting participants to experience first-hand how intercultural playback theatre can be brought to life. Participants worked together to shape the script of a personal narrative shared by young people in Greece, exploring ways it could be adapted for online performance. This interactive activity provided a practical insight into the project's core methodology.

A pedagogical guide for teachers worldwide will be published in July 2025, featuring learners' stories and scripts from the project. It will be freely available via British Council Palestine's official channels.

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11.6 Implementing trauma-informed strategies to support refugee learners

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Introduction

As António Guterres has always emphasised in his World Refugee Day messages, refugees are people with dignity, needs and aspirations who deserve compassion and support (United Nations, 2022). The global humanitarian crisis of forced displacement due to wars and conflicts continues to grow rapidly, making it very challenging for refugee students, who are often traumatised, to access quality education. The question is: How can we make the world a better place for them to support their resilience and growth?

Refugee students often arrive in host countries carrying with them the invisible wounds of trauma, loaded with horrible experiences of violence, loss, displacement and profound instability. For educators and institutions, addressing these needs is not only an ethical obligation but a foundational step toward creating environments where refugee learners can thrive. Implementing trauma-informed strategies is essential to ensure that education becomes a source of healing, resilience and hope.

Understanding trauma and its impact on learning

Trauma is a deeply distressing or life threating experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope. It leads to a wide range of physical, emotional and psychological

effects. It affects not only the brain's development and the ability to process and retain information but also causes stress, difficulty concentrating, withdrawal and excessive worry. These behaviours are often survival mechanisms rather than signs of disobedience or disinterest. According to Bloom (1997), a trauma-informed approach shifts the perspective from 'What is wrong with you?' to 'What has happened to you?' Recognising that trauma shapes behaviour and learning is the first step towards implementing supportive educational practices.

Key principles of trauma-informed teaching

Safety

Children are only able to learn within a context of safety and security. Physical and emotional safety must be prioritised. Clear routines, predictable structures and consistency provide the stability that many refugee students have lacked.

Trust

Refugee students may have experienced betrayal and loss of trust. Being clear about expectations, boundaries and available support fosters trust over time.

Empowerment and choice

Trauma often strips individuals of agency. Allowing students to make choices whether in assignments, activities or seating arrangements can help restore a sense of control (Palanac, 2019).

Practical strategies for supporting refugee learners

Building relationships

Strong relationships between teachers and students are the cornerstone of trauma-informed teaching. Taking time to learn students' names, understanding their stories (when shared voluntarily), and showing genuine interest in their wellbeing creates trust. Simple acts of kindness and consistency can have a profound impact.

Fostering a predictable environment

Refugee learners often come from chaotic environments. Classrooms with clear routines, visible schedules and consistent rules provide a reassuring sense of order. Preparing students for transitions and giving warnings before changes reinforce stability.

Incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL)

Integrating social-emotional learning techniques, such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution and mindfulness foster learners' resilience and self-awareness. Equally important, dedicating time for morning meetings, regular check-ins, journalling activities and guided breathing exercises can help students process their emotions safely.

Collaborating with families and community resources

Addressing refugee learners' diverse needs requires community partnership beyond the classroom. Establishing strong partnerships with refugee families is vital to promote social integration and cultural exchange. Collaboration among community networks helps refugee learners feel safe, accepted and valued, which is essential for emotional stability and mental health. Additionally, organising local group activities and cultural festivals that celebrate diversity can help rebuild a sense of belonging in their new environments.

Providing professional development for educators

Since they face many challenges when dealing with traumatised students, teachers need to be equipped with the right tools to better respond to their students' emotions through appropriate behaviour interventions. At the same time, professional development for teachers and staff members should include ongoing training to identify signs of secondary traumatic stress and to show how supporting traumatised students can impact their own wellbeing.

Conclusion

Trauma-informed education is not a one-time programme but a sustained commitment to creating a nurturing environment for all students, particularly the most vulnerable. Investing in trauma-informed practices is an investment in human potential. When refugee learners are given the tools to heal, they not only succeed academically but also enrich their new communities with resilience, diversity and strength. Education can be a powerful force for healing. By adopting trauma-informed strategies, educators can transform classrooms into safe environments where refugee learners are seen, heard and supported. The journey towards healing is long, but, with compassion, consistency and collaboration, schools can light the path for every refugee child seeking a new beginning.

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11.7 Assessing the impact of ESOL for work programmes

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Background

Over the past academic year, we conducted research focused on the impact of Edinburgh College's English for Work programmes. Edinburgh College has a large ESOL department with refugees and asylum seekers making up the majority of the students. The ESOL department runs several ESOL for employability courses to help develop language skills and prepare students for employment. Some courses are more generalised, e.g. English for Work, while others have a specific focus (Computing with ESOL, Access to Care and Health Professions with ESOL, Childhood Practice with ESOL).

We have recently seen a decrease in inward EU economic migration and a growth in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. This shift has led to rising demand for ESOL. Additionally, there is evidence that lack of language skills is resulting in

economic inactivity in the region. We decided to investigate how far ESOL courses can help overcome these issues and help to fill some of the skills gaps in the area.

Approach

We carried out a survey of students on our ESOL and employability programmes, as well as some semi-structured interviews with lecturers and a number of local employers who offer work placement opportunities. The research provided useful insights into the courses and their impact, although we accept this is a small-scale study and findings cannot be generalised.

Findings

There has been a significant shift towards more sanctuary-seeking students taking these courses, with 52 per cent (58 out of 111) of students in the academic year 2024/25 from this background.

Our statistics also highlight that women make up the vast majority, 83 per cent (437 out of 525) of the student body on our employability programmes: We often have mothers who've taken time out of their careers to have children and they're returning adults but they need to increase their level of English and get back into that.

These two key findings highlight the importance of these courses in reaching groups of students who are often furthest from the labour market and face the greatest barriers in accessing the workplace.

The survey of students provided information on the impact for individuals undertaking these programmes and we identified four themes, namely:

- Increasing students' confidence in using English in a workplace environment: *I became more confident in my English skills, therefore I have a wider choice of work.*
- Providing a greater awareness of career opportunities and how best to pursue these: *I understood in what directions you can build a career and how I can develop my business.*
- Providing a sense of motivation and purpose: *It's let me start to think about the future, because if I pass this course, I might have a chance to further study.*
- Understanding of the workplace: *It allows me to have a deep look into the job market and the procedure of how to apply the job.*

Results suggested that our courses could support students more in understanding the cultural differences between work in the UK and their own countries: *I need more information about general rules and regulations, about differences in mentality.*

Employer responses highlighted how much they value their involvement in the work placement element of the courses. Some had subsequently employed their placement student and commented that the courses provided a potential recruitment pipeline at a time when there were facing recruitment challenges. They also felt that the workplace students brought a greater diversity to the workforce and often provided opportunity for development of existing staff.

Our findings emphasise the importance of these courses in Edinburgh, not only supporting the integration of 'New Scots' into the community but in supporting the local economy and aligning skills demand and supply in the region. They also support the College's mission of supporting those who face the greatest barriers to employment.

Recommendations and next steps

Our research has highlighted and clarified key areas that support the successful implementation of ESOL for work programmes. These are: having an industry specific focus, rather than a more broad-brush approach; making sure there are key practical application elements to the course (alongside targeted work placements); and increasing the input of soft skills and cultural difference in the workplace.

Our research will also help to inform the development of this area of the College curriculum, including the priority of expanding our ESOL provision to meet growing demand and industry needs. We are particularly looking at courses in construction, professional cookery, automotive maintenance, and hair and beauty. We are also investigating how to progress students out of ESOL into vocational courses at a lower level and how to support their English within these courses.

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11.8 Eco-responsibility in language teaching: challenging anthropocentrism with Indigenous perspectives

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Education scholars state that there is a clear relationship between the language we use, our thoughts and our actions (Martusewicz et al., 2015). In the light of current environmental catastrophes, there is a need to examine the relation between English and ecological disasters. In my Conference talk, I posed the question: What role does language play in society, and how does it shape specific worldviews?

Anthropocentric roots of ELT

Anthropocentricism is a worldview where humans are the central entity, the most important and intelligent species on the planet, separate from nature, and where other beings termed as 'natural resources' are meant for human consumption. This worldview largely shapes today's educational landscape, where the age of industrialisation and human technological innovation dominates the education system governed by free-market logic to serve economic goals (Martusewicz et al., 2015).

Language plays an important role in society. English language, in particular, is set to take over the world as the global lingua franca. However, the rise of the language industries (standardised tests, ELT, advertising) has led to the commodification of the English language, making it a product, with our students as customers.

Examining the discourse in global ELT materials

Critical discourse analysis examines the hidden power structures in spoken and written discourse. ELT curricular materials often promote hidden anthropocentric ideologies, such as consumerism, individualism, neoliberalism and commodification, through topics such as shopping, travel, product presentation, sales, lifestyle and fashion, transforming

learners into hyper-consumers and economic slaves. For instance, in *Workout Upper Intermediate* (Radley & Millerchip, 1993, as cited in Kullman, 2013), learners are asked to discuss the understanding of a satisfactory lifestyle through materialistic options such as money, a nice house, a car, exciting holidays, living in town, living in the country, good food and drink, a successful career. Hence, sustainability in ELT cannot be meaningfully addressed if learning materials continue to reinforce dominant anthropocentric discourses.

Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy

To foster an ecological consciousness, i.e. shifting from human-centred ways of thinking to earth-centred ways, I advocate for Indigenous pedagogy and knowledge as an alternative curricular framework to teach English. The value of Indigenous pedagogy lies in its interconnectedness. Knowledge, methodology and the experience cannot be separated, emphasising the holistic nature of the pedagogy. For Indigenous peoples, community is not separate from nature; knowledge is not separate from the spiritual realm. It is with this understanding of connectivity and relationality that I advocate for a curriculum grounded in Indigenous oral traditions of storytelling, land-based pedagogies rooted in their relationship with the environment, and a celebration of diverse ideologies crucial to protect the ecosystem (Martusewicz et al., 2015).

1 Deconstructing anthropocentric thinking through stories

An English language curriculum rooted in Indigenous stories would emphasise narratives of human relationships with nature, challenging anthropocentric perspectives based on the discourse of ecological metaphors. The current utilitarian teaching of English language can benefit from a shift towards holistic and culturally rich narratives that support both spiritual and mental functions.

2 Land as a teacher

Globalisation has fuelled substantial mobility, driven by job opportunities facilitated by the English language. This lack of rootedness fosters an anthropocentric worldview, a world of convenience driven by western individualism. Referring to nature as 'objects' implies a utilitarian perspective, treating it as a resource for human consumption. On the other hand, land as pedagogy necessitates a relationship of reciprocal respect, challenging the objectification of nature as a resource (Styres et al., 2013). Indigenous communities view land as a relation, consider animals and plants as kin, and regard land as both a dynamic and spiritual entity. Land as pedagogy goes beyond outdoor activities; it emphasises a reciprocal relationship with the land, acknowledging its stories, land rights, and our responsibilities to Indigenous communities, as well as the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nature.

Future directions

As TESOL educators, we are unfortunately complicit in the discourse of environmental unsustainability. By identifying the hidden curriculum and root metaphors of anthropocentricism in teaching materials, ELT educators can transform the classroom discourse and reframe ecological issues. Martusewicz et al., (2015) call this an eco-ethical consciousness – cultivating the knowledge and appreciation of nature as a whole and an awareness of related issues. However, since Indigenous peoples and their way of life have been exoticised, marginalised and colonised in the western realm

of knowledge systems, it is pertinent for teachers to understand how to work with Indigenous stories. Integrating Indigenous values of respect, responsibility and reciprocity – especially when including Indigenous stories – is essential when teaching a coloniser's language.

In conclusion, the TESOL field must critically examine and transform its practices by challenging dominant educational frameworks and embracing alternative worldviews that promote ecological consciousness and social equity.

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11.9 Greening the classroom: cultivating sustainable futures through English language teaching

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In line with Saudi Vision 2060's net-zero emissions target and the United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), I gave a Conference presentation on how to incorporate sustainability into English language teaching (ELT) in order to promote environmental stewardship and global citizenship. The eight-week pilot project with Saudi Arabian university students is described in this report, along with useful strategies for integrating sustainability into ELT and audience insights into providing flexible solutions for a range of teaching situations.

I instruct intermediate-level English language learners aged 18 to 22, many of whom are driven to address global issues like climate change, at King Abdulaziz University. To promote engagement and improve their critical thinking, language proficiency and ecological awareness, I created a project with sustainability themes. According to Richards (2006), authentic materials make language learning relevant, so to relate ELT to current events, I used news stories and videos about environmental issues, like Saudi Arabia's $180 billion investment in net-zero goals (BBC, 2021).

In order to develop vocabulary (such as 'sustainability' and 'renewable energy') and spark conversations, the project started with an analysis of real materials, such as the BBC article on Saudi Vision 2060. Through debates on subjects like the adoption of solar energy, students improved their speaking fluency and discussion skills. Teaching the '3 Rs' (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) through role plays that mimic neighbourhood recycling campaigns was also suggested by the audience. As one participant pointed out, this engages more reserved students, demonstrating how inclusive role plays are

for a variety of learners. To deepen engagement, students can then write reflective journals on their role play experiences, practising narrative writing and reinforcing environmental concepts.

My focus was on project-based learning. In order to create compelling presentations on sustainable practices, like conserving water in Jeddah's arid climate, students worked together on 'Green Campus' projects. They practised pronunciation for oral delivery and incorporated visuals using PowerPoint. For instance, one group successfully used the modals 'must' and 'should' to propose a campus-wide plastic reduction campaign. Creating posters with energy-saving advice was another task that called for creative expression and succinct writing. Instructors reported enhanced critical thinking and teamwork abilities, and post-project surveys revealed that 80 per cent of students felt more comfortable speaking English. These results show how ELT fits into larger educational frameworks and are in line with SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 13 (Climate Action).

There were difficulties in putting sustainability-focused ELT into practice, such as curriculum limitations and scarce resources. Access to materials was made possible by collaborating with the University's environmental science department; one audience member recommended expanding this approach to nearby NGOs for community-based initiatives. In order to ensure inclusivity in low-resource settings, I modified tasks to make use of accessible resources, such as group discussions or handwritten posters. Another challenge was the disparity in students' environmental knowledge. As suggested by one participant, scaffolding with glossaries, model texts and pre-task quizzes could fill in gaps and increase confidence.

Through professional development opportunities like workshops on sustainability in ELT offered by the British Council, educators can embrace this strategy. Engagement can be sparked by starting small, such as with a single lesson that analyses a conservation news article, for instance, using persuasive language to raise awareness during a recycling debate. Journal entries on the '3 Rs' or oral storytelling work well in settings with limited access to technology. Accessibility across skill levels is ensured by providing clear instructions, sample presentations and rubrics. Writing policy briefs on climate action, for example, can help advanced students develop their critical thinking skills.

In line with the sustainability objectives of Saudi Vision 2060, this strategy turns ELT into a forum for fostering globally aware citizens. 'It's about empowering students to act, not just speak', one audience member thought. To see instant enthusiasm, readers could try a lesson with a sustainability theme, like a role play on waste reduction. By incorporating ecological awareness into ELT, we give students the language and problem-solving skills they need to address global issues and help create a sustainable future.

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11.10 How to teach about sustainability in a sustainable way

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Foreign language skills are essential for accessing and sharing information on the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, institutionalised language education provides an excellent opportunity for debating and reappraising the concept of sustainability. This paper addresses different dimensions of sustainability and shows how they can be integrated into English language teaching in higher education. It describes how to teach for sustainable outcomes, how to design courses in a sustainable way, i.e. efficient and economical with resources, and how to make sustainability a central theme of a language course.

How to teach for sustainable outcomes

Foreign language courses for adult learners can contribute to the achievement of several socio-emotional learning objectives formulated in the *Education for Sustainable Development Goals* (UNESCO, 2017). Through the use of participatory methods they: help motivate and empower learners; encourage learners to analyse and identify their own learning needs in their personal development; enable learners to recognise the importance of their own skills for improving professional careers beyond university; and provide learners with the opportunity to engage personally with issues related to sustainable development.

These objectives can best be achieved by following three pedagogical approaches: learner-centred, action-oriented, and transformative learning. These approaches allow for greater recognition of learners' prior knowledge, linking abstract concepts to learners' lives, empowering learners to question and change their views, and contributing to the development of interdisciplinary academic skills. Figure 11.10.1 illustrates teaching and learning strategies within these approaches.

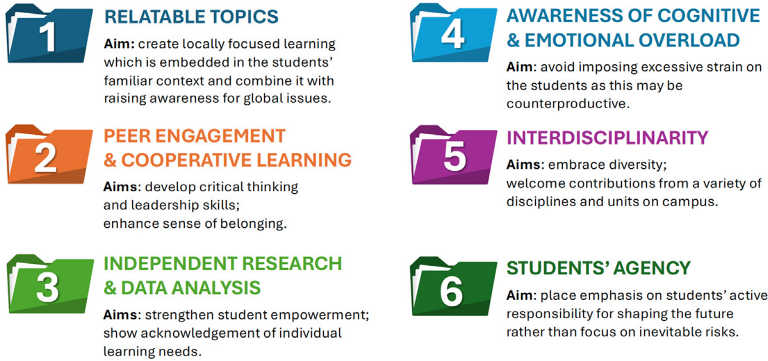

Figure 11.10.1: *Strategies for teaching and learning for sustainable outcomes (based on Soltyska, 2025, and Beth Conklin's tips for teaching sustainability at Vanderbilt University)*

How to design courses in a sustainable way

Sustainability, here understood as the economical and efficient use of available resources, has a significant impact on the daily work of teachers and course designers. Typically, the development of a language course for specific academic purposes (LSAP) requires a considerable investment of various resources (time, know-how, personnel), which is difficult to minimise. This investment generates a unique and bespoke course, tailored to the needs of a specific target group, which, however, can rarely be reused in other contexts. The aim should therefore be to obtain a high-quality product that is 'made to last' and that can be modified with low maintenance costs, i.e. with small intelligent adjustments that have already been taken into account at the initial stage of course development.

Based on the results of needs analysis, literature review and contacts with experts in the field, a non-replaceable core and some replaceable components are identified for each course under consideration. Figure 11.10.2 summarises the characteristics of both sets of components and the purposes they serve.

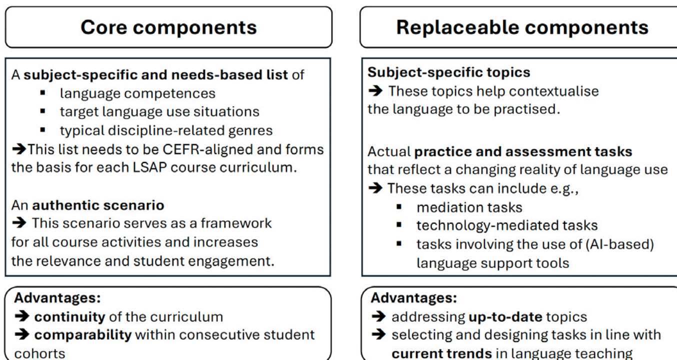

Figure 11.10.2: *Overview of the core and replaceable components of LSAP courses according to sustainable course design*

While the core components can remain unchanged over a longer period of time, i.e. over several iterations of the course, replaceable components can be changed with little effort and little impact on the rest of the course design. This dual structure allows for flexible adjustments to be made as and when required, without the need for resource-intensive updates to the entire syllabus.

How to make sustainability a central topic of a language course

A model course was designed for undergraduate students of Sales Engineering and Product Management at a large German state university. In this compulsory, credit-bearing course, students were asked to take on the role of sustainability consultants and advise their university in solving authentic sustainability problems, such as rethinking the university's energy consumption, planning a green campus transportation system, or evaluating campus resource management. The course scenario was embedded in a familiar setting, namely the geographical, social and economic environment of the university. Moreover, it was related to the students' first-hand experiences and personal encounters on campus. Rooted in the university's sustainability strategy and based on a plausible issue that needed to be addressed, the scenario welcomed student involvement and encouraged them to act in an authentic way, contributing to the solution with their ideas, opinions and evaluations.

The course design, both in terms of teaching and assessment tasks, incorporated strategies for sustainable outcomes as shown in Figure 11.10.1 and followed the design guidelines summarised in Figure 11.10.2. Making sustainability a key theme of the foreign language course helped to meet the needs of a specific, albeit very diverse, group of learners and provided a stimulus for discussion between different stakeholder groups: the students themselves, their teachers, the language centre and other university units.

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Language and skills: *listening*: Archer, **3.2**; Yuzawa, **8.6**; *pronunciation*: Crisfield, Fritz , Kotzor, McIntyre and Spiro, **3.1**; *speaking*: Vaisviliene, **2.6**; Abrill, **3.3**; Kowalczyk, **3.4**; Sturua, **8.7**; *writing*: Crisfield, Fritz , Kotzor, McIntyre and Spiro, **3.1**
Leadership: Price, **6.6**

Materials: Walter, **1.1**; McMillan, **1.4**; Lindley, **6.8**; Yuzawa, **8.6**; Doláková, **8.10**; **Chapter 10**; Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Raha, **11.8**; *alternative text*: Philip-Xu, **10.5**; *inclusion and diversity*: Davies, **10.2**; *local and global culture*: Liu and Zhu, **10.1**; *reading*: Li, **10.3**; Collins, **10.4**; *secondary*: Liu and Zhu, **10.1**; Davies, **10.2**
Migrants, refugees and displaced people: Block, **8.5**; Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Krynska, **11.4**; Salem, **11.6**; Gardiner and Donno, **11.7**
Mindfulness: Waters, **1.3**; Demiroz, **2.4**
Movement-based/multisensory pedagogy: Khachatourian, **2.3**; Iakovidou, **2.5**; Vaisviliene, **2.6**; Doláková, **8.10**

Neuroaesthetics: Iakovidou, **2.5**
Neurodiversity: Walter, **1.1**; Martinez, **3.6**; van der Pool, **3.7**
Neuroscience: Khachatourian, **2.3**; Lacerda and Ferreira, **10.6**

Personalisation: Khachatourian, **2.3**; Cabrera Duarte, **2.7**; Doláková, **8.10**; Khaled Jadallah, **11.5**
Plurilingual approaches: Walter, **1.1**; Momber and Allen, **1.2**; Tran, **2.2**; Crisfield, Fritz, Kotzor, McIntyre and Spiro, **3.1**; Robinson, **8.4**; Block, **8.5**

Research: Walter, **1.1**; Banat, **4.9**; Kostka and Toncelli, **4.11**; Xerri, **6.1**; García Stone and Smith, **6.2**; Krynska, **11.4**
Retrieval practice: Kuepper-Tetzel, **2.1**; Tran, **2.2**

SDGs: Hunter, **7.3**; Setterfield, **8.2**; Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Alharbi, **11.9**; Soltyska, **11.10**
Social-emotional learning (SEL): Panchenko, Dmitrenko and Hladka, **9.2**; Lacerda and Ferreira, **10.6**; Salem, **11.6**; Soltyska, **11.10**
Social justice: Momber and Allen, **1.2**; McMillan, **1.4**; Brown, **11.1**
Social responsibility: Walter, **1.1**; Momber and Allen, **1.2**; Hansel, **7.2**; Setterfield, **8.2**; Liam Anderson, **8.11**
Spaced practice: Kuepper-Tetzel, **2.1**; Tran, **2.2**; Khachatourian, **2.3**
Storytelling: Khachatourian, **2.3**; Cabrera Duarte, **2.7**; Khaled Jadallah, **11.5**

TBLT: McMillan, **1.4**; Soto, **6.7**; Hunter, **7.3**; Duarte and Azevedo, **9.1**
Teacher associations: Price, **6.6**; Krynska, **11.4**
Teacher education: **Chapter 5**; *accessibility*: González, **5.2**; *digital literacy*: Manea Gultekin, **5.6**; *evaluating teachers*: Ellman, **5.5**; Hasper, **5.7**; *metacognition*: Ianiro, **5.3**; *teacher identity*: Stewart, **5.4**
Teacher training and development: **Chapter 5**; Kolb and Pinguri, **8.3**; Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Krynska, **11.4**; *communities of practice*: Price, **6.6**; Lindley, **6.8**; Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Alhassan and Holi, **11.3**; *cooperative development*: Do, **6.3**; *materials development*: Lindley, **6.8**; *mentoring*: García Stone and Smith, **6.2**; *primary*: Lazarde, **5.1**; **Chapter 6**; Soto, **6.7**; *student feedback*: Demine, **6.5**; *teacher associations*: Price, **6.6**; *teacher research*: Xerri, **6.1**; García Stone and Smith, **6.2**; *teaching teams*: Schumm Fauster and Schweighofer, **6.4**
Technological tools: Tran, **2.2**; Acton, **9.4**
Trauma-informed teaching: Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Khaled Jadallah, **11.5**; Salem, **11.6**

Vocabulary: Kuepper-Tetzel, **2.1**; Tran, **2.2**; Khachatourian, **2.3**; Vaisviliene, **2.6**; Crisfield, Fritz, Kotzor, McIntyre and Spiro, **3.1**; Fürstenberg, Thurner and Gottlieb-Zimmermann, **3.5**

War and conflict: Hornby Scholars, **11.2**; Alhassan and Holi, **11.3**; Krynska, **11.4**; Khaled Jadallah, **11.5**; Salem, **11.6**
Wellbeing: Waters, **1.3**; Demiroz, **2.4**; Panchenko, Dmitrenko and Hladka, **9.2**; Acton, **9.4**; Lacerda and Ferreira, **10.6**; Alhassan and Holi, **11.3**; Salem, **11.6**

Young learners and teenagers (YLT): Momber and Allen, **1.2**; Waters, **1.3**; Iakovidou, **2.5**; Martinez, **3.6**; van der Pool, **3.7**; Duarte and Azevedo, **Chapter 8**; **9.1**; Khaled Jadallah, **11.5**; Salem, **11.6**; *investment*: Vallejo, **8.8**; *multiple literacies*: Setterfield, **8.2**; *plurilingual approach*: Robinson, **8.4**; Block, **8.5**; *primary*: Ved, **8.1**; Setterfield, **8.2**; Kolb and Pinguri, **8.3**; Robinson, **8.4**; Yuzawa, **8.6**; Doláková, **8.10**; *project books*: Doláková, **8.10**; *secondary*: Block, **8.5**; Sturua, **8.7**; Vallejo, **8.8**; Dieckhoff and Leonhardt, **8.9**; Doláková, **8.10**; *SEL*: Lacerda and Ferreira, **10.6**; *speaking*: Sturua, **8.7**; *TV series*: Dieckhoff and Leonhardt, **8.9**; *values*: Liam Anderson, **8.11**; *virtual exchange*: Kolb and Pinguri, **8.3**

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