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Blended Learning

A Review of Research on Language Anxiety in Face-To-Face and Remote Learning

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Abstract

This review of language learning anxiety research, both in physical and remote classrooms, describes the process development of understanding the phenomenon of anxiety among students over the past 3 decades to the present day. The main prevailing school of thought in the study of second language acquisition is presented for the nature, causes, and effects of the experience of anxiety. Among the topics discussed are the learner's presuppositions of language learning as a cause of anxiety, feelings of anxiety in synchronous and asynchronous learning, the relationship between motivation, enjoyment, and anxiety, the use of learning strategies, and cooperative learning. The last part of the article suggests practical pedagogical suggestions to alleviate language learning anxiety.

Keywords: Language anxiety, distance language learning

1. Foreign Language Anxiety

In the mid-20th century, studies revealed early anxieties that exist in learners prior to language learning and don't necessarily arise during language learning, which affect the ability to study and function. Evidence of this was found in the research of a couple of linguists who recorded a diary of their experiences in learning Arabic and Persian in the target cultures vs. a US classroom. It was found that personal characteristics, tensions, pressures of social and cultural adaptation, rejecting teaching methods, and personal goals, all constitute variables that may have a negative or positive effect on language acquisition (Schumann & Schumann, 1977). According to McCoy (1979), people who are wary of criticism may experience language anxiety. This may overwhelm the feelings of fear and shyness and affect the level of functioning in class. Even students with public speaking anxiety will express language anxiety and poor speech skills due to the requirement to speak publicly. In the late 80s, Horwitz et al. (1986) described situations in which language students "freeze" during exams, and stutter while speaking in class. Others trembled during writing activities. Some felt uncomfortable in colleagues' presence and embarrassed when native speakers addressed them (125). Anxiety was described as a unique emotion for a foreign language classroom, independent of other anxieties and even separated from anxieties in other academic subjects. It is a major factor affecting the functional abilities of language learners and isn't a side effect of language studies (Horwitz et al. 1986). The FLACS Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was developed by Horwitz et al. to assess speech anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative criticism related to language learning. Later came the FLRAS-Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale and the WAT-Writing Apprehension Test (Pichette, 2009). Both tools were used to measure anxiety levels during the course, incorporate a pedagogical intervention in early and late course stages, as well as to evaluate the impact of these pedagogical changes on learner's anxiety (Russell, 2020). Young (1991) summarizes in her review the studies in this field until the early 90s and lists the main factors found to influence language anxiety. [1] Learner's personality- According to Krashen, learners with low self-esteem worry about what others think and pleasing others. The emotional filter is removed when people feel they are part of a group (qt. in Young 427), and Price adds that while performing a verbal task, there is a fear of self-image and loss of self (qt. in Young 427). [2] Learner's perceptions- According to Ginen, some learners believe they must speak with no accent, avoid content and grammar errors, and have no reason to speak L2 until they are proficient (qtd. in Young 428). [3] Teacher's role- Brendel claims that a teacher who acts as ruler and center of knowledge, constantly and publicly correcting student errors and avoiding group activities for fear of losing control, will contribute to an ineffective teacher/learner relationship and language anxiety (qt. in Young 428). [4] Classroom activities- Koch and Terrell believe that activities such as speaking in front of the class with

no prior practice, oral tests, or demanding an immediate response stimulate dominant anxiety (qtd. in Young 429). [5] Assessment- According to Madsen, unfamiliar or vague assessments and a mismatch between teaching and evaluation methods, will lead to an anxiety increase and a decrease in performance ability (qt. in Young 429).

2. Learners' Perceptions of Physical and Remote Learning

From the existing research, no significant difference was found between anxiety levels in physical and remote classes, but the difference is within the quality of anxiety. Baralt and Gurzynski (2011) showed how students expressed both positive and negative feelings about the two spaces but for different reasons. The physical classroom is viewed positively as a natural and social environment, while in the remote class, positive feelings arise from characteristics of learning space diversity, innovation, and speed. However, both spaces are captured as frustrating and stressful. In the physical class, the main reason is the fast rate of the teacher's speech, causing confusion and embarrassment. In the remote class, feelings of detachment, fear, boredom, and frustration are due to a lack of personal attention (216). These differences are rooted in learners' choice of learning space and in the combination of beliefs and perceptions regarding distance learning. Although choosing the remote learning space is moved mainly by external factors such as adjusting to life schedule, cost, or even a global virus, assumptions (sometimes wrong) that learners have about distance learning and language learning in general, affect their language abilities and the nature of experience (Hurd 2007; Russell 2020).

2.1 Anxiety in Language Acquisition Processes

Aydin (2018) claims anxiety level is shaped by the presentation of goals and the assignment's nature. Anxiety in distance learning is inherent in its processes and comes to form during the language acquisition process. In the passive stages of input and processing, the anxiety is not to a great extent. Few learners expressed fear of listening and understanding a native speaker, low fear of errors, and low anxiety while listening to authentic materials using digital devices. Also, an increased vocabulary and grammatical topics have not been proven to have a significant effect (Russell, 2020; Hurd, 2007; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018). However, in the productive processes of speaking, reading aloud, and writing, a high anxiety level was shown in all learning stages, specifically in synchronous reading and writing exams there was a fear of pressure (Aydin, 2018). However, in speaking exercises on VoiceThread \Flipgrid measures of anxiety were found low, although there is no certainty that it is precisely these systems that reduce anxiety levels (202). David et al. (2018) found that using a remote dialogue log not only lowered writing anxiety but also its nature changed. Anxiety moved from fear of the writing's action to fear of the final product quality and the reader's reactions (80-79).

2.2 Anxiety, Motivation and Learning Enjoyment

Russell (2020) states that distance learners must take responsibility for their work, manage time and course load, and be ready to learn despite the physical distance (space and time) and the psychological (separation from colleagues). Failure to meet these conditions will be a basis for manifestations of anxiety (342). Coryell & Clark (2009), however, testify that even learners who came with high motivation to learn a language to integrate into culture also expressed anxiety in distance learning. The reason is that the production of language in remote space is perceived by learners as a live performance of correctness and accuracy, and not as an indication of developing communication skills within the community. This perception makes learners focus on memorization and error avoidance. They avert from producing meaningful communication and the enjoyment of it. According to Curiel and Klar (2009), learners who are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, appreciate learning communication skills but during communication attempts in distance learning, enthusiasm turned into anxiety for fear of being caught as a fool (493). As for enjoyment, Grant et al. (2013) found that remote learning is not necessarily more fun or interesting, but feelings of enjoyment are important in the learning process (7).

2.3 Anxiety and Cooperative Learning

The researchers' opinion on shared work is consistent. Hauck and Hurd (2005) conclude that anxiety levels will decrease if learners cooperate, feel part of a supportive community, and experience a non-threatening learning environment. These conditions will increase self-confidence, motivation, a sense of cohesion, and the development of mutual trust (17). Speech activity in small groups allows more thinking time towards language production and learners don't feel as if they are under a magnifying glass, and able to communicate with others at a similar level of proficiency. Role-playing using synchronous platforms isn't a threatening experience and allows ease of speech. Using Wikis in collaborative writing reduces anxiety levels among learners. Uploading videos, responding to content by other learners, proofreading, and editing others, found a measure of low language anxiety (Yen et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018; Baralt and Gurzynski, 2011). Curiel and Clark (2009) conclude that language

learning in remote space which doesn't allow a high degree of learner interaction, will lead, among other things, to anxious learners.

2.4 Anxiety and Learning Strategies

The Oxford model (1990) distinguishes between direct and indirect strategies in language learning. Direct strategies include cognitive strategies of repetition, memorizing, and guessing. Indirect strategies include metacognitive actions of organizing and planning information, techniques of emotion control during lessons, and cooperation with others to practice the language (17). Hauck and Hurd (2005) examined the experience of anxiety in distance learning and metacognitive strategies of learners. It appears that meta-cognitive strategies of self-management, planning, organization, and assessment, are necessary for all remote learners who experience language anxiety. Hurd (2007) proved this in a follow-up study and showed that using indirect strategies, primarily taking risks, and guessing, giving positive self-feedback, and the use of calming techniques, were the ones that helped to reduce anxiety.

3. Summary and Conclusions

A summary of studies indicates the level of language anxiety in the remote space is in general like the traditional classroom (Baralt and Gurzynski, 2001; Pichette, 2009; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018; Hurd, 2007). Learners often come to remote language classes by choice, accompanied by different assumptions and perceptions about the traditional classroom and the remote world. Combining concepts in relation to the two learning spaces creates new assumptions and approaches that are not necessarily correct. When these assumptions are encountered, the level of anxiety may increase or decrease (Pichette, 2009; Webb & Doman, 2019; Russell, 2020). It was found that in remote courses, anxiety levels decrease, but it is not clear if the reasons for this are the characteristics of the learning channel (synchronous or asynchronous) or the amount of exposure to the target language (Pichette, 2009; Russell, 2020). Another variable is cooperative work which indicates low levels of anxiety (Baralt and Gurzynski, 2005; Yen et al. 2013; Aydin 2018). As for the modes of communication, it seems that there are higher anxiety levels in productive processes than in receptive processes (Russell, 2020; Hurd, 2006; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018). Distance language learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous, raises fear of criticism and negative evaluation of peers and teachers (Hurd, 2006; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Baralt & Gurzynski, 2011; Grant et al. 2013; Yeng & Quadir, 2018; Russell, 2020). Finally, the use of metacognitive methods, emotional and social, reduces anxiety in the remote space (Hurd, 2006). As in the physical class, and in the remote class, the presence of learning enjoyment increases the degree of motivation and allows a reduction in anxiety (Coryell & Clark, 2009; Grant et al. 2013).

4. Pedagogical Recommendations

To create a remote learning environment with less anxiety experience, it's recommended to take the following pedagogical actions: [1] Check the learner's familiarity with the remote space and give guidance on the use of platforms (Russell, 2020; Aidyn, 2018). [2] Inform the learners about learning strategies that can optimize the learning process (Bown, 2006; Russell, 2020; Hauck & Hurd, 2005). [3] Repeat instructions several times and allow practice time for cooperative work before presenting to the entire class. Before asynchronous tasks, practice and demonstrate in a synchronous class to make sure that learners are aware of the task's nature and its objectives (Russell, 2020; Pichette, 2009; Aidyn, 2018). [4] Give learners open, encouraging, and supportive feedback, emphasizing that there is no expectation of perfection, and create a supportive learning community by providing collaborative assignments (Bown, 2006); Russell, 2020). [5] Provide authentic, humorous, and up-to-date content, which gives opportunities and encourages to get to know the target culture (Russell, 2020; Pichette, 2009).

Recognizing the nature of language anxiety, its character, and modes of expression allows one to identify feelings of frustration and discomfort among language learners, whether they learn in the remote space willingly or out of necessity. The learner's perceptions of language learning, remote space, task types, cognitive factors, and metacognitive, emotional, and social, all influence anxiety and shape its nature in the process of remote language learning.

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Using Conversational Artificial Intelligence for Online Learning Activities in English for Specific Purposes: A Pilot Study of Students' Experiences with Bing Chat

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Abstract

The use of conversational artificial intelligence (CAI) tools like ChatGPT or GPT-4 is gaining much attention in the context of EFL/ESP instruction and numerous recommendations for educators can be found online regarding various means of using CAI tools in language teaching. In our paper we present the results of our investigation into the use of the CAI tool Bing Chat regarding its pedagogical potential for designing online learning activities (i.e., e-tivities) in ESP instruction. At the end of the summer semester of the 2022/2023 academic year students in an ESP course were engaged in various e-tivities with the use of Bing Chat that were aimed at exploring different aspects of Business English grammar and vocabulary. After the students performed these e-tivities a survey was used to collect data on (a) their experiences with the e-tivities and (b) evaluation of selected technological attributes of Bing Chat. As an easily accessible CAI – or chatbot – that is integrated with an existing search engine, Bing Chat was found in our study to be a convenient and reliable tool for the design and implementation of instructional activities in an ESP course. Also, the e-tivities with Bing Chat that were performed received predominantly positive evaluation from the students. The observation of the authors of this paper is that, in terms of interaction with students in a higher education setting, Bing Chat displayed an adequate level of linguistic competence in using the English language, as well as satisfactory general knowledge of the English language system (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc.).

Keywords: higher education, online instruction, EFL, perceptions, survey

1. Introduction

The potential for innovation in language learning with technology has considerably increased after the introduction of generative artificial intelligence tools based on large language models (LLMs). The number of non-scholarly publications on how to utilize the best known of such tools, i.e., ChatGPT (or GPT-4) has been on the increase, with various tutorials that have also emerged on this subject. Scholarly papers on this topic are not so abundant but also growing in number, now that a year has passed since ChatGPT was made publicly available.

This paper presents an empirical evaluation of the use of Bing Chat (i.e., a chatbot based on a LLM and running GPT-4 in its core, but also a search engine that complements the popular Bing) in the context of performing online learning activities within an English language course for students of economics.

2. Online Activities (e-tivities) in Teaching EFL/ESP

Online teaching and learning activities, or *e-tivities*, are a means of synchronous or asynchronous instruction with the use of various internet-based tools and online services, including conversational artificial intelligence (CAI) tools such as GPT-4 (provided by OpenAI) and Bing Chat (provided by Microsoft). E-tivities, as a type of internet-based learning activities, can be broadly defined as “frameworks for enabling active and participative online learning by individuals and groups” [6, p. 5]. E-tivities can be conducted at different levels of education and adapted for teaching various subjects, including *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) and *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP). In the EFL/ESP setting, e-tivities can supplement or replace face-to-face instruction and can be used for various objectives, including the development of students' language competence (e.g., vocabulary and grammar knowledge and usage), as well as conceptual knowledge and communication skills. E-tivities can also contribute to the enhancement of learning experiences of students in EFL/ESP instruction and to their acquisition of learning-to-learn skills. It must be noted that the previous work of the authors of this paper included the development and evaluation of numerous e-tivities using a wiki system and several other web 2.0 tools (for instance, see: [5]).

In the research that is presented in this paper the students were instructed to use conversational AI to perform e-tivities to explore predefined language topics. The goal of the online activities that were conducted with students and evaluated in this paper was to draw students' attention to and increase their awareness of particular features of Business English vocabulary, phraseology and grammar (word formation in Business English, telephone English and phrasal verbs, respectively). These e-tivities included: (a) search for content related to the Business English course with Bing Chat and checking the accuracy of collected information with the Google search engine; (b) learning about phrasal verbs with Bing Chat, including their definition and examples; (c) correcting sentences in English with Bing Chat; (d) creating multiple-choice questions for practice; (e) learning about the typical conversation structure on an example of a telephone dialogue etc.

3. The Use of Conversational AI in EFL/ESP Instruction

After the introduction of ChatGPT conversational AI tool in November 2022 there has been a growing number of scholarly papers that analyse and illustrate its potential in EFL/ESP instruction. Like other chatbots, ChatGPT can interact with learners using the English language in the form of 'authentic' human-like conversations, while at the same time performing various language learning activities (for examples see: [3]). Its use for teaching and learning activities can provide students with assistance in a personalized learning environment with immediate feedback [7]. Despite the concerns regarding academic integrity of students, ChatGPT has the potential for innovation of pedagogy in teaching English, as was demonstrated in one qualitative study [4]. The knowledge of the English language by ChatGPT/GPT-4 is such that it can easily pass high school English language tests [2] and even assist in writing preparatory Kindle eBooks material for the TOEFL exam [1].

4. Research Questions and Methodology

The goals of this study were to (a) investigate the potential uses of the Bing Chat conversational AI tool and search engine in the context of EFL/ESP instruction, (b) select and evaluate various online learning activities with Bing Chat that could be beneficial for the development of English grammar, vocabulary and phraseology (in a specialized area of the ESP course in which the study was conducted).

4.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were defined for our study:

RQ1. How do students evaluate the online learning activities (e-tivities) with the Bing Chat conversational AI and search engine in their ESP course?

RQ2. In what ways and how much do the students expect Bing Chat and similar AI tools to be potentially useful in their further learning of the English language?

RQ3. How do students evaluate the technological features of Bing Chat regarding its usability and user experience attributes?

4.2 Methodology

The ESP course in which the study was conducted was delivered in the summer semester of the 2022/2023 academic year at a higher education institution in Croatia. After performing several asynchronous and synchronous learning activities with the use of the Bing Chat conversational AI tool and search engine, at the end of the semester (in June 2023) the students were asked to participate in a paper-and-pencil survey. The sample in our survey (N=69) included male (31.9%) and female (68.1%) respondents aged 18-19 (92.8%) or over (7.2%), all of whom were enrolled in their first year of an undergraduate university study. Only 30.4% of the students had not used Bing Chat or similar tools (e.g., ChatGPT) prior to the use of the Bing Chat tool for learning activities in their ESP (Business English) course, but most of the students (65.2%) stated that the frequency of their prior use of such tools was less than once a week.

5. Results of Data Analyses

5.1 Students' Evaluations of Learning Activities with Bing Chat

The data presented in Figure 1 represents the joint percentages or responses "4 – I agree" and "5 – I totally agree" to the survey questions that were related to students' *general evaluation of the online teaching and learning activities with Bing Chat* conversational AI and search engine. As many as 79.7% of respondents stated that doing the online activities (learning tasks) with Bing Chat *deepened their knowledge* in certain areas of the English language and 73.9% of them indicated that the activity format and tasks *helped them understand certain areas of English vocabulary*. Also, 71% of the respondents

declared that doing the online activities *allowed them to be creative*. The *motivational effect* of the use of Bing Chat was also visible since 68.1% of respondents stated that performing online activities was *stimulating for their learning* of English and 65.2% confirmed that the online learning activities with Bing Chat generally *contributed to motivating other students*. Finally, 63.7% of respondents believed that the learning activities *helped them better understand specific topics of English grammar* and 68.1% of them reported that these activities contributed to other students' acquisition of the content of the Business English course. From the data presented above it can be concluded that the online learning activities with Bing Chat in the ESP course were overall positively evaluated, especially considering that 71% of the students stated that these activities generally contributed to the success of this course.

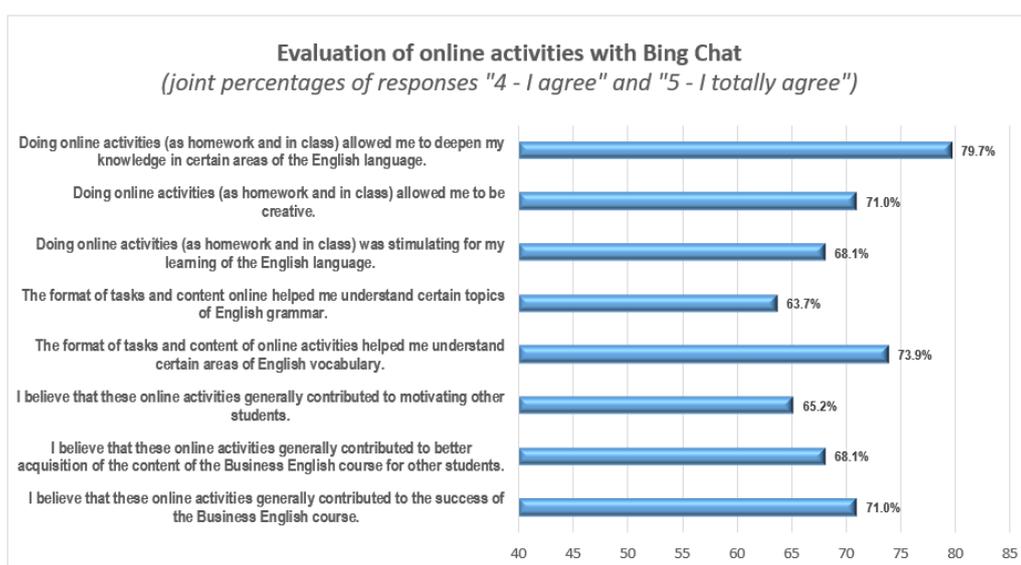


Fig. 1 Students' evaluations of online learning activities with Bing Chat (N=69)

5.2 Expected Usefulness of Conversational AI Tools in Students' Further Learning of English

To evaluate the students' expectations regarding the potential usefulness of using AI tools like Bing Chat in their future learning of English the students were asked to state their agreement with a series of statements that completed the sentence "I believe that the use of tools like Bing Chat, GPT and alike in my further learning of English language may...". The joint percentages of students who provided responses "4 – I agree" and "5 – I totally agree" to these survey items are presented in Figure 2. As can be concluded from these data, a vast majority of students indicated that such tools would be useful for: their better understanding of grammar rules in English (84.1%); their more precise use of professional vocabulary in English (82.6%); translating from Croatian to English, and vice versa (81.2%, respectively); improving their English spelling and more accurate application of grammar rules (81.1%, respectively); better understanding of professional vocabulary in English (75.3%) and the development of writing skills, i.e. composing different types of texts for different purposes (73.9%). From the data presented in Figure 2 it can be concluded that most of the students expected that Bing Chat and similar conversational AI tools could be beneficial to them in case they wished or needed to expand their general knowledge of English or more specific knowledge in a field like Business English. The only aspect in which the use of such tools was not recognized as potentially beneficial by students in our study was the improvement of pronunciation skills since the text-to-voice functionality of conversational AI tools was not demonstrated in the online learning activities that they were engaged in.

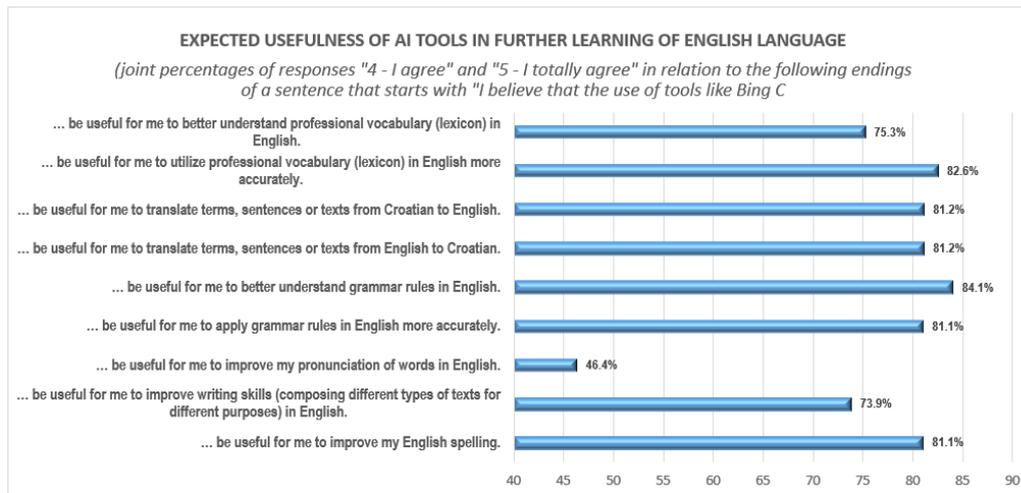


Fig. 2 Students' expectations regarding various aspects of potential usefulness of tools like Bing Chat in their further learning of English (N=69)

5.3 Students' Evaluations of Various Technical Characteristics of Bing Chat

To investigate the appropriateness of using the CAI tool Bing Chat in educational settings, items related to the constructs of *usability* (general usability, learnability, system reliability, visual design & navigation, information quality, information display) and *user experience* (cognitive involvement, trust, risk perception, personification of Bing Chat) were also included in our survey. The data presented in Table 1 illustrate that for most attributes that are related to *usability* the joint percentage of positive responses ("4 – I agree" and "5 – I totally agree") was 88.4% or above, while for the four user experience attributes those percentages were slightly lower and in the range from 59.4% to 73.9%.

Table 1 Students' evaluations of various technical characteristics of Bing Chat and the related labels for usability and user experience constructs (N=121; the percentages represent joint positive responses "4 – I agree" and "5 – I totally agree")

Technical characteristics of Bing Chat (<i>constructs</i>)	Percentage of positive responses
Bing Chat can be used for many different things (<i>perceived usefulness</i>)	97.1%
Bing Chat responds to my queries/commands as I expect. (<i>General usability</i>)	92.7%
The basics of working with the Bing Chat tool can be learned quickly. (<i>learnability</i>)	92.8%
Bing Chat worked fast enough and reliably. (<i>System reliability</i>)	88.4%
Functionalities on the Bing Chat interface are well organized and easily accessible (e.g., menus, copying, etc.). (<i>visual' design & navigation</i>)	91.3%
The use of the Bing Chat service enabled the collection of accurate information. (<i>Information quality</i>)	91.3%
The way information is displayed in Bing Chat responses is clear and well-structured. (<i>Information display</i>)	95.6%
Using the Bing Chat service to search for information is interesting and fun for me. (<i>Cognitive involvement</i>)	71.0%
The more I used Bing Chat, the more I felt that I could rely on this tool if I needed it. (<i>trust</i>)	69.5%
I am sure that there is no danger or potential threat to Bing Chat users. (<i>Risk perception</i>)	73.9%
My conversations with Bing Chat resembled an exchange of online text messages with an informed person. (<i>Personification of Bing Chat</i>)	59.4%

As can be concluded from the data presented in Table 1, the selected technical attributes of Bing Chat that are related to usefulness, general usability, learnability, system reliability, visual design/navigation,

information quality, and information display received a rather favorable evaluation. On the other hand, the attributes that are related to user experience, like interestingness and fun to use (cognitive involvement), level of trust in the system, perception of risk during use, and resemblance of textual interaction with a real person also received a positive evaluation by a majority of students. According to these evaluation results, there seems to be no significant obstacle for most of the higher education students included in our study to further use Bing Chat in EFL/ESP language settings, which may also refer to future students. However, Bing Chat and other similar CAI tools (GPT, Bard) are constantly evolving and such evaluations have to be regularly performed.

6. Conclusion

The first appearance of advanced CAI tools based on LLMs in November 2022 (ChatGPT / GPT 3.5), and the subsequent launch of more advanced tools like GPT-4, Bing Chat and Bard, have created an imperative for educators to make a transition in student assessment methods, as well as an opportunity to (re)design the channel(s), modes and pedagogies of teaching and learning activities in order to improve their effectiveness. In our paper we have investigated how students perceive online learning activities (or e-tivities) with Bing Chat, as well their estimate of potential usefulness of Bing Chat in their future learning of English language.

In this conclusion we provide a summary of the results of our study in terms of answers to the previously defined research questions (RQ1 to RQ3). Regarding the **first research question** (RQ1) and the data presented in Figure 1, most students (in the range from 63.7% to 79.7%) positively evaluated the use of online activities with Bing Chat for their learning and use of English in educational settings. In relation to the **second research question** (RQ2) and data displayed in Figure 2, students' expectations regarding various aspects of potential usefulness of tools like Bing Chat and ChatGPT in their further learning and use of English were predominantly positive (from 73.9% to 84.1%). Finally, considering the **third research question** (RQ3) and data presented in Table 1, it can be concluded that technical characteristics of Bing Chat were positively evaluated by the students in the sense that no obstacle was identified in that area that would prevent its future use for educational purposes in higher education (in the form of online learning activities designed for students).

The authors of this paper emphasize that, due to the constant evolution of CAI tools and LLMs, their use in higher education needs to be regularly reevaluated. Also, the limitations of the research that is presented in this paper refer to the small size of the convenience sample of students of Economics and the specific educational environment of the Business English course. Therefore, the results of our study should not be generalized. However, the implemented research methodology model could be useful for future studies related to the use of CAIs for English language teaching and learning in higher education.

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The Role of Visuals in Promoting Self-Learning of Grammatical Concepts

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Abstract

English is taught as a second language in almost all non-native countries across the world and from early childhood in many countries. By the time the learners reach the college level, they learn to communicate in English enough to make themselves intelligible and use English for functional purpose regarding all the four language skills. However, it is observed that their grammatical concepts are not very clear and they lack confidence especially regarding the use of tenses. Several methods and techniques of teaching tenses have been tried out till date and new ideas emerge constantly. This study explores the use of visuals for clarification of tenses and their uses. The subjects were fourth year Iraqi college students. Results showed that visuals are extremely useful for promoting the self-learning of the use of English tenses in case of college level students.

Keywords: *self-learning, grammatical concepts, use of tenses, visuals, time-lines*

1. Introduction and Background

Research regarding teaching English as a second language is in full-fledge in current times. The advent of technology and internet, the gap and radical change brought about by COVID-19 pandemic led to virtual methods and online teaching learning. Now corona is left behind but the footprints remain in the form of online teaching-learning, and most teachers and educationists continue to be engaged with technology. It is now time to find out new methods which can combine the online and offline modes or can be adapted to either of the two because offline mode is back in form. This study explores a method which can be used offline but can be enhanced by technology.

Learning English as a second language since early childhood is common in many countries in the world. Consequently, by the time students reach the college level, they do achieve a good level of proficiency in all the four language skills. Although they do not understand all the grammatical concepts, they do manage to make themselves intelligible enough to communicate in daily life. One cannot communicate without using verbs and appropriate tenses; second language learners commit several errors in the use of tenses. Sometimes, they are misunderstood but mostly, the listeners can make out the correct tenses and meanings from the context. Thus, communication takes place but even the users are not confident about the use of tenses.

This study tries to find out how far visuals can be used for clarifying the use of tenses. College students are old enough to learn on their own; rather, they would prefer to learn on their own something that they have not understood properly since childhood. The researcher thought that preparing special visuals to present tenses can help students to understand the concept through self-learning. Gould and Roffey-Barentsen (2018) contend that 83 percent of our learning is achieved through the sense of sight.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Although second language learners achieve a certain level of proficiency in English by the time they reach the college level, it is observed that their grammatical concepts are not completely clear, especially regarding the use of tenses in English. They do manage to communicate intelligibly but often do not use tenses correctly and admit that they do not have confidence regarding use of tenses. Inductive and deductive methods have been tried out to teach the use of tenses, but with little success. Videos help to clarify tenses in a better way. Yet, if tenses are represented in the form of time-lines complemented by pictures, they can be understood at a glance. These visuals immediately make the meaning clear and there is no need for anyone to explain them to the learner. They are self-explanatory. At a stage when learners are fairly proficient in English and just need a quick clarification in the use of tenses; these visuals can be very helpful. A visual image can be remembered for a long time when they are exposed to it several times. It gets stored in the inner eye and can be brought back to memory whenever required. It is also necessary to suggest that teachers can apply visually-based grammar

teaching based on the nature of grammatical rules taught, learner ability, while taking into account pedagogical principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

One may wonder why visuals should be used in this age of technology. It has already been mentioned that this is a time for combining the old and the new, the offline and online; the emphasis is on facilitating learning rather than teaching and the focus is on self-learning. College level students are matured enough to access material and learn on their own. Students may vary in their knowledge about the use of tenses. Hence, they can select only those visuals which help them to clarify unclear concepts. Moreover, the visuals can be prepared in soft or hard copy formats.

Considering all the above points, preparing visual material for teaching tenses to college level Iraqi students seems to be a worthwhile effort.

1.2 Objectives

- To take a review about the confidence level of fourth year college level students regarding the use of tenses in English through a questionnaire.
- To prepare visuals in the form of time-lines and pictures for understanding the use of tenses in English.
- To implement the self-learning program and note the minimum duration required to complete the program.
- To record the results of the study based on statistical calculations and observations.

1.3 Sample

50 students from the fourth-year college level Iraqi were selected for the study.

1.4 Method

The proficiency level and opinion of students prior to the experiment were gathered from a questionnaire distributed to 50 college students studying in the fourth year. The experimental method was used to find out the effectiveness of the program based on visuals for self-learning of English tenses. A hard copy of the visuals was provided in addition to a soft copy and students were given a choice to use any one of them. The results of the pre and post-test were compared statistically.

SECTION 2 – Theoretical Background and Review of Literature

2. A. Theoretical Background

2. A.1 Tenses in English

The word 'tense' has been derived from the Latin word 'tempus' which means 'time'. While 'time' is a physical concept, 'tense' is a grammatical concept. Verbs are words that indicate action. Every action takes place at a specific time; it might be completed in the past, may be an ongoing action, may be taking place at the time of speaking or may take place in the future. Tense indicates the time of the action. Hence, the correct and appropriate use of tense is important while teaching and learning English. There are three basic tenses – the past tense, the present tense and the future tense.

2. A.2 The Importance of tenses in English

Tenses in English are the most important elements in English grammar. Knowledge of tenses enables second language learners to construct grammatically correct sentences and express the precise meaning that they want to convey. Tenses help to describe the time of actions that take place.

2. A.3 Visual Aids in Teaching-learning

Teaching aids are of three types – audio, visual and audio-visual. According to Rautrao (2012) the interest of students as well as teachers increases when visual aids are used. Visual aid is, as Stevick defined it, "anything visible which helps your student master the language more quickly or more accurately".

Visual aids are stronger than audio aids. They include pictures, charts, diagrams, graphs, tables, sketches, films, and actual presentations. An image of a visual can remain on the mind's eye for a long time. Visual aids help learners to retain what is visualized. Visual information is more engaging. Ngonyani (2018) stated that teachers consider the use of real objects as important in teaching and learning process.

2. A.4 The Characteristics and Advantages of Visual Aids

Visual aids are of 3 types according to F. L. Billows (1968). Two-dimensional visual aids are charts, pictures, diagrams, figures etc. Three-dimensional visual aids include models, puppets, mimes, gestures of teachers and students etc. The third type of visual aids are any other aids that can be seen with the eyes like films, videos etc.

Visual aids help to clarify concepts. Abstract concepts can be made clear through visuals. Showing the picture of something that is beautiful or a beautiful artefact enables the learners to understand the abstract term 'beauty'.

Showing the picture of a railway station immediately enables a learner to imagine the crowd and commotion on a platform. Description in words would fail to create an exact picture and a very lengthy description would be necessary. Thus, visuals save a lot of time spent in description and explanation.

A concept like melting of ice can be easily understood from a demo rather than through description. Words, explanations, and descriptions are supplemented by visuals. PowerPoint slides prove to be more effective in classroom teaching since they can be enhanced by visuals like pictures, videos, graphs, photographs etc. Feleshi, (2014) also reported that planned and well-prepared slides motivate students and retain their attention because they elaborate the presented information. Time-lines enable understanding the use of tenses. Glancing at a timeline clarifies where and how a particular tense must be used. This article tries to prove the success of time-lines for enabling students to understand tenses by themselves.

"There are numerous benefits of visual arts in education for young children, ranging from sensory exploration to the exercising of the imagination. However, visual arts are not granted the high value and serious consideration that they deserve in the school curricula and are not fully appreciated by the community" (Buldu & Shaban, 2010 p.1).

A graphical representation of rainfall in 10 consecutive years becomes clear in a glance rather than through words. A timetable is another common visual that is convenient and time-saving. Such visuals can be indirect yet effective. They can be suggestive, mocking, or implicative. Icons are also visuals that can be interpreted even by those who cannot read and write. Icons are used on cell phones and other digital devices. Road signs are visuals that are understood universally. Thus, we find that visuals play an important role in daily life and can be effectively used for teaching learning purposes.

2. A.5 Self-Learning Material

Although teaching by teachers or instructors is the commonest method in education, self-learning material is preferred in many situations, especially when the students are employed full-time or part-time. Very often, taking admission in a college, travelling to a place far from the home town, staying in a hostel etc. is expensive and may not be feasible for several reasons. Hence, in modern times, distance learning has become popular. In the distance learning mode, students are provided with specially prepared material. They can read and learn on their own. Students can learn at their own pace and convenient time.

In a similar way, visual material can be used for self-learning. It does not require a mediator or intervention of any kind. Dr. Jayaram K. and Dorababu K. (2015) clearly state in their article that "SLMs include all the material prepared to stimulate independent study/learning. The learners in distance education have less contact with either the institution or the tutor, and depend heavily on these specially prepared learning materials (p 21929)."

Gbenoba and Dahunsi (2014) also note that "customised, self-instructional materials are at the heart of instructional delivery in Open and Distance Learning.

SECTION 3

Methodology and Procedure

This section will deal with the method used for carrying out the research and the detailed procedure for analysis of the data collected.

3.1 Method

The experimental method is used for collecting primary data. Qualitative data is gathered through a questionnaire. 50 students studying in the fourth-year college of Education in Iraq, Al Mansour University, were selected for the experiment. The sample was purposive. The single group pre-test/post-test design was used.

3.2 Design and Procedure

Table 1. Single Group Pre-test / Post-test design

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Online pre-test	Implementation of self-learning course	Online post-test

The students had knowledge about the use of English tenses. A pre-test was conducted to test their knowledge and awareness about the correct use of English tenses. The test was conducted online. This was followed by the teaching programme using visuals for teaching the tenses.

A programme was prepared using visuals. It was divided into 4 parts, each part dealing with one form of the Present tense. The tense forms were presented through time-lines. In addition, an explanation of the use of each form was given in the form of notes along with sufficient examples. Two exercises were provided for the purpose of practice. Ideally, each programme would be completed within an hour. Each practice session would require maximum 30 minutes. However, the students were asked to complete the programme at their own convenient pace. The maximum duration given was one month.

All this material was self-explanatory and prepared as self-learning material. The material was given as both soft and hard copies and the students could choose any mode which they found convenient. Singh (2005) states that any device which by sight... increases the individual's experience beyond that acquired through reading is described as a visual aid." (p. 78)

A questionnaire was distributed to the students to find out their opinion about the understanding and difficulties regarding tenses in English and their reactions to the visuals-based programme for teaching English tenses.

3.3 Questionnaire (the Students Responded Whether They Agreed, Disagreed or Partly Agreed with the Following Statements)

1. English tenses are difficult to understand.
2. The use of each tense is best understood through examples.
3. I would prefer an explanation of the use of English tenses.
4. There is no need to teach tenses – they can be understood automatically through use of language.
5. It is essential and important to understand the use of tenses.
6. I am sure that I use correct tense forms while speaking and writing in English.
7. I don't care much about the tense that I use as long as I can convey my message unambiguously.
8. The visual method is interesting and useful.
9. The visual method is clear and easy to understand.
10. The visual method enables self-learning; hence it is convenient.

SECTION 4

4.1 Data Analysis

An online pre-test was conducted in order to assess the knowledge of the students regarding the use of the 4 forms of the Present Tense in English. The test consisted of 10 questions, each carrying 1 mark. Every correct answer was given one mark and every incorrect answer was given a zero. Only errors related to the use of the correct verb form were considered; other errors like spelling mistakes, capital letters, punctuation marks and other grammatical elements were ignored.

4.2 Statistical Calculation

Table 3. Table showing Mean and SD in pre-test and post-test

Group	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	5.14	7.38
SD	1.20	1.26
SEM	0.17	0.18
N	50	50

Confidence level:

Difference between mean of pre-test and mean of post-test: - 2.24

t = 10.1587

df = 49

Standard error difference = 0.221

P value and statistical significance

The P-value is less than 0.0001

This difference is statistically very significant

Hence, the visual based self-learning method proves to be highly effective compared to the traditional method.

Observations

Scores in the pre-test show that very few students scored more than 50 percent marks whereas in the post-test, very few students scored less than 50 percent marks. In the pre-test, not a single student scored 10 out of 10 marks while in the post-test, 3 students scored 100 percent marks. A statistical comparison of scores in the pre and post-tests shows significant difference, proving beyond doubt the success and effectiveness of the visual method for teaching tenses in English.

4.3 Observations

Table 4. Table showing Responses to the questionnaire

Question	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
1. English tenses are difficult to understand.	33	10	7
2. The use of each tense is best understood through examples.	26	20	4
3. I would prefer an explanation of the use of English tenses.	12	6	32
4. There is no need to teach tenses – they can be understood automatically through use of language.	2	22	26
5. It is essential and important to understand the use of tenses.	41	5	4
6. I am sure that I use correct tense forms while speaking and writing in English.	5	33	12
7. I don't care much about the tense that I use as long as I can convey my message unambiguously.	20	16	14
8. The visual method is interesting and useful.	44	5	1
9. The visual method is clear and easy to understand.	38	7	5
10. The visual method enables self-learning; hence it is convenient.	28	7	5

Observations

The number of students who agree, partly agree, or disagree with the statements in the questionnaire was tabulated and analysed. Maximum number of students agree that mere explanation of the use of tenses is not very helpful, that English tenses are difficult to understand and that examples are more helpful than explanation. Maximum students also show an inclination towards the use of visuals and self-learning through visuals. They find it more convenient. One of the reasons for favouring the self-learning method is, that at college level, students hesitate to admit that they are not confident about the use of tenses and thus hesitate to seek guidance or instructions. They prefer to take efforts, learn on their own and at their own pace and convenience.

SECTION 5 - Conclusion, Major Findings, Suggestions and Recommendations

5.1 Major Findings

- Visuals in the form of pictures and time-lines can be prepared and used as self-learning materials for understanding the use of English tenses.
- Students prefer learning on their own at the college level, something that they have been taught at school level but about which they lack confidence.
- It is a matter of clarifying doubts rather than learning, hence the self-learning mode is preferable.
- The visuals can be used on screen or in hard copy. They can be referred to at any time.
- Visuals save a great deal of time spent on explanation and examples.

5.2 Conclusion

A comparison of scores in the pre-test and post-test clearly shows that college level students can make use of self-explanatory visuals to understand, confirm or re-check their knowledge about the use of tenses. Sometimes, students have doubts regarding few tenses and not all. In this case, they can refer only to selected visuals and save time learning all tenses. Sometimes, they only want to make sure that their knowledge is correct so they can quickly refer to the necessary visuals. If they have little or no knowledge, yet, the self-explanatory visuals help them to understand verb tenses.

Hence, it can be concluded that visuals in the form of time-lines, complemented occasionally by pictures, can be extremely useful as self-learning material for college level students, whatever their status regarding the knowledge of tenses.

5.3 Suggestions and Recommendations

A similar study can be carried out by preparing customized visuals for all levels. For younger students, they must be prepared as teaching aids or teaching materials.

A plan for all the tenses can help teachers as well as students to teach and learn the use of correct verb tenses forms.

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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)



In the Virtual Medieval Marketplace: Learning Dead Languages and Cultures Through Content and Language Integrated Learning

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) promotes teaching grammar in the cultural context of its use. While video games offer an ideal medium for such lessons, the potential of CLIL in teaching dead languages is largely untapped. This paper examines a module of Brendan's Voyage, an online game under development for teaching medieval French through twelfth-century narratives. Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Brendan's Voyage represents a fresh approach for educators teaching extinct languages with modern methodologies.

We focus on module 3, which introduces players to key present tense verbs in medieval French. Instead of direct grammar instruction, the module uses games set in a twelfth-century marketplace connected to Henry I's French-speaking court. Players immerse in the era's multilingualism, encountering languages like Catalan, Dutch, and medieval French. As they learn essential verb forms, they also engage with a historically authentic backdrop, highlighting the era's linguistic diversity and narrative traditions.

Brendan's Voyage captures CLIL's essence by immersing learners in a cultural setting while teaching a dead language. Given that time travel is unfeasible, the game provides a virtual immersive historical experience, allowing players to interact with diverse characters and hear the language in historically recreated contexts. This method is expected to boost learner motivation. Brendan's Voyage is a novel CLIL application, enriching the learning journey for dead languages through immersive experiences.

Keywords: immersion, CLIL, multi-lingualism, game-based learning

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has stressed the importance of teaching grammar through the study of the cultures in which a language is spoken and written [1]. CLIL approaches combine subject-area learning with target language acquisition, engaging learners and requiring them to situate their language skills within a complex and challenging matrix, often immersed in the target culture. Video games and other digital immersive environments are well suited to achieve this goal [2] [3] [4], but unfortunately CLIL-compliant games are rare, even for modern languages. For instance, *Slime Forest Adventure* teaches elements of the Japanese language, but the game mechanics (killing slime and rescuing a princess) provide an engaging and gamified experience that does not allow students to understand Japanese culture better or combine language learning with subject-area learning [5]. Playing commercial off-the-shelf games (such as *Call of Duty*) in the target language has allowed modern language learners to immerse themselves in a language experience. These games arguably offer contextualized language learning, but to have a truly effective CLIL experience, learning within and about the target language culture is essential. The ability to change the target language of the game necessarily flattens the target culture to one that approaches the culture of game production. *Learn Japanese RPG: Hiragana Forbidden Speech* is an example of a modern language-learning game that recognizes and addresses this problem by leveraging the worlds of Japanese anime [6].

Even a flattened cultural experience is not available for many languages, and the potential of CLIL to teach dead languages is still vastly underexplored. To that end, we explore one learning module of *Brendan's Voyage*, an online video game designed to teach medieval French language through a series of learning activities that immerse the player within culturally significant tales from the twelfth century in which the target language evolved. In development with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, *Brendan's Voyage* offers a scalable model for other teachers of dead languages and past cultures who look to revolutionize their pedagogies and increase learner motivation [7] through modern language learning, acquisition, and teaching paradigms.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 *Brendan's Voyage Overview*

Brendan's Voyage is composed of five successive modules that initially position the player in the French-speaking court of Lady Adeliza of Louvain, the twelfth-century figure who commissioned the translation of the Brendan tale from Latin into Anglo-Norman French. In module one, the player meets the queen in her palace and learns basic greetings and vocabulary in Anglo-Norman. These basic language learning goals are accomplished through cultural immersion activities, from learning about female patronage of medieval poetry to discovering the importance of Saint Brendan for twelfth-century English culture. Having received a commission from the queen to translate the Brendan story into Anglo-Norman, the player proceeds to a monastic scriptorium in module two. Here, a monk helps the player acquire a more expansive Anglo-Norman vocabulary while the player learns elements of medieval manuscript production. As with module one, this portion of the game realizes CLIL's goal of offering language instruction through immersion in the target language's culture. Module three, discussed below, conveys the player to a medieval market.

Modules four and five take place in ancient Ireland where the player is magically transported within the story of St. Brendan. These final modules advance the player's learning of Anglo-Norman while incorporating exposure to Late Antique Irish monasticism and maritime voyages as imagined by later medieval audiences. Thus, the game unfolds in two phases: the first modules conduct the player through the world of the Brendan story's material production in the Middle Ages; by contrast, the final modules allow a glimpse, however fanciful, of the much older Irish world that constitutes the narrative of the Brendan poem. These two phases of the video game present two distinctive medieval cultures that shape the learning environments of the game's language learning activities.

2.2 *Multilingual Immersion in the Twelfth Century*

One of the main cultural priorities animating the game design is to expose players to the rich multilingualism of twelfth-century English life. This goal becomes explicit in module three, which invites players to explore a medieval market within the walls of Lady Adeliza's palace. Having been tasked with translating (and transcribing) the Brendan tale from Latin into Anglo-Norman, the player must now acquire the necessary items for the task such as ink ingredients. Working with our video game design counterparts at Causeway Studios, we prioritized an environment that would reflect the multilingual setting of medieval English markets. As in the contemporary world, medieval markets formed a nexus of global trade where sailors, merchants, and artisans would conduct their business in a range of languages. To take just one example, lapis lazuli appearing in medieval manuscripts was famously sourced from Afghanistan [8]. This fact is explicitly incorporated into the gameplay. At one point during the module, the player purchases ingredients from different stalls requiring the player to read a letter from a merchant indicating his purchases of Tunisian spices and Afghani lapis lazuli.

As this example illustrates, the many commercial goods of medieval markets signified the diverse destinations and sources of these objects and their vendors, necessitating a corresponding diversity of global languages. Such multilingualism also characterized medieval literary translation and production, which is prominent in the story of St. Brendan. In addition to the Anglo-Norman translation, the original Latin poem was translated into a host of other languages including Catalan and Old Dutch [9]. We wanted the experience to reflect the multilingual history of the source text while simultaneously illustrating the linguistic diversity of the medieval market. As a result, players encounter greetings in Anglo-Norman, Catalan, and medieval Dutch while moving about the market stalls. While no activity within the module asks the player to comprehend the vocabulary of these other languages, the user is still valuably immersed in authentic linguistic exposure to diverse languages that typified medieval commerce and textual transmission alike.

This environment of immersive multilingual and multicultural exposure frames the module's explicit task of learning simple present tense conjugations for key Anglo-Norman verbs (such as "to buy") as well as relevant vocabulary. The commercial vocabulary is itself derived from the Anglo-Norman Brendan text, featuring nouns like candle, wax, and wood. The game script also incorporates precious stones like amethyst which are prominently featured in the story of St. Brendan [10]. This approach ensures that the modular vocabulary is not arbitrary but instead reflects key terms that are culturally significant to the narrative culture informing the game design. Players of the video game—be they scholars or students—are prepared to use their new language knowledge as a tool to interact with a particular story and an authentic manuscript tradition.

For example, in module three the player converses with a merchant, explaining the need to purchase supplies for manuscript transcription. The merchant replies that he has all the supplies needed for such a long task, including candles and oil. Then the merchant offers food for the task ahead: "I will bring you enough provisions and I will find you a great abundance of meat for the long days ahead!" The

expressions “I will bring you enough provisions” and “I will find you a great abundance of meat” are both lifted directly from passages in the Anglo-Norman *Voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot*. When the player hears the expression *De viānde je vus troverai plentét grande* (I will find you a great abundance of meat), the player receives comprehensible linguistic input directly sourced from an authentic text in the medieval target culture.

2.3 Multilingualism Matters

This multilingual approach works against any stereotype of the Middle Ages as a time of linguistic purity. It is well established that many nationalist groups in Europe and the United States have perennially fashioned false narratives of cultural and linguistic purity attached to medieval cultures [11]. This construal of the Middle Ages cannot withstand historical scrutiny given the extreme diversity of complex languages and cultures that saturated medieval environments (such as England in the twelfth century). Despite the historical evidence contradicting these nationalist appropriations of medieval pasts, the stereotypes persist. Using CLIL as a guiding pedagogical framework, *Brendan’s Voyage* emphasizes medieval multilingualism to reclaim a historically informed account of cultural diversity within medieval cultures. CLIL has been known to increase “positivity towards plurilingualism and pluriculturalism” since the 1990’s [12]. Our video game builds on these past successes in the contemporary language classroom. Foregrounding multilingualism in *Brendan’s Voyage* extends CLIL’s demonstrated uses to help combat nefarious stereotypes through dead language instruction.

3. Conclusion

The Middle Ages, often misconstrued as a monolingual era, was, in fact, linguistically diverse. *Brendan’s Voyage*, drawing inspiration from the CLIL framework, offers an accurate portrayal, challenging prevailing myths. By spotlighting medieval multilingualism and the intricate ties between language and culture, the game stands as a testament to the value of plurilingualism in education and asserts the importance of integrating language learning with its cultural and historical context.

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The CAMPS Project: CLIL for Arts and Music Teaching in Primary Schools

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Abstract

The paper examines the implementation of the European project CAMPS, funded by the European Commission, by the EuroED primary school in Iasi, Romania and educational institutions from Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Romania. The project relies on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach used in primary schools. Applying the method in primary school is quite novel, while it is currently mostly applied in secondary schools. Since language studies have increasingly shown that foreign languages can be learned more easily at a younger age and the CLIL methodology favours the language learning process, the CAMPS project aims to develop awareness of the importance of the CLIL methodology for primary schools. The project examines how to incorporate CLIL into school curricula with an emphasis on the arts and music. It also looks at its practical applications, advantages over conventional approaches, and additional value. The project offers a trustworthy and accessible e-course in methodological training that can provide knowledge and expertise with the CLIL methodology and easy and effective access to CLIL teaching tools for primary school teachers. The article provides an overview of the project's goals, target groups, and key findings while illustrating the methodology. It also provides details on the online training programme, which is accessible from a specific e-learning platform.

Keywords: CLIL methodology, primary school, e-training course, teachers

1. The European Context and the CAMPS Project

Education has faced numerous challenges since the 1990s including mobility, internalization of education, and technological advancement. The demands of Europe's multiculturalism and multilingualism press hard on schools. Students need new competences to adapt to new circumstances, where foreign languages, arts and sciences have vital significance. The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method satisfies these demands by encouraging the integration of language study into other curriculum subjects. Teachers utilizing the CLIL method teach the content of a subject through the medium of a language other than the student's mother tongue; thus, language becomes a helpful means of instruction and not an end in itself [1].

According to the CLIL method, the learning of the second language happens in meaningful contexts just as the learning of the mother tongue does. Language acquisition does not proceed in the conventionally progressive manner. Rather, language structures are taught to learners because they are essential to the learning material. The chosen topic, communication, cognition (thinking abilities), and culture (the cultural component of the lesson) are all used in the CLIL activities. CLIL offers opportunities for students to use languages effectively while learning them. All subjects can be taught through foreign languages: mathematics, physics, chemistry, civic education, biology, geography, arts, music or history [2, 3, 4].

The CLIL approach has proven to be successful for encouraging students to further develop their linguistic and scientific literacy. Cultural awareness, language proficiency, improved motivation are all advantages of CLIL. The development of new methods for language learning has piqued Romania's interest [5]. English, German, French and Spanish are the main languages taught in Romania. If teachers' qualifications and budget permit, at parents' or students' request CLIL may be provided at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels of education in private schools as well as optional classes (mathematics, physics, and chemistry in a foreign language) in state schools. Programs that

encourage students to study languages are very appealing to parents. Parents embrace CLIL because they are certain of its advantages. Students are more prepared for the workforce since CLIL classes teach in a manner that is similar to real-world employment. Additionally, CLIL students are exposed to the constructivist method of learning and will be better adapted to collaborate in groups in the workplace.

Despite the fact that CLIL is acknowledged to have advantages and that it plays a significant role in language teaching, there are just a few schools that benefit from the program. The CAMPS project's results bridge several significant gaps by developing an online course for primary school teachers, CLIL resources, as well as best practice samples. The CAMPS project looks at how to integrate CLIL into the curricula in primary schools with a focus on the arts and music.

2. The CAMPS Project

2.1 The CAMPS Project's Objectives

Since language studies have shown that foreign languages can be learned more easily at a younger age and this seems to be the case for foreign languages learned and taught through the CLIL methodology, the CAMPS project aims at increasing awareness of the significance of the CLIL methodology for primary schools.

The specific aims of the project are:

- To offer primary school teachers substantial training to enable them to create content in English suitable for their children
- To provide teachers with CLIL based video lessons in English focusing on Arts and Music as samples of best practice to follow
- To raise awareness of and promote the CLIL methodology at the primary school level through motivational case studies

2.2 The Project's Partnership

The CAMPS project's challenges need a multinational approach to be solved. The partnership is made up of primary schools (EuroEd Primary School, Iasi, Romania and the IC Pier Cironi, Italy), language teachers' associations (LEND – Lingua e Nuova Didattica, Roma, IT), education, research and training institutions/organizations (Pixel, Florence, Italy and Universal learning systems, Dublin, Ireland) and local government officials (The Guadassuar Town Council, Spain). These institutions promote the European dimension of education encouraging innovation, multiculturalism and multilingualism, engaging children and citizens in active participation in community social life and exploiting the best potential of ICT for education and training.

2.3 Target Groups

The project targets primary school educators, principals, parents, and children. Teachers at this level are less fortunate than teachers at higher levels in terms of the accessibility of training, materials, tools, and general resources online and, therefore, it makes sense to focus on them.

2.4 The CAMPS Project's Results

The key subjects and their subtopics to be handled when devising the main structure of the deliverables were determined by a mixed team of teachers, trainers, and technicians working within the project consortium in order to produce the project's results.

The main project deliverables are:

- An online training course which makes use of digital solutions to enhance the accessibility and usability by primary school teachers
- A collection of video lessons on specific Arts and Music topics
- A database of CLIL case studies illustrating direct experiences of CLIL experts, primary school teachers, primary school decision-makers, and policymakers in the field of education

3. The Online Course

3.1 The Content of the Online Course

The online course is the main result. It offers priceless insights into useful methods and resources for CLIL teaching. The online training course is structured into five modules. It provides an introduction to the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology and focuses on teaching Arts and Music in primary school by using a foreign language, English. The online course also supplies primary school teachers with the skills for self-assessing their CLIL knowledge.

The Online Course includes the following chapters:

- Introduction
- Module 1 explains the CLIL Methodology for Primary Schools. CLIL is related to all forms of education in which subjects are learned through a foreign language (L2). As a general term, CLIL is frequently applied to a range of distinct educational techniques. This module promotes numerous methods and tactics that are essential to introducing and using CLIL in primary school. This module examines how to create a CLIL environment in primary education based on Vygotsky's idea of a dialectic approach to language and learning, in which a child's need to learn more languages grows as a result of the child's increased language proficiency.
- Module 2 makes use of the most common teaching practices among primary school teachers and instructs teachers how to use them with a CLIL focus. Another focus is on approaches and the techniques to scaffold learning in CLIL classes.
- Module 3 focuses on assessment and provides teachers with suitable tools to self-assess their knowledge and skills.
- Module 4 examines the practical uses of CLIL, its advantages over traditional methods and gives solid suggestions as to how to integrate them into the school curricula with an emphasis on arts and music.

Children can study two or more school subjects using CLIL since interdisciplinary knowledge, understanding, and skills must be pre-learned for learning to occur. Additionally, certain learning techniques including active, experimental, digital, cooperative, learning via discovery, and task-based learning are supported by CLIL in primary school. Tasks must be selected, and the choice of resources depends on the activities to be carried out, once the teacher has identified the topic to examine and which abilities are going to be developed.

Teachers are also given links to open educational resources that can be tailored to the aims of the lessons. Lesson plans for teaching English while teaching the arts, music, and other subjects are also available to teachers in this module. The lesson plans for online instruction include the learning objectives, visual or auditory resources, step-by-step activities to achieve the objectives, and information about the students (Figure 1 A lesson plan).

Figure 1. A lesson' plan

The figure displays three pages of a lesson plan for a music lesson. The first page is the title page, the second page contains the main lesson plan, and the third page contains additional activities and assessment.

Page 1: Lesson Plan

Project Number: 2022-5-ES01-4-022-SC04-000007951

Teachers: Cornelia Paraschiv (Music teacher), Mihaela Constantina Vitariu & Ionuț Tincu (English teachers)

School: Eminescu Primary School, Iasi, Romania

Subject: Arts

Topic: Musical instruments

Grade: 4th

Level: Upper elementary

Educational background of the students involved: The students are in the 4th grade at Eminescu Primary School. They have a very good level of English for their age they have five classes of English per week and started studying English in kindergarten. They also train for their Cambridge YLE exam. Fluent.

Students' prior knowledge, skills, and competences:

- Music:
 - English language: All the students master the required vocabulary necessary for the content of this unit.

Module length: 2 lessons of 45 minutes each

Lesson 1: Mozart and the music world

Activity 1 – 10 min

Learning objectives:

- To introduce students to one of the greatest composers, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Language skills: Listening, Reading, Writing

Assessment: Compose, Wolfgang Mozart, Great Composer. Who do you think he is? Who composed...?

Interaction: Whole class

Materials: Video, paper worksheets, digital worksheets (Wordwall), paper, pens

Assessment: The teacher will check for ability to listen and read for meaning, their ability to work in groups, and their ability to use structures and forms to discuss, ask effective questions, and make presentations.

Description of the activity:

The teacher starts the lesson by playing the well-known "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" and asking the students who they think composed it. Then it shows the students a picture of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and elicits the answers from the students. To prepare students for the next activity, the teacher hands in cut-outs in the shape of stars and asks them to write as much information as they can while watching the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9C70PQ9a6C0> - Mini bio-Mozart. The notes on the cut-outs will be used in Activity 2.

Activity 2 – 25 min

Learning objectives:

- To discuss Mozart's life and contributions to music
- To talk and answer questions about Wolfgang Mozart
- To work cooperatively to complete a jigsaw reading task

Language skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking

Assessment: Musical instruments, Mozart, composer, concertmaster, violinist, pianist, string quartet

Page 2: Lesson Plan

Project Number: 2022-5-ES01-4-022-SC04-000007951

Communication: What was Mozart born? Who was his...?

Interaction: Group work, individual work

Materials: Video, digital worksheet (Wordwall), worksheets and chart, paper

Assessment: The teacher observes students while they are working and offers guidance and support.

Description of the activity:

The teacher divides a text about Mozart's life into four sections and also divides the students into groups of four accordingly. Before giving the instructions, the teacher pre-teaches the students the critical vocabulary needed. Then the teacher hands in the charts of content, each having a different topic (Early life and family). Early activity: Having asked his: Striving to make a living and his ability, so that each of the four students in the group is assigned a chunk. The model for the content of the Jigsaw Reading was made in <https://www.gonitwo.com/2020/04/16/6060911702796/> and is available in a pdf format on <https://www.gonitwo.com/2020/04/16/6060911702796/>

Assessment: Group work, individual work

Materials: Digital quiz made in Wordwall. Paper worksheet (the pdf version of the quiz)

Assessment: The teacher observes students while they are working and offers guidance and support.

Description of the activity:

Where tables are available, students can do the digital quiz <https://www.all-softwares.com/4814114> . Mozart's life and work. If not, students do the quiz on paper worksheets.

Lesson 2: Musical instruments in Rondo Alla Tura

Activity 1 – 15 min

Learning objectives:

- To introduce musical instruments and their main families

Language skills: Listening, Writing

Assessment: percussion instrument, wind instrument, string instrument, violin, piano

Communication: If you could play any musical instrument, what would you play? Why? What instrument do you think would be the most challenging to learn to play? Why? What instrument do you think would be easier to learn to play? Why?

Interaction: Whole class, individual work

Materials: Video, chart and markers

Assessment: The teacher observes how students take notes and checks the correctness of the notes.

Description of the activity:

The teacher presents the topic of the lesson, musical instruments, and the main families they belong to. On the board, teacher draws a table with three columns and then asks the students to watch the video

Page 3: Lesson Plan

Project Number: 2022-5-ES01-4-022-SC04-000007951

Communication: What are the names of the musical instruments? While watching, students must take notes on the main groups of musical instruments and as many names of musical instruments as possible. After watching the video, students, in pairs, write the information they have obtained from the table on the board.

Activity 2 – 10 min

Learning objectives:

- To define musical family terms (string, wind, and percussion)
- To describe musical instruments in the string, wind, and percussion families
- To identify musical instruments by image and sound
- To learn about many kinds of musical instruments and be aware of the importance of each instrument in the context of music

Language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading

Assessment: wood, metal, string, percussion, wind, made of blow, pluck, hit

Communication: What is it made of? What musical instrument sounds like this? I think it is...

Interaction: Whole class, individual work

Materials: Video, paper, digital quiz made by using Quizizz, quiz in paper format

Assessment: Teacher asks students specific about certain instruments and objects what they can say about the features and sounds etc. (text and guess)

Description of the activity:

The teacher presents students with the common features of the musical instruments in each group. Then the teacher puts students into pairs and gives each pair a set of musical instrument matching cards. Students are told to sort the instrument cards into their appropriate musical instrument families. When all pairs have sorted their cards, briefly discuss each instrument to ensure understanding. To reinforce their understanding, students are asked to do the following quiz: <https://quizizz.com/join/quiz/64760487245110014e4646>

Activity 3 – 15 min

Learning objectives:

- To discover the instruments in a video
- To recognize the different sounds that each instrument can produce
- To match the instruments to the correct sounds they produce.

Language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading

Assessment: flute, drum, trumpet, horn, piano, violin

Interaction: Group work

Materials: Video, paper

Assessment: The teacher observes the students and offers feedback.

Description of the activity:

The teacher asks students to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70N7Pz-2c> - Rondo Alla Tura. While watching, students must answer different questions on a handout (e.g. How many instruments could you name? How many are you sure that you really?). Then Teacher hands in a worksheet that shows all the instruments on the video: <https://www.gonitwo.com/2020/04/16/6060911702796/>

Assessment: Group work

Materials: Video, paper

Assessment: The teacher observes the students and offers feedback.

Description of the activity:

The teacher asks students to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70N7Pz-2c> - Rondo Alla Tura. While watching, students must answer different questions on a handout (e.g. How many instruments could you name? How many are you sure that you really?). Then Teacher hands in a worksheet that shows all the instruments on the video: <https://www.gonitwo.com/2020/04/16/6060911702796/>

Assessment: Group work

Materials: Video, paper

Assessment: The teacher observes the students and offers feedback.

Description of the activity:

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Assessment: Group work

Materials: Video, paper

Assessment: The teacher observes the students and offers feedback.

Description of the activity:

The teacher asks students to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70N7Pz-2c> - Rondo Alla Tura. While watching, students must answer different questions on a handout (e.g. How many instruments could you name? How many are you sure that you really?). Then Teacher hands in a worksheet that shows all the instruments on the video: <https://www.gonitwo.com/2020/04/16/6060911702796/>

Module 5 not only provides teachers with materials and lesson plans but also helps them to create their own materials.

3.2 Teachers' Feedback

The feedback we got was positive. Thus, in their opinion, the project's modules helped teachers to:

- find ideas and activities for developing CLIL art and music projects
- give relevance to the curriculum (if the content is relevant to the students, their motivation to learn will be sustained);
- provide active and experiential learning for pupils
- work with pupils through English, to develop projects in drawing, art, craft, design, and music;

- identify and analyse the language demands of their curriculum
- adapt target language materials
- design CLIL art activities to support pupils in their CLIL learning;
- use visual language as support for the 4Cs
- plan and deliver CLIL art lessons with confidence
- increase and diversify the way they implement learning activities with children
- encourage the development of a new type of teacher focused on children and better prepared for challenges
- use better strategies/activities to teach children
- follow best practices and adapt them to their own context

4. Future Developments

The future development of the project focuses on providing teachers with suitable best practice examples to follow as well as with materials to enable primary school teachers to improve their teaching methods, stimulate children's motivation and create their own resources tailored to their children's needs. All the project's outputs will be piloted in schools and modified to meet the needs of teachers and children. The project partners will create:

- A collection of video lessons on specific Arts and Music topics being taught in English by teachers who are native speakers
- A database of case studies with which the project partners will collect direct experiences of CLIL experts, Primary school teachers, Primary school decision-makers, and policymakers in.

5. Conclusions

The project's goal is to provide teachers with training and innovative teaching tools that help them introduce and develop the CLIL Method with primary children. The project increases teachers' understanding of the value of CLIL and the role that school topics and foreign languages play in education. CLIL programmes motivate children to learn languages by using them for real practical purposes. They also develop children's tolerance and respect for other cultures. Given the current challenges of distance and digital teaching and learning, the project aims to strengthen the profiles of educators, empower and equip them with essential and logically structured digital open educational resources, which are necessary for the development of primary school children.

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Curriculum Development

Open Educational Resources, a Win-win Situation for All?

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Abstract

Throughout the years, higher education instructors have adopted textbooks that would be used for a determined number of courses; in my experience, we use one textbook for two semesters, or the equivalent of one year. Students pay a significant amount of money for those textbooks, and personally, I feel obligated to use them in their totality, covering every chapter. However, are we really benefiting our students in doing so, when research has proved the student will learn in a natural order, no matter how we teach them? After a few semesters facing highly motivated students who were frustrated after not being able to understand the use of subjunctive in their 2nd semester of Spanish, as a department, we decided we needed to do what was best for the students. We started an OER (open educational resources) project. This paper is the result of our experience.

Keywords: OER, open education, material development

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In higher education, textbooks have long occupied a central role in the learning process. Traditionally, higher education instructors have relied on these printed books as the primary source of knowledge dissemination. For decades, students have been required to invest substantial amounts of money in acquiring textbooks, often serving as the foundation for coursework in multiple semesters. The use of a single textbook for two consecutive semesters or, equivalently, an entire academic year, has been a common practice in language learning.

This practice, however, raises several crucial questions. Does the utilization of these textbooks genuinely benefit students? Is the cost, which is often a financial burden on students, justified by the educational gains derived from these textbooks? These questions have prompted educators to reassess the efficacy of this longstanding approach to pedagogy.

The cost of textbooks has consistently risen, adding to the already substantial expenses of college education. These expenses can be particularly daunting, especially for those from lower-income backgrounds, and may deter students from purchasing required materials, impacting their learning experience.

Despite this economic strain, the conventional belief has been that textbooks serve as a comprehensive resource for students. Instructors often feel compelled to utilize these textbooks in their entirety, especially when the price cost is so elevated. However, are we really benefiting our students by doing so? If we look in detail our textbooks, there is content in there that research has proved the student will not learn. Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis states that language learners will get content following a natural order, no matter in what order or what we teach them.

Hence, an additional challenge emerges from the real-world experiences of educators. Instructors have encountered highly motivated students who, despite using the recommended textbooks, find themselves frustrated due to their inability to grasp certain concepts or skills. I have faced highly motivated students who were deeply frustrated after not being able to understand the use of subjunctive in their 2nd semester of Spanish. This anecdote illustrates the very real, practical challenges faced by instructors when traditional textbooks do not align with the needs and progress of their students. This brings to the forefront concerns about whether textbooks genuinely align with how students learn best.

Utah Tech University and its Spanish faculty reevaluated their approach to course materials. This reassessment led to the exploration of alternative strategies, including the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OERs).

2. Methodology

2.1 Review of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Driven by our concern for our students, and by their frustration, we decided to take action. The situation demanded a thorough examination, encouraging us to analyze of our first-year courses.

We decided to assess our CLOs to realistically determine if the alignment of these outcomes with the proficiency standards by ACTFL were adequate. Our CLOs aimed for our students achieving Novice-Mid proficiency by the conclusion of Span1010 and rising to Novice-High upon the successful completion of Span1020. In the end, we all agreed: our existing CLOs were indeed suitable for our courses, and the pursuit of proficiency standards appeared to be realistic.

So, if the CLOs were not the problem, the next natural step was to analyze our textbook.

2.2 Assessment of Available Materials and the Decision-making Process for OERs

The real turning point in our journey occurred as we examined the textbook that had been used in these courses. It was full of content that exceeded the linguistic capacity of our students. This discord between textbook content and student readiness was the reason behind our students' frustration.

In search of an alternative, we evaluated other textbooks. However, most textbooks we explored also presented this challenge. We were left puzzled by the insistence on introducing complex subjunctive structures in the second semester when our students were still mastering basic present tense.

This realization led to a significant shift within our Spanish faculty. We understood the need to adjust our course materials to better suit our students' language development stages.

At this point, Utah Tech University was shifting towards OERs, and I was developing a textbook for another course; so, we discussed what OERs were. These are educational materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license, which permits free access, use, modification, and sharing. These materials encompass a broad spectrum, ranging from textbooks and lecture notes to multimedia content, simulations, and assessments. OERs are celebrated for their accessibility and affordability, offering students and educators a wide variety of resources without the constraints of traditional copyright restrictions.

2.3 Different Commitment to OERs and Faculty Buy-in

Incorporating OERs into a curriculum has different levels of commitment. Faculty can opt to adopt existing OERs, utilizing them as they are, with minimal modifications. They may also choose to adapt OERs, customizing the content to align with their teaching methods and course requirements. Lastly, faculty can embark on the creation of OERs from scratch, crafting tailored educational materials. Each approach offers a unique set of advantages and challenges, allowing educators to make deliberate choices based on their pedagogical goals and resources.

The role of faculty in endorsing and integrating OERs is fundamental. Faculty members are not merely adopters but curators of educational materials. Their active involvement in identifying suitable OERs, whether for adoption, adaptation, or creation, can drastically influence the trajectory of OER integration. Faculty buy-in is essential for the widespread adoption of OERs, as their expertise and advocacy can spearhead institutional efforts to promote open education.

So, the Spanish program faculty as a group searched for OERs that already existed for Beginning Spanish. To access OERs within our institution, we utilized Pressbooks, which serves as a repository, offering a user-friendly interface for creating, adapting, and publishing open textbooks and educational materials. We narrowed our focus to two available textbooks, [1] and [2], conducting a thorough examination of their contents.

2.4 Development of Essential Concepts, Grammar, Vocabulary and Cultural Aspects

A critical aspect of course design lies in the development of content that not only aligns with CLOs but also resonates with the specific needs of students. In this context, the creation of a list encompassing essential functions, grammar points, vocabulary, and cultural aspects was a pivotal component in ensuring that students receive a tailored and enriching educational experience.

We embarked on this endeavor, pooling our expertise to compile a catalog that would be instrumental in shaping our curriculum. However, this endeavor presented a unique challenge: the envisioned list seemed to surpass the intended proficiency levels outlined in the CLOs. A moment of reflection ensued, leading to a collective decision to embrace the comprehensive list, recognizing it as the blueprint for our ideal 1st-year-Spanish.

To bridge the gap between this comprehensive list and the intended learning outcomes, we color-coded each element based on its alignment with the selected OER textbooks. This meticulous process involved cross-listing the list with the CLOs, ensuring that every element was deliberately connected to the proficiency goals. This step was integral in tailoring the materials to the unique needs and proficiency

levels of the students, as the color coding allowed for a clear understanding of which concepts and resources were readily available in the chosen OER textbooks.

By aligning our curated list with the available OER materials, we ensured that the course materials resonated with the students' proficiency levels. The act of color-coding provided a practical guide for instructors, allowing them to streamline their teaching approach, focusing on the elements that were readily available while supplementing areas where OER resources were lacking.

2.5 Details of the Adaptation and Expansion Process

For Span1010, we decided to adopt the existing OERs we analyzed, recognizing their value. However, understanding the need for customization and the alignment of content with the comprehensive list of essential content, we also decided to adapt them. This involved enhancing the OERs with supplementary materials tailored to the students' needs. These materials were brought to the classroom to amplify the learning and exposure to Spanish.

For Span1020, in contrast, we chose to create OERs from scratch. Even though the selected OERs were providing content for this course, the fact that language teaching is usually based on recycling and spiraling, made it hard to make a clear distinction between what faculty in 1010 would use, and what I could solely use for 1020. The fact that 2 different professors were teaching 1010, and only I would be teaching 1020 facilitated this decision. I carefully design course materials that specifically met the proficiency levels and learning objectives of Span1020. Simultaneously, I ventured into the realm of adaptation, leveraging available resources from the internet. The integration of external resources, such as online articles, videos, and interactive activities, allowed for a dynamic and comprehensive learning experience. These resources were selectively curated and fine-tuned to align seamlessly with the course's learning outcomes.

Link to Span1020 OER - <https://uen.pressbooks.pub/span1020/>

The integration of OERs and internet-sourced materials was not only cost-effective but also tailored to the needs of the students. It exemplified the potential of open education, where the boundaries of traditional textbooks are transcended to offer a rich and diverse learning experience. The process underlines the adaptability of educators in embracing a blend of curated OERs and supplementary internet resources, championing a modern approach to Spanish language education.

3. Lessons Learned and Future of the Project

3.1 Challenges and Areas for Improvement

One notable challenge was the involvement of multiple professors. While this collaborative approach held immense potential, it also posed the difficulty of creating a cohesive, "traditional looking" textbook. In the case of Span1010, this challenge was more pronounced. The Span1020 course produced a more cohesive and connected textbook, mirroring the needs of our students, since I was the sole instructor. This experience underscores the importance of synchronized collaboration and offers lessons for future multi-professor projects.

3.2 What Could Have Been Done Differently

In retrospect, we recognize that more time for analysis, discussion, and workload division among faculty would have been beneficial. Our journey was marked by the spirit of experimentation, as we ventured into uncharted territories with OERs. This "try-out" semester approach was undoubtedly a learning experience, yet it also revealed the advantages of a more meticulous and considered planning phase. Further, we aim to embrace this learning by allocating time for thorough deliberation and precise distribution of responsibilities among the faculty, promoting a more cohesive and coordinated curriculum development process.

3.3 Future Plans

The OER project is far from a static endeavor; it'll evolve after each semester. We have ambitious plans to enhance its effectiveness. A key element is a focus on our students' experiences. We will conduct surveys to gather feedback and insights, which will inform our continuous improvement efforts. Student input will be instrumental in refining our OER materials.

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Language Skills Assessment: A Standardized Reference Framework for Burkina Faso

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Abstract

The assessment of language skills plays a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Still, Burkina Faso's absence of a standardized reference framework is a major challenge. This article explores the issues in assessing language skills in this context. We highlight current shortcomings, including the lack of common standards for assessing language skills, which have implications for language teaching. We propose a needs analysis of language skills assessment in Burkina Faso, highlighting the obstacles teachers and learners' encounter. We also examine international best practices in language assessment to provide insights into how to develop a framework adapted to the Burkina Faso context. In conclusion, this article argues for developing a standardized reference framework for language skills assessment in Burkina Faso. Such a framework could not only improve the quality of language teaching but also facilitate Burkina Faso's integration into the international language teaching community. This is a crucial step towards strengthening learners' language skills through progress monitoring and feedback mechanisms. This also paves the way for international collaborations and Internationalization at home projects.

Keywords: Language skills assessment, Standardized reference framework, Burkina Faso, International best practices, language learning

Introduction

The assessment of language skills plays a crucial role in language teaching. It is a cornerstone for measuring learners' progress, identifying their specific requirements and guiding teaching methods. However, in Burkina Faso, as in many other regions, the lack of a standardized reference framework for language assessment constitutes a significant challenge for teachers, learners and educational institutions.

This lack of a standardized reference framework raises fundamental questions about the relevance, accuracy and fairness of language skills assessment in Burkina Faso. How do teachers assess learners' language skills? To what extent are these assessments reliable and comparable from one institution to another? More importantly, how does this affect language learning in a context where proficiency in English, French and other foreign languages is increasingly essential for academic and professional success?

This article intends to examine the language skills assessment in Burkina Faso comprehensively. We will delve into the distinct difficulties that educators and learners encounter due to the absence of a universally accepted benchmark. Furthermore, we will address the consequences of this deficiency on the fairness and effectiveness of language education within the nation. Lastly, we will investigate potential remedies, such as incorporating or embracing global standards, for this urgent issue in language instruction.

1. Literature Review

Language proficiency assessment is an essential part of language teaching worldwide. It is a process which measures an individual's command of a language, whether in an educational, professional or social context. These assessments' results significantly impact learners' academic and professional careers (1).

Standardization of language assessments is crucial to ensure their validity, reliability and comparability. Standardized reference frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or CEFRL (2), or, in the United States, the Proficiency Guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages or ACTFL (3), have been developed to

establish common standards for language assessment. They provide clear descriptors of language skills, enabling more accurate and consistent assessment.

In Burkina Faso, the assessment of language skills faces unique challenges. The lack of a standardized frame of reference makes language assessments subjective and heterogeneous (4). Teachers develop their own assessment criteria, leading to bias and inconsistencies in results. Furthermore, this limits the comparability of learners' language performance between educational institutions.

The lack of standardization in language assessment profoundly affects language teaching in Burkina Faso. Teachers find it difficult to define clear learning objectives, and learners can be confused by constantly changing expectations (5). This situation can also affect learners' motivation and confidence in their language skills.

Faced with these challenges, solutions are possible. The adaptation or adoption of international reference frameworks, such as the CEFR, could provide an answer to the question of standardization (6). In addition, in-service teacher training in the principles of language assessment could help improve assessment quality.

2. The Current State of Language Teaching in Burkina Faso and the Challenges Teachers and Students Face

The current state of language teaching in Burkina Faso is marked by several challenges concerning the assessment of language skills. These challenges affect teachers and students and impact the country's language teaching quality.

Firstly, it is necessary to note that Burkina Faso is a multilingual country, with several national languages in addition to French, which is the official language. Teaching foreign languages, such as English, is therefore essential to enable students to communicate in a globalized context, which explains why the lack of a standardized reference framework for assessing language skills in these languages is so problematic.

In addition, teachers in Burkina Faso face challenges such as a lack of teaching resources and appropriate assessment tools. They are often forced to use traditional teaching and assessment methods that do not take account of students' specific language skills requirements.

For students, the lack of a standardized reference framework makes it difficult to assess and progress in foreign languages. They need clear benchmarks to understand where they stand in terms of language skills and to monitor their progress (7).

To meet these challenges, it is essential to develop assessment tools adapted to Burkina Faso's context and train teachers in their use. In addition, integrating Information and Communication Technologies in Education (ICTE) can provide more efficient and standardized opportunities for assessing language skills.

3. Needs Analysis of Language Skills Assessment in Burkina Faso

The assessment of language skills plays a crucial role in language teaching. It makes measuring learners' competence levels possible, guides teaching, and directs efforts at continuous improvement.

Assessment of language proficiency is an essential practice in language teaching. According to (8), it refers to a systematic process of measuring and evaluating an individual's proficiency in a given language, whether it is the mother tongue or a foreign language. This assessment aims to determine the mastery of linguistic skills, particularly oral and written comprehension, oral and written expression, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.

The main purpose of language proficiency assessment is to provide accurate information about an individual's level of language proficiency (9). This can be used for several purposes, including guiding teachers in their teaching methods, adapting curricula, certifying language proficiency for academic or professional purposes, and measuring the progression of language learning over time (10).

Various methods and tools for language proficiency, from standardized examinations to continuous classroom assessments (11). These methods vary according to the aims of the assessment, the target language, the age and level of the learners, and the resources available (1). The effectiveness of language assessment lies in its ability to provide accurate and objective information about an individual's level of proficiency, which can guide educational and professional decisions.

Language assessment is given new perspectives today with the democratization of artificial intelligence (AI). When coupled with IA, the existing frameworks such as CEFR and ACTFL are easy to use both for language teachers and students. For example, ChatGPT will assess the level of any given text according to the CEFR guidelines and not only indicate the level of the text but also produce a detailed explanation as to why the text conforms to the criteria that the CEFR framework stipulates

4. Proposal for a Reference Framework for Language Assessment in Burkina Faso

As we confront this issue, one must ask: is it more prudent to create an entirely new assessment system or to draw upon well-established and globally recognized models? Our proposal advocates for the latter, suggesting that the path to improved language assessment in Burkina Faso may lie in adopting proven and widely accepted reference frameworks.

One key consideration in adopting an established framework is the economic factor. Developing a new assessment system from the ground up can be costly. However, there are reputable language assessment models available online and, in some cases, even free. By leveraging these existing resources, Burkina Faso can economize and immediately implement a comprehensive language assessment framework. It is an approach that aligns with the nation's broader efforts to enhance education accessibility and quality (12) (Hines, 2009)

In light of this, we propose to share information concerning the “reference framework for language assessment” more broadly. This implies, for example, posting information concerning conferences in West Africa. It also means putting follow-up initiatives into place, especially initiatives focused on Burkina Faso's needs.

The organization of a dedicated conference within Burkina Faso would bring together experts, educators, and policymakers. This conference would be a platform for discussing adopting a reference framework for language assessment in Burkina Faso. The objective is twofold: to raise awareness about the urgent need for standardized language assessment and to explore viable options for integrating well-established systems into the nation's educational landscape. By fostering dialogue and collaboration, Burkina Faso can move closer to addressing the language assessment gap and ensuring equitable and high-quality language education for all.

Conclusion

Educators and learners in Burkina Faso grapple with the challenges posed by the absence of universally accepted benchmarks, leading to the subjective nature of language assessments. Without standardized criteria, these assessments are conducted with inherent bias, often resulting in incoherent results and the inability to compare learners' language skills across different educational institutions. The repercussions of this lack of standardization extend far beyond the classroom, influencing the broader educational and professional landscape of Burkina Faso.

Addressing this issue is not beyond the realm of possibilities. Adopting established frameworks such as the CEFR or ACTFL standards would allow Burkina Faso to harmonize language assessment practices with global best practices, ensuring that its learners' skills are measured efficiently and recognized internationally. Indeed, rather than embarking on the costly endeavor of developing a new assessment system from scratch, utilizing readily available, well-established, and often accessible language assessment models provides a practical, cost-effective solution. This approach aligns with Burkina Faso's broader objectives of enhancing education accessibility and quality and utilizing existing resources efficiently.

The proposal to organize a conference within Burkina Faso dedicated to adopting a reference framework for language assessment is a pivotal step in this journey. Through this conference and follow-up initiatives, awareness can be raised, solutions can be explored, and collaboration can be fostered. This journey towards standardization is not just about assessing language skills; it's about opening doors and broadening horizons for the Higher Education system in Burkina; it's about empowering individuals with the tools they need to succeed in a globalized world.

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E-Learning

The Effect of Online Flipped Lessons on Language Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

Using virtual reality (VR) platforms to conduct online lessons in real time has generated interest among language teachers since VR can potentially improve learning outcomes for language learners. However, most research studies that have been carried out on this topic have tended to be small-scale case studies. They typically include a small number of participants for a short time period focusing on limited areas of language learning such as vocabulary acquisition [1]. Unfortunately, there are few longitudinal studies which have critically examined how VR can affect wider aspects of language learning and teaching. To bridge this gap, the presenters initiated a quasi-experimental study to compare learning outcomes under two online flipped conditions: Zoom and VR. The control group study (Zoom) was completed in early 2023 with 31 Japanese university students taking part in a one hour, once a week, eight-week course. The experimental (VR) group study begins in October 2023 with approximately the same number of participants. In this paper, the methods and results from the Zoom phase of the study are shared. The materials that the participants used were a series of YouTube videos about ‘Small Talk in English’; that is, strategies and tips for improving basic communication skills when meeting somebody for the first time. Each lesson had a similar pattern alternating between teacher talk and short breakout room sessions in which students practiced small talk. These breakout room sessions were all recorded and transcribed. Each student’s English level was scored by two external assessors at the beginning, middle and end of the course. Results from the data collection suggest that such a flipped online classroom is successful in promoting meaningful improvements in spoken language ability, especially in terms of improving skills to initiate and sustain conversations.

Keywords: *online language lessons, small talk in English, flipped lessons, Zoom, language learning outcomes*

1. Introduction

Since 2020 and the spread of COVID-19 across the globe, language teachers in all kinds of contexts have moved their lessons online, often using some kind of video conferencing tool such as Zoom. These tools allow whole group participation as well as pair or small group interactions using the ‘breakout room’ feature. For many teachers, using these tools for the first time was very stressful and, not unnaturally, they tried to replicate what they were used to in their face-to-face contexts. For others, however, this was an opportunity to try out different approaches that they had not thought of before. One of these is the flipped classroom approach [2], which, simply put, means that students learn about and prepare content before a lesson and the lesson itself is mainly focused on practising a specific skill or strategy. There are several studies which show that a flipped approach can benefit language students as it gives them increased opportunities to study autonomously and develop oral proficiency [3, 4].

Online lessons are particularly suited for a flipped approach as students will, as a matter of course, have to access materials independently. It is also possible in an online environment to gather data about student interaction that may not be so easy to do in a face-to-face lesson. The group lessons can easily be recorded and with some ingenuity even individual breakout rooms can be recorded. However, there are few studies examining the impact of the flipped approach in an online language learning context. This paper will describe one project which gathered data to see if an online flipped approach was effective in improving spoken learning outcomes.

2. The Study

As part of a larger project comparing the effects of VR and online video conferencing on language learning, the two authors conducted a quasi-experimental study involving 31 participants (19 females and 12 males) with an average age of 20.3. The target participants were Japanese language speakers enrolled at four Japanese universities. Thirty-one intermediates to higher intermediate English proficiency students were asked to join eight one-hour weekly English lessons that were held on Zoom from December 2022 until February 2023. The study materials were a video course that the first author had jointly made about 'Successful Small Talk in English'. The 14 five- to six-minute videos teach students various tips and strategies as well as English words and phrases so that they can better carry out small talk. These include, for example, common topics for initiating small talk and listening strategies such as echoing and back-channelling.

The students watched two of the videos each week prior to the lessons. During the lesson, for each video they would have a short quiz to check their understanding, then go to a breakout room in groups of four or five to discuss the content of the videos, and finally they would practice small talk in pairs. The total number of opportunities for participants to talk to each other during every lesson was five, and out of the hour-long lesson approximately 40 minutes was spent interacting with other students. The students were rated three times during the course quantitatively and qualitatively using the paired end of lesson recordings.

To analyse the effects of the Zoom experience on language learning outcomes we will share the results of two data sources: participant English level ratings, and a qualitative analysis of student small talk.

3. Results

3.1 Rater Assessments

To evaluate students' learning outcomes, two raters scored the students' performance with a rubric consisting of five criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and interaction and communication strategies. The raters watched three videos per participant in which the students engaged in small talk with another partner. Videos were selected at three different time points throughout the course: the beginning as a pre-test, the middle as a mid-test, and the end as a post-test. The maximum score on each of these tests was 25.

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the control group on the pre-, mid- and post-tests. The means show a gradual increase but to further investigate this observation, a repeated measures ANOVA was calculated, which yielded significant results at $p < .001$. This means that the pre-test, mid-test and post-test scores were statistically different. Pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni correction as the adjustment method for multiple comparisons show that there was no significant difference between the pre- and mid-test scores; however, the post-test scores were significantly higher than both the pre- and mid-test scores. This means that the students made significant progress as time went by.

Table 1. Pre-, mid- and post-test mean and standard deviation values and pairwise comparisons

	Mean	SD	Pairwise comparisons	
Pre-test	17.88	2.54	Mid-test	.337
			Post-test	<.001**
Mid-test	18.46	2.72	Pre-test	.337
			Post-test	<.001**
Post-test	20.02	1.80	Pre-test	<.001**
			Mid-test	<.001**

3.2 Small Talk Qualitative Analysis

In order to aid readers in imagining the context in which the lessons took place, a qualitative analysis of conversations carried out by 'lower achievers' and 'higher achievers' will be described. Lower achievers tended to be hesitant when speaking, characterized by long pauses at the beginning or the middle of their small talk. They often struggled to pronounce English clearly and spoke with a strong Japanese accent that often featured an unnecessary additional vowel and a monotonous tone (negative L1 transfer). They sometimes had difficulty understanding their partners due to insufficient listening skills, had a limited choice of words and phrases and made frequent grammatical errors. They often responded in fragments or really short utterances, used a lot of Japanese words or even full sentences and pause fillers without using any compensation strategies. Regarding small talk, overall, they had long

pauses, little effort to initiate conversation or take the lead, and a reluctance to ask follow up questions or give extended answers, all of which can be attributed to their general low proficiency level.

In general, the higher achievers were the opposite of the lower achievers. They were fluent, did not hesitate too much, had clear pronunciation, and made few errors. Regarding small talk, they could initiate talk by asking questions of their partners, asking follow-up questions and adding extra details without being asked. They also gave positive back channelling signals and echoed what their partner said. In this way they could initiate talk about a common topic and then successfully sustain the conversation. The content of conversations also reflected some of the lessons' small talk topics and themes: weather, recent news, and weekend plans; specific language strategies such as using metaphors; and, examples of praise and compliments. As the talks finished somewhat abruptly due to the closing of the breakout rooms by the authors there were few examples of 'natural' endings except 'thanks, nice talking to you' type comments. There were many laughs and smiles between the speakers who seemed genuinely interested in their partner's answers which created a good rapport.

4. Discussion

There is some evidence from the rather assessment of speaking skills that exposure to an online flipped approach benefited the participants and that over the course of eight weeks they improved their proficiency levels. In particular, the higher achieving students showed evidence of having picked up specific small talk strategies including ways to initiate and sustain conversations.

It is suggested that there could be several reasons for this, all of which are connected to the flipped approach. Firstly, the video materials were useful, and overall, most students did study them prior to the lessons. During the lessons the main points were checked by the students themselves, so they had an opportunity to learn from their peers; and finally, they were given plentiful opportunities to practice. This kind of practice would probably have been more limited in a traditional classroom where the video input would have taken more class time. In addition, the breakout rooms allowed students the chance to talk in pairs in a fun and enjoyable manner.

The teaching implications are that if a flipped approach is used then the materials must be motivating and easy for students to use; that as much time as possible spent in the lesson on practicing skills will result in improved learning outcomes; and, that the use of breakout rooms is an excellent way to increase practice opportunities.

5. Conclusion

This paper describes the first part of a quasi-experimental study comparing a Zoom and VR flipped classroom approach to teach small talk skills to English language learners in Japan. The results indicate that the participants improved their speaking skills over the eight-week course and that higher achieving students could better initiate and sustain conversations. The next stage of the project is to repeat the small talk course using a web-based VR platform.

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Online Italian Language Courses at University for Foreigners of Perugia: From Planning to Testing

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Abstract

University for Foreigners of Perugia has been recently involved in a vast process of digitalization, also as a result of the challenges of the pandemic and the lessons learnt to be implemented in the post-pandemic era, or “new normal”. The main missions of the University include the spreading of Italian language and culture all over the world and the teaching of Italian to foreigners, both for professional and personal purposes. An online platform addressed to the teaching of Italian has been designed, implemented, and enhanced with videos and materials produced by the same University in the past. The courses, delivered on the University Moodle platform, are aligned with the CEFRCV and adopt an innovative and dynamic approach, based on self-study and self-assessment with the support of professors and tutors. The courses have been planned and implemented by taking into account the syllabi and corpora produced at the University for Foreigners of Perugia in latest years. The courses are based on audio and video storytelling, and involve the learners in authentic and real tasks, according to the Action-Oriented Approach described in the CEFRCV. Main features of the courses will be highlighted, with particular reference to some advanced functions, such as immersive environments in 3D and the use of Artificial Intelligence. Preliminary results of the ongoing experimentation of Artificial Intelligence applied to the learning and teaching of Italian as a Second or Foreign language will also be mentioned.

Keywords: *Online courses; Italian as a Second/Foreign Language; Online testing; Webtools*

1. Introduction

University for Foreigners of Perugia¹ is a small, welcoming campus, with a strong international atmosphere: Italian and international students interact every day, sharing experiences, courses and study time in a multicultural and multilingual environment. The strong focus on the international dimension is demonstrated by the in-depth study of English, Spanish and French, as well as the most requested non-European languages on the market (Chinese, Japanese and Arabic). The University for Foreigners of Perugia offers courses of Italian language and culture face-to-face or remotely, aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Companion Volume (CEFRCV), after taking an online placement test, placing the attendees at their relevant level of competence.

The CVCL (Centre for Language Evaluation and Certification) of the University for Foreigners of Perugia is responsible for the Italian language certification at the different levels, recognized by the Italian Ministry of Interiors and Foreign Affairs, and valid for migrants' long stay permit and citizenship. The language certificates issued by CVCL are comparable to the most important certificates issued by the European institutions' members of ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) and relate to the learning objectives specified in the CEFRCV. The CVCL, in collaboration with the Division for Language Policy of the Council of Europe and of European Commission funding, has been carried out several research projects on language assessment and on the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

¹ <https://www.unistrapg.it/en>

2. Language Teaching and Learning in the “New Normal”

In the post-pandemic era, so-called “new normal”, the University for Foreigners of Perugia and the CVCL have started a research project on digitalization, which has come out to be inevitable, after the enriching experience of the pandemic. In fact, despite the challenges and the huge problems caused by COVID 19, a lot of opportunities emerged in terms of digital and technological literacy.

A research conducted by INDIRE in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit and the European Commission [1] [2], has shown that a lot of Italian teachers of foreign languages who had never used learning technologies for their teaching activities, found out the great potential of webtools, repositories, platforms as an added value to the traditional teaching and learning process, to be considered and implemented also in the post-pandemic era. In fact, teachers highlighted the importance of webtools and online platforms as a trigger for the students’ motivation and also stressed the fundamental role of technologies and the need to find new stimulating and engaging materials.

The University for Foreigners of Perugia has organized online undergraduate and postgraduate courses during the pandemic, without stopping the teaching activities. In the “new normal”, teachers and tutors have come back to teach in presence, but still continuing using a lot of the online functions provided by the university Moodle platform and by other webtools. The university has also extensive experience in online postgraduate degrees and professional teacher training courses on Italian as a foreign and second language which have been enhanced and empowered during the pandemic [3].

3. The online Courses of Italian at the University for Foreigners of Perugia

After the pandemic, a research group coordinated by the author, started a specific research project on online courses of Italian to be launched and spread internationally. An online platform addressed to the teaching of Italian has been designed, implemented, and enhanced with videos and materials produced by the same university in the past. The courses, delivered on the university Moodle platform, are aligned with the CEFR CV and adopt an innovative and dynamic approach, based on self-study and self-assessment with the support of professors and tutors.

The courses have been planned and implemented by taking into account the syllabi and corpora produced at the University for Foreigners of Perugia in latest years [4] [5]. They are based on audio and video storytelling, and involve the learners in authentic and real tasks, according to the Action-Oriented Approach described in the CEFR CV [6] [7]. Therefore, they are based on real and meaningful learning scenarios which represent the scene for real life actions.

The learning environment is characterized by materials and video-lessons specifically created to develop the linguistic and meta-linguistic skills of the learners, focusing on the Italian language and culture, while facilitating reflection on “Made in Italy” and on themes with a literary, historical-artistic, and socio-cultural background, with the aim of enhancing the Italian historical-cultural heritage, in close correlation with the Italian language.

The learning pathway is based on the interactive use of content and materials, both through asynchronous communication tools such as forum, blog and mailing list, and through synchronous video-conferencing tools.

Through the activities proposed in the virtual environment, the courses aim at fostering BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), i.e., the basic skills for communication and interactional exchanges typical of the domains of daily life, and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), the formal, academically oriented register necessary to face university studies. Online seminar meetings held by lecturers and experts on specific topics of history, art, culture, literature, etc. are organized. In fact, those courses are requested by different international universities willing to arrange exchange programs with our university and to send their students to Italy according to study-abroad programs or international scholarships.

Digital resources and cooperative tools are available on the platform, aimed at the full involvement and participation of students, through the realization of “e-tivities”, individual or collaborative tasks planned according to certain learning objectives, which can be presented directly by the students during special webinars, named “TeachMeet”, based on peer learning. The PBL (Project-Based Learning) approach is therefore, taken into account, which assist in the production and presentation of small projects, also in collaborative mode, exploiting the potential of webtools and dedicated apps.

Synchronous events, regularly scheduled on the platform, involve lectures or seminars held by experts on various topics, or presentations held by the students themselves, who are eager to share their experiences with their colleagues in the virtual classroom.

The courses are based on a narrative and functional approach, focusing on storytelling as one of the most important forms of human expression and its highly motivating and identifying role in the learning process.

The approach adopted, therefore, is both narrative because it refers to authentic language use, according to the real needs of speakers, and functional, as it describes "language in action," not theoretically extracted from model-situations, but emerged from specific needs of learners, related to their experiences in different contexts of daily life.

Thus, the courses are designed and implemented according to the following features:

- reticular, not linear: the pathways are conceived not as separate skill packages, but as set of integrated skills;

- modular: the different modules are self-consistent, reusable, interchangeable;

- synchronous and asynchronous: input and materials of different types are offered, alternating asynchronous delivery with synchronous interaction among students and with teachers, also taking inspiration from the SOFLA model (Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach) [8], which adapts the flipped learning method to distance or blended learning, alternating individual or collaborative study in asynchronous, with interaction, discussion and presentation in synchronous. The student has the freedom to choose the most suitable learning modes, according to his or her needs and learning style, but within a well-defined path. The role of the teacher and tutor is crucial in this regard.

The content of the courses is in line with the syllabi developed by the University for Foreigners of Perugia, inspired from the Italian language profile [9], making use of video clips taken from sit-coms and web series, as well as videos specially made by professionals in the field. Students are guided in reflecting on the linguistic features of Italian-style fiction and video clips for authentic language use in real contexts and situations. Therefore, the potential of fictions and sit-coms in teaching Italian L2/FL for the development of pragmatic and sociocultural competence is exploited, focusing on the sociolinguistic, pragmatic, extra-linguistic and para-verbal features typical of oral communication and interaction in Italian in everyday life contexts.

Given the peculiarities of the multimedia learning environment, the courses also aim at the development of online interaction, one of the new descriptors of the Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2020) [10].

Tasks, e-activities, individual or collaborative interactive exercises are crucial in the learning pathways, under the guidance of the teacher and the tutor, who will also aim at the personalization and individualization of the different activities.

Learning analytics are constantly monitored to collect data and make a screenshot of the learners' experience, for further improvement. Data are also collected through initial, mid-term and final questionnaires and tests, providing information not only on the different profiles of the participants but also on expectations and satisfaction in terms of usability of the activities, degree of interactivity and involvement in the course. Learning Analytics will provide indications about possible additional support needed by the students to achieve their goals, suggesting potential new activities to overcome critical issues during the course itself.

4. Ongoing Development with Artificial Intelligence

The Artificial Intelligence system is the current most popular research strand in language education and the research group at University for Foreigners of Perugia has started investigating the potential of AI in Italian language teaching and learning. A specific AI prototype, created by a group of technicians, is being trained using a substantial corpus derived from the afore mentioned Italian language profile, which serves as a reference framework for the linguistic components corresponding to levels A1 through B2 for Italian as a second language. The research group is currently engaged in exploring the potential of AI-powered technologies within the context of Italian online courses described in the previous paragraphs. In fact, AI systems and chatbots are expected to offer learners interactive and personalized language practice opportunities, instant feedback, and immersive conversational scenarios. AI can enhance both oral communication and written production, addressing limitations frequently encountered in online course settings. The aim is to contemplate the promising role of Artificial Intelligence in augmenting language learning experiences and outcomes of the online courses of Italian implemented at the University for Foreigners of Perugia.

5. Conclusions

The research group at the University for Foreigners of Perugia led by the author, is currently engaged in studying and trying out the potential of Intelligent Tutoring Systems, powered by Natural Language Processing (NLP), to analyze learners' responses, administer personalized language exercises, and provide immediate feedback. AI may enhance students' abilities to recognize and rectify their syntactic errors more effectively, as well as to practice grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

The group is currently experimenting the online courses of Italian implemented on the university Moodle platform with a sample of Chinese university students, attending a joint-degree programme with

the University for Foreigners of Perugia, providing online and self-study programmes and residential lessons in Perugia for the MA. The online courses of Italian allow them to improve their language skills before coming to study to the university campus in Perugia. Data are being collected in terms of participation and motivation, and preliminary results collected from the students' comments show positive attitudes and reactions, although it is too early to draw conclusions as far as learning outcomes are concerned.

However, the combination of online courses on a Moodle platform and additional practice through chatbox and Intelligent Tutoring Systems seems to be very engaging and promising, but further experimentations in the upcoming months are needed to achieve sustainable and scalable results.

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Applying Translation and Interpretation Technology in Teaching and Learning Chinese Slangs Using *Youdao* Online-Dictionary

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Abstract

In recent years, with the sweeping of economic globalization and cultural globalization, China has come up with the strategy of “Chinese culture going out”, so as to promote the spreading and communication of Chinese culture. As an indispensable part of Chinese culture, Chinese slang also deserves the attention of scholars. Slang, as colloquial spoken language, is vividly flavored with local color. In fact, it can be considered as a living part of the Chinese language. To a certain extent, it reveals various changes in the economy, culture, and standard of living part of a society. Youdao is a search engine released by Chinese Internet company NetEase in 2007, which develops mobile applications with big data technology. Youdao online dictionary provides a software and function to conduct a whole-paragraph translation. Translation was based on data from the search engine, along with web data generated that produced by data mining and natural language processing. Users use its search engine as a starting point to expand into the area of large-scale data storage. Youdao online dictionary as a tool for language learners to learn Chinese slangs independently is efficient and convenient, and it has created digital learning opportunity for learners to learn Chinese slangs online during the pandemic of Covid 19. The Youdao online dictionary provided us popular and high occurrence of Chinese slang spoken by the China people in their daily lives, using searching engine the output contains bilingual (Chinese-English) information such as explanation on Chinese slangs from different dictionaries, example sentences contained Chinese slangs, web interpretation about the context meanings of Chinese slangs, professional interpretation, English interpretation, collocation, synonym, conjugation, encyclopedia, translation, and vocabulary book. The study will illustrate the practical functions of the Youdao online dictionary and verify how it will improve the teaching and learning of Chinese slangs through online and actual classroom learning.

Keywords: Chinese slangs, digital learning, translation, technology, online dictionary

1. Introduction

In recent decades, with the rapid development of Internet, the online dictionary gradually replaces the paper dictionary. Nowadays, online dictionary has already become a fundamental tool for language learners. According to Nielsen’s research in 2012, *Youdao* Online-Dictionary ranked the first among seven online dictionaries (including PowerWord, Google, etc.), with 58% coverage among 16-45 years old Internet users in 10 cities in China. *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is a search engine released by Chinese Internet company NetEase in 2007, which develops mobile applications with big data technology. So far, there are more than two hundred million valid users. *Youdao* Online-Dictionary provides a software and function to conduct a whole-paragraph translation. Translation was based on data from the search engine, along with web data generated that produced by data mining and natural language processing. Users use its search engine as a starting point to expand into the area of large-scale data storage.

As an indispensable part of Chinese culture, Chinese slang also deserves the attention of scholars. Slang, as colloquial spoken language, is vividly flavored with local color. In fact, it can be considered as a living part of the Chinese language. To a certain extent, it reveals various changes in the economy, culture, and standard of living part of a society. *Youdao* Online-Dictionary as a tool for language learners to learn Chinese slangs independently is efficient and convenient, and it has created digital learning opportunity for learners to learn Chinese slangs online during the pandemic of Covid-19.

2. Literature Review

Yang (2017) studied effects on English learning of Online dictionary, taking Youdao Dictionary and Kingsoft Powerword for example. It exploited their merit and avoided their demerits then users can adjust and improve English learning strategies and methods. Li and Liu (2015) tried to find out the influence on translation study of online dictionary. Zhang and Lu (2014) reported inter-subjectivity approach to lexicon configuration in cyber dictionaries: with particular reference to Youdao Dictionary. It started from a brief account of the status quo of cyber dictionaries, and described the strengths and weaknesses of three types of lexicons, i.e., copyright-based, webpage-extraction-based and wiki-based ones, which were illustrated by Youdao Dictionary, and then investigated how compilers, technicians and users can take most advantage of their combined expertise to optimize the lexicon configuration of cyber dictionaries.

Overall, online dictionaries are preferred over other forms of dictionaries because they can quickly obtain word definitions and provide sample sentences. This form of dictionary allows language learners to learn without interruption, making it easier for them to recall words. They also promote learning autonomy since they value the usage of dictionaries in their studies and are eager to utilize them while learning a foreign language. However, the use of dictionaries in Chinese slangs learning has not been thoroughly studied.

The study will illustrate the practical functions of the Youdao online dictionary and verify how it will improve the teaching and learning of Chinese slangs trough online and actual classroom learning.

3. The Advantages of *Youdao* Online-Dictionary

3.1 Authoritative Data

Youdao Online-Dictionary has complete collection of three copyrighted dictionaries data: *The 21st Century Unabridged English-Chinese Dictionary*, *A New Chinese-English Dictionary*, and *Collins English-Chinese Dictionary*. Based on this giant database, users are able to do parallel comparison of the same Chinese slang, looking up the definitions and example sentences in different dictionaries, in order to better and deeper understand the pragmatic meaning in certain practical circumstances. For Chinese slangs, especially for those contain cultural elements, there is not always a consistent one-to-one match between its English translation and Chinese characters. By referring to the comparison of English definitions and example sentences from different dictionaries, the actual meaning of the Chinese slangs can be defined and the usage can be mastered accurately.

Taking Chinese slang “掌柜” for example, it is a Chinese slang with local colour in ancient Chinese society which indicated a shop owner served in the counter of a shop and his duty was deal with payment from customers. When searching Chinese slang “掌柜” (input Chinese characters) in *Youdao* Online-Dictionary, the Chinese spelling and English definition “shopkeeper; manager (of a shop)” is given from *A New Chinese-English Dictionary*. Then continue to input “shopkeeper”, the definition “A shopkeeper is a person who owns or manages a shop. 店主; 商店经理” is given both in English and Chinese (but not Chinese slang version). In this way, the semantic meaning of “掌柜” can be explored by the language learners.

3.2 Rich Definitions

A distinguishing feature of *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is the webpage crawling lexicon, an automatically updated dynamic information resource system. Through the webpage crawling, more content can be explored, such as web definition, specialized definition, English to English definition, phrase, bilingual example sentence, authoritative example sentence, original example sentence.

For example, inputting “走火入魔”, the English definition “possessed by the Devil” is given from *A New Chinese-English Dictionary*. Besides, several web definitions are given: “Possessed by the Devil (based on 1016 websites), Ultimate User, Kurosufaia, gone mad”. Then follows the phrases, bilingual example sentences and encyclopedia.

走火入魔 ☆

possessed by the Devil

新汉英大辞典

走火入魔 [zǒu huǒ rù mó]

1. possessed by the Devil

以上来源于: 《新汉英大辞典》

网络释义

Possessed by the Devil

这只诡异的球队, 在朱骏和贾秀全的耍弄之下走火入魔(Possessed by the Devil), 能漂亮的赢下山东, 也能窝囊的兵败成都和长沙。贾秀全从来就不是一个出色的厨师(Chef), 甚至可以说是一个平庸的教头。

基于1016个网页

Ultimate User

Kurosufaia

给网易有道词典评分 | 满意度调查 | 意见反馈

取词 划词

Screenshot 1. Dictionary definition and web definitions for “走火入魔”

Ultimate User

Kurosufaia

gone mad

短语

从没愿走火入魔 HEAR WHAT I SAY

启蒙的走火入魔 enlightenment gone mad

爱会走火入魔 Love gone mad

爱会走火入魔 The devil will love

或走火入魔的哲学 Philosophy gone mad

双语例句

1. 我对于装潢有点走火入魔了。
I got a little carried away with the decorations. <D>

2. 如果你走火入魔——你可能无法如此敏感的生活在这个世界上。
If you go too far you can pay a price — you can be too sensitive to live in this world. <D>

3. 他已经变得——他不喜欢我说这些——但我认为他真得有些走火入魔了!
He had become-he doesn't like for me to say it, but I think he had become truly obsessed. <D>

给网易有道词典评分 | 满意度调查 | 意见反馈

取词 划词

Screenshot 2. Phrases, bilingual example sentences and encyclopedia for “走火入魔”

3.3 Practical Functions

The rich information provided by *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is basically met the requirement for self-learning and e-learning users. When this electronic and online database and resource apply to inside classroom learning, students can try to understand the Chinese slangs by themselves before teachers' instruction. After teacher explaining the Chinese slangs, students get deeper understanding of the word.

Besides its powerful basic dictionary function mentioned above, *Youdao* Online-Dictionary provides users other practical functions like vocabulary book. After searching the new words, users can add them to vocabulary book for review. The vocabulary book helps users to recite the word by card learning. In this way, users are allowed to set their own plan, such as daily learning project and stick to it. It not only achieves learning and memorizing Chinese slangs whenever and wherever, but also allows to classify the vocabularies according to users' need, which highly promote the efficiency of learning.

4. Conclusion

For Chinese slangs learners, *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is comprehensive and user-friendly. First of all, it is free of charge. Secondly, it provides Chinese spelling, British and American English pronunciation, definitions from both authoritative dictionaries and websites, example sentences and encyclopedia. It allows learners to explore the literal meaning and semantic meaning of Chinese slangs with newly updated content. For translation learners, translation methods can be analyzed at the meantime. Also, the function of vocabulary book makes review work convenient. For language teaching, *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is a helpful tool for classroom teaching. Students can better understand the meaning of Chinese slangs especially through example sentences. However, there are still some Chinese slangs can't be found or not clearly explain in *Youdao* Online-Dictionary, especially for some cultural terms. For instance, the definition of Chinese slang “黄花闺女” in *Youdao* Online-Dictionary is “an untouched virgin; bread-and-butter miss; be still a virgin”. This definition doesn't explain the Chinese cultural elements in the slang, that is why yellow flower is used to describe virgin in ancient Chinese society. In this situation, teachers need to further illustrate the Chinese slangs in actuarial classroom learning.

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Engagement in Language Learning

Utilizing Bilingual Story Telling in a Learner Centered L2 Classroom

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Abstract

In the post-pandemic classroom, social withdrawal and dismissive reaction to explicit teaching methods are posing a challenge to language instructors. Will traditional language teaching disappear, considering the competition from online language apps such as Duo Lingo and Babbel, or is there a way to connect with our present-day students that will regenerate excitement and engagement?

What will draw students back into a physical realm that embraces active learning and interaction with humans, not Avatars? This presentation proposes that an effective way to re-engage students is by utilizing a community engagement, learner-centered model in the L2 classroom. One example of how Penn State Berks has integrated this two-fold approach is through bilingual storytelling. This paper describes the concept of merging a Learner Centered Classroom (LCC) with Community Engagement (CE), and the process of applying them to L2 learning. To successfully utilize bilingual storytelling in a language acquisition classroom, this paper will discuss the effect of a Learner Centered Classroom Approach when teaching L2, review Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) as it relates to the theory of comprehensible input, highlight effective storytelling practices in the classroom, and finally, offer experiential evidence of the impact that bilingual storytelling has both on students learning the L2 language as well as on the students to which the stories are told.

Keywords TPRS, Engagement, Learner Centered Classroom

1. Introduction

The influence of social media has revolutionized ways to capture people's attention. Language apps such as Duo Lingo and Babbel, and the social media platforms Tik Tok, Instagram and Snapchat have snatched students' attention to the point of excluding all other methods of acquiring information. Thus, in post-pandemic teaching, it is essential that instructors utilize teaching methods that will draw students away from their electronic devices. This paper proposes that an effective way to command attention in an L2 classroom is by utilizing a community engagement, learner-centered model in the L2 classroom. Penn State Berks has integrated this two-fold approach through community bilingual storytelling in all levels of its Spanish classes.

Penn State Berks is located in Reading, PA. Reading is the 4th largest city in the state. Census data from 2022 reports that the average household income of Reading residents is \$43,842, with a poverty rate of 39.87%. 66.5 % of Reading's population is Latino or Hispanic [1. World Population Review, 2023]. The city of Reading is home to the Reading School District, comprised of 19 schools and 17,659 students. The school district's minority enrolment is 90%, 85.7% of which are Latino or Hispanic. 69.2% of students in the district are economically disadvantaged [2. [usnews.com/Pennsylvania](https://www.usnews.com/Pennsylvania), 2019]. Furthermore, the Reading School District is home to one of four Regional Migrant Education offices in the state. Thus, it makes sense to provide L2 Spanish learners with language immersion, real-time experience, and real-life language exchange with heritage speakers while at the same time providing service to our Latino/Hispanic community.

2. Using a Learner Centered Classroom (LCC) Approach in the L2 Classroom

The Bilingual Storytelling Project at Penn State Berks started with one school in 2018, and has since expanded to five schools in the Reading Area School District. As of this writing, it continues to grow with two more schools waiting to be onboarded. The project began when faculty noticed that area children did not customarily go the public library for story hour because the stories were offered only in English, and many of the children did not speak English. Since the instructors were also searching for new language teaching and learning connections, they decided that a real-life experience that served the community at the same time was a perfect opportunity. Therefore, Penn State Berks students, and

faculty, decided to perform dramatized, bilingual readings for elementary and middle school children at their schools. Stories are read in English, Spanish, or in both languages.

From the perspective of a foreign language class, bilingual storytelling is a high impact practice. It compels students to enact the four core skills that they must conquer in any language class: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. With bilingual storytelling, students utilize their language skills while learning cultural competencies and experiencing firsthand issues involving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Rather than an instructor explicitly teaching these concepts, students learn how to think, solve problems, and generate hypotheses on their own. This type of learning forms the core of the Learner Centered Classroom.

Bilingual storytelling aids in language learning because it communicates information in an interesting and engaging way, which is more effective than just simply hearing plain facts. Facts are twenty times more likely to be remembered if they are told as part of a story [2. Bearden, 2022]. The meaningful context of the story and the continuous repetition of phrases allows both storytellers and listeners to achieve mastery of the vocabulary. The images in the books and the readers' dramatizations contribute to imprinting an indelible image in the minds of the participants.

In addition to teaching language skills, bilingual storytelling enriches social and cultural awareness and builds empathy because it opens doors to new cultures & traditions. Storytellers and listeners are introduced to worlds, customs, and traditions previously unknown. They gain an understanding that people have the same wants, needs, and fears, and therefore, the "other" may not be as different or strange as one once thought.

Providing student-centered activities that furnish target language input in a meaningful and authentic way is at the core of LCC pedagogy. Mary Ellen Weimer, a key promoter of LCC, defines five key changes to the practice in her book, *Learner Centered Teaching* [3. Weimer, 2013]. Bilingual storytelling meets at least three of those five principles:

1. *Directly engaging students in the work of learning* – students select a story that best fits into the content of their class. They also select which characters they wish to portray. The professor serves as a guide in the process, but students must learn to collaborate with one another and seek pronunciation and/or translation help in the foreign language as needed.

2. *Collaboration* – is a particularly important aspect of this project. Without it, the project would flounder. Students learn quickly that collaboration is essential to performing the story in front of a live audience. If students do not coordinate and collaborate, for example, by sharing of their time at rehearsals, the story would be missing characters and plot lines, and the children who have been anxiously awaiting a storytelling event in their native language would be terribly disappointed. Realizing how their part impacts everyone else is a valuable lesson learned in collaboration.

3. *Encouraging students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it* – students assist the professor in selecting the story only after they have learned about who their intended audience is, and about the environment in which they will present their story. A post-performance reflection session is conducted, in the L2 language, to discuss the successes, failures, and lessons learned from the project. Students who participate in this project return often, asking to participate again, even if they have completed their course of language study.

Shifting to an LCC pedagogy is becoming the new paradigm in the L2 classroom, fueled, in part, by the 2017 "Can Do" assertions put forth by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL), *LinguaFolio*® (LF®), and its European predecessor, the European Language Portfolio (ELP). They advocate for increased student participation in the learning process because language can be more effectively acquired when the learners are situated in a communicative environment [4. <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>].

Yet, LCC pedagogy may prove to be a bit too chaotic for certain instructors. They cannot imagine a classroom without rote repetition, verb conjugations, and vocabulary charts; however, LCC is effective and produces results. One can easily access a wide array of scholarship on the topic, but let us look at one recent example. In 2022, Li and Li offered a comprehensive literature review in which they cite several examples in support of the notion that students enrolled in LCC or flipped classrooms are more motivated, more engaged, more likely to participate in the lesson by asking and answering questions. More importantly, they are more willing to use the target language. [5. Li Z. and Li J., 2022]. Since Li and Li's article does not offer specific details on LCC pedagogy, the next section of this paper will examine TPRS, an LCC method which speaks directly to bilingual storytelling.

3. Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

As illustrated, innovation in language learning does not necessarily have to come from futuristic technology; innovation can come about by turning to the past, with the ancient practice of storytelling. Bilingual storytelling provides a highly motivational way to learn a new language because it presents vocabulary and grammar via a non-threatening, stress-free platform. The story's context allows students to stretch their imagination and enables them to comprehend constructs beyond their current level of language production.

Dr. Stephen Krashen terms the phenomenon of comprehending language just beyond one's linguistic competence as "comprehensible input." Dr. Krashen is a leading expert in the field of linguistics, and theories of language acquisition and development. In his book, *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, Dr. Krashen asserts that students learn an L2 language more naturally when instruction is delivered with context and meaning [6. Krashen, 2000]. Bilingual storytelling offers meaningful interaction in the target language among the participants which is then reinforced with images and repetition. The active exchange adds dimension and perspective to the story as opposed to simply memorizing meaningless, generic, vocabulary lists. Storytellers and listeners produce communicative language without necessarily focusing on grammatical structures. Thus, in Krashen's terms, the student acquires the L2 language in the same way as he/she did when acquiring the L1 language.

Comprehensible input is at the center of a TPRS lesson, which can include a story that is drafted spontaneously in the class by the students (albeit with instructor guidance), or it can be a published story suggested by the instructor and agreed upon by the class. In either case, the story should target the vocab and structures the instructor feels is appropriate to the curriculum.

Since not all students will initially comprehend the totality of the story, the instructor should offer a variety of activities to ensure that comprehension can be successfully achieved by all students. This can be done by asking simple yes or no questions, then progressing to more content-based questions once the group masters the basics of the story. The instructor can also task the students with asking questions or adding elements from their own imagination to the story. The result is that students will enjoy creating all kinds of scenarios for the characters in the story. The more fun, the story becomes, the more students want to add to it. Without realizing it, students accomplish all this story telling in the target language. What is important here is not the correct employment of verb conjugations or grammar; rather it is the comprehensible language output that will eventually lead to proficiency in the target language.

When students enjoy classroom activities, they will participate exponentially because they are motivated. The drive is not necessarily to score an "A", but to explore and participate in the activity that caught their attention. High motivation, or the "affective filter", is a component of TPRS that is common in Krashen's theories [7. Patrick, 2019]. Because students have selected the stories themselves, they are interested in the content. They become very familiar with the structure and meaning of the story, which helps boost their self-confidence. Rehearsing the story lowers their anxiety level as they become familiar with the story as a whole. High motivation, low stress, and self-confidence lead to successful acquisition of a language through an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The motivation storytelling provides does not necessarily end at the conclusion of the story. When the storytelling is turned into a performance, students can add yet another dimension by creating their own activities to accompany the telling of their story. These activities could be in the form of a word search, a crossword puzzle, or a matching game. Each activity makes an impression on their brain to help participants remember the new words and constructs at hand. This last step in working with the story allows learners to use their imaginations as far as it will take them. They may even create innovative substories to accompany the original narrative, enticing further language production. The result is an extension of comprehensible input and output far beyond the initial level of language competence.

4. Impact

The impact that bilingual storytelling has both on students learning the L2 language as well as on the students to which the stories are told can be measured in several ways. For Penn State Berks, one successful measure is that schools repeatedly invite our students back to perform these stories and another is that the storytellers themselves return annually to participate until they graduate.

Bilingual Story telling empowers children whose first language is not the predominant language of the society in which they live. It can lessen social inequities by promoting a sense of belonging and reducing anxiety because the stories enable linguistic and cultural development for both the storyteller and the listener. It helps both listeners and storytellers engage in conversation about the differences and similarities in each other's customs and traditions.

For marginalized children, bilingual storytelling promotes a sense of belonging when stories that relate to their situation become part of the daily routine. For the storytellers, dramatizing and recounting the stories as opposed to memorizing linguistic and cultural content, evokes a range of emotions, which in turn, builds empathy. By minimizing the alienating effects of difference, participants can relate to one another, breakdown barriers, and build trusting relationships.

Finally, it merits mentioning that Bilingual Storytelling addresses the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education (4) and Reduced Inequalities (10) by providing access to traditional literary pieces to children in their native language, and in their school. Bilingual Storytelling also addresses the UN SDG of Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (16), in that the stories are enjoyed in safe spaces and carry peaceful messages of tolerance and global governance.

5. Conclusion

In an era of fierce competition for our students' attention, bilingual storytelling is a high impact practice that grabs student attention much more than memorizing vocabulary and verbs. In an L2 Learner Centered Classroom, bilingual storytelling affords the students control over the delivery of the lesson. Control in the hands of the learners reduces anxiety, serves to promote a sense of belonging, and enables linguistic and cultural development to occur in a manner more akin to the way one learns these constructs while growing up. Bilingual storytelling places the responsibility of learning squarely on the shoulder of the students who embrace the pedagogical method, enjoy the experience, and acquire language and cultural skills they will not soon forget.

Utilizing bilingual storytelling as a community engagement opportunity elevates the language acquisition beyond a language lesson into an empowering experience that builds empathy and understanding as the stories lessen social inequities by engaging students in conversations about the differences and similarities in each other's customs and traditions.

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Introduction of Complex Vocabulary in Literature through Fine-Tuning: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

Methods of foreign language teaching that deliberately mimic the way children acquire their first language, such as Krashen's comprehensible input [5], have proven effective for a large number and variety of learners. As these methods rely heavily on knowledge of psychology and psycholinguistics, it comes naturally that new discoveries in the said fields should motivate their extension and, possibly, modification. Leung et al. claim that parents introduce complex vocabulary in a specific, fine-tuned manner, providing additional explanatory context to the child [6]. The present study adopts the framework of corpus linguistics to test the hypothesis that abridged literature for language learners and young readers also exhibits this trait. For the purpose, original and abridged versions of three classical literary works as well as their translations in several languages will be juxtaposed in relation to the context in which they introduce complex vocabulary. Furthermore, the presence and prominence of the examined textual characteristic will be analyzed by target reader age as well as by language, thus shedding light on what Krashen refers to as the "natural order" of language acquisition.

Keywords: *comprehensible input, graded readers, second language acquisition*

1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The qualities of reading have been highly emphasised in recent years, notably as it is compared to popular pastime activities of more controversial nature, such as engagement in social media and other digital forms of entertainment. In particular, the reading of novels is proven to directly improve both academic performance and motivation [7]. Altered or "abridged" versions of literary works are specially created in order to aid children and foreign language learners in their language acquisition. The relative difficulty of a given text is traditionally measured through its "readability", a calculated and highly objective characteristic that has recently benefited greatly from advancements in the field of Natural Language Processing. Narrow research has sought optimal readability measures for texts in languages other than English (for example, Wilkens et al. provide a detailed readability assessment tool for French [10]) as well as for texts created for L2 learners (such as Xia et al.'s study [11]). In accordance with intuition, typical readability features, such as the length of a given text or the average number of words within a sentence, associate reduced length with reduced complexity. However, there are exceptions to this rule, one of which will be examined in detail in this paper: namely, the introduction of complex vocabulary with added auxiliary context.

The primary motivation for the current experiment is a recent study conducted by Leung et al., according to which parents tend to introduce advanced vocabulary in a specially fine-tuned manner, providing additional context to the child [6]. For instance, a leopard may be explicitly marked as "dotted" or said to be acting "like a cat". Could this tendency be extended to the domain of reading as well as to foreign language learners? According to Krashen's theory of language acquisition [5], such a link is anything but farfetched. With the idea of comprehensive input, the linguist emphasises exposure to altered and thus understandable by the learner spoken and written language and industriously establishes similarities between an infant's acquisition of their native language and foreign language learning. When it comes to the acquisition of discrete languages, Krashen notes that the so-called "natural order" may differ (i.e. pluralisation may be learned before or after verb conjugation or grammatical case endings), and that differences seem strikingly independent on the learner's L1 [5]. No extensive work has sought to establish the referenced natural order of different languages.

2. Experimental Setup

For the purpose of this study, three classical English-language novels of roughly the same time period are selected: *A Christmas Carol* (Charles Dickens), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll), and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain). A corpus is formed that consists of the original works, translations into French, Russian and Spanish and abridged versions of all full texts (up to two different translations and three abridged versions per language are considered, based on availability). Some abridged versions are defined as targeting a specific reader audience, such as children of a certain age or foreign language learners of a specific level.

Firstly, all texts undergo basic preprocessing, which includes the removal of capitalisation and non-alphabetic symbols. Lemmas and part-of-speech tags are then derived from each word in a given text. A basic algorithm is utilised to find candidate complex words in the unabridged texts: a list of just the nouns is derived as exemplifying most strongly the examined readability feature; then, following Zipf's principle of least effort, the longest words are taken (following a process of trial and error, 300 words per text are opted for). The derived word lists are examined and manually cleaned of errors. Wrongly selected words include non-words derived from textual processing ("adventuresbeginning"), non-nouns ("aficionada", used as an adjective) and words that are objectively not complex despite their length ("Christmas", "cumpleaños"). Hyphenated collocations ("school-house") are purposely included in the list; whilst expressions in French and Russian that are hyphenated based on grammatical rules ("commença-t-elle", "как-нибудь") are removed.

All words from the finalised lists are sought within the respective book's abridged versions and, thus, shorter lists of words that appear in both works are derived for each full-abridged textual pair. The contexts of the word's introduction (i.e. first use) in the two texts are extracted and analysed. Instances of the examined characteristic; namely, introduction of a complex word within a more detailed context in an abridged work, are noted and studied. Words that appear in different contexts in the two works are disregarded.

3. Results and Observations

A total of 62 instances of complex vocabulary being introduced via additional context in an abridged version of a text were found out of a total of 377 complex words appearing in full-abridged textual pairs. Three main subtypes of the characteristic were observed: 46.8 % of the instances included the addition of related vocabulary issuing from the same lexical field, at times bordering redundancy ("brouillard" vs "épais brouillard"; "гостеприимство" vs "щедрое гостеприимство"); 41.9 % consisted in transformation into simpler grammatical structure ("tejer una guirnalda de margaritas" vs "juntar margaritas para trenzar una guirnalda") and 11.3 % featured an explanation or definition ("в суде заседают, потому и называются 'присяжные заседатели'"). Occasionally, the distinctions between the three subtypes were not straightforward as, for instance, the addition of close but not fully synonymous vocabulary comes close to "explanation."

Language	Prominence of the Feature (proportion)	Prominence of the Feature (%)	Breakdown by Type of Additional Context
English	4/69	12.2%	50% gram. trans.
			50% related voc.
French	14/67	20.9%	28.6% gram. trans.
			42.9% related voc.
			28.6% explanation
Russian	15/85	17.6%	46.7% gram. trans.
			33.3% related voc.
			20% explanation
Spanish	29/156	18.6%	44.8% gram. trans.
			55.2% related voc.

Figure 1. Instances of complex vocabulary introduced with additional context in abridged literary works by language.

Fig. 1 shows the presence and distribution of the examined readability feature by language. Instances are fewest in English texts and highest in French, followed by Spanish texts; the proximity of scores for the latter two suggesting that their commonality as Romance languages might influence the examined feature. The distribution tends to be highly balanced between "grammatical transformation" and "related vocabulary", a limited number of explanations appearing only in French and Russian.

If one is to regard the works by intended audience (see Fig. 2), a few tendencies can be discerned. Very few complex words as defined in the full versions of the texts are present in the abridged versions for very young children, the only two instances of added context consisting in explanations. Similarly, none of the sought complex words are found in the abridged versions for lower-level foreign language learners (keeping in mind the limitation that only English works are examined). Inversely, the characteristic is most prominent with higher-level foreign language learners (40% of considered words).

Audience	Prominence of the Feature (proportion)	Prominence of the Feature (%)	Breakdown by Type of Additional Context
General/Undefined	24/139	17.3%	50% gram. trans.
			41.7% related voc.
			8.3% explanation
FL Students	4/15	26.7%	50% gram. trans.
			50% related voc.
0-500 words	N/A	N/A	N/A
500-1000 words	2/5	40%	50% gram. trans.
			50% related voc.
Children	28/169	16.6%	35.7% gram. trans.
			44.4% related voc.
			17.9% explanation
Age 5-8	2/10	20%	100% explanation
Age 9-11	14/95	14.7%	50% gram. trans.
			50% related voc.

Figure 2. Instances of complex vocabulary introduced with additional context in abridged literary works by audience. “Age” is based on the lowest recommended age for a text. Works for children and foreign language learners that are not further specified are accounted for only in higher levels.

4. Conclusion and Future Directions

The presented experiment shows that in a non-negligible proportion of cases, complex vocabulary is introduced in abridged literary works with additional context as compared to their full counterparts. The said context mostly comes in the face of additional vocabulary of the same lexical field and what can be defined as grammatical transformations as accounted for by Harris, which render the text simpler whilst information remains constant [4]. The characteristic seems to be more present in the context of L2 learners as well as to be of increasing relevance as a reader’s level of proficiency (or age in the case of native speakers) increases. Variance by language is possible but inconclusive.

Whilst knowledge of the examined readability characteristic can be directly applied in the composition of texts as well as in FL classrooms in the context of introduction of vocabulary, additional research on and around the topic would be beneficial. As the corpus of examined works is limited, clear outliers can be pointed out (such as Sam’l Gabriel Sons and Company’s version of *Alice in Wonderland*, which features no instances of the feature in a large sample of 51 complex words). Also, attention should be accorded to similar yet distinct tendencies in abridged works that have been observed, which speak of possible general simplification of the context around newly introduced complex words rather than necessarily its expansion. The process of seeking the examined and related textual characteristics can be further automatized and refined; for instance, through reliance on relevant frequency lists rather than purely on a word’s length.

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Appendix: Corpus Content

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Exploring Cultural Motivation: A Case Study on the Fascination with the Korean Language

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Abstract

While communication and language can be the motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) [1] for some students to start learning a second language, that is not the case for many others, who learn the language motivated by the culture (Kramersch, 2012) [2] which attracted them. These learners show a deep intrigue with the culture of a country, which serves as their main motivation for foreign language learning. By examining the implications of media exposure, particularly in relation to Korean culture, we aim to bring into focus the factors that drive individuals to initiate their Korean language learning journey. This case study will analyse the motivation of five students of Korean language by using an interview as the instrument of research, validated through the Delphi method. Results suggest that these learners are predominantly motivated to learn the Korean language by an initial fascination with Korean culture, the aesthetic, costumes, and traditions, rather than solely by the language itself, which came after the fascination by Korean culture. This fact allows researchers to categorize these subjects as culturally motivated students, a new term in the literature. Through an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon, we uncover the intricate interplay between media, cultural motivation, and language learning, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of intercultural education (Byram et al., 2002) [3] dynamics. Conclusions lead researchers to continue exploring this phenomenon among other cultures and age participants, to confirm that the direction of this journey is not unidirectional (i.e., from the language to the culture), but bidirectional (i.e., also from the culture to the language).

Keywords: *intercultural education, language learning, motivation, culture, media*

1. Theoretical Backdrop

The relation between language and culture is undeniable and has been widely studied by experts throughout the years. As stated by Brown (1994, p. 165) [4]: “A language is part of a culture and culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. Therefore, when learning or teaching a second language, we should strive to include culture as part of the curriculum. In fact, culture is fundamental for the proper acquisition of the language, to be able to communicate effectively in real social settings: “It has been widely recognised in the language teaching profession that learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 4) [3]. This highlights the importance of culture in second language (L2) learning, and the opportunities it brings to the classroom.

However, while some students believe that culture should not be taught by the language teacher: “the language classroom is not really the place to learn about values, history, and culture... It’s debilitating.” (Kramersch, 2011, p. 361) [5], most students are willing to learn about culture in the L2 class: “Yet others, indeed a majority of learners of English around the world, are keen on learning the language precisely because it gives them access to a culture that they admire and a lifestyle they aspire to” (Kramersch, 2012, p. 59) [2]. Thus, it can be affirmed that this admiration for the culture of a different country may be the motivation for students to start learning a language even though, in most cases, language is seen as the key to culture and not the other way around.

The main objective of this research is to identify the cultural reasons that drive students to learn Korean as an L2. The hypothesis of this study is that these students are firstly motivated by culture and not by language. Dörnyei and Ushioda describe motivation as: “What moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, to expend effort and persist in action” (2011, p. 3) [1]. Cultural motivation is a new term supported by the literature (e.g., Brown (1994) [4]; Byram (2002) [3]; Kramersch (2011; 2012) [5] [2]; Dörnyei (2011) [1]; and Coyle (2005) [6]), which describes a desire to learn a new language because of the student’s appreciation of the traditions, customs, aesthetics, history, or lifestyle of a country. This term describes a scenario where students learn first about a certain culture and, because

of their desire to keep learning about the country and its people, they start learning the language as well.

This research will approach the Korean culture and the increasing number of students interested in learning Korean as L2, given the Korean wave phenomena: “Korean popular culture such as movies, TV dramas, and pop music is overwhelmingly powerful and TV dramas are one of the most remarkable popular cultures of these” (Huang, 2009, p. 1) [7]. Korean culture has had a great impact in the last few decades, which may also affect education, particularly when it comes to language learning. K-pop for example, has been used as a powerful tool for teachers and the main motivation for students in the L2 classroom: “As K-pop (Korean popular music) gains global popularity, a growing number of students want to learn Korean as a foreign language. K-pop is their major motivation in learning Korean, but it can be a great tool to learn Korean.” (Jung, 2021, p. 1) [8].

To sum up, this study will find out if five participants interested in learning Korean as an L2 are culturally motivated by discerning when and how these students discovered the Korean culture. We will also analyse which factors from the Korean culture motivate them, and whether language is one of these factors. These are the specific objectives (S.O.) of this research:

- S.O.1. To find out when and how participants discovered Korean culture.
- S.O.2. To find out what factors of Korean culture motivate participants.
- S.O.3. To find out whether language is one of the motivating factors.
- S.O.4. To find out the motivation of non-culturally motivated participants to learn Korean as an L2.

2. Methodology

2.1 Type of Study

This research is a case studies of three Korean as a second language learners, where qualitative data will be gathered from an online interview to participants. Interviews will focus on their experiences and perceptions towards the Korean culture and their motivation to study the language.

2.2 Participants

Participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) were selected from snowball sampling method (Goodman, 1961) [9] due to their interest in learning Korean as an L2 and about the Korean culture. The five subjects are female, between twenty and fifty years old (P1, P2 and P3 are 23; P4 is 29; and P5 is 41), and of Spanish nationality. Their academic levels are as follows: P1 is enrolled in a bachelor’s degree in Tourism; P2 has a bachelor’s degree in advertising and PR; P3 is enrolled in a bachelor’s degree in Fashion Design; P4 is a PhD; and P5 is doing Vocational Training. All participants speak English, and four speak at least another language.

2.3 Research Design

The design of this research starts by addressing the main problem or issue, i.e., the motivation for students to learn Korean seems to differ from those who want to learn majority languages such as English. Next, selection of participants was made through snowball sampling method, according to their desire to learn Korean culture. Then, the instrument (i.e., interview) was designed and validated through the Delphi method (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963) [10]. Then, data gathered were analysed through content analysis methodology by considering the objectives of this study.

2.4 Instrument

The instrument used for this research is an interview validated through the Delphi process, which has the following sections:

- a. Demographic data.
- b. 2 questions about participants’ first contact with Korean language (S.O.1).
- c. 2 questions on participants’ cultural motivation to learn the Korean language (S.O.2).
- d. 2 questions on the factors in the culture that motivate participants to learn Korean as an L2 (S.O.3).
- e. 2 questions to identify the motivation of non-culturally motivated learners to study Korean as L2 (S.O.4).

3. Results

3.1 First Contact with Korean Language (S.O.1)

Most participants (P1, P2, P4, and P5) had their first contact through friends or partners (e.g., P1: “Thanks to a friend who liked both Korean music and Korean series”, or P4: “The first thing was K-pop music that a friend of mine shared with me in high school”). P3 discovered the Korean culture through

a magazine. The first factor of the Korean culture for all of them was K-pop, K-dramas (P1, P2, P4) and Taekwondo (P5).

3.2 Cultural Motivation to Learn the Korean Language (S.O.2)

Participants listed K-pop, food, make up, skincare, K-dramas, fashion, beauty standards, aesthetics, and *manhwas* as the cultural factors that motivate them to learn about Korean culture and language. E.g., “In my daily life, especially music and make-up, but also food and skincare products” (P1); “I am most interested in Korean entertainment, and music as well as series and films, which I consume on a daily basis” (P2); “As a student of fashion design, I am particularly interested in the beauty standards they have, as well as their modern yet traditional society.” (P3).

3.3 Factors in the Culture that Motivate Participants to Learn Korean as an L2 (S.O.3)

The factors that motivated participants to start or to be interested in studying the Korean language are: P1: to study a bachelor’s degree in Asian Studies; she was already interested in Asian cultures. P2: Korean is the language of the content she consumes the most. P3: to study fashion design in Korea, to understand K-dramas, and to read or speak in Korean. P4 has not started to learn Korean yet, however she is interested. P5 has not studied Korean and does not provide further information.

3.4 Motivation of Non-culturally Motivated Learners to Study Korean as L2 (S.O.4)

Even though most participants (P1, P2, P3, and P4) said that the Korean language is one of their reasons to start learning Korean, it is not identified as the first or main reason for any of them.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Cultural motivation is the reason for students to start learning Korean (Jung, 2021) [8], and media play an important role regarding participants’ first contact with both Korean language and culture (Huang, 2009) [7]. Language is not identified by participants as the main reason to start learning Korean. Therefore, including culture in the L2 classroom should be a priority for teachers (Kramersch, 2011) [5] to boost motivation in the L2 classroom (Dörnyei, 2005) [11].

These findings encourage further investigation of this phenomenon across diverse cultural backgrounds and age groups to understand why some culturally motivated students do not initiate their language learning journey. Conclusions underscore the significance of considering culture as a factor influencing students’ motivation to learn a second language (L2). As a result, this study points toward a future research direction centred on a novel methodology where the second culture, rather than the L2, takes precedence in L2 learning.

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Project-Based Learning for Teaching a Course in European Union Institutions

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to look at reasons why using project-based learning for a course in EU Institutions destined for students in the third year at the Translators and Interpreters section could be useful. First of all, it looks motivating, as the course otherwise can be regarded as a series of laws and rules, together with institutions that have their role in the European Union, together with policies that could be of interest to them. Students can be given tasks to search for certain information, since the main purpose of the course is to allow them to know what sort of information they can search for within these institutions. Their rights can also be found, together with opportunities for their profession. Students will be asked to look for and apply information to their situation and opinions. Project-based learning is supposed to help them realize the practical aspect of the information they can access on various sites, especially on the EU portal. Interactivity, motivation, preparation for everyday life and professional life can be reasons why project-based learning is the best approach. These students all study English as a main language, so it would be useful for them to realize with respect to their minor language what institution they could translate for.

Keywords: Translators, interpreters, citizens, rights, policies

1. Introduction

Maintaining students active and motivated during the courses of lectures is one of the main goals and concerns of university teachers throughout the world. Students expect interaction with their teacher, and also to express their own opinions regarding various topics related to the lectures. This was what the students wanted and voiced their opinions in favour of when offering feedback for the course in European Union and Its Institutions which was held by the author of the present paper for the first time during the academic year 2022-2023. Students appreciate the interactivity offered by a course, both among students and among students and the teachers. As a result, the author of the present paper has thought that methods to maintain the students active during the course were a must. Asking for their opinion every now and then, for example, during the first course, the students could be asked about a definition they would give to the European Union, based on what they know so far. Afterwards, the teacher can bring to their attention several definitions of the European Union, in order to show them that the course can still bring insight to them, and that they do not know everything about the European Union yet. As an example, source [1] mentions the following possible definitions of the EU: a supranational or an international organization, a stage, a federation, and a confederation. Students can be given as a task to reflect on which definition they would choose and why, this task, of course, requiring a bit of research into features of the EU that support the respective definition, as well as looking up the terms enumerated. Bringing in something new can be a strategy to maintain the interest of the students, and discussing with them can help them realize that the course does follow its purpose, namely to complete their knowledge. Another way to maintain the students' attention would be to allow them to work in pairs or in groups in order to research and answer a question related to the European Union and its institutions. Generally, the author of the present paper has noticed that the students tend to feel safe when discussing with a colleague about a task, and asking for advice. The students discuss homework during the breaks and help one another, since this particular group of students, at the specialization Translation and Interpretation with the Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, are most of all not from Bucharest, the city where the University is found. They are from all over Romania, and they tend to form a unitary group since they live together at the same hostel and frequent the same courses and seminars. Some of them prefer to be with their friends in the same seminar groups as well. In this particular situation, students can be expected to enjoy working together on projects as well, not only simple homework involving quick research on the EU websites. In this case, the collaborative learning and team spirit can be understood

as natural, as students tend to stick together, helping one another to go through the moments when they need help with their courses and seminars' activities. What is more, the course the European Union and Its Institutions seems, if we ignore activities that can be done in class, a bit dry and fixed, thus not open for any creative work. It is expected to learn about rules, organization and legislation regarding the way the institutions work, and also regarding what is expected of those professional translators or translators in training programmes, as well as interpreters, to do for the various institutions. Laws are seen as simply given information, which can be checked and remembered, yet students need to develop various skills, not just to learn information by heart or simply know where to look for it. As students of Translation and Interpretation, it is expected for these students to be interested in those institutions dealing with translation and interpretation, and with the types of documents and text genres that they are dealing with in translation and interpretation, function of the specificity of each institution.

The course aims to show these students that learning about fixed notions, rules and laws, as well as politics, and the activity of institutions does not need to be boring. They will not have to learn by heart and they will not only be given abstract notions. They will understand the way their everyday lives can be influenced by various decisions taken at supranational level. For example, values such as multiculturalism, which include respect and understanding for members of other cultures that have a different lifestyle and mindset, is promoted at the level of the EU. Minority rights are also part of the values promoted at EU level. The students will also understand how policies can change their lifestyle. If the EU did not include policies related to minority rights and multiculturalism, then they would not live in a society influenced by these values. They would not have environmental care concerns either. They would not study certain foreign languages if they were not promoted by the language policy at EU level. Their university curricula would not be structured on a period of three years for Bachelor's degree, following the Bologna system. All of these can be subjects of interactive discussions and group or pair work. Students tend to think about the practical side or practical application of the theoretical notions they gain in their university studies. They are very concerned about the practical skills that they can acquire during their university years, since they are eager to get hired and start successful work as professionals in a domain that they feel very much attracted to and which they have chosen to study for their Bachelor's degree.

Since the European Union portal [2] is the main site for updated information regarding the EU institutions, where students can find out everything they need to know, once they are aware of the opportunities given to them, both as translators and interpreters and as citizens of a country which is part of the EU, it is beneficial to create activities for students so that the course does not remain dry and, ultimately, not really practical. The EU portal website will open for the students the perspective related to the institutions' functioning, their rules, their activities, to the EU policies structured on a vast array of domains, as well as to the various opportunities for trainings ensured by the Directorate-General for Translations, an institution which is expected to be of particular interest for the students in the European Union and Its Institutions course, having in view the domain of their Bachelor's degree. The European Union's values and principles are also present on the EU portal website, and students can become aware of the status of their own country within this supranational organization which is the EU. However, just reading and browsing through the information is, by no means, enough. Generally, when we resort to browse a site, we do so once we have a problem, and a question, and search there for answers. As an example, if we want to go on a trip abroad, we ask ourselves whether the country is in the EU or not, and if yes, as well as if no, we need to look up what documents we need to have with us, as well as where to go in order to obtain a passport, visa, and other documents to ensure that we have a smooth trip through the customs. We also look up our rights in the respective country, the period of time we are allowed to stay, and, if we go for an academic event such as a workshop or a conference, or for university study purposes, we need to be aware of what we are going to need for our stay, so that everything is covered, including health policy, money resources, clothes fit with the climate, and so on.

2. Materials and Methods

When we start, as teachers, to lecture a group of students, we need to understand, first of all, the needs of the respective group of students. Thus, for this particular group, taught by the author of the present paper for the one semester the course was planned in the curricula, the interaction with the teacher and also among them was significant. The teacher was also concerned with the level of knowledge these students had about politics and the EU. From the discussions, it became clear they were beginners. Adapting the course to their interests represented by their future professions, translation and interpretation, was also an aspect to take into account. The discussions and tasks would include some usual questions about the EU, the role of its institutions, but in the end consequences regarding their future professions, as well as facilities offered, were supposed to be mentioned. Translations also occupy an important place at the level of EU institutions. It was considered important for the teacher to

make students aware that they should know the official languages of the EU in order to know what advantages they may have if they decide to apply to work for one of the institutions.

All of these notions can be fixed better, in the opinion of the author of the present paper, if students are discovering them through doing tasks. The tasks offer them a question, or a problem, which is likely to appear throughout their lives as translators and interpreters, such as the way GDPR could apply in their job, regarding preserving safely the sensitive data of their clients. Students may also be asked which policy they consider the most relevant for themselves, personally, and most beneficial for their country. They may also be asked which institution of the EU they would choose to work for and why, considering mainly the text genre and terms they may need to know. It may not be only the text genre they may have to deal with, but also, they may need some background knowledge regarding the domain, such as the domain of Law or Economics. Brochures for informing the EU countries' citizens may be easier to translate, since they are mostly part of popular science, and, thus, meant to be accessible to the general public. These brochures may deal with health or environmentalist policies, for example.

From the needs analysis of this particular group of students, we can conclude that the following can be relevant in order to teach them: Engagement in Language Learning, Project-Based Learning, and Translation. The last one, Translation, does not need to be followed as a skill throughout the course, since the BA program includes, in the curricula, enough subjects where they can practice these skills already. However, the students could be explained that the online databases such as IATE which they are recommended to use for their Terminology course, and for their seminar called Glossaries, where they are taught how to prepare a glossary that could help them when translating documents in a certain domain, come from an initiative of the EU. These Romanian students are all learning English as a foreign language for their major specialization, and a second, or minor foreign language of their choice, such as German, Spanish or French. The course in EU and Its Institutions is, thus, expected to help them with their knowledge of specialized terms regarding the EU, to some extent, as well, next to the background knowledge promised by the very title of the course.

According to source [3], the engagement in learning refers to motivating the students, having as results their paying attention in class, their solving their assignments and their feeling stimulated to answer the questions given by the teacher. Source [3] also emphasizes the idea that "students feel relaxed, energized, joyous in their learning." This engagement in language learning can lead to students feeling that they are truly at the centre of the teaching process. The teacher can help them organize themselves and lead them to both learn actively and to enjoy these activities. Once the students are given a lecture where the teacher does all the talking, they tend to get lost in their own thoughts or to chat with their nearby colleagues. The main goal in the teaching process is that of maintaining the students' attention. One method is for the teacher to ask them questions now and then, to check if they have followed until that point. Another method is to give them a short quiz at the end of each lecture, which would motivate students to remain attentive and to take notes throughout the lecture with the main ideas and concepts. However, a more efficient method is that of allowing students to cooperate with their colleagues in order to find the answer to a problem.

An even better solution to the problem, faced by the teacher, in such situations, when they teach a course, could be, for the students, to reinforce their knowledge gained during the course through project-based learning, which can be abbreviated as PBL, and which "is an active student-centred form of instruction which is characterized by students' autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication and reflection within real-world practices" [4]. The specificity of project-based learning is that it "allows students to learn by doing an applying ideas" [5].

Learning by doing, as opposed to passive listening to lectures, is understood as more efficient by Glasser's pyramid [6]. At the basis of the pyramid, Glasser situates the most important skills, which are expected to be gained by the students, and which are the following: "explain, summarize, classify, structure, define, generalize, elaborate, test and illustrate" [7], activities which imply "the use of active learning methodologies" [7]. At the very basis of the pyramid, students should be able to teach others or, in the case of the project-based learning, to explain what they have understood to their colleagues. This is a good exercise to remember 90% of the information acquired during the EU course in our case, through teaching the others. According to the pyramid [7], and its immediately next level, students tend to remember a percentage of 80% of what they do. Here we can include the activities recommended during the course. At the next level [7], we can see that students remember as much as 70% of what they discuss with the others. This is why discussions can be seen as significant during a course. Obviously, this does not mean that the teacher should always, during all the courses, let students do all the work. The teacher can and should lecture, yet at some intervals the teacher can stop and allow the students to express themselves and interact during activities together, in order to fix the notions just learned. One of the advantages is that the knowledge acquired is reinforced and, in a way, already attained right on the spot, without them needing to review the notes and decipher the information later on while on their own. Even if they study together with colleagues, it may be more difficult to grasp some notions in the absence of the teacher. During this time, instead of their going over the notes in an attempt

to understand the subject, the students can work on the exercises and assignments given by the teacher. Some tasks are meant to be done in pairs or groups, while others are also meant to be done individually. In this way, the evaluation process can be done in such a way as to prevent situations where some students may not work as much as other members of the group.

According to the learning pyramid [7], only a percentage of 20% is memorized by the students from what they hear, in our case during the lecture. Judging by this, we can notice why interactive learning is the best option. Otherwise, “the use of passive learning methodologies is often associated with the neglect of the strengthening of certain skills, such as oral expression, creativity, the courage to face new challenges, the search for personal goals, self-improvement, critical spirit and the acceptance of external criticism, or teamwork, among others” [7].

Project-based learning can be applied to the course by devising activities where the students search for a question regarding the functioning of the EU institutions. First, the teacher can give the students a presentation of the institutions, and afterwards they can go for an in-depth study by working together in groups. For instance, the students can be asked, based mainly on source [8], what the policy-making EU institutions are, and to offer a brief explanation of the role of each of them. In order to answer this question, the students will collaborate in groups, then the result will be a presentation in PowerPoint for each group. The students will develop not only their search for information skills, but also their presentation skills. PowerPoint slides can help students present their ideas briefly and concisely. Its use can become part of project-based learning, as students are supposed to “gather information from a variety of sources and synthesize, analyze, and derive knowledge from it” [9]. Working together with other students can be considered safe and easier, and it can also be used as an occasion to test the students’ team-working skills. Such skills are at high price now, especially in education promoted by the EU and in any professional fields of activity. It is a well-known fact that employees at any workplace need to collaborate in order for the activities to go on smoothly and efficiently.

3. Results

Learning can be more efficient when it is fun and when the students get actively involved in the process. Not only do they get to make use more efficiently of the notions learned, but they also get the chance to see how this course can get to help them in real life, both professional and every day. They learn how they can search for information, and where, as well as what type of information can be available for the regarding the EU and its institutions, as well as policies, which can give them rights and opportunities. Students, by the end of the course, will understand how the EU can create the lifestyle they lead today or, at least, some of its aspects. They will get to grasp the notion of “ideology” and realize that all aspects in life can be controlled, to some extent, by the powerful elites at a certain moment. Even some topics chosen for literature and the arts are under the influence of ideology, since this is the reason why those novels regarding minority rights, or women’s rights, and, more generally, human rights, for instance, get actively promoted and achieve worldwide fame.

A successful course can be a combination of the teacher’s lecturing, which should be focused on making clear for students the main notions, and then allowing the students to express themselves through creating projects, having the notions reinforced through working together with their colleagues, as well as developing additional skills, especially team work skills, which are considered crucial by employees nowadays.

4. Discussion

The method of listening to lectures during class is not only boring for students, but it can also be inefficient with respect to their results. Students, at least within the University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, feel tempted to skip lectures if they have a handbook after which they can learn. Sometimes, the teacher needs to “compete” with the handbook, by creating an attractive course for the students, which, in the present case, can apply very well. The author of the present paper, since it was her first time this academic year to teach this course, did not have the time to write a textbook for the students. Some of them did ask about a textbook, but she tried to compensate by offering them schemas and materials from the Internet, as they were available in electronic format and were easier to access than books in print format. The focus on activities during the course could compensate very well for the classic expectation to have a handbook for each and every course. This absence of a handbook was, however, replaced by an interactive learning environment, where students could use the internet and their technological gadgets (smartphone, laptop or tablet). Technology could provide students with a familiar environment, and with exercises useful in real life situations, where they need to look up information regarding citizens’ rights in the EU, research opportunities, educational and language policies, as well as what the Directorate General of Translation can offer them.

Naturally, the risk of allowing students to work together during activities and wishing to maintain them active during the courses through tasks can be that of repeating a type of task in a monotonous manner, during several courses. This is why the teacher needs to take care to bring about variation into the tasks, concerning their type, not just the content. Sometimes, students can be asked to answer a question on the spot, other times they can be asked to present their findings in front of the class, in pairs or in groups, other times, they can solve an individual homework, while still other times they can be asked to work in groups during class and find solutions to a problem through research. They can also be asked to argue for or against a certain perspective, or even to propose a policy, so that it can be clear to the teacher that students have understood what type of issues can be present in EU policies. They can also be asked to make a simulation regarding the steps proposing and then accepting and implementing a policy. Once the notions are clear and they know where to get their information from, the activity can be both instructive and fun. Students enjoy bringing their own contribution and feeling creative. Classes can become, in this way, accessible and students can understand why some amount of theory can be useful, when they get to rely on it and use it in their practical activities.

5. Conclusions

The course EU and Its Institutions, through its approach to teaching and learning, focuses on interactivity and collaboration with both teachers and other students. While acquiring the main notions is a significant aspect followed throughout, the students can gain additional insights into the way the EU and its institutions can impact our present-day lifestyle, and why we are what we are, due to the values and lifestyles promoted. Practice reinforces theoretical knowledge and brings a concrete dimension to it.

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Micro-film Creation: A Novel Attempt by Thai Undergraduate Students in Advanced Chinese Audio-visual and Speaking Course

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Abstract

There is a lack of coherence between chapters in traditional Chinese audio-visual course in non-target language environments, and the design of exercises and practices primarily focuses on language learning and cultural understanding through selected individual video materials. This inhibits proactive self-expression and constrains the quality and quantity of discourse output among learners proficient at an advanced level of Chinese proficiency. This practice provides students with ample freedom of expression, encouraging them to actively engage in introspection regarding personal growth and societal issues, as well as promoting interdisciplinary expression through the utilization of the target language. Over a period of 4 months, students progressively prepare to produce micro-films as they participate in each chapter. In the end, each group needs to submit a micro-film, and individuals submit micro-film creation and viewed impressions. The course evaluation consists of assessments from Chinese language lecturers, film producers, as well as self-evaluations and peer evaluations conducted by the students. Guided by the Production-oriented Approach (POA), the selection criteria for chapters of film and television materials are mainly considered from three aspects: (1) thematic coverage, encompassing subjects such as economics, culture, politics, and natural sciences; (2) alignment with the various stages of micro-film creation, namely pre-production, shooting, and post-production; and (3) the difficulty of the materials, which is determined by factors such as pacing, average sentence length, and the HSK level of new words. The exercises in the chapters are designed to facilitate students in the conception of micro-films, analysis and development of roles, and training in performance skills. Research findings show that engaging in micro-film creation transforms students from passive audiences into active creators, thereby significantly igniting their enthusiasm for learning. The length of micro-film scripts written in the target language ranges from 2,600 to 6,300 words. Moreover, the enhancement of generic competences, particularly problem-solving abilities during the project, further fortifies students' self-confidence.

Keywords: *Chinese audio-visual and speaking course, advanced Chinese, micro-film creation, the multimodality theory, the production-oriented approach*

1. Introduction

Traditional exercises in Chinese audio-visual and speaking courses do not adequately meet the needs of intermediate to advanced-level Chinese learners to express themselves freely and comprehensively. The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is designed to address the issues of input-output disparity and the prevalence of instrumentality over humanity in English teaching within Chinese higher education. It emphasizes the unit teaching process is composed of several motivating-enabling-assessing cycles, with each cycle corresponding to a sub-production objective [3]. This approach has been widely adopted by numerous teachers and has received positive feedback for its teaching effectiveness. However, there is no sign that it has been widely applied in semester-long projects.

This study aims to discuss, within a semester-long audio-visual and speaking course, (a) the selection of chapter materials and design of chapter tasks under the guidance of the POA to assist undergraduate students in completing the course's major project — the creation of a micro-film, and (b) the process of micro-films producing is beneficial for enhancing students' generic competence.

2. Project Design

2.1 Participants

This attempt was carried out in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The students are all Thai, majoring in Chinese language studies at the third year. The class comprised a total of 38 students, among whom 33 are female and 5 are male, with an average age of 20 years old. Prior to the project started, students' proficiency in the Chinese language ranged between HSK levels 5 to 6, which is approximately equivalent to the CEFR levels C1 to C2.

2.2 Motivation

In the first week, the teacher presented micro-film works made by former students (conducted entirely online during the pandemic period). Watching senior schoolmates, only slightly older by 1-2 years, independently writing, directing, and producing a complete micro-film in Chinese, ignited a strong desire in everyone in the classroom. During teacher-student interactions, the teacher encouraged students to extemporaneously outline a micro-film, helping students identify gaps in their in their capabilities and inspiring their desire to learn [7]. In the second week, a guest lecturer systematically explained the steps involved in content production, providing case studies of popular Thai series. The Chinese teacher guided students to comprehend the significance of micro-film creation. Through the warm-up sessions in the first two weeks, students realized that they were fully capable of creating a Chinese micro-film by the end of the semester in collaboration with their classmates [6].

2.3 Enabling

The chapter themes covered Chinese history, culture, economy, politics, and natural sciences, aiming to broaden students' understanding of the target language country, aiding them in acquiring the encyclopaedic knowledge required for output tasks [6]. These materials also supported the development of students' positive world views, intercultural competence, and social responsibility [7]. The video materials and corresponding production tasks for each chapter were specifically selected to align with the steps of micro-film creation, encompassing preparation, pre-production, production, and post-production. A variety of stimulus types (such as visual, auditory, reading/writing, kinaesthetic) and modes of activity organization enabled students to alternately utilize different cognitive processing mechanisms, thereby enhancing learning efficiency (Figure 1 and Table 1) [2, 5, 6]. Considering the difficulty of the input, video materials have a speaking speed of approximately 220-280 words per minute, with an average sentence length of 9-12 words. On average, there are 7-8 new words per hundred words, most of which are classified at HSK levels 5-6.



Figure 1. Production workflow

Table 1. Input materials and corresponding stages of micro-film creation

Chapter	Input Materials	Genre	Language Form	Theme	Stages of Micro-film Creation Associated with	Task	Notes
1	Appreciation previous Micro-film works	-	-	-		-	
2	Introduction to content production	-	-	-	Introduction to Micro-film Creation;	-	Guest lecturer, a senior producer, in Chinese and Thai
3	Tea Person	Documentary Film	Voiceover; interview; dialogue	Culture	Idea formation; Treatment and synopsis.	Personal presentation: My favorite quotes	
4	"Hitchhiking" Accident	TV Programs	Dialogue; voiceover; interview	Legal; morals		1. Role-play: Traffic Accident Interview Investigation 2. Poll: Do you suppose the court's verdict? Why?	
5	The Movie Dream of a Foreign Wife	Feature Film	Interview; voiceover; dialogue;	Intercultural communication; study in China	Script development; Casts and crews; Wardrobe; Make up; Location; Mood and tone.	Retelling stories	
6	100 people assistance charity activity series in Qinghai, China	Feature Film	Interview; voiceover	Public welfare		Group presentation: Introduce charitable activities that you or your idol have done	2 weeks
7	To Live	Movie	Dialogue	Modern Chinese history; kinship		Seminar	2 weeks
8	Animal Cubs Collection	Documentary Film	Voiceover; dubbing	Human and nature	Shooting	1. Script writing on animals 2. Group performance (based on Task 1)	
9	Takes a Real Man S02 Highlights	Variety show	Interview; voiceover	National defense education	※Post-production ※Distribution	1 Discuss 2 Voice dubbing	
10	Micro-film Screening, Reviews and Awards						

In the pre-production stage of micro-film production, the teaching objectives aimed to inspire students to consider the social background, main storyline, climax point, symbols, and motifs in their micro-film project. Using the teaching process of the film *To Live* as an example. This film, adapted from the eponymous novel, narrates the hardships endured by the protagonist's family during various historical periods, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, as they persistently choose to endure and continue living. The unit task involved conducting a seminar, with groups discussing the following topics:

- i. How to interpret the film's title *To Live*?
- ii. Heartwarming moments in the film *To Live*.
- iii. (Dark) humor in the film *To Live*.
- iv. Analysis of supporting characters in the film *To Live*.
- v. A particular item runs through the entire film *To Live*. What is it, and what roles does it play in different historical periods?

During the production phase of micro-film creation, namely the shooting phase, the teaching objectives were focused on cultivating students' performance skills, particularly focusing on their dialogue delivery abilities [1]. While studying the defense-themed variety show *Takes a Real Man S02 Highlights*, the original footage featured intense conflict scenes between the squad leader and the celebrity soldiers experiencing life in the military camp, as well as personal interviews conducted by the director with the celebrity soldiers. The teacher instructed the students to analyze the participants' professional roles (military personnel, athlete, actors, TV host), the personas, and personalities. This aimed to help students understand the participants' initial reactions and language expressions within the program [5, 8]. After discussions, students were engaged in voice dubbing exercises, where the emphasis was not only on pronunciation and intonation accuracy but also on the importance of emotion-filled vocal output [1, 2].

Though the post-production phase was not the focal point of this course for students majoring in language studies, it was still referenced throughout various chapters, encouraging self-study among students who are interested. Examples included the utilization of background music in the documentary *The Movie Dream of a Foreign Wife*, the extensive use of flashbacks in the TV program *Hitchhiking Accident*, and the implementation of reaction shots in the documentary *Animal Cubs Collection*.

Students were tasked with completing an outline in Chinese within a ten-week timeframe. The guest lecturer provided feedback on their outlines. Subsequently, students drafted the initial version of their Chinese scripts and sent them to the instructor for language polishing, particularly focusing on the lines of the characters.

2.4 Assessing

Upon completion of the micro-film shooting, each group uploaded their work to One Drive for exhibition. Additionally, each student was asked to submit a 600 to 800-word report in Chinese within three days after the display. The individual report included the following:

- i. Reviewed the works of the other four groups and assigned scores based on the scoring criteria, and these scores were factored into the group's overall grade with a weightage of 30%. (story-content and inspiration, voice, grammar, vocabulary, performance, and post-production); and designated four individual awards (Best Actor/Actress, Best Costume and Makeup, Best Cinematography, and Best Post-Production).
- ii. Reviewed their own group's work.
- iii. Summarized individual contributions to their group's work.
- iv. Discussed individual achievements throughout the project.

Two Chinese teachers (one from China and the other from Thailand) along with the guest lecturer evaluated the groups' works from the perspectives of language and micro-film production. Their scores to each work accounted for 70% of the group's total micro-film grade.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Output quality

Table 2. Script Themes and Lengths

Group	Theme	The script length of the 1st version	The script length of the final version	Film Duration
Group 1 Supermodel War 《孰为（谓）汝吾好友乎？》	Fashion; vicious competition; jealousy and vanity; friendship	2369 words	2711 words	17:54
Group 2 Distrust in Friendship 《友谊友疑》	Friendship; trust crisis; reflection	4036 words	4137 words	19:33
Group 3 Unbreakable Love 《挨在身边》	Sisterhood; family's unfair treatment	5810 words	6248 words	16:14
Group 4 People Pleaser 《要懂得拒绝》	Mental health; people-pleasing	2271 words	2637 words	15:07
Group 5 Mad House 《疯人院》	Mental health; judging others	2930 words	3482 words	15:51

As shown (Table 2), the length of the scripts written in the target language by each group ranges from 2,600 to 6,300 words. The micro-film themes chosen by students are intricately linked to issues closely tied to their daily lives, yet often overlooked. They hope to reveal social phenomena and provoke audience reflections through their audio-visual language. On the other hand, these themes also reflect the strong desire for self-identity among students.

3.2 Generic Competences

Based on students' individual reports, they demonstrated proactivity in interdisciplinary learning during the micro-film creation process, encompassing target language knowledge and micro-film production techniques. With no restrictions on the theme, students are more inclined to invest time in self-study within their areas of interest. Encouraged by both peers and instructors, students are willing to venture out of their comfort zones and embrace challenges. Despite encountering numerous difficulties throughout the process, the immense sense of accomplishment upon successfully completing a micro-film project has significantly boosted students' self-confidence. Students' critical thinking and reflection have also received effective training through this practice. Their perception of social issues has evolved from either black or white to a progressively clearer recognition of the existence of gray areas. While confronted with criticism from others, students confidently and logically advocated for themselves. Their improvements in leadership, teamwork, communication, creativity, problem solving, and the critical reflection resonate with the generic competencies (including the Cluster of People Skills, Cluster of Conceptual Skills, and Cluster of Personal Skills) that undergraduate students should master [4].

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Using Language History, Loanwords & Etymologies in Language Teaching to Inspire Learners and Build Motivation

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Abstract

The talk will outline how we can use aspects of English and Indo-European language history to build motivation and a delight in learning a broader vocabulary in their target language. We will look at deep history, the roots of English and Indo-European (and even the languages before them), suggesting how we can use these thrilling historic stories of the linguistic developments and migrations of 5000 -6000 years ago to inform and engage students. We will touch briefly on how the triple sciences of archaeology, genetics and linguistics lead us to a better understanding of the history of languages in and around Europe, and its connection to the history of European peoples, and will look at how to make use of this to inspire our learners. We will look at word histories – the etymology of common words in modern languages and how they got there, using interesting stories about unusual words to spur learners' fascination with language. We will look at loanwords, how and when words were borrowed from world languages and how they often changed their meaning along the way, and we will look at the cognates in other world languages that learners can learn to recognise. We will discuss what kinds of word histories can be used to engage, excite and motivate learners. Using this fresh and fascinating content in the language classroom is not aimed to provide detailed knowledge of the history, nor to displace more usual communicative activities but to add new types of linguistic content. It also provides extra skill development in constructing meaning through reading, listening, speaking communicatively and writing about a more substantive set of factual topics.

Keywords: Engagement, motivation, language knowledge, language history, projects, community

Using Indo-European Language History in Language Teaching

1. Introduction

Most of our language learners are highly motivated to learn English (or other languages – though this paper focuses on the learning of English) because they need it for their education, their work or for future career opportunities.

But we still need to find new ways to motivate learners, to keep them interested, to keep them delighted in the process of learning more.

Most textbooks use quite standard topics – work, holidays, foods, the environment – to contextualise language. Can we include a wider range of topics?

For example, topics about the language itself. These might include where English and other modern European languages come from, how English is related to other languages, how Indo-European developed over 5000 years ago, and how it reached English-speaking countries.

In my teaching experience, the majority of students are quite fascinated by this new area of knowledge about Indo-European language history which most of them had not previously encountered.

2. Themes and Content

What would this mean in practice? We need to decide what kind of stories we want to tell-about the history of English, stories that learners can get involved in and re-tell in speech or writing.

Traditional Stories

For English language learners we can tell the ‘traditional’ stories, those usually outlined in books on the history of English. These includes stories about the arrival of Anglo-Saxon into England in the 5th century CE, the invasions of Scandinavian Vikings in the 8th and 9th centuries CE, the coming of the Normans in 1066 and examples of middle English from Chaucer, through to Shakespeare and on to the present day.

Deeper Stories

But this traditional approach raises the question – where did the Anglo-Saxon language come from? From German – but where did the Germanic language come from? From Proto-Indo-European – but where did the Proto-Indo-European language come from?

A new, broader approach suggests looking into the deeper history, the roots of English and Indo-European (and even earlier languages), suggesting how we can use these thrilling historic stories of the linguistic developments and migrations of 5000-6000 years ago to inform and engage students.

This means looking briefly at how the triple sciences of archaeology, genetics and linguistics lead us to a better understanding of the history of languages in and around Europe, and its connection to the history of European peoples. We can make use of this to inspire our learners.

Word Stories

To complement the history stories, we need also to focus on actual words, and tell the story of individual modern words and where they came from – whether from Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans or as borrowing (or thefts!) from other languages.

This involves looking at the etymology of common words in modern languages and how they got there, using interesting stories about unusual words to spur learners’ fascination with language.

Looking at loanwords borrowed from world languages, and cognates in other world languages that learners can learn to recognise, can engage, excite and motivate learners.

3. History Stories

First, we would need to establish a context and a history timeline for learners. This would be a story in itself – how modern humans left Africa 60,000 years ago, how they migrated west into Europe from the Middle East after the end of the last Ice Age around 12,000 years ago, how they developed farming about 10,000 years ago.

We can tell the story of how historical linguistics has re-constructed the Indo-European roots of hundreds of modern languages – spoken by almost 50% of the world’s population – and identified the likely original homeland as the steppes of southern Ukraine.

We can plan some sessions on the Yamnaya, the dynamic hunter gatherers in the Ukrainian steppes and how they moved across Asia and into Europe, carrying the Indo-European languages that they spoke.

We would explain how Proto-Indo-European (known as ‘PIE’) came about – probably from north-west Asia - and how we can reconstruct it from existing languages.

From that point we can show the development of language families like Italic and Germanic (and others) from PIE), and how Anglo-Saxon and later English developed as part of the Germanic language family.

We would give key examples of words from each of these families and arrange activities to try and match these cognates to their meaning.

These language history lessons may be taught in a longer session (e.g., 45 minutes) or a series of short sessions (5-10 minutes per activity) over a number of lessons. Activities would include comprehension questions and tasks to help learners unpick the relationship between languages.

Here are some of the lesson topics we might include:

- Ancient History: migrations out of Africa
- The Yamnaya & early Indo-European
- The creation of language families
- Germanic languages
- Anglo Saxons & Vikings & Normans
- Middle English and Chaucer
- Shakespeare and the King James Bible
- Renaissance borrowing from Latin & Greek
- The empire – borrowing from India and beyond

Each theme combines a bit of history, some sample words in context showing the changes in meaning, and some word histories – how words relate to their cousins and cognates in other languages.

4. Word Stories

In a series of short activities combining input, reading, discussion and writing, we can outline the development of modern words. This might be through showing with words came from Anglo-Saxon and Viking words, and how the two languages often gave us 2 versions of a similar and cognate word (like 'ship' and 'skip').

We can show students how the influence of Norman French had a massive impact on changing Old English to Middle English, offering leaving pairs of words like 'house' and 'mansion'.

We can show word stories that derive from Shakespeare's neologisms and words that came from Latin and Greek during the Renaissance.

The other kind of development is how the language grew and changed through 'loan words', the words borrowed (or 'stolen') from other languages in the last two or three hundred years.

As James D. Nicoll wrote:

"We don't just borrow words; on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary".

5. Classroom Activities

What kind of activities could we involve the learners in?

When looking at the present day, we can develop activities around the English language by the selection of loan words and phrases borrowed from other languages and countries.

One activity could be to learn about loan words from specific languages like Hindi (bungalow, pyjama) or Arabic (alcohol, algebra). Learners can match the word, the meaning and the origin.

Another activity can be based on cognates (related words, or 'cousin' words) that we can recognise in modern languages. Learners can read short texts on the language families, and explain the word histories in pairwork 'information gap' activities.

For example, we can explain how the word 'exit' in English is linked to 'exodus' in Greek and 'vykhod' in Russian, noting how 'exodus' links to the word 'method' as well.

We can also look at the deep roots of words in Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the language spoken about 5500 years ago. Our English word 'heart' is cognate with Latin 'cor', and both stem originally from PIE 'k_ṛdjom'.

PIE roots can be fascinatingly close to modern English. The change from an initial 'k-' sound to an 'h-' sound is an example of a common sound shift. And this also explains how PIE 'p_hter' becomes Latin 'pater' but English 'father' – via a sound shift in the initial consonant.

A further activity may be based on the reverse borrowing from English into other languages – such as the way modern French 'flirter' is borrowed from English 'flirt', without people being aware that 'flirt' is itself an example of the English stealing the word from French, 'fleurette'.

This type of language history lesson might fit into other subjects taught in the school (e.g., history, or the students' native language and literature) in a CLIL approach.

6. A Sample Lesson Plan

Here is a sample activity plan that can be used as a model for a number of lessons.

- **Warmer** - give students a word and ask what they know about its origins and its relation to other languages.
- **Pre-teaching** - explain words before they read a text.
- **Input** - using a text or a illustration, introduce the simple context of the word history in about 100-200 words.
- **Comprehension check** - check comprehension and get students to summarise the texts to each other.
- **Pairwork** – get students to explain the word history to each other; or speculate on other languages this may be related to. Ask them to link this back to their own language wherever possible.
- **Research** - get students to research the origins of words in the language they are learning which have been loaned to or borrowed from it. They can present the results to the class and discuss how their usage may have changed in the language under study.

7. Conclusion

These activities, and others like them, are not meant to displace more traditional communicative tasks and competency-building exercises.

They are designed to introduce variety of theme into the language classroom, as well as making students more aware of the links between the language they are learning, their own language, and other languages that have borrowed from them.

There could be an intercultural benefit too, as understanding the long historical connections of languages like English to other languages around the world may help learners to build more acceptance and understanding of other language speakers in other cultures, and become more accepting of a multilingual world.

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Enhancing English Vocabulary Learning through Listening to Vocal Music

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a fourth-year English major concerning the effects of listening to vocal music while learning English vocabulary. While previous research has extensively documented the positive effects of music on the human brain, there is a dearth of studies addressing the specific influence of vocal music on memorization tasks. The primary objective of this study was to ascertain whether listening to vocal music exerts any discernible impact on English vocabulary memorization. Although inconclusive, the findings suggest that listening to vocal music while studying had a somewhat adverse effect on the participants' focus and concentration.

Keywords: English vocabulary, memorization, listening to music

1. Introduction

The benefits of music on human mind have attracted extensive scholarly attention. Music has been identified as a potent tool for stress reduction and mood enhancement [1], as well as a catalyst for heightened motivation and concentration [2]. Furthermore, it may facilitate the memorization of new information [3]. With the advent of portable technologies such as smartphones and mp3 players, many students now incorporate music into their daily routines, including activities like studying.

In recent years, an expanding body of research has delved into the relationship between music and study activities. Nevertheless, the findings in this field are rather inconclusive. Some studies conducted in Japan failed to establish a discernible link between music and improved learning outcomes [4], while others have indicated a beneficial influence on concentration during the learning process [5]. Additionally, investigations examining the specific nature of the learning task and the age of the learner have yielded conflicting results [6].

However, it is worth noting that relatively few studies have thoroughly investigated the influence of vocal music on concentration and memorization. Prior research has yet to address the effects of various music types (instrumental vs. vocal) and genres (classical, pop, jazz, hip-hop, etc.) on study habits. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to explore the impact of vocal music, specifically music with English lyrics, on English vocabulary memorization tasks. It is noteworthy that Japanese students exhibit a diverse range of musical preferences, including vocal music featuring English lyrics. Consequently, to assess the implications of music with English lyrics on memorization tasks, the author has decided to conduct the present research.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have indicated that listening to music while studying can enhance the efficiency of the learning process by increasing concentration and focus. A 2011 study involving boys with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) suggested that, despite individual variations, classroom performance improved when students listened to music while engaging in learning activities [7]. Moreover, although multitasking during study sessions may be ineffective for some, others find it beneficial as music helps to drown out surrounding noises [8]. On the contrary, listening to one's favorite music while studying may divert concentration away from the task at hand [4]. Particularly, music with lyrics in the learner's native language may disrupt their focus. Ultimately, the ideal study environment depends on individual preferences [9].

In addition to individual differences, it is essential to consider variations in study subjects. A study involving 75 participants aimed to investigate the impact of music on verbal learning performance [10]. This study utilized new musical compositions varying in tempo (fast vs. slow) and consonance (in tune vs. out of tune). It found that listening to music had no discernible influence on verbal learning. In contrast, a study that sought to determine the optimal environment for mathematical and memory tasks

among elementary school, junior high school, and college students revealed that while junior high school and college students performed best in silence, elementary school students demonstrated improved memorization when they studied while listening to classical music [6]. However, their mathematical performance did not exhibit any positive or negative impact from music.

Apart from its demonstrated effect on learning efficiency, listening to music has been found to stimulate motivation. A 2014 study utilizing instrumental music from YouTube to assess students' descriptive writing performance showed improved performance, along with increased endurance, effort, and motivation [11]. Another study involving different age groups (12-13, 15-16, and 20-21 years old) revealed that younger students listened to music the least, whereas older students who listened to music daily tended to do so even during study sessions [12].

Despite previous investigations into the effects of studying with music, most research has concentrated on factors like melody and rhythm, such as classical or upbeat music. Therefore, this research aims to examine the distinction between the impact of studying with vocal music and studying without music. To assess the influence of music with lyrics, an experiment was conducted among Japanese students majoring in English. Furthermore, this study primarily focused on English vocabulary acquisition, drawing on earlier findings that suggest music is more likely to have an effect when applied to memorization tasks [6].

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives

One of the primary objectives of this research was to investigate how listening to vocal music (with lyrics) affects the learning of English vocabulary. To accomplish this, the author conducted an experiment comparing the results of participants who studied English vocabulary while listening to music with those who studied without music. Prior to the experiment, a survey was administered to participants to inquire about their regular use of music while studying and their preferred musical genres.

3.1.1 Participants

The participants comprised 19 English majors enrolled in a seminar at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business. This particular sample was chosen to replicate real-world study scenarios, with students actively engaged in English studies.

3.1.2 Survey

Prior to conducting the experiment, a three-item multiple-choice questionnaire was administered to the participants. The aim was to determine the type of vocal music that most participants preferred while studying. The questionnaire was created in a bilingual format using Google Forms and distributed online through Google Classroom.

Figure 1 below shows the participants' preferred music genres during study sessions. Out of the participants, eight students (42%) selected rapid tempo music, such as pop and rap. Only one participant reported listening to classical music while studying. Considering that the proportion of participants who preferred vocal music was significantly higher than those who favored instrumental or classical music, and given the notable preference for pop music, the author chose Taylor Swift's song "Shake it off" as the background music for the experiment.

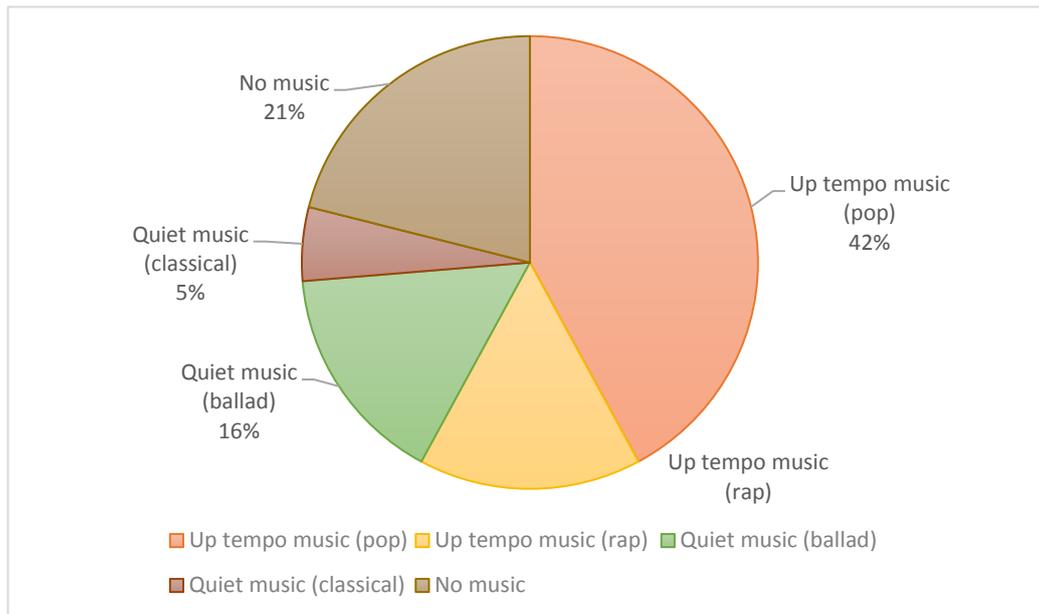


Figure 1. The kind of music participants listen to when they study

3.1.3 Preparing Word Lists and the Test

To ensure equal conditions, the author selected 20 difficult English words featured in the 'Eiken,' or English Proficiency Test, which were likely unknown to all participants. Subsequently, the vocabulary items were randomly divided into two groups: one for studying without music and another for studying with music. Each participant was allotted five minutes to study and memorize each of the two vocabulary lists, first without music and then with a musical background. Next, two vocabulary tests, each based on one of the word lists, were created using Google Forms. In these tests, participants were presented with English words and asked to provide their corresponding meaning in Japanese. All 10 words were presented in a question-and-answer format, with each correctly answered question worth one point. The maximum achievable score was 10 points.

3.1.4 Conducting the Experiment

The five minutes of study time were immediately followed by a three-minute test. During this phase, we did not prescribe any particular study method; instead, we instructed each student to proceed in their customary manner. The experiment was carried out twice: first in a silent environment and then a second time with music.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Findings About Effectiveness of Studying Vocabulary with Music

The difference in scores between studying with music and without music is illustrated in Figure 2 below. This figure shows the variance in scores on an English vocabulary test when participants studied with music and when they studied without music. The overall results indicate that scores tended to be higher in the absence of a musical background. Nine participants scored between 5 and 6 points when studying without music, compared to an average score ranging from 3 to 5 points when vocal music was used as a background.

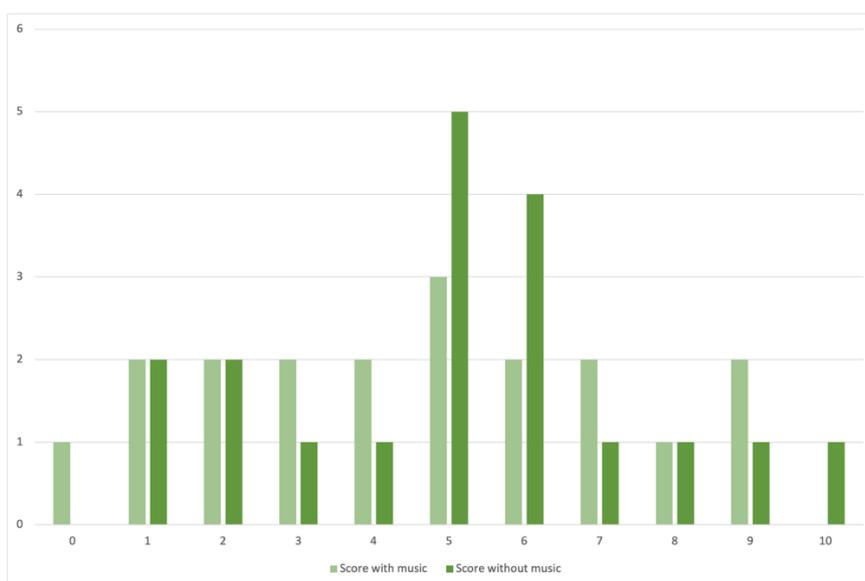


Figure 2. Difference in participants' scores when studying English vocabulary with and without music

Next, to identify statistically significant differences, we analyzed our data using a t-test for two dependent means (Table 1).

Table 1. Average, median, standard deviation, and t-test result of each of the experimental results ($p < .05$).

	With music	Without music
Average	4.58	5.05
Median	5	5
Standard deviation	2.71448357	2.50496583
<i>t</i>	0.630986	

Table 1 suggests that, for some participants, studying English vocabulary without music is somewhat easier and more effective. However, the t-test results indicate that there is no significant difference between the two methods. Therefore, our study does not provide conclusive evidence that listening to vocal music enhances the effectiveness of studying English vocabulary.

5. Limitations

The most significant limitation of this research is the small sample size. With only 19 participants, the t-test results failed to show significant differences. Furthermore, the study highlights that the effectiveness of using vocal music as a background for memorization tasks varies greatly based on individual differences and preferences. Consequently, some individuals may perform better when exposed to a musical background, while others may perform poorly.

Another limitation pertains to the language of the vocal music used in the experiment. As previously noted, lyrics in one's native language may negatively impact concentration [8]. Therefore, future studies should investigate how language comprehension in music influences the efficiency of study behavior.

Conclusion

While inconclusive, the results of the present study suggest that listening to vocal music while studying tends to interfere with the learning process and may have a negative impact on effectiveness. However, given the limited sample size and previous research indicating that some individuals benefit from studying with music, it can be argued that the actual effect depends on the individual, the subject, the environment, and the purpose of the study. Effective learning often hinges on the learner's sense of enjoyment. Therefore, further research should investigate the capacity of vocal music to motivate learners.

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‘WoLLoW’

[World of Languages, Languages of the World]: A New Way into the World of Languages

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Abstract

There is deep, long-term and growing concern in the United Kingdom about the teaching of languages and the decline in the take-up of languages, all the way from the education system. At the same time, however, the school population, which is increasingly diverse through migration, has never known so many languages. It is obvious that pupils’ first experience will have an impact on their attitude to languages, but that first experience, starting at the age of seven, is deeply flawed in two ways. The first is that the teaching of languages varies enormously in language chosen, in quality of teaching, in time allocated, so that, in almost all cases, pupils start their language study all over again at the age of eleven. The second is that the teaching of languages gives little or no regard to the rich pre-existing knowledge of so many of the pupils: it is as if the pupils’ home language didn’t exist or matter. ‘WoLLoW’, ‘World of Languages and Languages of the World’, provides an entirely different approach for pupils as they start to learn languages. It encourages pupils and teachers on a journey of shared exploration, to understand how languages work, where they come from and how they are related, to see the importance of languages in all other academic subjects, and in the wider world of empire and migration. This approach not only engenders a curiosity and dialectic but, above all, it allows pupils to share their own languages and histories and see why, in a changing world, they matter now more than ever.

Keywords: *primary languages, multilingualism, teaching.*

1. Socrates, JRR Tolkien and Herodotus

According to Plato, Socrates began his defence against the charges of ‘not believing in the city’s gods’ and ‘corrupting the young’ by saying that his speech wouldn’t be much good because he had not appeared in a law court before [1]. So, like Socrates, I admit that this won’t be much of an academic paper because I am not an academic and I have never written an academic paper before.

What I am is a teacher of Classics for forty years, who inadvertently wandered off into headship for 14 of those years. For ten years I was the Chief Master of King Edward’s School, Birmingham, where I had been a pupil in the early 1970s. Another perhaps more famous alumnus was JRR Tolkien, creator of hobbits and Gollum and the elvish language. This is something of a traveller’s tale, in the manner of my real hero, Herodotus, an account of the paradoxical nature of primary language teaching in the dark land that lies beyond the streams of Ocean. Herodotus believed that the understanding of other cultures enabled us to see our own in a new light [2], so I hope that this analysis will be something to think with, even for those who dwell in sunnier climes.

2. The Teaching of Primary Languages in the UK: The Problems

The boys and girls who sit in primary school classrooms of the United Kingdom are, in their very nature, a conundrum. On the one hand, they speak and are taught in English, a language of global spread, so that there is an overwhelming sense that the learning of another language is of no great value. On the other hand, the number of pupils in primary schools who are categorised as EAL – English as an Additional Language – is 22.0% [3], and the number of EAL pupils in all schools is now 1.6m, a figure that has doubled since 2006 [4]. Of course, these EAL pupils are not spread equally across the country: there are inner-city primary schools in many major cities where the percentage of EAL pupils is over 90% and schools where 30 or 40 different languages are spoken. And those numbers are, of course, growing all the time.

Hence the conundrum. The vast majority of pupils are quite content to be monolingual whereas a large and growing number are, or will soon be, bilingual, if not multilingual. So, what is taught in the

midst of this conundrum? Since 2014 it has been compulsory for primary school pupils to study a language:

‘Teaching may be of any modern or ancient foreign language and should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language. The teaching should provide an appropriate balance of spoken and written language and should lay the foundations for further foreign language teaching at key stage 3 [i.e., pupils aged between 11 and 14].’ [5]

There is no specification of which language is to be taught, nor any specific curriculum. Nor does the inspection regime, Ofsted, pay much attention to language provision, or EAL provision, in primary schools.

Of course, in this land without maps, there is a lot of wandering about by schools and teachers, lots of variety in the languages taught, in quality and quantity and method. When Heraclitus wrote ‘all things are in flux’ [6], he might as well have been writing about primary language teaching. Most of the language teaching is not done by specialist language teachers. So, French is the language taught in most primary schools precisely because that’s the language primary school teachers themselves learnt at school.

In the face of this uncertainty and diversity, there have been initiatives to enhance what is being provided. For example, in the last decade, £16.4m has been spent by the Department for Education on the Mandarin Excellence Programme, which works with 75 schools [7]. The Swire Chinese Language Foundation has invested £25m since 2016, supporting 12 language hubs which work with 127 schools [8].

In this ecosystem, there is only one certainty. In almost every school the pupils who have a home language which is not English get little or no chance to use, develop or value the language, the culture or the history which they already have. As one teacher once said, *‘We are turning bilingual pupils into monolingual pupils whilst failing to teach a new language to monolingual pupils.’* That is quite an achievement. And here is the same thought, presented by a pupil of Malaysian origin from Birmingham, now aged 16 but talking about his own experience in primary school:

‘And then we get to Year 1. And I begin to lose my Malaysian accent as the years go by. I become less Malaysian, English -er. I managed to create a divide between the language I used at home and the language I used at school, and I learnt to switch off my school language whenever I got home, and my home language whenever I got to school. After all, I had no use for Malay at school, right? English was much more important to excelling in my studies, so obviously, that’s what I had to focus on learning.’

And, as is widely agreed, what happens next isn’t any better. In England, almost all pupils cross to secondary school at the age of 11 and those the new pupils at each secondary school come from a large number of different primary schools and hence different experience. So, secondary school language teachers have little choice but to start all over again from the beginning. As the British Council Languages Trends report puts it: *‘[There is] a demonstrable lack of continuity between KS2 and KS3 language education.’* [9] It is hard to imagine that this does much for the morale or interest of the average pupil: he/she is quite soon asking one of two dispiriting questions: ‘Why am I doing French all over again?’ or ‘What happens to all that French/Mandarin/Latin I learnt now that I am learning Spanish?’ And pupils who have strong knowledge of their own family language might have another question: ‘What will become of the Arabic/Chinese/Romanian/Farsi/Somali/Tagalog that I speak at home?’

And, after all this, it may be no surprise that there is no great enthusiasm for languages in secondary schools, why the numbers of candidates for the national exams, GCSE, at the age of 16, and A level, at the age of 18, and university entry are in decline: in 1997/1998 86% of pupils took a GCSE at the age of 16, whereas in 2020/2021 it was 46% [10]. In 2015, there were over 30,000 candidates for languages at A level. By 2022, that figure had declined by 21% to 23,660 [11]. The government’s most recent response to these problems is to create language hubs and, in particular, to provide extra funding for the teaching of German. However, it could be argued, that the damage has already been done before a pupil even sets foot in a secondary language lesson.

3. A New Approach: ‘WoLLoW’

So, if those are the problems, is there a solution? I’d like to think so. Let’s imagine that we can find a different place from which to start, an elsewhere. Let’s imagine that, instead of teaching a single language to pupils at the age of seven, we, teachers and pupils, set out on a joint journey of exploration. That exploration can go in a variety of different directions. What languages do we all speak, and why? How do different languages convey meaning in different ways? Where do all these words in English come from? Why are French and Spanish alike but different from German? Why is it Thursday today in

England but giovedì in Italy and Donnerstag in Germany? What does ‘Punjab’ mean, or why are the Philippines called the Philippines? How do languages relate to all other subjects, history, geography, Maths, science, empires, migration, even English, for heaven’s sake? Can we break a code, or make a code? Can we read and write in a different script?

Of course, all of this becomes much, much richer when the pupils themselves bring their own languages into the classroom. In so doing, those pupils will be able to talk about and find out about their own history and culture, thereby gaining confidence in themselves and other pupils will listen and learn, too. And it’s a lot more fun – and less stress – for the teachers because they are not teaching something badly or uncertainly but merely guiding the expedition.

And let’s imagine, finally, that this means that pupils will leave primary school with an interest in, an enjoyment of languages, their own and those of others, and thereby start the study of individual languages in secondary school with a lighter and brighter heart.

So, what can be done with all these imaginings? Well, what can be done is ‘WoLLoW’ [<https://theworldoflanguages.co.uk/>]. It has been designed by language teachers, who have spent their lives trying to teach lessons that actually work. In the last three years, it has also been taught in a wide variety of contexts, in primary and secondary schools, in state and independent schools, in schools for children with special educational needs, in schools beyond the Channel. And, although, as yet, we have no academic research, nor measurement of outcomes, we do have feedback from a wide range of experienced teachers, not all of whom are language specialists.

There’s this from a teacher in an inner-city state primary school in Birmingham where 47% of the pupils do not have English as their first language. Senior pupils from King Edward’s School, Birmingham, are doing the teaching there:

‘WOW! The pupils were bowled over by the workshops and were full of praise for the students and the materials they were delivering. They loved how the materials were wholly inclusive and how each child could relate to it personally through their own culture and heritage. The senior pupils are teaching about the Indo-European language family. The children enjoyed identifying cognates in French, Spanish and Italian sentences, and discussing similarities and differences between Romance languages. It’s hugely valuable to get the pupils thinking about where languages come from, how languages are related, how languages have (or haven’t) moved across the globe. ‘WoLLoW’ draws them on and encourages them and gives them the opportunity to share their knowledge of languages.’

And here is the Head of English at an international school in The Netherlands:

‘Put simply – the students love it! We are teaching it to pupils aged from 11 to 14 and the fact that the EAL students are able to play such an important role in the lessons and feel completely ‘heard’ and understood is an important aspect of that.’

And here’s my favourite, if research is allowed to have favourites, from a very experienced languages teacher, in Manchester:

‘We have a wide diversity in our school and a large proportion of pupils who have suppressed their culture. And now - it sounds ridiculous - but it is like a spring flower opening. They love sharing their knowledge, their cultural background.’

But perhaps I should end with the words of the Malaysian pupil who was quoted earlier. That pupil is now teaching ‘WoLLoW’ to primary school pupils as part of the school’s partnership programme:

‘WoLLoW’ has the potential to be immensely beneficial to the affirmation and validation of pupils in regards to their languages which might otherwise be overlooked and lost. I’d like to offer my endorsement of ‘WoLLoW’ as someone who, like, I suspect, a lot of the children we have taught, has felt disconnected from their language for a long time, and has been given the chance to once again put it front and centre and find their sense of self within it again.’

He may only be sixteen, but perhaps he is right. After all, one thing that ‘WoLLoW’ proves is that, at the moment, the pupils know more than we allow them to show.

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Formative Assessment

Enhancing Language Learning Through Cultural Understanding and Diagnostic Assessment Strategies

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Abstract

In his book Language and Mind (1968), Chomsky discusses the role of culture in language acquisition and how cultural factors may influence language variation and use. According to Chomsky, language is deeply embedded in culture, and by delving into the cultural aspects of a language, learners can gain a deeper understanding and proficiency in that language. This presentation not only embraces Chomsky's theory but also explores the crucial role of cultural understanding and effective diagnostic assessment (DA) strategies. By combining these approaches, we aim to enhance language learning at higher proficiency levels. Through our practical experience, we have discovered that by emphasizing the teaching of culture and employing DA strategies that measure both linguistic and cultural competence, learners can surpass basic language skills and develop advanced proficiency. The presentation will cover the following topics: 1. The significance of using the target language in language learning and the advantages of creating an immersive language learning environment. 2. The integration of culture-focused learning to enhance learners' cultural understanding, sensitivity, and communication skills. 3. Strategies for designing and applying DA and ODA that encompass both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of learners' language abilities. 4. Case studies that highlight the positive impact of this integrated approach on learners' language proficiency and cultural awareness. Readers will gain valuable insights and practical strategies to enhance their language teaching practices.

Keywords: culture, language, diagnostic assessment, strategies, competence

Introduction

In his seminal work, "Language and Mind" (1968), Noam Chomsky ventured into the intricacies of language acquisition, illuminating the profound connection between culture and the acquisition of language. Chomsky's insights challenged conventional wisdom, emphasizing that language, rather than being an isolated entity, is intricately woven into the cultural fabric within which it flourishes. This research pays tribute to Chomsky's theory, elucidating not only the central role of cultural understanding but also the integration of effective diagnostic assessment strategies (DA) within the domain of language education.

The essence of this research lies in the belief that language acquisition goes beyond mere linguistic proficiency. To attain advanced levels of language proficiency, learners must embark on a journey that encompasses the cultural nuances, traditions, and contextual intricacies that underlie the language they aim to master. Drawing from our extensive practical experience in language education, we have identified a powerful formula: the amalgamation of culture-focused learning and DA strategies, which evaluate both linguistic and cultural competence. This integrated approach not only propels learners beyond basic language skills but also cultivates advanced proficiency and cultural awareness.

There are four fundamental facets of this integrated approach:

1. The Significance of Using the Target Language in Culture-Based Immersion

Effective language learning often involves immersing oneself in the target language environment. Immersion allows learners to naturally develop their language skills and gain a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. Cultural Immersion involves engaging in cultural experiences that include virtual immersion. For example, as a part of classroom teaching tasks, they are asked to make reservations with a Chinese restaurant, schedule appointments with a Chinese doctor, or participate in online forums, meetings, or conferences—all conducted in the target language. Instructors utilize rubrics to assess these tasks, encompassing not only linguistic proficiency but also the understanding and application of target culture. This comprehensive evaluation ensures that students grasp cultural nuances and can

employ them effectively. Other cultural immersions may include watching films, reading literature, attending target language clubs like calligraphy, Taichi, folk music etc., or participating in events like Chinese New Year celebration, Chinese cultural event, and Chinese Talent Show. These encounters naturally expose learners to the language's cultural context, enabling them to develop language skills more organically and gain deeper insights into cultural subtleties.

2. Integration of Culture-Focused Learning

Incorporating cultural understanding into language teaching enriches the learning experience in profound ways. Culture-focused learning serves as a dynamic conduit that amplifies learners' cultural understanding, sensitivity, and communication skills, forging a deeper connection with the language.

Culture-focused learning cultivates cultural sensitivity among language learners, extending beyond the mere acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. It provides insights into the customs, traditions, and values of native speakers, allowing learners to authentically reflect culture in their behavior, attitude, and thinking. When in Rome, act like the Romans. By internalizing the culture, learners can genuinely embody it in their actions.

Language and culture are intricately intertwined, and culture-focused learning reinforces this connection and helps learners delve into the heart of a culture. It empowers learners to not only speak the language but also navigate the intricacies of cultural communication norms. For instance, the Chinese idiom 柔能克刚 (softness winning over the strong) extends beyond words to shape behaviors and attitudes. Understanding such cultural nuances enables learners to communicate effectively within the cultural context. Understanding such cultural underpinnings enriches learners' language proficiency and allows them to decode subtle nuances and idiomatic expressions.

Language and culture often intertwine in riddles and sayings. For example, the riddle "人有它大，天无它大" ("When a man has it, the man becomes big, and when heaven has not it, heaven becomes big") reveals deeper philosophical insights. Knowing the cultural context behind the characters aids in deciphering such riddles, offering a profound sense of cultural awareness.

Language is a mirror of culture, and dialogues provide a unique window into cultural phenomena. For instance, in the dialogue involving the word "意思" (*yisi* underlined below, the same word has different meaning in each sentence), learners not only focus on the linguistic aspect but also unveil the layers of culture hidden behind the word. It reveals concepts such as modesty, hypocriticalness, and corruption, showcasing the interconnectedness of language and culture.

A: “你这是什么意思?” - What do you mean by this?

B: “没什么意思，意思意思。” - Nothing. It's just a token of thanks.

A: “你这就不够意思了。” - You know you do not need to do this.

B: “一点小意思，小意思。” - Well, it's just a small gift.

A: “你这人真有意思。” - Emmm, you are an interesting guy.

B: “其实也没有别的意思。” - It's just a gift to express my gratitude. I mean nothing else.

A: “那我就不好意思了。” - Then I'd be rude not to take it.

B: “是我不好意思。” I would be rude to visit you without any expression of thanks!

3. Strategies for Designing and Applying DA

As we know, diagnostic assessments encompass both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence, offering a holistic evaluation of learners' language abilities. It is a learner-centered approach, placing emphasis on how students learn best rather than on just concerning the materials. The surface meaning and the deep meaning is subject to the learners' level of understanding of the linguistic meaning and cultural meaning behind the underlined words in context.

Diagnostic assessments encompass both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence, offering a holistic evaluation of learners' language abilities. This learner-centered approach emphasizes students' optimal learning methods rather than focusing solely on the materials. The interpretation of both surface and underlying meanings depends on the learners' comprehension of linguistic and cultural significance within the given context.

Diagnostic Assessment Dimensions: DA assesses learners from various dimensions, including Personality, Motivation, Learning Styles, and Cognitive Styles, among others. These aspects collectively contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of an individual's language learning potential and progress.

There is also an Online Diagnostic assessment (ODA) for Proficiency and Cultural Understanding. ODA assesses learners on their comprehension of passages and vocabulary usage in context. Moreover, it can be tailored to evaluate learners' understanding of specific Foreign Language Objectives (FLO) topics such as culture and society, military and security, politics and economics, and environment and geography. ODA serves as a versatile tool for assessing both linguistic and cultural competence.

Assessment items may include questions pertaining to cultural practices, gestures, and etiquette, which serve to assess learners' comprehension of cultural nuances and their sensitivity towards cultural differences. When it comes to incorporating cultural elements into diagnostic assessment, a specialized focus on culture proficiency can be achieved through the following strategies:

- 1) **Cultural Competence Evaluation:** To gauge cultural competence effectively, it is imperative to integrate target cultural components into assessment items. This process involves evaluating an individual's ability to interact with proficiency. Assessment items may include questions pertaining to cultural practices, gestures, and etiquette, which serve to assess learners' comprehension of cultural nuances and their sensitivity towards cultural differences.
- 2) **Cultural Contextualization:** The integration of cultural contexts within language tasks is a pivotal strategy. This approach assesses how well learners can practically apply their language skills within real-life situations embedded in specific cultural contexts. Recognizing that language proficiency is intrinsically connected to cultural competency, this strategy empowers individuals to communicate effectively while comprehending the cultural subtleties of a foreign language. It includes two perspectives:
 - A. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Promoting awareness of cultural differences and discouraging stereotypes is of paramount importance. Assessments within this category may include scenarios or case studies wherein individuals are tasked with responding appropriately to culturally sensitive situations, thereby fostering cultural sensitivity.
 - B. **Cross-Cultural Communication:** Effective communication across diverse cultures is a vital facet of cultural competency. Assessments in this domain focus on evaluating an individual's capacity to engage in respectful and appropriate communication with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This encompasses assessing listening skills, proficiency in non-verbal communication, and competence in resolving intercultural conflicts.
- 3) **Feedback and Remediation:** Ensuring comprehensive feedback is critical to the assessment process. Feedback should not solely address linguistic errors but should also encompass cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, offering resources and avenues for remediation in both linguistic and cultural aspects, equips learners with the necessary tools and support to enhance both their language proficiency and their understanding of diverse cultures.

By employing these strategies, educators can create a robust framework for diagnostic assessment that not only evaluates language skills but also delves deeply into cultural proficiency. High cultural competency and high language proficiency are closely interlinked, with language proficiency serving as a valuable tool for enhancing cultural competency. However, it is crucial to recognize that cultural competency encompasses more than just language skills. It encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that promote effective and respectful interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

4. Case Studies

In this segment, we will delve into concrete case studies that highlight the tangible benefits of our integrated approach, showcasing its positive impact on learners' language proficiency and cultural awareness.

Case 1: Unlocking Cultural Nuances through Language

In an advanced class, students were organized into three groups, each comprising three members. Each group was assigned a different passage containing the statement '青出于蓝而胜于蓝' (blue comes from the indigo plant, but it is bluer than indigo) to read and explain its meaning in the given context. This statement originates from an essay by the ancient Chinese scholar Xun Zi. The passages included:

- "This young actor, although a newcomer, has astonished audiences with his performance in the latest movie. His acting skills '青出于蓝而胜于蓝,' surpassing many seasoned actors."
- "Although this young entrepreneur is just starting out, his creativity and business acumen have made his company stand out in the market, '青出于蓝而胜于蓝,' quickly gaining the trust and support of customers and investors."

- "This young artist, though at the beginning of his career, has already garnered widespread attention and acclaim in the international art world. His creativity and unique style make his artwork '青出于蓝而胜于蓝,' becoming a rising star in the contemporary art scene."

Students initially studied the passages within their original groups, focusing on the key word '胜' (surpass, stand out) and the meaning of the statement within the passage. They then broke into three new groups, each comprising members from different original groups, to share their interpretations. Finally, each student submitted a report on their understanding of the statement and applied it to at least one example they found independently. The essays were assessed based on the degree of comprehension and the accuracy and appropriateness of the application.

Language proficiency: students were assessed on their comprehension of the statement and their ability to apply its meaning to different contexts. This assessment evaluated their linguistic and cultural competence. The essays submitted by students were assessed based on the degree of comprehension and the accuracy and appropriateness of the application. This aligns with the principles of diagnostic assessment, which aims to measure a learner's abilities comprehensively.

Cultural Proficiency: The statement '青出于蓝而胜于蓝' is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and philosophy. It is an example of a cultural concept conveyed through language. Students needed to understand not only the linguistic aspects of the statement but also its cultural connotations and implications. This demonstrates the integration of cultural understanding into the assessment process. By engaging with this statement in different contexts (acting, entrepreneurship, art), students gained insights into how culture shapes language and communication in diverse fields.

Case 2: Unlocking Cultural Depth in Language Proficiency

Here high proficiency Chinese language learners faced challenges in understanding highly nuanced language, such as the lyrics of a song by Dao Lang. The lyrics contained the phrase, "那马户不知道他是一头驴, 那又鸟不知道他是一只鸡" (The horse and household do not know that he is a donkey, and the other bird does not know that she is a chicken).

While the surface meaning was decipherable by combining simplified and traditional Chinese characters (马户=驴 and 又鸟=鸡), the deep meaning critiqued an upside-down society where chickens assumed political roles, and individuals with donkey-like qualities took center stage on the battlefield. To comprehend the profound cultural elements behind the language, the learner was guided to read the novel 《聊斋志异》 written by 蒲松龄 in the Qing Dynasty.

Language proficiency: The learner's initial difficulty in comprehending the lyrics highlights the need for diagnostic assessment, as it identified a specific area where the learner required support. The learner's journey to understand the lyrics involved reading a novel from the Qing Dynasty, showcasing a tailored approach to address the learner's unique needs. This approach aligns with the principles of diagnostic assessment, which involve identifying areas for improvement and providing targeted support.

Cultural Proficiency: The lyrics contained cultural elements and metaphors that were not immediately apparent to the learner. This demonstrates the intertwining of language and culture. The learner's reading of the novel 《聊斋志异》 further illustrates the importance of cultural contextualization and sensitivity in language learning. By delving into the novel, the learner gained a deeper understanding of the cultural elements embedded in the lyrics. This showcases the enhancement of cultural proficiency through language learning.

Both case studies underscore the relevance of diagnostic assessment in identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses in both linguistic and cultural aspects. They also emphasize the importance of cultural contextualization, sensitivity, and understanding in language learning. By integrating DA and cultural proficiency, these case studies showcase a holistic approach to language education that goes beyond linguistic skills to encompass cultural awareness and competence.

5. Conclusion: Nurturing Proficiency Through Cultural Integration

Language stands as more than a standalone entity; it is the vessel through which culture finds expression, and culture, in turn, molds language. To excel in a foreign tongue, one must traverse beyond grammar and vocabulary, navigating the intricate tapestry of cultural norms, values, and behaviors. This fusion of language and culture forges learners into true communicators, equipped to engage effectively and respectfully with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

As educators and learners embark on this journey, it is paramount to acknowledge that cultural proficiency surpasses language skills alone. It encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that foster meaningful and respectful interactions across cultural boundaries. In this holistic approach, we

bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, equipping learners with the tools to thrive in an interconnected world

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Comparative Consideration of Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Introduction of Self-Evaluation in Foreign Language Teaching in Different States

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Abstract

This research paper is an overview of the research conducted among teachers of German as a second foreign language in North Macedonia, Greece, and Spain regarding the issue of how willing teachers in different public educational institutions are to introduce self-evaluation as an examination method in regular foreign language teaching. Further, a comparison of the collected results is made from different aspects, such as from the perspective of the age and experience of each teacher, from the perspective of the type and size of the target group etc. Finally, we present the collected results as a percentage in order to see if the German language teachers in the mentioned different states in South Europe are open to implementing self-evaluation in foreign language teaching as well as what arguments and counterarguments they will present.

Keywords: education, self-evaluation, language teaching, formative assessment

1. Introduction

During our work with students learning German, we have often heard statements such as: *I rarely dare to speak German, because I am afraid of making mistakes*. On the other hand, we have heard statements by teachers, saying: *in my class we have a trusting atmosphere, the students are not afraid of making mistakes because they are allowed to participate in the formative assessment by evaluating their achievements*. So, we came to the idea to conduct a survey about self-evaluation (SE) as one of the ways of formative assessment and its impact on the process of acquiring a foreign language. More concretely, the questionnaire considers issues about introducing SE as an integral examination method in regular foreign language teaching, with its advantages and disadvantages supported by teachers' experiences.

While learning, each learner should have in mind the goal to be achieved, his current condition and how to bridge the differences between the first two points. The most common way of following this progress is the assessment or the evaluation of the achievements.

The term evaluation, in its broadest sense, means a process of gathering and interpreting information on the learning and the achievements in relation to certain criteria for success, which can be used to: inform students and their parents; provide support to teachers to modify their teaching; inform other competent structures that make decisions on educational policy². The first conception that the term "evaluation" evokes is summative evaluation, which is about tests and examinations. These forms of revising may have influences on the respondent in giving answers and can even provide a wrong picture of the real abilities the learner possesses. Because of the dynamics of the development, as language competences are not linear, but develop dynamically and a dynamic system is represented as a result of the process, it is recommended to test more frequently (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36). Students' abilities are characterized by phenomena such as sudden setbacks, sudden advances, because of basic system restructurings or long-term perpetuation of wrong structures (fossilisation) (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36). To avoid such fossilisations, contemporary studies support the statement that effective students work best when they have insight into their own strengths and weaknesses. By being given the responsibility for their learning, students are nowadays considered as partners in the evaluation process. They take part in formative evaluation, as a diagnostic and cooperative interaction between the teacher and the learner. Formative evaluation refers to all activities to be undertaken by teachers and students, which provides information as feedback in order to be used in modifying the teaching and learning activities

² Handbook, pp. 9

(Black & Wiliam, 1998³). The feedback should be as far away from evaluation as possible but aimed at increasing motivation. (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36)

Self-evaluation (SE) concerns us as an essential component in formative assessment. Self-evaluation is a process through which students assess their progress and receive information about their own achievements, whether initiated by teacher or by student himself. Teachers can get a better insight into students' learning and understanding, especially in the part that refers to learners' efforts and feelings. Students can develop metacognitive abilities and awareness of the importance of learning and can increase their reflection skills.

2. Methodology

We conducted a questionnaire on 65 German teachers in North Macedonia, Greece and Spain (with help of our colleagues Foteini Chatzi from Greece and Renata Jankowska from Spain, for what we are very grateful to them). Despite certain general questions related to the personality of respondents and their experience, the questionnaire includes *yes/no*-questions concerning the possible consequences of the application of self-evaluation in the teaching process, as well as tasks where they need to value some given specific aspects related to the use of SE and the respondents had to choose a number for each aspect to create an order from 10 (best) to 1. We processed and comparatively analysed the collected data.

We also used contrastive, analytical, observative and descriptive methods, as well as some field work (by having insight into certain handbooks and checklists for self-evaluation on schools).

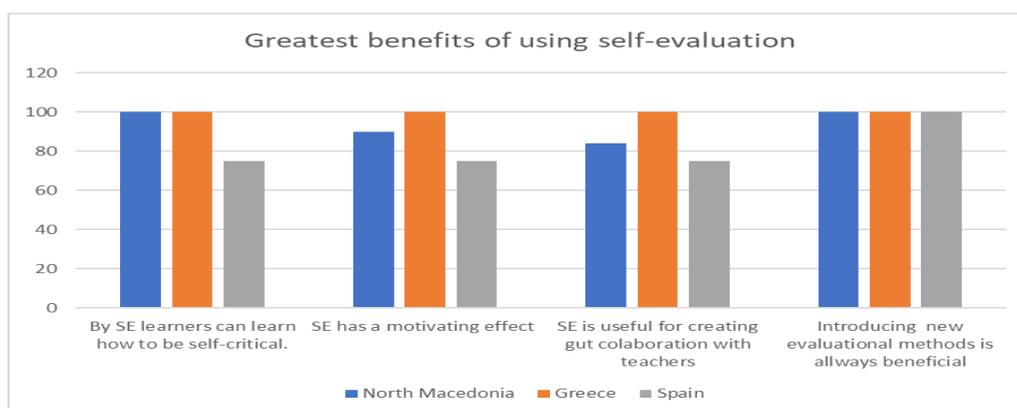
3. Presenting the Results

Most respondents in North Macedonia (81.3%) and in Greece (61.6%) are between 30 and 45 years old, in Spain most are older than 45 (with 55%). 97% of all respondents are women, 100% are experienced teachers. All teach German in public schools, most of them, 97%, in North Macedonia and 92.3% in Greece work with children or young people. In Spain, however, 70% work with adults.

More than half of the respondents have already had experience with self-evaluation (SE) (53.8 in Greece, 72.7% in North Macedonia, even 90% in Spain). However, there are also those who have never heard of SE - in North Macedonia (9.1%), in Spain (10%) and in Greece (15.4%). More than 80% of the Spanish respondents and 63.6% in North Macedonia have already used SE in classes but only 46.2% in Greece. More than 70% of all respondents liked this method in general. However, there are also teachers who have not seen big benefits from its implementation: 15.4% in Greece, 27.3% in North Macedonia and 30% in Spain. All of them (100%) are willing to introduce new evaluation methods into teaching, but 10% in North Macedonia and Spain and 15% in Greece do not like to experiment in general.

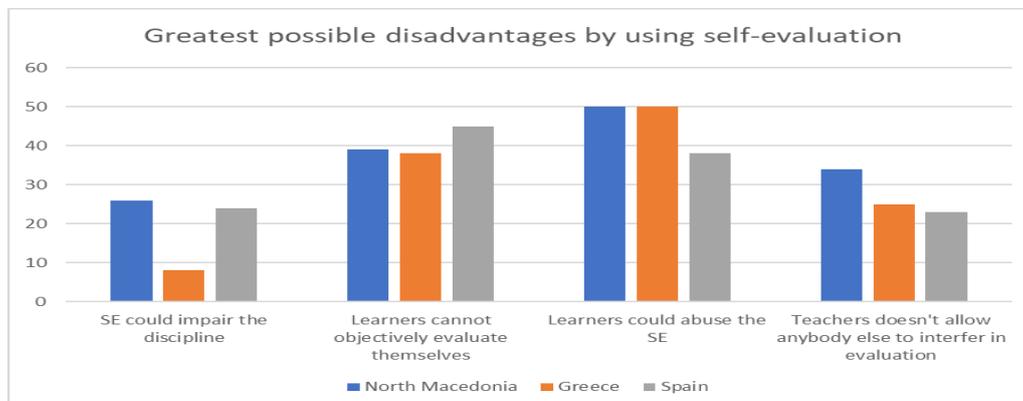
Most of the respondents put the advantages in the foreground:

All respondents in Greece and Macedonia (100%) and 75% in Spain share the opinion that by practicing SE, learners can learn how to be self-critical; 100% in Greece, 90% in North Macedonia and 75% in Spain believe that SE has a motivating effect; 85% in Greece, 61% in North Macedonia, and 50% in Spain think that with SE, learners are encouraged to speak freely. 100% in Greece, 84% in North Macedonia and 75% in Spain think that learners should participate in the assessment process in order to create good collaboration with the teacher.



³ In Handbook, pp.12

As for the disadvantages, 26% of the respondents in North Macedonia, 24% in Spain and 8% in Greece think, this method would impair the discipline in the class; 45% in Spain, 39% in North Macedonia, 38% in Greece think that students cannot objectively evaluate themselves. Around half of respondents in North Macedonia and Spain, but 38% in Greece think that learners could abuse SE. However, the percentage of those who are of the opinion: "Only I can best evaluate the learners' performance" is not small (34% in North Macedonia, 25% in Spain and 23% in Greece).



The ability to develop self-criticism is very important for most respondents; 100% in Greece, 75.8% in North Macedonia and 60% in Spain rated this aspect with 10, 9 or 8. It's good to try out new things and to experiment in classes, rated around 85% in North Macedonia and in Greece, but only around the half in Spain, with 10, 9 and 8.

As for the usage of grading as a tool to create discipline in the class, we have the most divided opinions. For North Macedonia and Greece, the chart of this statement is colourful, from grade 1 to grade 10 and in Spain dominate the grades 1 and 3 with 60% in total. Nobody else should interfere in grading. The Macedonian teachers with 22.6% and the Greek teachers with 23.1% rate this aspect with 7 or lower and in Spain almost half of the respondents rate it with 1 or 2. Transparency is for the most highly valued with 10, 9 and 8 (North Macedonia with 90,3%, Greece and Spain with 80%)

The learners should be encouraged to become aware of common mistakes. In Spain 53,3% (10), in Greece 60% (10 or 9) and in North Macedonia almost 50% (10, 9, 8)

Learners should experience how difficult grading can be. In North Macedonia more than half of the respondents (57,6%) value this aspect with best grades: 10, 9 and 8, while in Greece 64,3% give 8 or 7; in Spain, 26,7% give 1 followed by 3,4,7,8 (13,3% for each of them).

Teachers are willing to teach students about the grading process by providing them with a checklist of key aspects. Around 30% of the respondents in Spain and North Macedonia value this aspect highest, while the Greek teachers give it mostly an 8 (46.7%), as highest grade.

SE is a waste of time. Absolutely not, in the three states this aspect is low rated, 51,5% in North Macedonia with 1,2 or 3, 43,3% in Greece (1 or 2) and 66,7% in Spain (1,2, or 3)

Learners can learn by recognizing mistakes. Most respondents give this aspect 10, 9 and 8 (in Greece 86,7%, in Spain 78,5%, in North Macedonia 69,8%,).

Conclusion

Most of the respondents have extensive didactic experience and use self-evaluation in their daily teaching. There is clear interest in experimenting with new teaching methods, especially by younger respondents (till 45 years), while in Spain, where the majority of the respondents are older than 45 and work primarily with adults, it is understandable that the interest in experimenting is lower.

More than 75% of all respondents think of the greatest benefits of SE. They underline that through this assessment methods learners can develop self-criticism, which has immense importance in the process of acquisition a new language; this method would help learners to be able to learn by recognizing their own mistakes; the greatest percentage of the respondents consider that participating in the assessment process could highly motivate learners. For almost all respondents, it is the transparency that is, most valued, as expected. Another result that did not surprise us is that even 60% of respondents in Spain give the lowest grade to the aspect that the evaluation ought to be used as a tool for improving discipline in classes.

Surprisingly, around 10% of all respondents have never heard of SE, and around 20% have not seen big benefits from its implementation. More than one third think that students cannot objectively evaluate

themselves. We were also surprised to find that even around one third of respondents think "Only I can best evaluate the learners' performance".

So, taking into consideration the teachers' opinions and attitudes, we can confirm that learners can gain better results if they are aware of the final goals during the whole process of acquiring a new language, including the phase of assessment. We have understanding for sceptical teachers who are afraid of being manipulated by students. They should be better informed of the benefits of SE and we encourage them establish a better partnership with students.

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ICT for Language Learning

Traveling the Italian Regions: Teaching Italian to Intermediate and Advanced Japanese Students through Geography

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Abstract

In Japan, teaching Italian as a second language to adults and university students is mostly limited to the teaching of the language with textbooks designed for Western students. Many language schools also offer courses on topics such as art, history, literature, or food, but the primary emphasis of such courses is content, not language. Among such topics, moreover, geography receives scant attention, if not none at all. With this in mind, and in the spirit of the 1995 European Community's White Paper on Education, which listed the acquisition of new knowledge through a foreign language as one of its goals for lifelong learning, in April 2022 I began developing a series of interactive digital textbooks for the adult learners of one of my online classes. The textbooks integrate language and content, teaching language through the geography of Italy. Each one offers short and scalable units on a specific topic that can be used as starting points for conversations and to enhance the lexical competence of intermediate and advanced learners.

My presentation, based on the data collected during the first year of this project, will consider the following points: 1) How to design an effective digital textbook for intermediate or advanced learners; 2) Assessing the reception of interactive materials by adult learners; 3) Exploring the future of content and language integrated learning in contemporary language education in Japan; 4) Addressing challenges and expectations for this project in the near future.

Keywords: Digital textbooks, Italian regions, Geography, ARCS model, IMMS, CLIL

1. Introduction

Among all the subjects related to Italy taught in Japan, geography is one of the most overlooked. Language schools and universities offer an extensive array of courses covering art, literature, history, music, and food. However, geography consistently receives less attention. Some of these courses, especially at the higher education level, are integrated into the curriculum of Italian as a second language; in this case, the primary focus is content rather than language.

Despite their proficiency in Italian, many students struggle to identify city names within written texts – except for the most popular ones –, and often ignore the locations of cities and regions.

Such lack of familiarity with Italy's geography also significantly impacts the learning and understanding of various aspects of Italian culture, such as its food and arts. Many students at the beginner or elementary level are unable to locate prominent landmarks such as the Milan Cathedral or Giotto's Campanile (Bell Tower), and their knowledge of Italian cuisine is limited to pizza and spaghetti. This is despite the high number of Italian restaurants offering a wide variety of regional cuisines in the Tokyo-Yokohama area.

For this reason, I wanted to create an interactive textbook on the geography of Italy for the «Practical Italian (Advanced)» course that I teach at my university. The opportunity eventually arose with adult learners from a semi-advanced class I was teaching remotely. They were aware of their limited knowledge of Italy in a broader sense, and asked me to develop a course that would resemble a travel guide encompassing all twenty Italian regions.

Their request also aligned with the criteria of the 1995 European Community's White Paper on Education, which lists the acquisition of new knowledge through a foreign language as one of its goals for lifelong learning.

In 2022 I began outlining the course and the textbook. The objective was to create a structured course that would provide an overview of the Italian regions, similar to what is taught in secondary schools nowadays. This course would be divided into smaller modules, each focusing on specific topics. The modules are designed as concise units to be completed in approximately 20 to 30 minutes at the most, in accordance with microlearning principles aimed to reduce cognitive load on learners.

Additionally, each unit is meant to be seamlessly integrated into customizable learning paths that best suit the learner's individual needs.

2. The Digital Textbook: Structure and Design

The pros and cons of digital textbooks have been a subject of extensive debate in education for the past decade. The most significant, and still unresolved, issue is that this kind of media should not be regarded as a mere electronic replica of the materials used in traditional face-to-face lessons. The recent pandemic emergency vividly demonstrated the limitations of simple PDF versions of paper textbooks in enhancing the learning process during remote lessons.

Creating a digital textbook compels the author critically to analyze the nature of digital textbooks – what they are, what they should be, and what they can become [1].

The design of digital textbooks must carefully balance the role of the author, the interface, and the user. It must also take into consideration other pivotal factors such as content, expected learning outcomes, and assessment. Only by reflecting on the interplay between interactivity and readability, and considering how the choice of typeface, color, and font size will translate to the user's device, can balanced and consistent materials be developed, leading to a truly innovative and personalized learning experience.

The digital textbooks I have designed consists of series of booklets, each dedicated to a specific region, following a structured arrangement of contents that includes: 1) geographical data and administrative divisions, 2) a brief historical outline, 3) economic activities, 4) sightseeing spots and cities, 5) activities, events and festivals, 6) food and drink. Each booklet also includes an appendix with two short videos that provide additional insight into topics covered in the preceding pages and serve as starting points for further exploration. The iterative use of this consistent hierarchy allows for a two-folded use of the textbook: a horizontal (linear/synchronous) approach where students can explore each facet of a specific region, and a vertical (branched/asynchronous) approach that empowers students to create personalized learning paths by combining modules from various booklets.

Furthermore, I devoted significant attention to the text density displayed on a single page. Research indicates that the scanning pattern when reading on a screen is less intensive and takes more time compared to reading a printed text [2]. As highlighted by Wolf, contemporary society is transitioning from a *reading brain* to a *digital brain*, and during the reading process, the digital brain strives to minimize cognitive effort [3]. Because it is tailored for semi-advanced learners, the textbook is entirely written in Italian. To reduce cognitive load and enhance intake, the linguistic input must be comprehensible or slightly above the learners' proficiency level.

For the aforementioned reasons, I chose a highly readable font such as Montserrat Light, 12 pt. as the typeface. Each text section consists of a maximum of three lines written in a concise language with carefully selected words. This feature is designed to enable students to shift their focus from language to content, as approximately 80% of words and expression are expected to be familiar with the reader. The remaining 20% of the lexicon comprises of words related to the specific areas into which the textbook is divided and is intended to enrich the students' vocabulary and enhance their lexical competence in various fields, promoting an active engagement in conversations with the teacher and their peers.

Interactivity features were also carefully selected to align with the targeted readers and the intended educational goals, which include enhancing vocabulary in a more extensive and varied manner, as well as improving competence and confidence in the target language. To provide a responsive, yet not-stressful experience for adult readers, interactivity was streamlined to commonly used features: image galleries, hyperlinks, and videos. Images galleries were employed to depict the mountains, rivers, and animals of each region. Hyperlinks were utilized to pinpoint city locations or landmarks on the reader's device, and to connect with the homepages that showcase local activities, events, and festivals. The two videos at the end of the textbook, as previously mentioned, serve as supplemental materials to encourage active inquiries by students. This minimalistic approach to interactivity was also conceived to honor the original request of my students, who wanted a sort of travel guide unlike the ones available in bookstores. The textbook can be easily accessed on a portable device when traveling in Italy, utilizing images, hyperlinks, and videos as reference.

The textbooks were created using Pages and then exported in both EPUB and PDF formats to ensure an optimal multiplatform experience. This approach also enables students unfamiliar with the EPUB format to access the contents seamlessly. When a file is exported from Pages as a PDF, it becomes an interactive PDF file, granting access to all the interactivity features found in an EPUB, with the exception of image galleries.

3. Assessing the Textbook and Its Reception

To evaluate the effectiveness of the textbook and gauge its reception among students, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The quantitative analysis involved a straightforward survey in which students were asked to rate each section of the textbook on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing the lowest score and 10 the highest. The objective was to determine the sections or topics that captured the students' greatest interest.

For the qualitative analysis, the approach was based on the Instructional Materials Motivation Scale (IMMS) developed by Keller [4], with the implementation of its reduced version (RIMMS) as proposed by Loorbach et al. [5]. The decision to use RIMMS was motivated by its consisting of fewer items in comparison to IMMS (12 as opposed to 36), as well as its balanced approach whereby each of the four constructs of (A)ttention, (R)elelevance, (C)onfidence, and (S)atisfaction is assessed through three items. The intention behind this choice was, naturally, objectively to measure the students' response to the digital textbook and their overall learning experience. Both surveys were administered anonymously to a small study group of five members.

3.1 The Quantitative Analysis

The results of the quantitative survey showed that the preferred sections of the book were, unsurprisingly, «sightseeing spots and cities» and «food and drink», both of which received a full score of 10. The «brief historical outline» of the region and «activities, events and festivals» earned second place, both scoring 9.6. The section dedicated to «economic activities» finished third with a score of 9.4 and «geographical data and administrative divisions» was the least liked, with 9.2 points.

3.2 The Qualitative Analysis

The RIMMS was administered in both Italian and Japanese translation, to minimize misunderstandings, following a Likert-type scale based on five levels: 1 = Not true, 2 = Slightly true, 3 = Moderately true, 4 = Mostly true, 5 = Very true. The minimum score for each item is 5 and the maximum is 25, with a midpoint of 15. For each construct, the minimum score is 15, the maximum is 75, and the midpoint is 45. The scores for each subscale were as follows: (A) = 72; (R) = 70; (C) = 61; (S) = 72. One noteworthy result is the relatively low score for confidence. The reason for this can be attributed to the items selected in RIMMS to measure confidence, namely 13C05, 25C07, and 35C09. Item 25C07, which asks whether the student feels confident to pass a test on the subject, received the lowest score (14/25) among all survey items. This result is not surprising because the textbook and the lessons didn't include any form of assessment, leading to a lack of confidence among the students. This assumption is further supported by 35C09, which states that «the good organization of the content helped me be confident that I would learn this material», which received the second-lowest score of 22/25. At first glance, this could be interpreted as a flaw in the textbook design, but a comparison with 13C05 («As I worked on this textbook, I was confident that I could learn the content») with a full score of 25/25 seems to demonstrate that the low level of confidence can be attributed to both internal factors such as the lack of an assessment system and to external factors such as the characteristic low self-assessment esteem among Japanese learners.

4. Conclusions

The data and feedback directly collected during the first year and a half of this project have shown a significant interest in Italian geography, broadly defined, among Japanese students. The results from the quantitative analysis have demonstrated that their interest covers nearly every area, from food and drink to geographical data. Therefore, geography can be utilized as an extremely versatile subject for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) based classes, particularly when aiming to enhance the learners' lexical competence, as it spans a wide variety of disciplines such as history, architecture, art, economics, and food, among others.

Additionally, the qualitative analysis also appears to confirm that carefully designed and well-crafted digital textbooks can exert a substantial impact on the learning process of adult students. However, these materials must be appropriately contextualized within a holistic strategy for lifelong learning. The findings from RIMMS emphasize the necessity of implementing an assessment system to bolster reader confidence and promote self-esteem. This issue can be readily addressed by incorporating a series of quizzes at the end of each section using a tool like BookWidgets, which provides a high degree of personalization and feedback options. Moreover, it's important to note that the current booklet series only covers five out of Italy's twenty regions, and further testing on a larger study group is required to confirm these preliminary findings.

Acknowledgments

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Integrating TED Talks and TBLT for Enhancing Speaking Accuracy: A Study in the Algerian EFL Classroom

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Abstract

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education within Algerian universities, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) stands as a promising avenue to enrich students' language proficiency. This research paper investigates the integration of TED Talks within the framework of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The primary aim is to evaluate their impact on the speaking accuracy of EFL Algerian university students. To examine this dynamic, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining the use of questionnaires, a case study, and interviews to gather data from a sample of EFL Algerian students. The findings revealed the transformative potential of integrating TED Talks, and by extension, other ICT Video tools, into the language learning process. Notably, this integration yielded a substantial enhancement in students' speaking accuracy, with a particular emphasis on grammar and tense usage. This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on the symbiosis between technology-enhanced language learning and traditional teaching methodologies, underscoring its significance in the context of Algerian EFL education and beyond.

Keywords: ICT tools, TBLT, speaking accuracy, EFL students

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, the integration of technology and ICT tools has become a key factor for successful education worldwide. It has fundamentally transformed the landscape of language learning, offering a host of possibilities for educators and learners. According to [1] (p.4), "ICTs have the potential to accelerate, enrich, and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, as well as strengthening teaching." This transformative potential is particularly pronounced in the EFL education context, where ICT tools have evolved into invaluable resources for learners across the globe [2]. In Algeria, a country with a growing emphasis on English language proficiency, while ICT tools are making their way into the educational landscape, however, their integration is still in its nascent stages [3]. This stands in contrast to the global community, where there has been remarkable growth in the use of ICT tools in education. Algeria, with its distinct language learning requirements shaped by its linguistic diversity, the growing importance of English, cultural factors, educational reforms, technology integration, motivation, and challenges, now finds itself at a crucial juncture, actively exploring the potential that these tools offer.

The prevailing approach in the Algerian educational system is Communicative Language Teaching [4], which emphasises fluency in language instruction. However, there is often a gap when it comes to accuracy. Open-ended production activities, while valuable for fluency development, may fall short in eliciting complex grammatical structures and precision, which can be challenging to acquire [5]. This highlights a potential gap in how fluency and accuracy are addressed within the EFL Algerian education system.

Recent literature has illuminated a shift in the landscape of language instruction. ICT tools such as TED Talks and teaching methodologies such as TBLT are gaining prominence in language classrooms, with educators worldwide recognizing their transformative potential (see [6], [7], [8]). It is within this evolving educational landscape that this study finds its purpose. This research is designed to fill the identified research gap by exploring the transformative potential of integrating ICT tools, particularly TED Talks, and TBLT within the EFL Algerian context. The primary aim is to assess the impact of this integrated approach on EFL Algerian university students' speaking accuracy. This paper focuses on grammar, with a special emphasis on the accurate use of past tense. By analysing the effectiveness of this synergy, this research seeks to bridge the gap between fluency and accuracy, offering a potential solution to the challenges in language instruction within the EFL Algerian context. This research, situated against the unique backdrop of Algerian EFL education, contributes to the broader discourse on the integration of ICT tools in language education and its implications for students' language proficiency. This paper will briefly describe the methodology and results of the study and conclude by offering

recommendations and discussing the broad implications for the evolving landscape of language learning in Algerian universities and beyond.

2. Method

The research methodology comprised three stages. Initially, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 50 first-year undergraduate students specializing in the English language at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla, Algeria. It gathered preliminary insights into the participants' perceptions of integrating ICT tools in language learning and their accuracy difficulties. Secondly, the researcher conducted an in-depth four-week pedagogic intervention involving six students, exposing them to TED Talks and various language learning tasks. Figure 1 demonstrates the pedagogic intervention design. Finally, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with the same six participants, exploring their experiences and perceptions in greater depth.

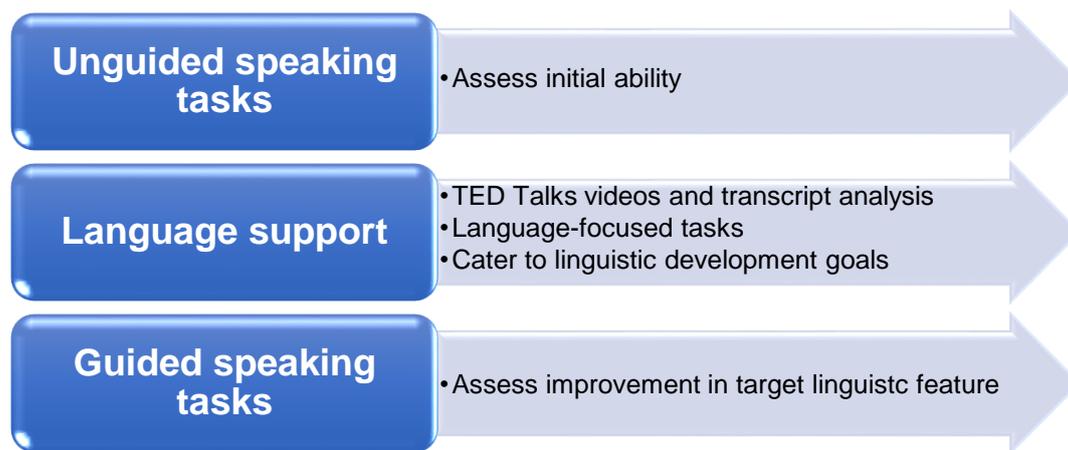


Figure 1. Pedagogic intervention design

The Accuracy Score (AS) measure was used to evaluate the correct use of past tense in the participants' performance in obligatory contexts (OC). The AS measure aligns with the instructions and combines elements from the local accuracy measures Supplied in Obligatory Contexts and Target-Like Use (see [9]). To employ the AS measure, the students speaking performances were transcribed and analysed, with a specific focus on evaluating the correct use of past tense within the OC. After that, the correct usages of past tense within these contexts were carefully counted and recorded. This process ensured a targeted assessment of students' ability to employ past tense correctly in the prescribed OC as instructed during the intervention. To calculate the AS, the number of past tense verbs correctly used in OC was divided by the total number of OC.

Moreover, thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure by [10], was employed to analyse the interview data. To ensure the reliability of the findings, method triangulation was applied by combining quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of TED Talks and TBLT on speaking accuracy among EFL Algerian university students. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the research aim and addressed the identified gaps in language instruction within the Algerian EFL context.

3. Results

This section will offer key excerpts of the data collected. Figures 2 and 3 offer insight into the participants' usage patterns of various ICT resources for study purposes and their experience regarding these ICT resources.

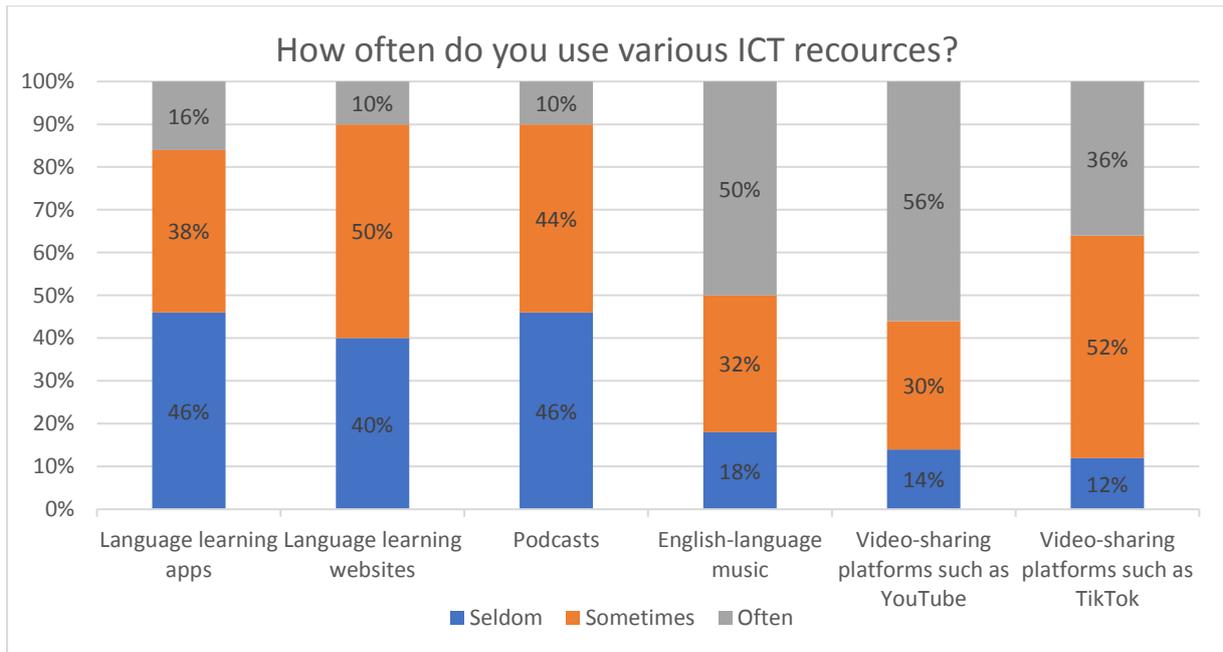


Figure 2. Participants' use of ICT resources

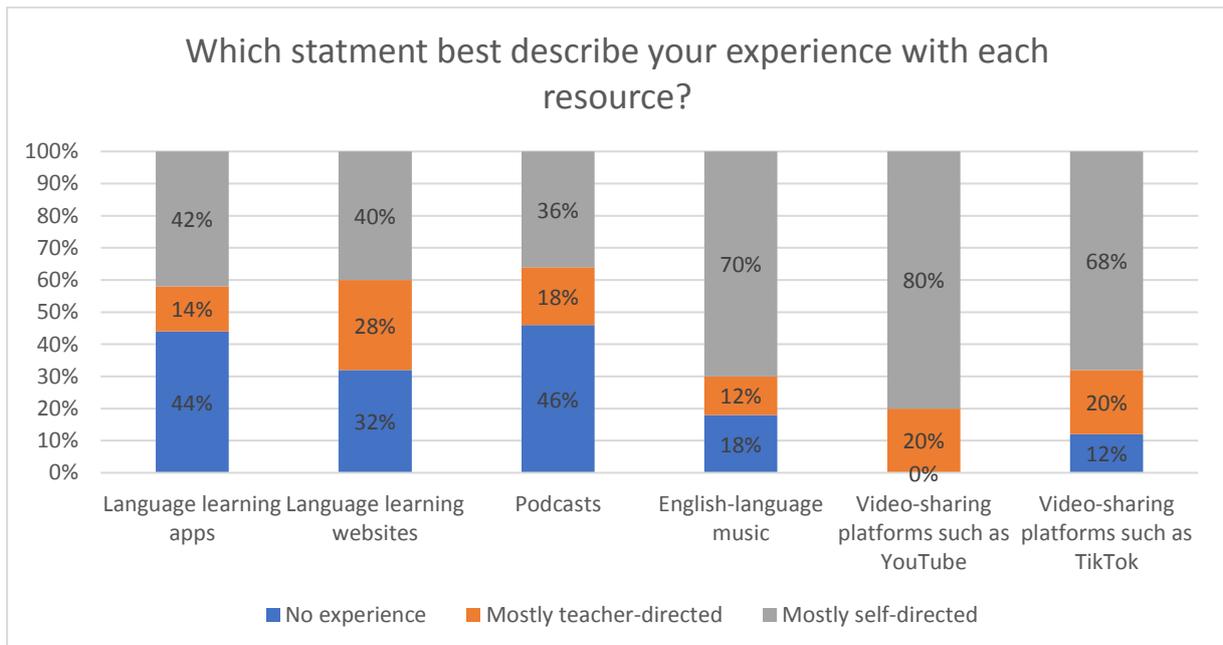


Figure 3. Participants' experience with ICT resources

Figure 4 demonstrates the AS of using the past tense by the six participants to accurately measure their proficiency in using this linguistic feature. The functions examined include recalling past events, describing past event details or sequences, and signifying past event impact or significance. During the unguided speaking tasks, the AS ranged between 0.29 and 0.73. However, in the guided speaking tasks, participants demonstrated perfect accuracy, achieving an AS of 1.00.

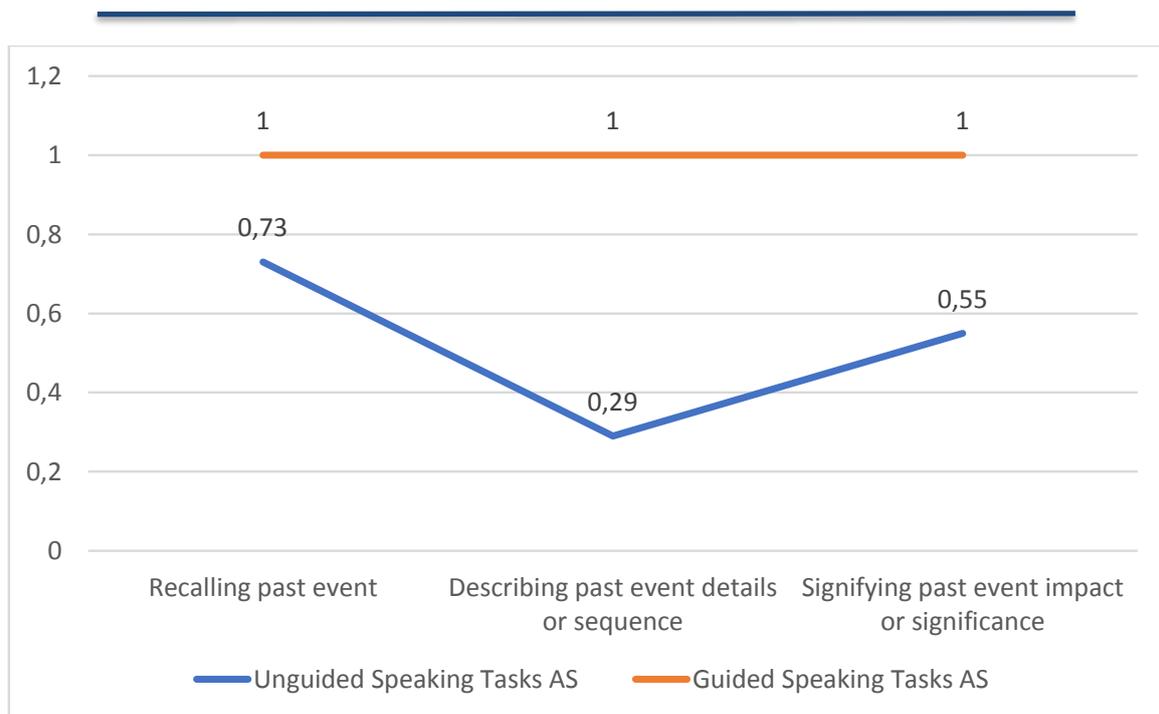


Figure 4. Participants' AS of using past tense during unguided and guided speaking tasks

4. Analysis and Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the integration of TED Talks, within the framework of TBLT, had a significant impact on the linguistic proficiency of EFL Algerian university students, mainly on the use of past tense. These findings are multi-faceted and shed light on several key aspects of language learning and technology integration.

4.1 The Role of Multimedia and Entertainment in Language Learning

The prominent usage of video-sharing platforms, English-language music, and TikTok by participants, as seen in Figure 2, underscores the growing role of multimedia and entertainment in language exposure. This aligns with the contemporary shift towards interactive and engaging language learning methods that leverage familiar and enjoyable content. Notably, these findings influenced the design of the pedagogical intervention in this study. By incorporating multimedia resources, such as TED Talks videos, the intervention aligns with the contemporary understanding of effective language instruction.

4.2 Varying Degrees of Familiarity and Autonomy in ICT Usage

The data reveals varying degrees of familiarity and autonomy in using diverse ICT resources for language learning (see Figure 3). Some participants were less familiar with these resources, suggesting opportunities for introducing them to ICT tools. Moreover, participants' self-directed use of ICT resources demonstrates their proactive approach to language learning. Additionally, the significant role of teacher guidance in utilizing specific resources indicates the potential for educators to shape students' digital learning experience effectively. These findings underscore the effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention in cultivating a technologically informed language learning environment. The intervention fostered a comprehensive and adaptive learning process by addressing varying familiarity levels and encouraging both independent and guided ICT resource use.

4.3 Enhancing Language Learning Through Guided Instruction

By strategically incorporating videos into language instruction, such as TED Talks, guiding autonomous learning efforts, and showcasing the educational potential of entertainment content, the intervention fostered language learning holistically and effectively. During the unguided speaking tasks (as shown in Figure 4), participants demonstrated moderate accuracy in using past tense, highlighting areas where improvement is needed. However, the guided speaking tasks, conducted after the intervention, revealed remarkable progress in participants' ability to use past tense accurately. These notable improvements observed in the guided speaking tasks illustrate the value of exposure to authentic language and targeted practice, where various language-focused tasks contributed to the participants' improved proficiency in using past tense. This resulted in more coherent, accurate, and

expressive communication. Overall, the results underscore the importance of guided instruction and practice in enhancing participants' language proficiency. The judicious combination of TED Talks and TBLT was pivotal in empowering students to develop a strong command of utilizing past tense with proficiency and precision.

4.4 Perceived Usefulness of ICT Integration

The participants' attitudes towards ICT integration in the classroom were overwhelmingly positive. During the interviews, they consistently expressed favourable views, highlighting the practical benefits and motivational aspects of technology. Their comments revealed a deep appreciation for the role of technology in enhancing their language learning journey. As a representative comment, participant 5 reported, "I think it encouraged us and helped us, and we are in the technology area and generation." This statement illustrates that the participants perceive technology as a motivating factor, aligning with the digital nature of the current generation that grants them access to a wealth of resources. The responses collectively demonstrate that the participants view technology and ICT tools as not only convenient but also as powerful tools that significantly impact their language learning experience positively. The results indicate that ICT tools offer more than just convenience; they also provide essential support, motivation, and empowerment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the transformative potential of multimedia resources, particularly TED Talks, highlights the need to infuse language learning with engaging and authentic content. Educators should prioritize the integration of multimedia materials into their teaching methods, making language learning more dynamic, authentic, and relevant. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of guided language instruction and teacher support in the digital language landscape, emphasizing that instructors should guide students' engagement with technology for language learning. The perceived usefulness of ICT integration among participants underscores the need for educational institutions to invest in digital resources and training, fostering a technologically informed language learning environment that aligns with the preferences of the current generation. Furthermore, future research should explore and promote a blended learning approach that combines digital resources with traditional classroom instruction, fostering balanced and effective language learning. Embracing these implications and recommendations, EFL education in Algeria can continue to evolve, providing a more engaging and effective language learning experience for students, not only within Algeria but also extending its benefits beyond the nation's borders in the digital age.

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Delivering Training and Coaching to Enable Teachers to Successfully Engage in Virtual Exchange

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Abstract

In this paper we embark on an exploration of the E-LIVE project (Engaging Languages in Intercultural Virtual Exchange), a dynamic three-year initiative funded by Erasmus+ Cooperation partnerships in school education (KA220-SCH). We present a glimpse into the project's central objectives, with a primary focus on the teacher training actions. This manuscript presents a comprehensive analysis of teacher training initiatives, employing questionnaires and focus groups to investigate the necessary training requirements. The studies carried out involved in-service L2 educators and also a virtual exchange program among trainee educators. With the data gathered, we aim to provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the practical aspects and potential benefits of the implementation of intercultural virtual exchanges. Moreover, this paper presents the initial results of virtual exchanges within the E-LIVE project implemented in secondary school settings. The analysis offers valuable insights into the effects of these virtual exchanges in the context of secondary education. Through a comprehensive examination of the various aspects of implementing virtual exchanges, this paper aims to offer a thorough analysis. This includes identifying the key training requirements for teachers and determining effective methods for delivering training. The purpose is to outline a framework for the strategic growth and advancement of virtual exchange initiatives. The studies here presented, carried out with an exploratory methodology, aim to enhance current academic discussions on virtual exchange by providing fresh perspectives and forward-looking insights.

Keywords: *intercultural virtual exchange, teacher training requirements*

1. Introduction

Virtual Exchange (VE) has garnered recognition as a pivotal educational tool, enhancing intercultural communicative competence across diverse learners through digital pedagogies, particularly within higher education. Despite its increasing significance, explorations into VE's efficacy in primary and secondary contexts remain nascent. The Erasmus+ supported E-LIVE project (2021-2024) collaborates with 32 associate partner schools and teacher training institutions to, firstly, weave VE into higher education language teacher training, aiming to elevate trainee-teachers' competencies in various domains, and secondly, to enrich L2 teaching at primary and secondary levels through VE experiences. This paper delineates initial training actions and preliminary results from VEs executed in secondary schools within E-LIVE. It aims to investigate strategic VE implementations and scrutinize the educational, pedagogical, and infrastructural prerequisites and obstacles encountered by educators when incorporating VE, aspiring to spur an informed dialogue regarding VE's potentials and challenges in primary and secondary education.

2. Virtual Exchange in Educational Contexts

Since the 1990s internet boom, VE has promoted collaborative online learning among students from different countries and cultures. Belz (2003) [1] defined this shift as prioritizing intercultural awareness, communicative skills, and language skills. Along with the growing use of communication technology to connect language learners, there has been a movement to consolidate the pedagogical foundations for this type of exchange and establish VE as a pedagogical approach (O'Dowd, 2018) [2].

Although VE has traditionally focused on tertiary education, its relevance and implementation in secondary education have grown. Early European projects like TILA revealed the needs and challenges of implementing VE at the secondary level, revealing educators' positive attitudes toward technology

and the urgent need for more investments to strengthen VE in Europe (Jauregi, Melchor-Couto, & Vilar-Beltran, 2013) [3]. Scholars have also studied educators' roles in telecollaborative projects, focusing on task organization, technical problem solving, and student behavior monitoring (Clavel-Arroitia & Pennock-Speck, 2015) [4]. Despite extensive literature, a gap remains, especially in primary education, requiring more empirical studies to understand how VE affects learning outcomes and determine the best teacher training and VE implementation strategies.

VE offers a unique way to improve learners' intercultural communicative competence by providing a subjective view of cultural knowledge that differs from foreign language textbooks (O'Dowd, 2018) [2]. However, while VE teacher training and professional development may improve digital literacy and intercultural awareness, it remains understudied (O'Dowd, 2007) [5]. VE's course integration, task design, technology/tool selection, online coordination, and assessment require educators and facilitators to receive dedicated training, coaching, and resources. It can be concluded that VE is a powerful tool for intercultural understanding and learning across diverse social dimensions, but its success depends on careful planning, structured implementation, and strong training paradigms.

3. E-LIVE Teacher Training Initiatives

3.1 In-service Teachers

In the first study, aimed at discerning in-service teachers' profiles and training requirements, questionnaires and focus groups were used to scrutinize their felt, anticipated, and critical incident needs concerning VE. Insights from 39 participants shed light on the existing teaching scenarios and perceived self-proficiency in VE, thereby informing the forthcoming training program's format and content. In the traditional educational landscape, primary teachers encountered challenges in establishing authentic communication and designing structured language lessons that catered to a diverse array of student interests and linguistic backgrounds. Meanwhile, secondary educators, especially from Spain and the Netherlands, underscored the significant barrier presented by large class sizes, associating it with issues like students' reluctance towards public speaking and complexities in catalysing student-centered learning.

A dichotomy revealed itself regarding VE integration between primary and secondary educators. Primary teachers emphasized the imperative of technical understanding and support, while secondary educators spotlighted the necessity for knowledge related to efficiently integrating digital tools into language education. Secondary teachers discussed logistical issues from prior VE experiences, such as timetable alignments and slow partner responses, coupled with task design difficulties, and technical issues like unreliable Wi-Fi. In contrast, primary educators pondered over managing incompatible timetables and linguistic limitations among younger students, while all acknowledged the merits of VE, noting its capability to enhance student engagement and facilitate interactive experiences that boost linguistic, intercultural, and digital skill development. In terms of training delivery preferences, primary school teachers slightly favoured in-person workshops, whereas secondary teachers inclined towards interactive materials and online sessions. Half of the secondary educators expressed a desire to learn from VE-experienced peers through diverse formats such as job-shadowing and peer discussions, while primary educators indicated a preference for experience-sharing training courses, potentially condensed into shorter sessions. Regardless, all highlighted the imperative of receiving practical, technical, and pedagogical training concerning VE.

Results of the needs analysis had a substantial impact on subsequent initiatives, particularly in the organization of online workshops focused on enhancing the voices of teachers. The workshop participants, who were experienced in the field of VE, emphasized various VE school projects during these sessions. These workshops were specifically designed to focus on important topics such as motivation and engagement, the integration of emerging technologies, and strategies for effectively addressing diversity and differentiation within VE. The thematic focus of the expert webinars (Autumn 2022 - Spring 2023) was influenced by the insights derived from the needs analysis. The webinars addressed themes such as differentiation and lingua franca exchanges, aligning with the identified needs and concerns of educators during the analysis phase. In addition, the E-LIVE team adopted a coaching methodology, specifically for VEs conducted among associate partner schools, consisting of a close partnership between coaches and teachers throughout all stages of the exchange activities. The effectiveness of this approach is currently being evaluated.

3.2 Trainee Teachers

In a six-week VE teacher-training collaboration conducted in Autumn 2022, 48 trainee language teachers from different universities were introduced to VE and VE task design across different courses embedded in their Master courses. Utilizing various digital tools for synchronous and asynchronous activities, the VE was structured around three tasks, with the final task requiring trainees to co-design

VE tasks for their current teaching placements in secondary schools, considering various teaching aspects like learning objectives, environments, and interaction patterns.

The feedback from the participants (gathered with a questionnaire) indicated positive perceptions of the VE activities, with technological ease of use and sound quality rated highly, as well as interaction enjoyment, comfort during sessions, communication enjoyment, and the perception of value in discovering new perspectives and fostering active participation. Participants also expressed a strong intention to incorporate VE into their future teaching. Although challenges like time constraints and technical difficulties were encountered, the overall perception was that the VE experience was enriching and provided valuable insights into the integration of VE in future language teaching endeavours, highlighting its potential for facilitating intercultural learning and promoting engagement.

One important observation derived from the study is the need of equipping trainee teachers with fundamental pedagogical, intercultural, and digital competencies in order to effectively navigate a technologically advanced society. The study identifies a demand for extensive training and support for teachers in VE's technical aspects and effective digital tool integration, with clear instructions and streamlined communication being crucial for VE success. It acknowledges teachers and students' time constraints, emphasizing the necessity of aligning project objectives with existing workloads. Despite these challenges, many trainee teachers found VE experiences to be enriching, enjoyable, and valuable, appreciating the international connections, cultural exposures, and collaborative projects.

4. VE Experiences in Secondary Schools

A study was conducted to investigate the use of VE in secondary school language programs. The study included three distinct educational institutions, where different approaches were implemented to accommodate the distinctive demographics and objectives of each school. VEs were consistently employed as a means of enhancing linguistic abilities, fostering cultural understanding, and promoting collaborative learning. One institution focused on building immediate and collaborative communication among 14/15-year-old students with a B1 level in English language proficiency. Another school aimed to promote genuine interactions, self-confidence, and intercultural exchanges among its 13/14-year-old students who had English proficiency ranging from A2 to B1. Lastly, a third institution focused on both linguistic and cultural goals for its students aged 15/16, who were proficient at an English B1/Spanish A2 competence level. This school used different digital platforms to enhance discussions and reflections regarding cultural stereotypes and facts.

The results of the VEs conducted in these schools primarily demonstrate a positive level of engagement and noticeable educational experiences in cultural and linguistic domains. The students generally expressed their enjoyment in participating in the exchanges and placed a high value on the international dimension it brought to their learning experiences. From a linguistic communication standpoint, a significant number of students exhibited capabilities to effectively communicate and understand their counterparts, spotlighting practical language application. Differences in emotional reactions to the interactions were observed, with one group reporting feelings of security and absence of nervousness, while another group encountered significant technical difficulties. The central subject of cultural learnings was also observed, although the reported learnings varied in terms of depth and specificity. The students expressed their acquisition of knowledge regarding diverse school days, lifestyles, habits, and cuisine in foreign nations. However, the extent of this comprehension exhibited variation, as some participants acknowledged nuanced discoveries pertaining to preferences, aversions, and everyday routines, whereas others indicated a limited acquisition of knowledge. One notable result was the rapid spread of students' VE experiences to their non-participating peers at a particular school, suggesting a transfer of the interest and enthusiasm generated by the VEs. The exchanges showcased a wide-ranging influence on student engagement, communication abilities, emotional reactions, and cultural understandings, which were influenced by the unique implementations and contexts of each educational institution.

5. Conclusions

By combining the findings from the studies here presented, it becomes evident that the incorporation of VEs into language education presents a complex array of possibilities and challenges, particularly in the domains of pedagogy, technology, and intercultural competence development. Educators have highlighted the crucial role of adequate professional development and resource allocation in ensuring successful implementation of VE, since they have significant intrinsic worth in promoting intercultural interactions and exchanges. Significantly, despite the expressed concerns of teachers regarding the design of tasks in the context of diverse educational backgrounds and the integration of digital tools, the experiences and outcomes within the project suggest a significant positive influence and potential for transformation through the use of VE in language education. Further undertakings in this field would

benefit from drawing on these observations, enhancing the synergy between technological, pedagogical, and intercultural aspects to shape more effective and fulfilling VE experiences in the field of language education.

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Artificial Intelligence and Special Educational Needs: Exploring the Potential for Personalized and Inclusive Learning

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents an unexplored frontier in the field of education and teaching. The development of digital skills and a renewed awareness of new technologies and their role in teaching and learning are priorities that both students and teachers need to address. One promising potential of Artificial Intelligence in secondary education can be found in the opportunity to promote personalized and effective learning. This contribution aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the potential of AI, with a focus on the benefits it can offer to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), along with inclusive strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The combination of instructional design adhering to UDL principles and emerging AI systems, could support a qualitative differentiation recognizing the value of diverse materials and different learning modalities that is essential for some and useful for all. Examples include AI-powered intelligent tutors and information processing through analysis and synthesis algorithms that address the concrete and crucial needs of students with SEN, such as explaining complex concepts, providing instant feedback, extracting key concepts from complex texts, facilitating comprehension and information processing. In this perspective, AI technologies can provide support for personalized learning based on students' needs and learning styles, offering access to advanced educational resources.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Special Educational Needs, Technologies, UDL, Personalization

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the technological landscape has undergone rapid transformation, marked by one of the most notable advancements – the widespread integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI represents an unexplored frontier in the field of education and teaching. The development of digital skills and a renewed awareness of new technologies and their role in teaching and learning are priorities that both students and teachers need to address. This paradigm shift carries substantial potential within the realm of education, necessitating educators to adapt their pedagogical approaches and capitalize on the potential benefits it offers, given its pervasive influence on students. More specifically, AI can play a decisive role in addressing the distinctive needs of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) [1], both within the confines of educational institutions and beyond. The present paper delves into the evolution of AI technologies and their application within the context of SEN, elucidating the myriad benefits they offer to learners, educators, and educational institutions alike, as well as acknowledging their inherent limitations.

2. Literature Review

In the contemporary landscape, Artificial Intelligence (AI), has become an integral facet of our daily lives, assuming a central role in addressing some of the most critical global challenges. The term Artificial Intelligence refers to the capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behavior, enabling them to execute tasks typically necessitating human intelligence, such as speech recognition, decision-making, visual perception, and cross-linguistic translation. Within a constantly changing perspective, AI systems demonstrate intelligent behaviors as they assess their environments and occasionally engage in autonomous actions to achieve specified objectives, as elucidated by the European Commission [2]. AI has, notably, arisen as a feasible instrument for the progression of inclusivity. According to Fulcher and Davidson [3], inclusivity means fostering an atmosphere that facilitates equitable access and participation for every learner, regardless of their individual characteristics, cultural backgrounds, skills, or learning preferences. Through the provision of individualized educational content, flexible learning encounters, and precise evaluative insights, AI technologies present innovative approaches to accommodate the diverse requirements of learners [4].

Exemplifying AI-driven technologies, natural language processing and machine learning algorithms hold promise in their capacity to conform to the abilities, predilections, and advancements exhibited by each learner. This has prompted reflection regarding the notion of adaptive learning and the redirection of reform efforts away from a one-size-fits-all teaching approach towards personalized education as the path forward for educational reform in the future [5].

From this perspective, the integration of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework presents an opportunity to design adaptable educational environments and resources that comprehensively address the diverse needs of all students [6]. UDL advocates for the provision of various modes of representation, avenues for participation, and means of expression to enhance the quality of learning experiences across diverse mediums. Furthermore, the framework emphasizes the incorporation of interactive technologies and the cultivation of collaborative learning environments to provide a wide spectrum of relevant learning experiences, fostering students' interest and motivation. The synergy between UDL principles and AI has the potential to empower educators to establish inclusive settings that are responsive to the manifold requirements of learners, thus ensuring equitable access and contributing to effective personalization and student advancement. An approach to AI that places paramount importance on the welfare of both individuals and society, with particular attention to those facing vulnerability and adversity, can be established as a fundamental principle for harnessing a technology replete with significant promise.

The domain of Special Educational Needs encompasses a wide range of learning challenges, from disabilities to developmental disorders, as well as various types of transitory challenges, such as socio-economic and linguistic disadvantages. Historically, addressing these challenges necessitated tailored interventions and extensive human resources. However, the integration of AI technologies into education has introduced innovative and more efficient methodologies to support learners with SEN. AI-powered adaptive learning platforms are now capable of analyzing individual learning profiles and delivering customized content and interventions in real time. As delineated in the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators [7], digital technologies possess the capability to support differentiation and personalization in education, with a primary focus on ensuring accessibility for all students. This adaptability not only fosters greater engagement but also accelerates the learning process by catering to each learner's strengths and addressing their specific areas of improvement. Natural Language Processing (NLP), a subfield within the domain of AI, is dedicated to the pursuit of enabling computers to comprehend and communicate proficiently using human language. NLP has evolved into a valuable technological facet replete with a multitude of applications in the realm of education. These applications encompass the development of intelligent instructional systems, chatbot implementations, language assessment tools, and speech recognition technology [8].

3. Discussion

One promising potential of Artificial Intelligence in the educational field can be found in the opportunity to promote personalized and effective learning. The combination of instructional design adhering to UDL principles and emerging AI systems can offer to students a qualitative differentiation of materials taking into consideration different learning modalities, that is essential for some and useful for all. AI can foster individualized learning pathways that adjust in real time based on the learner's progress and preferences, ensuring an optimal and inclusive educational experience. AI-driven assistive technologies, such as speech recognition and text-to-speech tools, empower learners with communication disabilities to actively participate in educational activities, fostering a sense of independence and confidence. Additionally, AI can also facilitate early identification of learning challenges through data-driven analysis, enabling educators to intervene proactively and provide timely support. Furthermore, AI-powered educational games and simulations provide a dynamic and engaging learning environment, enhancing sensory experiences and promoting active learning for learners with diverse needs.

Such an approach ensures that students could receive instantaneous feedback, promotes metacognition, and obtains tailored in-depth explanations of complex texts and concepts. Students with SEN may encounter difficulties in reading and comprehending written texts, experiencing challenges in extracting key concepts from them. The inherent capability of Natural Language Processing (NLP) to generate summaries and highlight key words from lengthy texts can represent a significant added value for disciplinary study. This substantial support, widely extendable even beyond formal educational contexts, can foster motivation, self-esteem, and a sense of self-efficacy, factors that are frequently lacking in students with SEN. Additionally, AI can provide support to newly arrived international students who frequently struggle with the understanding of disciplines because of the lack of specific lexicon. They can turn to AI-powered tools for resolving difficulties, translating and comprehending texts, posing specific questions about disciplinary content based on their levels of language proficiency. From an educator's perspective, AI has the potential to significantly enhance teaching practices by generating

personalized content and materials that align with students' interests and needs, ultimately boosting motivation and engagement. AI can also assist in the creation of lesson plans, develop class syllabi, and generate glossaries tailored to students' proficiency levels and specific topics, all of which contribute to optimizing the overall learning experience. From an assessment perspective, chatbot systems could serve as a viable alternative to make the student evaluation process less anxiety-inducing. Several studies [9] have highlighted that when there is no human or human-like agent present in any way, people are more inclined to overcome psychological barriers that could otherwise hinder their responses.

Within this framework, it is essential to consider issues and limitations of the tool, which can at times yield inaccurate information or generate results that are not truthful. The issues of data privacy and security, along with transparency, constitute pivotal ethical concerns. Educators have the obligation to ensure the protection of individuals' privacy by transparently communicating the processes of data collection, its objectives, and its intended utilization to their students [10].

The potential for algorithmic bias and hallucination in AI systems is yet another ethical concern. AI systems depend on training data, and if that data contains bias or represents a limited range of perspectives, it can lead to biased predictions or to nonsensical or unfaithful texts by the algorithms. In this context, it is advisable to promote a conscious and critical utilization of generative artificial intelligence systems within the educational context. These systems can offer significant support for both educators and students, particularly those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), proving to be valuable compensatory tools to be integrated within personalized and customized learning, based on each student's strengths, needs, skills, and interests. Simultaneously, promoting an awareness of the limitations of generative AI systems can contribute to understanding their degree of reliability, which inevitably cannot be detached from human supervision and control over both outcomes and data [11].

4. Conclusion

The integration of AI into the realm of Special Educational Needs represents a crucial moment in the evolution of education. The transformative potential of AI technologies to address the unique challenges faced by learners with SEN is rapidly reshaping traditional educational paradigms. In this uncharted domain, the collaboration between AI and Special Educational Needs offers the prospect of fostering equitable and inclusive education. Exploring this phenomenon represents an intriguing avenue for future research.

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No Transfer Effect of English Language Learning Academic Self-Efficacy on Outcomes of Non-English-Language Learning

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that improved academic self-efficacy in English language learning has an impact on English language learning outcomes. The current study tested whether improved academic self-efficacy in English language learning can lead to improvements due to a positive transfer effect on learning outcomes that differ from English language learning. To this end, the current study used anonymized, English learning data from 155 students at a Japanese university. The MSLQ was used as the questionnaire on academic self-efficacy. The average GPA of all courses taken by the students was used as performance data outside of English language learning. The MSLQ and GPA were long-term, one-year data, as of February 2018 and February 2019, respectively. The results showed that increased academic self-efficacy in English language learning had no effect on the improvement in learning outcomes that differ from English language learning. The results of this study suggest that academic self-efficacy has an improvement in performance on content directly related to the content studied but does not have a positive transfer effect on improving performance on unrelated learning content.

Keywords: *English learning, e-learning, self-efficacy, motivation, achievement, GPA*

1. Introduction

In educational psychology, self-efficacy has been defined as one's belief in his/her own ability to meet challenges and successfully accomplish a task [1-3]. Recently, self-efficacy has been considered as one of key factors in academic success [4-6]. Thus, many studies have investigated what factor affects academic self-efficacy (ASE) and its enhancement on academic achievement.

One of important research questions on that research field is whether the ASE is domain-general or domain-specific, in other words, whether the ASE improvement for a certain learning domain enhances academic achievement for another learning domain. This kind of effect has been referred to "transfer" [7]. For example, transfer occurs when prior learning affects new learning. Transfer can be positive or negative. Regarding the ASE, this research question has not been resolved [8]. Jungert et al. (2014) suggested that normally achieving children's ASE may affects academic performance in another domain depending on whether children receive special instruction.

However, to my knowledge, there is a few previous studies in the environment of foreign language learning with ICT. In particular, it has been reported that distance learning including e-learning and traditional face-to-face learning show different influence of ASE on academic achievement [9]. Hence, it is necessary to investigate whether the ASE is domain-general or domain-specific, in other words, whether the ASE improvement for a certain learning domain enhances academic achievement for another learning domain not only in traditional education environment but also in distance learning environment.

A previous study has suggested that there is no transfer-like effect of ASE improvement on general self-efficacy in distance learning environment [10]. This study reported that general self-efficacy and ASE scales differed from each other in correlating academic achievement of foreign language learning with ICT in a higher education environment in Japan. However, this study did not directly determine whether the ASE improvement for foreign language learning with ICT enhances academic achievement for another learning domain.

To test the research question directly, the present study tested whether the ASE improvement for foreign language learning with ICT in higher education setting in Japan enhances academic achievement for another learning domain, such as GPAs in non-English education courses.

2. Methods

The current study used anonymized data of first-year students' questionnaire results (native language=Japanese, N=155) at a Japanese university. The motivational questionnaire was created based on Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ [11]), which included items related to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and academic self-efficacy, and whose items had 7-point likert scale. The MSLQ scores were collected in February 2018 and in July 2018. The average GPA of all courses taken by the students was used as performance data outside of English language learning. The GPA scores were collected in July 2018 and February 2019, respectively. The participants took regular 15-week blended English learning classes per a half year, where activities are being made to improve ASE for English language learning. These data make it possible to verify whether, after an increase in ASE during half a year of English education, the improvement in performance in other courses during the half year is affected by the increase in ASE.

3. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

Firstly, to confirm that ASE increased for a year, t-test was conducted between ASE scores in February 2018 and those in February 2019. Participants' ASE scores significantly increased ($t=8.279$, $p<0.001$). The result indicated that the blended English learning classes participants took successfully improved ASE for English language learning.

Then, correlation was tested between the subtraction of GPA scores that differ from English language learning in February 2019 > those in July 2018 and subtraction of ASE in July 2018 > those in February 2018. In this result, the correlation was not statistically significant ($p=0.4$). Therefore, the current study showed that increased ASE in English language learning had no effect on the improvement in learning outcomes that differ from English language learning. The result of the current study suggests that ASE improvement in English learning through blended learning environment does not have a direct positive transfer effect on improving performance on unrelated learning content.

The current result is not in line with the previous study described in Introduction [8]. In that previous study, children in the fifth grade were given special instruction in mathematics to test whether ASE in mathematics affects ASE in other domains. In the current study, on the other hand, foreign language education was provided to university students through the blended learning method to test whether ASE in foreign language learning has an effect on the academic performance in other domains. There were differences between the two studies in terms of participant types, intervention methods, learning domains, and whether the influence was between ASEs or between ASE and the academic performance itself. Therefore, it would be necessary to clarify the mechanism that positive transfer is caused by which factors. If these factors can be identified, it may be possible to establish how improving learners' ASEs more effectively can produce broad learning outcomes.

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The Impact of Recasts Vs. Computer-Mediated Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners' Affective Variables in On-line Classes

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Abstract

The issue of feedback has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of foreign language learning and teaching because not only does the type of feedback affect learning outcome but it also impacts learners' emotional states especially in a foreign language classroom. As one of the recent modes of delivery, computer-mediated instruction has posed new challenges in instruction in view of the fact that it has affected the presentation and interaction pattern with the teaching tools available synchronously and asynchronously. However, relatively few studies have compared the effectiveness of various types of oral feedback provided in on-line classes. To address this gap, this study compares the effects of recasts versus computer-mediated oral feedback on the affective variables of EFL learners. To this end, 40 intermediate learners with the age range of 15-21 from a popular language school were selected. The participants were from two intact on-line classes with 20 students in each who were randomly assigned to two methods of feedback. One of the classes received recasts on pronunciation mistakes and the other one was corrected using google dictionary box. A questionnaire on affective variables (anxiety, attitude, motivation, and self-confidence) was administered at the end of the course to evaluate the impact of the two methods on these variables. The data was analyzed using Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the two methods of corrective feedback (≤ 0.05). In other words, providing oral feedback through google dictionary box in comparison to recasts had a positive effect on alleviating the learners' anxiety and enhancing positive attitude, motivation and self-confidence in on-line classes. These results shed a light on the effectiveness of affordances provided by computers, and they also suggest how EFL teachers can use these tools to create positive emotional states in their learners.

Keywords: Computer-mediated, Recast, Google dictionary box, Corrective feedback

1. Introduction

Omnipresence of computer technology in different fields including education persuades practitioners to replace it with age-old practiced methods as it has opened up a vast world of information and has provided wide variety of affordances. As the medium of presentation has changed, it has brought up changes in the methods teachers adopt to present content and provide corrective feedback. Computer-mediated corrective feedback can be given through video, audio or text separately or a combination of modalities [1] synchronously or asynchronously. Corrective feedback can be of mixed blessing cognitively and emotionally depending on the type of feedback provided. Recasts have been considered to be suitable for face-to-face classroom situation because of being time-saving, less threatening to student confidence, and less intrusive to the flow of interaction during communication activities [2]; however, their effect may be affected by several internal and external factors. One of these external factors influencing feedback, in the digital era, is the change of learning environment from face-to-face to on-line mode. Several studies have been conducted about computer mediated recasts [1,3,4 to name a few]; however, there is scant research on the effect of recasts vs. computer-mediated feedback on learners' affective variables in on-line classes. Therefore, this study set out to compare the effect of recasts versus computer mediated feedback on L2 learners' anxiety, motivation, self-confidence and positive attitude.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Setting

The participants of the study were selected from two intact classes in a popular English Institute in Tabriz, Iran. They were taking an intermediate four-skill on-line English course and were all females with the age range of 15-21 some of whom were high school and some were university students. They had been taking English courses for approximately three years and had switched into an on-line mode after the pandemic. At present, the institute offers both on-line and face-to-face classes. The classes are being held in Adobe Connect Software. Each course in this institute takes 21 sessions the last session of which is the final exam held on-line for both face-to-face and on-line classes.

2.2. Instrument

The data was collected using a questionnaire (post-survey) designed by Lee [5]. The questionnaire was piloted on a similar group for reliability purpose and Alpha Cronbach (r) was 7.8. The questionnaire included 12 items addressing four affective variables: anxiety, attitude, motivation, and self-confidence. The Levels of each variable were measured using a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Low” one to “High” ten.

2.3. Procedure

In this institute, the list of vocabulary, placed at the end of each unit in the book, is taught by the teacher having the learners listen to it and then repeat after the teacher. The learners are supposed to study the meanings provided at the end of the book by themselves. Despite the repetition of vocabulary, the learners usually have persistent mispronunciation problems. In this study, the two classes were randomly assigned to recast and computer-mediated feedback. Therefore, in one of the classes they received recast on the mispronounced words and in the other the dictionary box in google was shared by the researcher. The google dictionary box includes the phonetics, sound and motion picture which articulates the word. It also permits the learners to listen to the word slowly by pressing the slow button on, so it exposes the learners to the word from multiple modes (text, sound, and motion picture).

The learners in recast group were corrected immediately after the error by the teacher. However, in computer-mediated group, in order not to disrupt the flow of speech, the teacher made notes of the errors and waited for the communication activity to finish and then shared the screen, played the audio, shared the motion picture and slow articulation and had the learner repeat the mispronounced word. This procedure was repeated throughout the course whenever errors occurred. At the end of the term, after being informed of the purpose and content of the questionnaire on the affective variables, the learners completed it and delivered it through Telegram.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data from the questionnaire was fed into SPSS software. Since the data was ordinal or rank data, the non-parametric test of Mann Whitney U/ Wilcoxon was used to analyze it.

3. Results

To answer the research question, first, descriptive statistics were conducted before referential statistics (see table 1).

Table 1.

Method	Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Recast	1. Anxiety	20	2.67	6.67	4.2333	1.02655
	2. Attitude	20	4.67	7.00	5.9167	.70814
	3. Motivation	20	4.00	6.00	4.9667	.69164
	4. Self-confidence	20	4.00	7.00	5.6333	1.08633
Computer Mediated Feedback	1. Anxiety	20	1.00	5.33	2.5833	.92322
	2. Attitude	20	6.00	10.00	8.4000	1.07931
	3. Motivation	20	4.67	10.00	7.9667	1.28827
	4. Self-confidence	20	2.67	9.33	7.1667	1.58391
	Valid N (listwise)	20				

As it can be seen in Table 1, the mean for anxiety in recast group is higher than computer-mediated group. Also, the mean of attitude, motivation, and self-confidence is higher in computer-mediated group than the recast group. It means that computer mediated feedback was more effective in reducing the learners' anxiety and promoting positive attitude, motivation and self-confidence.

In the second step, Mann-Whitney U was conducted to compare the effectiveness of the two methods of providing feedback on the learners' affective variables (see tables 2 and 3).

Table 2.

Ranks				
Variables	F	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Anxiety	1.00	20	28.58	571.50
	2.00	20	12.43	248.50
	Total	40		
Attitude	1.00	20	11.18	223.50
	2.00	20	29.83	596.50
	Total	40		
Motivation	1.00	20	11.15	223.50
	2.00	20	29.85	597.00
	Total	40		
Self-confidence	1.00	20	13.93	278.50
	2.00	20	27.08	541.50
	Total	40		

Table 3. Test Statistics^a

	Anxiety	Attitude	Motivation	Self-confidence
Mann-Whitney U	38.500	13.500	13.000	68.500
Wilcoxon W	248.500	223.500	223.000	278.500
Z	-4.388	-5.069	-5.084	-3.578
Asymp Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig. [2*(1 tailed Sig.)]	.000 ^b	.000 ^b	.000 ^b	.000 ^b

a. Grouping variables

b. Not corrected for ties

As table 3 indicates the median for anxiety in computer-mediated group is less than the recast group ($\text{sig} \leq 0.05$). In other words, computer-mediated corrective feedback with the significance level of 95% is effective in reducing the learners' anxiety. It also shows that there is a significant difference between the two methods in promoting positive attitude, motivation and self-confidence ($p. \leq 0.05$).

4. Discussion, Conclusion, Implication

This study examined the effect of recast and computer-mediated corrective feedback on EFL learners' anxiety, positive attitude, motivation, and self-confidence in on-line classes. The results of the study revealed that although recasts, in comparison to more explicit methods of feedback, are known to be less threatening to EFL learners' affective variables, they may not be as effective in on-line classes. In contrast, using google dictionary box to correct the learners' mispronunciations had a significant impact on reducing their anxiety, and increasing positive attitude, motivation and self-confidence. This discrepancy between these two methods of feedback may be due to the mode of presentation. As learners most often have affective problems in on-line classes, namely anxiety, demotivation, boredom [6], using creative ways and digital tools may minimize these affective problems. In this study Google dictionary box was found to be effective because it is a user friendly and multimodal tool. It provided several ways of presenting the pronunciation of the word (sound, motion picture, and text). It also had the ability of playing the audio in slow mode, which enabled the learners to distinguish the sounds from each other. In fact, the effectiveness of this tool is justified by Dual Coding Theory. This theory contends that while verbal associations and visual imagery are both effective learning methods, combining the two improves learning [7]. According to the dual-coding theory, the brain employs both verbal and visual information to represent information [8], but each channel in the human mind processes this information differently, resulting in unique representations for the information that it processes. The verbal system and the nonverbal/visual system are the two coding schemes now in use. Better recall is the outcome of the interaction between these two coding systems [9,10]. The verbal system organizes linguistic knowledge/units (such as text, sound, or even motor experience, such sign language) into logical groups termed "logogens.". The nonverbal/visual system organizes visual data/units (such as symbols, photos, or videos) and stores them in units referred to as "imagen." The terms "logogen" and "imagen" denote

representational units of verbal and nonverbal information that, respectively, generate already-existing mental words and images and might work unconsciously to enhance cognitive performance [11]. To conclude, as the medium of presentation changes, adaptations are required on the part of teachers in order to be effective and facilitate learners' engagement and learning because as Carrier and Nye [12] stated rightly, "It is not the technology, but the pedagogy that makes digital learning interesting to us as educators and to teachers and learners who are trying to achieve the most successful outcomes" (p.209).

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Virtual Exchange and Meaning-making – Translanguaging and Pushing the Boundaries

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Abstract

In this paper, we describe the latest iteration of our virtual exchange project (see [1], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9] for context) between students of Italian in an Australian university and students in a liceo linguistico in Italy. Students, in pairs or groups of three, met online for 4 weeks and, unlike previous virtual exchanges where we prescriptively programmed topics to be discussed, were given the instruction to define their own topics of interest to pursue together. The objective of this freer approach was to encourage students to become stronger agents of meaning-making using the languages at their disposal. As García and Kleifgen [2] note, “[t]o liberate the meaning-making potential of [...] bilinguals, a translanguaging pedagogy privileges emergence of meaning making, feeling, intensity, and excitement, as it moves the imaginaries of students to make connections across what are perceived and encoded as separate sign systems” (p. 568). Multilinguals can experience a transformation “when they realize the artificial and constructed nature of the categories imposed on them” ([4], p. 498), and they can then coordinate their own performances without the strictures of external categories.” ([4], p. 560). We explore the range of topics defined by student participants and compare this with both our own previous models for virtual exchange as well as others drawn from the literature. We also detail student responses to their online translanguaging experience. We examine the ramifications of this information for future similar projects but also for meaningful meaning-making for young people in languages education.

Keywords: virtual exchange, translanguaging, languages education, Italian language and culture

1. Virtual Exchange and Translanguaging

Our approach to virtual exchange is to create an online space integrated into the educational program and existing in parallel to the space-time of traditional class-tuition, which students inhabit with a great degree of autonomy. This is based on recommendations made by O’Dowd and Ware [9], O’Dowd ([5], [6], [7], [8]) about factors that educators should consider when designing and implementing virtual exchanges. The objective is to provide an authentic forum for language use amongst peer learners while also developing transversal skills such as intercultural competence and global citizenship through the critical analysis of the cultural practices and values of the cultures of the groups involved in the virtual exchanges. This project consistently blends face-to-face and digital learning through synchronous video communication tools.

We promote a translanguaging approach (see [10]) to communication whereby students are free to deploy the full range of their linguistic repertoires to communicate rather than being artificially restricted to parallel monolingualism, i.e., only speaking Italian and then only speaking English. This mixing allows students to “liberate the meaning-making potential” that their use of language can provide.

1.2 Pavia-Melbourne 2023

The virtual exchange project we discuss in this paper took place in April-May 2023 between students learning Italian at the University of Melbourne, Australia and senior secondary students learning a range of languages at the Liceo Adelaide Cairoli in Pavia, Italy. This is the continuation of a virtual exchange project which we have been developing over the past number of years and which has now settled into a familiar formula:

- Both sets of students receive details of the virtual exchange (see Fig. 1.)
- Students are paired by staff with a peer or occasionally two depending on respective class numbers
- All students post a short video introduction using flip.com, a video sharing platform which shares many aspects of current social media sites such as Instagram or TikTok but is especially designed for educational purposes – this then forms a useful repository of introductory videos which students can access at any time

- Students then organize themselves to meet weekly online via video to exchange ideas, views and opinions
- Typically, staff set a schedule of topics to be discussed which has, sometimes, also lead to the development of a shared piece of work

Progetto Pavia-Melbourne | Virtual exchange

Italian Studies, University of Melbourne, Australia | Liceo Linguistics Adelaide Cairoli, Pavia, Italia

Each student will have an international partner in the other country, who she/he will meet once a week online (4 weeks)

The virtual exchange will consist of

- Language exchange - you will speak both English and Italian during the exchange. We suggest at least 20 minutes in each language during each encounter (at least 40 minutes)
- Intercultural exchange – listening to each other and communicating, you will compare different cultures and think critically about them. You will certainly get to know Australia, and also Italy, better!

Dates

As a first step use Flip to create your introductions and post them by 30 April. Go to flip.com and enter the Join Code

For the following weeks, you need to organise at least one meeting online with your partner each week during which you chat in Italian/English for at least an hour

Program

- By April 30 Post your video on flip.com
- Settimana 9 First meeting – decide with your international partner dates and time of your meetings Introduce yourself. What do you know about the other person's country?
- Settimana 10 ...
- Settimana 11 ...
- Settimana 12 ...

Assessment

This project will be assessed via the final small online assessment (week 12) and in the final exam

- In your blog, I want you to include a dedicated reflection on the sorts of things you discover through your interactions with your partner in line with the ideas immediately above - this can be in Italian or English or a mix. This will be considered along with your reading reflections in week 12. For me to consider your reflections, you need to have published a Flip video introduction
- On the final exam, there will be an explicit section in which you will be asked to describe what you've shared and learned during the exchange along with any particular language aspects that came out

Fig.1. Information presented to University of Melbourne students via the learning management system

For this iteration of the virtual exchange, we decided to give students complete liberty and control over the content of their weekly meetings. This was an attempt to free them from what Claire Kramsch calls the “strictures of external categories” with the hope that this would lead to more spontaneous and fruitful exchange. It is also in line with Stephen Krashen’s position that “forced speech is not only uncomfortable, it makes no direct contribution to language acquisition”. In the next section we discuss what students did and their reactions to the virtual exchange experience.

2. Forging Connections Through Online Communication

An analysis of student reflections on the virtual exchange experience allows us to provide an overview of the range of topics canvassed during their weekly meetings (Table 1).

Table 1. Student themes - *denotes only found in one student entry

Animals	Food and eating	Slang
Books	Growing up	Sport
Cities (= their own cities)	Hobbies/Interests	Stress*
Climate change	Holidays	Student wellbeing*
Cultural stereotypes	Italian culture	Study
Cultural traditions and festivities	Introductions	Traditional games*
Day-to-day life	Knowledge of the other's country	Travel
Differences between Italy and Australia	Language learning	TV programs
Education systems	Driving licences	Ukraine-Russian war*
Environment and sustainability	Multiculturalism*	Weather
Eurovision	Music	Work
Family	Natural disasters*	
Floods in Emilia-Romagna	Patriotism/National pride*	
Films	Politics/Political issues	

These topics reveal a desire to connect with each other through familiar and known experiences combined with an attempt to test the knowledge held about the other country and culture. It is evident throughout student reflections on the experience that a constant compare and contrast approach was taken to evaluating information gleaned during online interactions. The range of topics in Table 1. Is not dissimilar to the types of indications we normally provide to students in terms of what they should discuss together. This clearly indicates that students have a firm task orientation in mind when approaching the virtual exchange.

2.3 New Friendships

Many students reflected that they made a real connection with their partner through the virtual exchange. For some this was unexpected. Others also noted future intentions to meet in person, typically in Italy.

2.4 Not So Different After All

Another recurring theme was an expectation of cultural difference which was offset by a surprising realisation of shared similarities, whether in views or different aspects of daily life.

2.5 Connecting Across Media

The virtual exchange provided a gateway for a complex set of connections across social media. Students detail how the initial contact led to exchange of Instagram profiles, sharing TikTok videos, and, in one case, the development of a shared online music playlist. This speaks to the multifaceted nature of identity both on and offline and demonstrates that virtual exchanges have the power to reach across the temporal-physical divide to integrate the online persona. Of note, some students detailed using one language while communicating in writing and then another in the online face-to-face contexts.

2.6 Understanding Language and Communication

Interacting with a stranger online provided students with an experience of real, authentic and spontaneous communication which enabled many of them to appreciate it does not depend strictly upon accuracy and correctness. They detail using a translanguaging approach to resolve moments of incomprehension and make statements like "it's more important to try to talk rather than be perfect".

2.7 Real Communication Means Real Learning

Students note that because the topics were either self-directed or unpredictable their learning was somehow strengthened in ways that were different from normal classroom learning. This suggests that virtual exchanges among peers have the propensity to provide more fertile learning experiences for students. There was also clear appreciation for the chance to learn about the world view of someone of a similar age but in a different part of the world.

2.8 Opportunities to Control the Situation

Out of student reflections it becomes clear that some students enjoyed the freedom to set their own agendas while others initially floundered. Those who had difficulty at the beginning, however, detail how they took control of the situation and either suggested a range of topics to ensure they felt comfortable in each meeting or developed a weekly program of topics to guide the online interaction.

3. Concluding Remarks

The overwhelming perception we have as staff of this particular iteration of our virtual exchange project is that making it less structured and more open-ended allowed students to engage more meaningfully on a human level which, in turn arguably leads to more significant learning experiences both linguistically and interculturally. Students from both hemispheres expressed how strongly they felt they had made new friendships which they hoped would endure. The natural interconnection between the virtual exchange experience and the students' online identities reveals that, for students, this is not just another "homework task" but is something more. Putting students in these situations allows them to test not only their language and culture skills but also their ability to communicate. Promoting translanguaging is key to providing an underpinning confidence - when things don't seem to work in a single language, they know that they have the flexibility to draw on all of their linguistic resources to ensure that they can make meaning. This pushes the boundaries of classic language teaching contexts and clearly provides students with access to deeper and more satisfying interactions.

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Exploring the Path of Compiling TBCL Chinese Digital Teaching Materials with Generative AI—Taking ChatGPT for Example

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Abstract

This study aims to integrate the Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) platform—ChatGPT with the Taiwan Benchmarks for the Chinese Language (TBCL) [14] for digital teaching materials (DTM) composition, proposing a digital teaching material composition model, showcasing the role of GenAI plays in DTM features. At the same, it shows the necessary measures to reduce the effect caused by the hallucination phenomenon [5] on the materials. The research production will be presented by web-based DTM which demonstrates the potential of GenAI in enhancing Chinese DTM composition. By adopting the IDEE framework [9] as foundational principles for designing web-based DTM with ChatGPT and using prompt engineering [11] as the research method, the study explores the strategies for avoiding the effect caused by the hallucination phenomenon in DTM composition with GenAI. It also delves into the potential features that GenAI can play in a web-based DTM. The procedure is as follows: (1) The instructional design is designed based on the Reference Guidelines for TBCL Application (RGTA) [15] and transcript as a unit outline. (2) input the unit outline into ChatGPT through prompt engineering, and generate DTM content based on the unit outline. (3) Using the Teaching Materials Editing Assistance System (TMEAS), the text is examined to ensure the content aligns with the TBCL proficiency level. Beyond assisting in material composition, GenAI can enhance features in web-based DTM as well : (1) utilize the “chat” from ChatGPT for “situational dialogue” and “essay review” by using prompt engineering, and (2) integrating “chat” by using webpage builder’s Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), allowing learners to use “continue this chat” feature to replicates the “chat” to their accounts for self-practice. The study presents a web-based DTM, combining the GenAI platform with the RGTA and TMEAS for material composition and interactive features for web-based DTM. We hope to draw attention to the effect caused by GenAI in Chinese language education. The study provides preliminary insights, looking forward to offering a reference direction for the future development of GenAI-assisted Chinese language teaching and web-based DTM composition.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Taiwan Benchmarks for the Chinese Language (TBCL), Web-Based Digital Teaching Material, ChatGPT

1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, the significance of Chinese language teaching materials has ascended, more so with the advent of E-learning spurred by recent pandemic challenges. The Taiwan Benchmarks for the Chinese Language (TBCL), introduced by the National Academy of Educational Research (NAER), serves as an instrumental benchmark for Chinese language competency. However, a conspicuous absence of digital teaching materials (DTM) framed within the TBCL remains. OpenAI’s 2022 offering, ChatGPT, a GenAI platform based on a large language model (LLM), shows potential in this domain, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Notably, its capacity for real-time text generation and role as a virtual interlocutor holds promise for the Chinese DTM sphere. Yet, limitations arise, as evidenced by the platform’s occasional inability to retrieve specific content, such as details on TBCL and RGTA, from its database or generate unfaithful content called the hallucination phenomenon. This scenario underscores the criticality of vetting and curating AI-generated content (AIGC) for educational usage. The study will focus on presenting an actual example of applying GenAI to DTM composition by applying the IDEE framework and prompt engineering. Looking forward to exploring the path of making good use of GenAI for compiling DTM content and establishing features.

2. Literature Review

2.1 GPT Model and AIGC

ChatGPT, built on the GPT model, is a pivotal player in the GenAI arena, deriving from the advanced natural language processing (NLP) domain. NLP, encompassing natural language understanding (NLU) and natural language generation (NLG), relies on the GPT model's Transformer architecture [10] for precise and stable generation of words. Consequently, ChatGPT skillfully responds to user prompts, showcasing its aptitude for educational uses. However, the hallucination phenomenon, where models produce misleading or nonsensical content [5], poses challenges in GenAI applications, especially in education. Language education is specifically required with DTM content fitting the targeted learner's proficiency level. Therefore, the content of the DTM will be generated based on prompts with the learner's proficiency level descriptors from RGTA to encompass the GPT model for AIGC and double-checked by using the TMEAS to avoid the effect on AIGC caused by the "hallucination".

2.2 Applying GenAI for Education

The application of GenAI in educational sectors has seen increasing attention, underscored by frameworks such as Su & Yang's (2023) IDEE, which offers structured guidelines for ChatGPT's integration in education. While research, including works by Kasneci et al. and Baidoo-Anu et al., extols GenAI's merits in personalized tutoring, automated grading, and adaptive learning, challenges such as biases in training data and concerns about data privacy persist. Based on the research, we can see the potential of GenAI applied as personal tutoring and risks lies in AIGC for language educational uses. The IDEE Framework provides a perspective of applying GenAI in educational scenarios.

2.3 Web-based Digital Teaching Materials

Teaching materials, tailored to a unit outline, can be classified as discrete, correlated, or integrated [12]. This study focuses on integrated materials, derived unit outline from RGTA, using ChatGPT for generating DTM content and forming "integrated" DTM content. The research applied AIGC as DTM content and chatbot functions to DTM features. By using the Gamma. app, leveraging its HTML capabilities to structure content and embed media, aiming to create a web-based DTM that integrates AIGC digitalized with other platforms, such as Quizlet and Ricciwawa [16] and ChatGPT's "continue this chat" feature along with prompt engineering making it as a chatbot [2] assistant of "situational dialogue" and "essay review" features of the web-based DTM.

3. Research Question

- (1) How is AIGC applied in compiling a Chinese web-based DTM that follows TBCL?
- (2) What features can a GenAI platform offer in a self-made web-based DTM?

4. Research Method

4.1 IDEE Framework for Compiling Teaching Materials

In this study, the IDEE framework guides the process of compiling AIGC DTM with GenAI features. This framework covers 4 dimensions: (1) **Identifying desired outcomes**, the input prompts for AIGC of the DTM will be based on the proficiency level descriptors in RGTA and so does the AI-powered features of DTM; (2) **Determining the level of automation**, the DTM composition will be semi-automated as for the AI-powered features will be fully automated; (3) **Ensuring ethical considerations**, emphasizing the need for educators to inspect AIGC for DTM by themselves or using tools, such as the TMEAS and verify dialogues between the GenAI and learners; and (4) **Evaluating effectiveness**, assessing if AIGC fits the TBCL proficiency level descriptors and the results of "situational dialogue" and "essay review" features, and effectiveness on real-time teaching scenarios requires quantitative data in future studies.

4.2 Prompt Engineering for Compiling Teaching Materials

The concept of prompt engineering aims to automate software development tasks for generative AI. Based on the White et al (2023) study, it enhances prompt references ChatGPT, aiming to suggest prompts specifically for AIGC. Such strategies include providing the GenAI a name and classification, the intent or motivation of the task, the structure or an example demand of the AIGC, and giving adjustments based on the generated consequences [11]. They delve into GenAI's abilities to generate content for DTM along with TMEAS addressing the hallucination phenomenon. The research presents templates for text, vocabulary, drills, and classroom activities. The final objective is to establish a web-based DTM infused with AIGC and AI-powered DTM features.

5. Results

5.1 AIGC as Core Content of DTM – Text Content

Firstly, based on RGTA, the unit outline was drafted as a prompt for the text content was formulated as follows: “你現在是一位在美國教學的華語老師，聽完我提供單元大綱、教學方案，請協助我編寫教材內容（插入單元大綱），課文的形式應為「課文」、難度應該落在華語中級，字數大約 500 字左右，分為 3 段” (You are now a Mandarin teacher teaching in the U.S. Having listened to the teaching unit outline and the teaching plan I provided, please follow my teaching outline [insert unit outline content] for the content. The text should comprise [lesson content]. The difficulty level should be [intermediate] in Chinese, and the word count should be around [500 words] divided into [3 paragraphs]). The generated content is shown in Fig. 01-DTM Text. Fig. 01-DTM TMEAS Analysis shows how the system works with the AIGC. By using TEMAS, the researcher can inspect if the AIGC fits the learner's TBCL proficiency level and make adjustments to the AIGC for the DTM.

5.2 AIGC as Extended Content of DTM – Vocabulary, Drills and Activities

After revising the core DTM text through human inspection and using TMEAS, the “詞表” (vocabulary list) feature of the system was utilized to produce the targeted vocabulary items. Through prompt engineering, non-target-level vocabulary items were filtered out. Further, a simple explanation and example sentences were extended for each vocabulary item. The prompt for the vocabulary list was formulated as follows: “貼上詞表，幫我去除上面的非目標級別的詞彙，並去除中間的詞頻。並且為剩下的詞彙加上漢語拼音與簡單的解釋，以及提供每一個詞彙一個例句” ([Paste the original vocabulary list] This is a vocabulary list. Please help me remove the [non-target teaching level] and eliminate [grade] and [word frequency]. Also, add Pinyin, an explanation, and a sample sentence for each vocabulary item). The generated results are as Fig. 01-DTM Vocabulary List.

The prompt for the drills was formulated as follows: “請幫我根據上面的課文、詞彙，出 10 題，4 題詞彙題，4 題對話完成選擇題，一個延伸閱讀題組，且需要包含兩個子題(每個題目要有四個選項，閱讀題的題幹約 200 字)” (Based on the teaching materials provided above, please generate [10 multiple-choice] questions with [4 options] each, 4 [vocabulary] questions, 4 [dialogue completion multiple-choice] questions, and an [extended reading] question with [2 sub-questions] (the stem of the drills should be around [200 words])). Results are shown in Fig. 01-DTM Voc and Reading Drills.

The prompt for the classroom activities was formulated as follows: “請幫我根據上面的教案設計 3 項以真實情境為基礎的任務，並說明任務的實施細節與注意事項” (Based on the teaching plan mentioned above, please generate [3 real-world situational tasks], and detail the execution specifics and considerations for each.) The generated results are as Fig. 01-DTM Classroom Activities.

DTM Text	DTM TMEAS Analysis	DTM Vocabulary List
<p>課文：</p> <p>半工半讀的生活</p> <p>段落一：</p> <p>近年來，越來越多的年輕人選擇進入半工半讀的職場。這種職場文化的興起使得學習者需要了解不同職場之間的差異性。在台灣，應徵工作是起步的第一步，因此我們首先需要學會閱讀應徵文件與招聘內容。這包括了宣傳單、菜單、廣告、佈告欄或海報上的時間、地點或聯繫方式等資訊。通過閱讀這些資料，我們可以理解基本訊息，並瞭解台灣招聘流程中的特有文化和語言點。</p> <p>段落二：</p> <p>為了準備好應徵工作，我們需要準備相關的招聘資料與文件。除了閱讀招聘內容外，我們還可以有應徵工作經驗的問候詢問經驗和意見。透過與他人交流，我們可以學習到詢問工作應徵的禮節和了解台灣應徵工作的術語。這將有助於我們在面試過程中更加自信和流利地表達自己的需求。</p> <p>段落三：</p> <p>在應徵工作時，填寫簡歷表單是必不可少的一個步驟。在這一階段，我們需要運用寫作技巧，針對應徵表單內容填寫正確的資料。通過這個任務，我們不僅能夠提升寫作能力，還能夠熟悉台灣招聘文件中的常見術語和名詞。這將為我們在面試中獲得更好的表現做好準備。</p> <p>總結：</p> <p>半工半讀的生活對於年輕人來說是一個嶄新的挑戰，但也是一個充滿機會的起點。通過閱讀應徵文件、準備招聘資料與文件、填寫簡歷表單以及準備面試，我們能夠瞭解台灣特有的職場文化和職場之間的差異性。希望學習者能夠在這個課程中掌握相關的語言技能，並以自信和流利的方式在半工半讀的生活中迎接各種挑戰。</p>	<p>DTM TMEAS Analysis</p>	<p>DTM Vocabulary List</p> <p>以下是經過過濾的詞彙，附上漢語拼音、簡單解釋以及一個例句：</p> <p>應徵 (yǐngzhēng)：申請工作的行動。 例句：我決定應徵這份職位，因為我對這個行業發展感興趣。</p> <p>職場 (zhíchǎng)：工作的環境和文化。 例句：在現代職場中，溝通和團隊合作能力非常重要。</p> <p>DTM Voc Drills</p> <p>2. 在應徵工作時，我們應該仔細閱讀_____，以獲取重要的資訊。</p> <p>a) 資料 b) 文件 c) 訊息 d) 簡歷</p> <p>3. 學習者可以透過與_____交流，瞭解他們的工作經驗和意見。</p> <p>a) 資料 b) 簡歷 c) 面試官 d) 老師</p>
<p>DTM Classroom Activities</p> <p>任務三：簡歷填寫與職場術語學習</p> <p>實施細節：</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 提供學生一份空白的簡歷表格。 2. 學生根據自己的情況填寫簡歷，包括個人資料、學歷、工作經驗等。 3. 學生使用所學的職場術語，使簡歷更專業。 <p>注意事項：</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 強調簡歷的格式和內容，幫助學生理解如何突顯自己的優勢。 • 提供一些小常識的職場術語供學生參考。 	<p>DTM Reading Drills</p> <p>半工半讀的生活</p> <p>近年來，半工半讀的生活在台灣越來越受到年輕人的歡迎。這種生活方式使得年輕人不僅可以在職場中獲得實際經驗，還可以充分利用學習的機會。半工半讀的起步就是在於應徵，因此，了解台灣特有的職場文化對於成功應徵工作至關重要。</p> <p>問題：</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 半工半讀的生活在台灣近年來受到了哪些人的歡迎？ <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 年輕人 b) 老年人 c) 學生 d) 家庭主婦 2. 半工半讀的生活讓年輕人可以同時獲得什麼？ <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 職場經驗和旅遊機會 b) 學習機會和家庭生活 c) 實際經驗和學習機會 d) 賺錢和休閒娛樂 	

Fig. 1. OpenAI (2023) AIGC as DTM content

5.3 GenAI as an Interactive Learning Tool for Web-Based Digital Teaching Materials: Situational Dialogues & Essay Review Features

ChatGPT can enable learners to achieve self-directed learning effects by interacting with it through a natural language based on the research mentioned before. I have crafted prompts for two DTM features: situational dialogues and essay review.” A prompt for situational dialogue was formulated as follows: “你現在是一位畢業生面試官，請你問我問題，並等我回答繼續問我，面試官的語言難度應適中，不要過於複雜，並在合適的情況下結束”(You are now an [interviewer for a graduate position]. Please ask me questions, wait for my response, and continue asking. The language used in the interview should be of moderate difficulty and not overly complex. Conclude when appropriate). The chat history of the feature is shown in Fig. 02-DTM Situational Dialogue.

The prompt for essay review was formulated as follows: “你現在需要根據學生輸入的文本內容給予修正建議、點出錯誤，我輸入想要被檢查的中文段落或句子。我的文本越詳細完整，你給的修正建議就越精。你要根據我的輸入，提供語法、用詞、標點符號等方面的修正建議。你要把錯誤和建議明確的標記和解釋”(Now, based on the text content input by the learner, you need to provide correction suggestions and point out the error. I will input Chinese paragraphs or sentences that I want to be checked. The more detailed and complete my text is, the more precise your correction suggestions will be. You should provide correction suggestions based on my input, addressing aspects like grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc. Errors and suggestions will be marked and explained). The generated result is as Fig. 02-DTM Essay Review.

<p>你現在是一位畢業生面試官，請你問我問題，並等我回答繼續問我，面試的語言應難度適中，不要過於複雜，並在合適的情況下結束</p> <p>當然，讓我們開始面試吧！首先，請告訴我一些關於你自己的背景和教育經歷。</p> <p>我是來自台灣畢業於國立台灣師範大學華語文教學系的學生，吳達奇，我想應徵貴公司的華語教材編輯的職位。</p> <p>很高興認識你，吳達奇先生。你的教育背景和專業相關，確實與我們公司的職位需求相符。請問你在大學期間是否參與過任何與華語教學或教材編輯相關的實習、專案或經驗？</p> <p>我曾經在美國明德書校實習半年，曾經參與「現在中文課程」教材的共同編輯工作</p> <p>很棒！這些經歷都讓你具備了一些實際的教學和教材編輯相關的經驗。在編輯教材的過程中，你遇到了哪些具有挑戰性的情況，以及你是如何克服這些挑戰的呢？</p>	<p>你現在需要根據學生輸入的文本內容給予修正建議、點出錯誤。我輸入想要被檢查的中文段落或句子。我的文本越詳細完整，你給的修正建議就越精確。你要根據我的輸入，提供語法、用詞、標點符號等方面的修正建議。你要把錯誤和建議明確地標記和解釋。</p> <p>當然，我會盡力根據您提供的文本給予修正建議和指出錯誤。請您提供您想要檢查的中文段落或句子，我會在之後的回答中給予您相應的修正和建議。</p> <p>大家好！我是「小啄木鳥」——陸詩綺。今天請和我一起去大街上找找錯別字吧！從學校出來，看到門前小賣部有一塊牌子上面寫著「往前500米停車場」。「停車場」是什麼意思呀？走去一看，原來是停車場，好一個「停」打不分呀！走了沒多久，我看到百貨大樓旁的一家正在搞國際理髮展，門口廣告牌上寫著「燈峰造極」。明明應該是「登峰造極」呀！我想這肯定是店家想讓人過目不忘而想出的高招。但這一廣告之的「燈峰造極」會給許多小朋友一種誤導，他們真的會認為「登峰造極」就是「燈峰造極」呢！一路上，我不時地看到一些如「騎樂無窮」、「快不容緩之類」的廣告牌，我覺得這真有些污染市容市貌。作為世界旅遊名城和歷史文化名城的桂林，乾淨的大街上竟會冒出那麼多的錯別字，這會讓那些中外遊客怎麼想？他們肯定認為桂林這得虛名山水的確好，可人文化水平卻不高。我還在電視裡看到一則關於花露水廣告——「默默無蚊」的。讓人們一看產品名就會覺得廠家別出心裁，會認為這產品質量肯定不錯。可是，當我們小學生看到後，在文章中也寫到「要做一個默默無蚊的人」時，那結果就不僅僅是令人一笑了之那麼簡單的事了。我還在書本中發現上面把「要」字印成了「耍」。我頓時驚呆了，原來書本也有出錯的時候！當然，我在寫作時也經常有錯字，如把「醫」字寫成「醫」字。我還喜歡把「基」字寫成「基」鬧出不少笑話。</p>
(Part of the chat history is omitted)	
<p>我曾經為「現在中文課程」結合 ViewSonic 的 myViewBoard 製作完整的互動式教材，學生不論是線上或實體都能透過個人裝置和教師教材進行互動，如果教學的教室有電子白板，還能讓學生上台和教材進行互動，我相信這樣的實例證明有能力勝任貴公司的工作的</p> <p>這個實例非常具體且令人印象深刻，你成功地結合了數位工具和互動元素，提升了教材的互動性和學習體驗。你的經驗顯示出你能夠創造具有價值的教學內容，並且運用科技工具來有效地支持學生的學習。</p> <p>吳達奇先生，感謝你的詳細回答。你在教材編輯和教學方面的經驗和想法非常令人欣賞。在你的回答中，你展現出了適應能力、創造力和對教育的熱情。我們會將你的面試表現納入考慮範圍，稍後我們將通知你有關進一步步驟的訊息。再次感謝你參與我們的面試！</p>	<p>您的文本看起來已經非常清晰，但我還是幫您指出一些可能的修正建議和錯誤：</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 將「停車場」改為「停車場」，語法和用詞錯誤。 將「燈峰造極」改為「登峰造極」，這是正確的用詞。 「騎樂無窮」、「快不容緩」之類廣告牌，應該是「騎樂無窮」、「快不容緩」。 「桂林這得虛名」應改為「桂林這失去美譽」，這樣表達更準確。 「要做一個默默無蚊的人」，將軍引號中的「蚊」改為「聞」，以修正用詞錯誤。 書本中的「要」字印成了「耍」，這是印刷錯誤。 「我還喜歡把「基」字寫成「基」，將「基」改為「使」，這是正確的用詞。 <p>以下是修正後的文本：</p> <p>大家好！我是「小啄木鳥」——陸詩綺。今天請和我一起去大街上找找錯別字吧！從學校出來，看到門前小賣部有一塊牌子上面寫著「往前500米停車場」。走去一看，原來是停車場，好一個「停」打不分呀！</p>
Situational Dialogue	Essay Review

Fig. 2. OpenAI (2023) the demo of the two DTM features

By using the HTML embedding technology in the Gamma. app, the digitalized AIGC with Edtech features and AI-powered features, such as situational dialogue, and essay review can be presented as a web-based DTM. (The prototypical web-based DTM link will be provided in the reference [15].)

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored how GenAI integrates with the TBCL for developing Chinese web-based DTMs. The research found that prompt engineering based on the unit outline of RTGA and a cross-referencing inspection platform (TMEAS) is required to overcome the potential hallucination issue since ChatGPT can't inherently recognize RTGA proficiency descriptors. The web-based DTM of the research shows the effectiveness of integrating GenAI in compiling DTM. While ChatGPT proves its value in generating teaching resources and aiding learners, platforms like LingoTeach.ai [17] highlight a more precise use

of GenAI in compiling DTM content, CoolE Bot [18] demonstrates applying chatbot to situational dialogue, and Linggle Write [19] presents how GenAI assists essay review. In conclusion, while GenAI's role in compiling DTMs or even language education is growing, the focus should be on enhancing the learning experience, with GenAI platforms potentially allowing educators to concentrate on tailored teaching and improving overall Chinese language education quality.

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Using Chatbots for Language Learning: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

The integration of chatbots into language learning has garnered significant attention due to their potential to revolutionize language acquisition processes. These intelligent conversational agents, powered by artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies, offer unique opportunities for interactive and personalized language learning experiences. Chatbots can enhance learner engagement, motivation, and proficiency by providing immediate feedback, engaging learners in authentic conversations, and offering language practice opportunities. This paper presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis using multiple publication databases and indexing services. By examining a wide range of scholarly publications, including journals, conference papers, and books, this analysis aims to gain valuable insights into using chatbots for language learning. The selected database and indexing services ensure the inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of the analysis, covering a diverse range of research publications. The analysis explores key research themes and trends in chatbot-based language learning. It identifies influential authors and research groups, highlighting their contributions and impact on the development of this domain. The analysis uncovers collaborative relationships and knowledge-sharing patterns among researchers by examining co-authorship networks, fostering potential collaborations and advancements within the field. Furthermore, the analysis investigates the interconnections between concepts in chatbot-based language learning. The study identifies the central concepts and their relationships by examining co-occurrence networks, providing an overview of the research landscape. This information helps identify prominent focus areas and potential research gaps, guiding future investigations and developing innovative approaches. The findings of this bibliometric analysis contribute to the current state of research on chatbots in language learning. They provide valuable insights into existing knowledge, research trends, and collaborative networks in this rapidly evolving field. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can benefit from these insights by understanding the current landscape more deeply, identifying potential research directions, and fostering collaborations.

Keywords: Chatbots, language learning, artificial intelligence, natural language processing, bibliometric analysis, research trends, collaborative networks, personalized learning

1. Introduction

The integration of chatbots into language learning has garnered significant attention in recent years due to their potential to revolutionize language acquisition processes. Chatbots, powered by artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies, offer unique opportunities for interactive and personalized language learning experiences. These intelligent conversational agents can provide learners with immediate feedback, engage them in authentic conversations, and offer language practice opportunities at their convenience. This research paper aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis using Scopus, a comprehensive catalog of scholarly papers, authors, and institutions, to gain valuable insights into using chatbots for language learning. By examining a wide range of scholarly publications, this analysis seeks to explore key research themes, identify influential authors and research groups, and uncover the interconnections between concepts in this rapidly evolving domain. Understanding the current state of research on chatbots in language learning is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it allows us to identify prominent themes and trends in the field, shedding light on areas that have received considerable attention from researchers. Secondly, it enables us to identify gaps and areas for further investigation, providing valuable guidance for future research endeavors. Thirdly, it offers insights into research collaborations and networks, fostering potential collaborations and knowledge sharing within the chatbot-based language learning community. To achieve these objectives, this study leverages Scopus as a comprehensive source of scholarly literature. Scopus provides researchers access to a vast collection of papers, ensuring the inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of the analysis. By utilizing these open and comprehensive catalogs, we ensure that our bibliometric study encompasses a wide

range of publications, allowing us to capture the breadth of research related to chatbots in language learning. By Systematically analyzing key terms, co-authorship networks, and term co-occurrence networks, this research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current research landscape in chatbot-based language learning. The findings of this analysis will inform researchers, practitioners, and policymakers about existing knowledge, potential research directions, and collaborative opportunities in this field. Ultimately, this research advances chatbot-based language-learning approaches and effective language-learning solutions.

2. Literature Review

The integration of chatbots into language learning has been the subject of extensive research. Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of chatbots in language learning contexts and highlighted their potential to enhance language acquisition processes. For instance, researchers conducted a systematic review demonstrating how chatbots can provide personalized and interactive learning experiences, promoting language practice and learner engagement [1]. Furthermore, chatbots have been found to offer immediate feedback, reducing the dependence on human instructors and fostering autonomous learning [2, 3, 4]. This aspect is particularly valuable in self-paced language learning environments, where instant guidance and correction are crucial. Researchers have also explored the role of chatbots in developing learners' speaking and listening skills through simulated conversations [5, 6]. These interactive dialogues provide learners with a controlled and supportive environment to practice their language skills, ultimately enhancing confidence and fluency. The utilization of natural language processing and machine learning techniques in chatbot-based language learning has also been investigated. Researchers studied chatbots' societal, technological, and educational benefits in language learning, and they found that chatbots provide a timely, accessible, personalized experience and promote coherent and open interactions [7]. Despite the progress made in this field, research gaps still need to be addressed. Based on this study findings, one area that requires further exploration is the design and development of chatbots that engage learners in meaningful and contextually relevant conversations. We noticed that more research is needed to understand the long-term impact of chatbot-based language learning and "the novelty effect" [8]. Another area is the impact of using chatbots on diverse learner populations, including children, adult learners, and individuals with different linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, while existing studies have primarily focused on the effectiveness of chatbots in specific language skills, such as speaking and listening, we realized the need for research that examines their impact on other language domains, such as reading and writing. Understanding the potential benefits and limitations of chatbots in these areas can inform the development of comprehensive language-learning solutions. The literature review underscores the significance of incorporating chatbots into language learning. It highlights their potential to provide personalized and interactive learning experiences, offer immediate feedback, and enhance learners' speaking and listening skills. However, based on the bibliometric analysis, we found that further research is required to address gaps in the literature concerning the design of contextually relevant chatbot interactions and their impact on different language domains and learner populations.

3. Methodology

Scopus is relevant to the study as it provides access to various academic publications related to the research topic. It allows researchers to retrieve relevant studies on using chatbots in language learning, including empirical research, theoretical papers, systematic reviews, and conference proceedings. The data collection process involved systematically searching the Scopus database using appropriate search terms related to chatbots and language learning. The search was performed for terms in the titles, abstracts, and keywords sections of each article. The keywords used in the Scopus search were chatbot, chatgpt, generative model, and language learning. The search code was described as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ((chatbot OR chatgpt OR "generative model") AND "language learning")

The methodology used in this bibliometric analysis follows the science mapping workflow described in [9]. It consists of the following steps: 1) data collection and saving, 2) data loading, 3) descriptive data analysis, and 4) data mapping and visualization. This study used R language with the package bibliometrix to implement the workflow.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Data Acquisition

Publications from the period (2004-2023) were retrieved from Scopus, stored, and analyzed, resulting in 116 records. The records were inspected to ensure they were relevant to the search query. Additionally, the metadata for each publication is extracted and stored in an R data frame, followed by a data cleaning process. An initial inspection of records shows that the annual publication growth rate is 21.27%, with an average of 13 citations per paper. These results indicate increased interest and research activity in “using chatbots for language learning” topic, especially within the last three years.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis calculated the main bibliometric measures of the collected dataset and the main information is summarized in Table. 1. Additionally, results show that multi-author publications count for 80% of the total publications, with an average of three authors per paper. The percentage of international co-authorships is 19.83%. The number of publications in each category is fifty-two journal articles, seven book chapters, forty-seven conference papers, four conference reviews, one editorial note, and four reviews. Haristiani N and Kohnke L are the top most productive authors, with five publications each. Moreover, the results show that the Education University of Hong Kong, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Institute of Cognitive Science, Keck School of Medicine of USC, and State University of Trade and Economics are the most relevant affiliations of authors. Collaboration between universities can bring about numerous benefits. Key advantages include knowledge and expertise sharing, research advancement, expanded resources, and Internationalization and global reach. The analysis revealed that the top countries in research production based on corresponding author affiliations are Hong Kong and China, Korea, the USA, and Indonesia. Each article was assigned to a single country based on the corresponding author affiliation. Fig. 1 (a) shows the top countries with the intra-country (SCP) and inter-country (MCP) collaboration indices. If we include all the authors from each publication, the USA will be ranked first, and the ranking will differ, as shown in Fig. 1 (b). Hong Kong and China are at the top of the list of the “most cited countries,” with 582 citations.

Table 1. Main descriptive information regarding the collection.

Description	
Publication Average Age (years)	2.7
Average citations per publication	12.7
Number of References	3926
Number of Keywords Plus (ID)	505
Number of Author's Keywords (DE)	346
Number of Authors	326

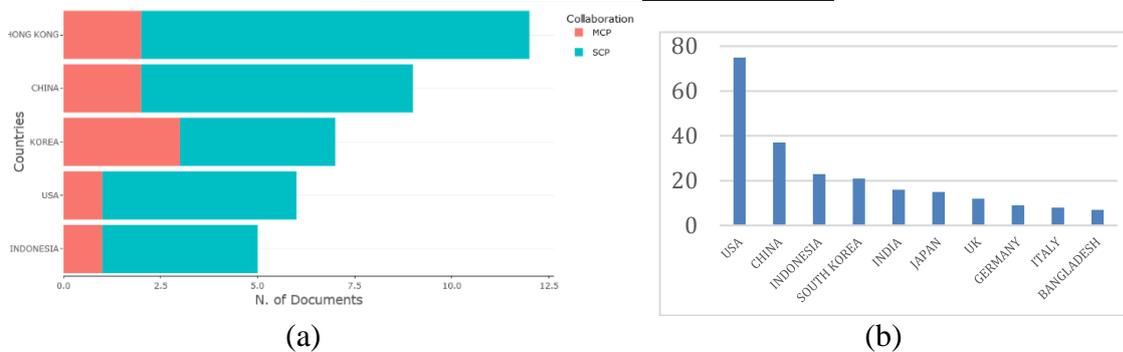


Fig. 1. (a) Corresponding Author's Top Countries in production with MCP and SCP indices. Results show that Korea has the best MCP ratio, which indicates more international collaborations with other countries. **(b)** Country scientific production measures the number of authors' appearances by country affiliations.

The publication “*Stimulating and sustaining interest in a language course: An experimental comparison of Chatbot and Human task partners*” has the highest number of citations, 161. In second place, the publication “*Chatbot learning partners: Connecting learning experiences, interest and competence*” has 131 citations. Table 2 shows the most frequent words based on keywords plus and author keywords. Keywords plus were extracted from each article references, mostly previous years. There are common terms between the two categories. Keywords plus reflect the main concepts in this topic and author keywords represent the articles’ content. Since chatgpt is a relatively new term, it is not present in the top keywords plus terms.

Table 2. Most frequent words and terms.

Terms from keywords plus	Frequency	Terms from author keywords	Frequency
language learning	31	chatbot	47
chatbot	31	language learning	24
learning systems	16	artificial intelligence	18
students	13	chatgpt	14
artificial intelligence	11	natural language processing	6
computer aided instruction	9	computer assisted language learning	5
computational linguistics	8	machine learning	4

4.3 Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual analysis can be approached through three different methods. Network analysis, which is widely used in bibliometric analyses. Factorial analysis, a technique for reducing data complexity. The third approach combines elements from previous techniques called thematic maps and evolution. In this study, we utilized conceptual analysis to identify key themes and research hotspots, create visualization of bibliometric data, and understand the evolution of different topics. In Fig. 2, we created a thematic map based on all bigrams (pairs of consecutive written terms) extracted from the publications’ abstracts. We used stemming, a process to reduce each word to its stem. Co-word analysis draws clusters of keywords that appeared in the same document. We used the Walktrap algorithm for clustering and limited the node label to the top two bigrams. The node size is based on the total number of term occurrences.

4.4 Social Structure Analysis

We constructed the co-authorship network to study the social structure and uncover the collaborative relationships and knowledge-sharing patterns among researchers. The co-authorship or scientific collaboration network is composed of authors as nodes and co-authorships as links.

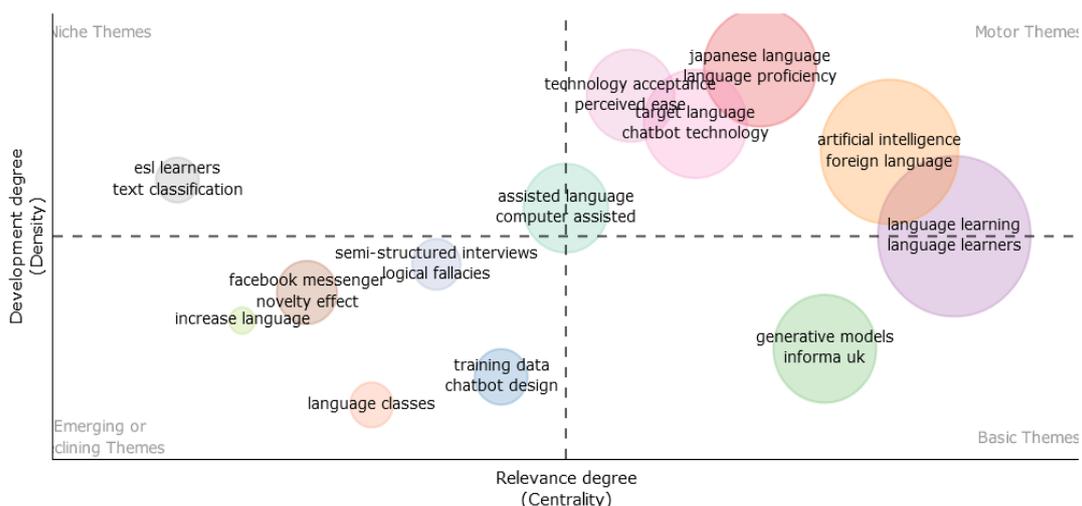


Fig. 2. The thematic map displays clusters and bigrams identified by co-occurrence network analysis from 2004 to 2023. It categorizes themes into four quadrants based on centrality (importance) and density (development): motor themes (highly developed and essential), isolated themes (highly developed but less significant), emerging or declining themes (weakly developed and marginal), and primary/transversal themes (general topics spanning research areas).

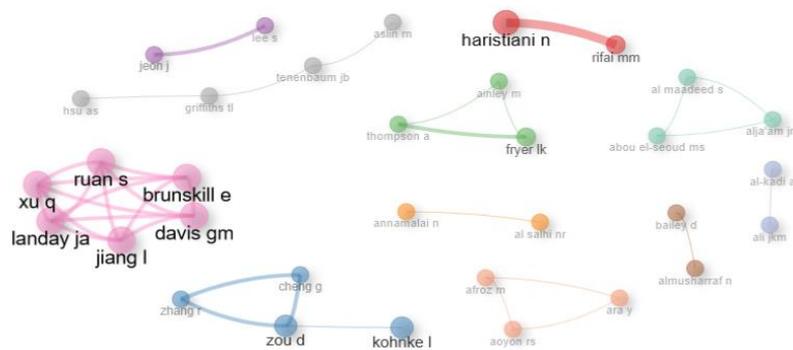


Fig. 3. The collaboration network reveals research groups investigating specific topics and their relationships, including identifying the most prominent research group in the analyzed area.

Co-authorship is widely recognized as one of the most extensively documented forms of scientific collaboration. Fig. 3 shows a total of 11 research groups for this topic. The biggest group comprises six authors, and four out of eleven groups are composed of only two members.

5. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper conducted a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of using chatbots for language learning. The integration of chatbots into language learning is a promising approach due to their ability to provide personalized and interactive experiences. The analysis identified key research themes, influential authors, and collaborative networks in this field. The findings contribute insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, enabling a deeper understanding of the current landscape and fostering collaborations. Our future work will examine additional publication databases and utilize more bibliometric analyses at the institution and country levels.

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Language and Society

The Role of Community Context in Italian as Second Language Learning in Perugia

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Abstract

Second Language Acquisition is a field of learning in which the contextual factor is crucial. According to several studies, circumstances outside the home country can help foreign language learning. Study abroad, in fact, is considered a prime context in language learning because it provides contextualized exposure [1]. Moreover, according to some investigations, during the “dipping” abroad, students achieve socio-cultural, linguistic, actional and strategic competences [2]. These outcomes are possible thanks to the role of the community, especially if it has an active role in language learning.

In the present paper has been carried out research on the possibility of applying a community engagement approach to Italian as a Second Language students [3]. The aim is to show how much the community role is important in language learning and which are the competences that students acquire. The study case is settled in the city of Perugia and participants attend a language school. Students were asked to fill in a questionnaire with items regarding their competences and behaviors within the community. By doing preliminary study, a sociocultural survey has been made. The model of the questionnaire is the “SCAS-R” [4]. Students were asked to specify their level of agreement to a set of statements in a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The data has been analyzed with a quantitative method and has been represented in a pie chart and in a histogram. Finally, mean has been calculated.

The research findings demonstrate that students enhance sociocultural and language competences and cross-cutting skills. Thus, these results could be the prove that Italian as Second Language class could be a breeding ground for community engagement. The goal is to share with the scientific community some insights to trace possible future lines of research.

Keywords: SLA, community engagement, sociocultural survey, Italian L2.

1. Introduction

Language and culture represent a closely intertwined duo rich in connections and meanings that cannot be dissociated. Therefore, when teaching a foreign language, it is imperative to impart not only the language itself but also the associated culture. Culture embodies the people who speak a language and furthermore encapsulates its past, present, and future. From a pragmatic-cultural perspective [5], the learning of a foreign language inherently includes the culturally affiliated models. In fact, in order to be a part of a social system, an individual must possess socio-cultural proficiency in addition to linguistic mastery. The community, therefore, serves as a fundamental resource from which students can draw to acquire a new language or reinforce their existing knowledge [2].

The objective of this study is to comprehend which Italian socio-cultural aspects exert greater influence than others and to assess the competencies of Italian L2 students regarding certain behaviors within Italian society. The study was conducted in the city of Perugia, within a private school offering Italian as a second language. This constitutes a preliminary study that is hoped to pave the way for new research avenues in the field.

2. Communicative Competence

It is beneficial to frame the context of intercultural competence within the broader framework of communicative competence. Throughout history, communication has been an essential element for human interaction [6]. When applied to foreign languages, communication becomes necessary for the circulation and exchange of various languages and associated cultures. Consequently, communication occurs within communicative events [7], which are characterized by a specific social situation within a particular social context [8].

In Italy, the communicative approach that emerged in the 1970s is built upon these principles. At its core is the belief that effective communication requires linguistic competence, which must be complemented by pragmatic and sociocultural competence to ensure communication is not only efficient but also appropriate. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish among the three dimensions of sociocultural competence: sociolinguistic, everyday culture (way of life), and reference values, which represent the civilization of a particular people (way of thinking). In agreement with Balboni, "communicative competence is a mental reality that manifests itself as performance in the world" [8]. Now, we aim to adapt this competence to the intercultural context, where the number of languages and cultures to consider is greater.

2.1 Intercultural Competence and Communication

In the first decade of the 21st century, Caon closely monitored the evolution of the concepts of culture and civilization within the field of language teaching [9]. It is worth noting that since the 1960s, these concepts have been in constant evolution, as culture itself undergoes continuous change. This phenomenon is also driven by the fact that nowadays, thanks to technology and the economy, people from various nationalities can live in the same territory [10]. While culture was initially considered primarily useful for interacting with foreign populations in the late 1960s, in the 2000s, the intercultural domain has become so vast that it is impossible to teach just one form of intercultural communication. It has, therefore, been necessary to devise a model for the analysis and description of intercultural communication that considers the theorization of intercultural communicative competence.

To achieve this, it is important to take into consideration certain concepts and consequences. In this regard, the term "acculturation" is used to describe the process by which an individual gradually acquires a culture different from their native one over time. This occurs at the level of the learner, who is influenced by the social distance between their native culture and the new "diversity" [11]. In addition to distance and diversity, there are other intrinsic factors that affect this process, such as the individual's personality and attachment to their home country's culture, as well as extrinsic factors such as how the hosting society receives the individual [10].

The concept of acculturation is closely tied to the concept of culture shock. This is the initial phase during which the student perceives the cultural differences between their native culture and the culture of arrival sharply. Feelings of indecision, sadness due to separation, and estrangement are indicative of this phenomenon. This phase is much more pronounced in an L2 (second language) context, such as studying a language abroad or participating in a university exchange program, like the American "study abroad period," for instance. According to Schuman [12], the greater the social distance between the two cultures, the more difficult it will be for the learner to acquire the second language. This concept is closely connected to the culture and society in which the language is embedded, making these elements just as important as lexical elements.

2.1.1 Cross-cultural Difficulties

During the socio-cultural adaptation of an individual, it is easy to encounter obstacles, particularly when knowledge of the culture and society associated with the language is acquired indirectly. An example of this is the association of Italy with pizza and pasta. Stereotypes, often formed through generalizing an element or characteristic, minimalizing meaning, and transforming the unknown into something familiar resembling a typology encountered in everyday life [13], tend to arise in such situations.

For this reason, it is important to understand how interculturality, differences, and stereotypes can be measured among L2 learners. Within the sociocultural elements, there is, as previously mentioned, the category of extralinguistic elements that encompasses all aspects beyond grammatical competence. Failing to comprehend the cultural dimension of language represents a hurdle for learners. It can happen that students become "fluent fools," individuals who speak a foreign language - in this case, Italian - proficiently but do not grasp its social and philosophical dimension. Students may, in fact, overestimate their abilities, giving a negative impression to native speakers of the community and potentially stumbling into diplomatic incidents [14].

2.1.2 Intercultural Communication Model

At this point, it is essential to attempt to identify a model that incorporates the element of interculturality in communication. As emphasized by Balboni and Caon in 2015 [15], in this case, the communicative event involves two native speakers who have two different cultures and languages, meaning there are multiple elements to consider. We can refer to variables that change depending on the language. Furthermore, within this model, specific relational skills are included, without which intercultural communication is unlikely to occur smoothly. Among these skills are "strangeness" and "decentering," which allow the speaker-actor to emotionally distance themselves from the situation to avoid creating filters. Associated with these skills are also "suspension of judgment" and "relativization,"

which imply that one culture is not superior to another, and each can fully represent a people [16]. Finally, in intercultural communication, the ability to negotiate meanings is essential.

2.1.3 How to Gauge the Sociocultural Competence

After clarifying what is meant by intercultural competence, along with potential challenges, and mentioning a model of intercultural communication, it's important to discuss how to measure and assess this competence.

Several tools are available to assess the intercultural sensitivity and competence of individuals involved in encounters between diverse cultures. Among the most common tools are the "Cross-cultural World-Mindedness Scale" (CCWMS), the "Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory" (ISI), and the "Sociocultural Adaptation Scale" (SCAS) [17]. These assessment scales take into account an individual's attitudes and abilities to adapt and change within a cultural context different from their own.

In this case study, the scale used was inspired by the SCAS-R, which is the revised version of the SCAS in 2013 by Wilson [18]. Originally developed for a study on the intercultural transition of Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand, the SCAS has become a reference tool for assessing and self-assessing individuals' social and cultural adaptation in a different context [19]. Within this scale, there are items related to interpersonal communication, academic and/or work performance, personal interests, involvement in the host community, and language proficiency, to name a few.

3. Case of Study: The Role of Community Context in Italian L2 Students in Perugia

The study was conducted at an Italian language school located in the city of Perugia. This private institution has been actively engaged in teaching Italian to foreigners since 1986. Within the school, students from various parts of the world attend Italian language courses for varying durations, both short and long, with the aim of learning the Italian language.

In addition to the traditional language courses, which focus on the development of morphosyntactic and communicative skills, the school also organizes cultural activities that allow students to immerse themselves in the social reality of the city of Perugia. For these reasons, a selection of representative students was chosen for the administration of the questionnaire.

3.1 Materials and Methods

3.1.1 Participants

A total of 26 students participated in the research. The majority of participants were male (14) compared to female students (12). The student sample was diverse and broad in terms of age, nationality, and native language. Most of the participants fell into the age range of 51 to 70 years (13). The sample included individuals of various nationalities, with a significant portion being American, German, and Dutch nationals. Additionally, some participants had non-European nationalities. There was a wide range of native languages represented among the participants, with English and German being the most common, followed by Arabic and Dutch. The interviewed student sample consisted of Italian learners spanning various proficiency levels, ranging from A1 to C1. Specifically, the most common proficiency levels were B1 and B2. The duration of the Italian course varied from one week to over three months, depending on the length of time students attended classes.

3.1.2 Methods and Analysis

Participants were given a paper questionnaire that they could complete either synchronously or asynchronously. The maximum time allowed for completing the questionnaire was ten minutes. Some students filled it out on their last day of Italian language course. It was associated with the school's final feedback questionnaire that students are typically asked to complete at the end of their stay in Perugia.

The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first part collects demographic information, and the second part contains items for self-assessing the participants' level of sociocultural competence. The input instruction for the students was as follows: "Thinking about life in Italy, please rate your competency level at each of the following behaviors." For self-assessment of these competencies, as mentioned earlier, the SCAS-R scale was used as a reference point. The fifteen items were based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents incompetence (= not at all competent), and 5 represents extreme competence (= extremely competent).

With the collected data, the mean and standard deviation were then calculated to examine the consistency of the values provided by the participants. Finally, some data were cross-referenced using Pivot tables.

4. Results

From the data analysis, it becomes evident that factors such as the participants' Italian language proficiency and their native language are important, even decisive, in determining the values chosen to indicate their sociocultural competencies during their time in Italy. Participants belonging to the "B" level of the CEFR [20], categorized as "independent level," exhibited greater competency in various sociocultural behaviors during their life in Italy. Only the significant results obtained from the analysis of participants' responses are reported here. Among the fifteen items to be evaluated, some were more interesting than others, primarily based on the responses provided by the students. Below is the Pivot table (Table 1) with selected items (5, 10, 13, 14) and the evaluation of these items based on the participants, categorized in this case according to their Italian language proficiency level and native language. The items considered relate to the ability to correctly interpret gestures and facial expressions (5) and changes in pace (10), manners (13), and social behavior (14) depending on the situational context in which the communicative act occurs.

Table 1. Pivot table summarizing survey results

Ita Level & 1st language	Item 5	Item 14	Item 13	Item 10
Arabic	3,5	3,8	4,8	4,3
B1	1,0	1,0	4,0	4,0
B2	4,3	4,7	5,0	4,3
Dutch	3,7	3,5	3,0	2,3
A2	#DIV/0!	3,0	3,0	2,0
B1	3,7	3,7	3,0	2,3
English	3,7	3,6	3,3	2,4
A1	4,0	3,0	2,0	1,0
A2	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0
B1	4,3	4,7	4,0	3,0
B2	3,5	3,0	3,5	2,5
German	3,3	3,4	3,6	2,7
A1	3,0	4,0	3,0	2,0
A2	3,0	3,0	3,0	2,3
B1	3,0	3,0	3,0	3,0
B2	4,0	4,0	5,0	3,5
Lithuanian	5,0	5,0	5,0	5,0
C1	5,0	5,0	5,0	5,0
Norwegian	4,0	5,0	3,0	2,0
B2	4,0	5,0	3,0	2,0
Spanish	4,5	5,0	4,0	4,0
A2	4,5	5,0	4,0	4,0
Totale complessivo	3,7	3,8	3,7	3,0

Item 5: Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions.

Item 14: Changing my behavior to suit social norms, rules, and attitudes.

Item 13: Expressing my ideas to other students in a culturally appropriate manner.

Item 10: Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner.

The table clearly demonstrates how the proximity of the native language to Italian is an important factor. It is noticeable that in the case of Spanish, this similarity led to the choice of high values, despite the participant's lower Italian proficiency level (A2). Conversely, those who have Arabic as their native language do not feel very competent in these communicative acts, despite having a threshold level of Italian (B1).

It is evident that the participants' choices are influenced not only by their linguistic abilities but also by personal factors. Intrinsic elements like personality, such as being introverted or extroverted, and extrinsic factors like customs and practices are some examples. Furthermore, the duration of the stay in Italy is another influential factor: from the analysis of the collected data, it becomes clear that the longer the period spent in Perugia, the greater the competencies of the participants.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, after mentioning some of the numerous reference theories, ranging from communicative competence to sociocultural adaptation, and after analyzing the results of a preliminary study, it can be affirmed that the community plays a significant role in education. In the context of teaching Italian as a second language, it is important for the development of sociocultural competencies in students.

This paper presented a preliminary study based on a limited sample of students. It is hoped that in the future, this line of research can be further pursued to support the thesis.

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Mother Tongue & Its Effect in Early Childhood Music Learning; A Study of Selected Nursery Schools in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

*Music is as vital as life. It is a *sin quo non* in the day-to-day living of a man and the best, most accessible language that children understand better. Music is a language of the soul; hence, it touches the emotions of man to cause a change in the character and behavior of the listener. Music affects all aspects of children's learning and life, but the means of communication of this one crucial subject remains paramount if its effect will be lasting. Mother tongue is the native language of a people, the language they are born and raised in. It is the language that defines who they are and tells them everything about them. Teaching children from home to school in their mother tongue helps them learn their native music and other music's as well as other subjects. This paper examines mother tongue's effect on early childhood music learning. The data for this study was collected through questionnaire and interview methods from a few mothers and some teachers in the selected Nursery Schools and drawn from the findings. The findings show collective opinions on the study. Both the mothers and the nursery teachers agreed that using the mother tongue in their teaching and learning activity at home and in school is very encouraging and overwhelming, hence the advocate for the continual use of the mother tongue in the state.*

Keywords: Music, Early Childhood, Mother tongue, Music learning and Its effect.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-tribe and bilingual Nation that adopted English Language as a general language of study and official language from home to school. The use of the English language has so much affected all families that there is little of the mother tongue spoken at home and in school, and this, if not addressed, mother tongue will be a thing of the past for the children as they grow; and will lead to loss of their identity since language is one fundamental fact of identity.

Objective / Statement of the Problem

This paper aims at advocacy for the use of mother tongue in a child's upbringing, as well as a means of communication through music in their teaching and learning activities in Nigerian Schools, beginning from the home. This advocacy is as a result of a constant observation that most families rarely speak their mother tongue at home, let alone teach their children their native language. Most of these families prefer speaking English, which should naturally be a second language; this has resulted in children's ignorant of their identity, their native language and even their native culture. This is a very bad sign and a stepping stone to a complete annihilation of a people's identity.

Research Questions

The questions for this research are: 1) Is mother tongue the best to be used in communication both at home and school more than English Language? 2) Does the use of mother tongue make teaching and learning easier than with English language, with children in early childhood? 3) Does Music in addition with mother tongue make teaching and learning easier in early childhood classes?

Methodology

Survey Research Design was adopted for this work. The population for the study stood at 15 mothers and 30 nursery school teachers drawn from Awka South of Anambra State Nigeria, sampled out from a vast number of the schools and their teachers. Structured questionnaires bothering on forced answers with the Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) were constructed, and the questions bothering on the objective of the study were distributed to the population and collected back for analysis using simple percentage against each test item by the researcher. Thus, the category which pooled greatest number of responses was used as an indicator for predicting the opinion of the population.

Literature Review

1.1 Music

Music is an aesthetic art of combining or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear (Agu, 2006, p. 1). Little wonder it is seen and regarded as the language of the soul since it appeals to all, irrespective of colour, race or age. Music is a lovely asset that can affect our mental and emotional states and moods. It acts very positively on the general development of children in intellectual, emotional, psychological, and social. Children enjoy making music; singing and dancing to music melodies give them great joy, energy, and motivation. Exposing them to music quite early in life helps them learn about sounds and the meaning of words, which later in their lives, lead to their knowledge of mathematics and the sciences. Music-making inspires and stirs children's motor skills and creativity; it keeps them busy in any assignment, even when they are almost giving up. It enhances their self-esteem and self-expression while building their memory skills. Esimone (2014:5) observed that when children listen to music, they respond with their whole feelings and emotions, manipulative skills through intellectual means and a combination of all. When music is taught, performed and exposed to children in their mother tongue, it enhances their identity and makes them confident of who they are.

1.2 Early Childhood

Early Childhood is a time between birth and eight years of age. Psychologists believe that brains witness maximum development within this age. It is a curious age. Moral, social, psychological, academic and physiological development stages occur within this period. Any mistake in their upbringing at this age meets with little or no remedy in correction; hence, it requires carefulness and strong determination in shaping their developmental stages. In agreeing with the above, UNESCO defines early Childhood as the period between birth and eight years of age. To them, it is when the child's brain is susceptible to the environment surrounding them; and it is a time of remarkable growth that requires a specialized approach that ensures this age learns critical skills and foundational concepts to prepare them for future life and endeavors. UNESCO believes so much in early childhood care and education, called in short form ECCE, an entirely inclusive education rather than just preparation for primary school. To them, early childhood learning can be the foundation for emotional well-being (unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education).

1.3 Mother Tongue

Mother tongue is also called "native language". It is the language a child is born and raised in from his origin country and which should dominate the young or growing age of the child. A child may be born in another country other than the parent's original country; the language of that country, whether English or another, is not the child's native language. Though the English language seems to have dominated the universe, to nations other than the original owners of the English language, English is not their native language. Nigeria adopted English as a second and an official language, but it is not the native language or the mother tongue of Nigerians. Mother tongue is very crucial to the identity of a child because it helps the child value his identity, culture and heritage and helps that child build a positive self-esteem and concept. Mother tongue further allows a child to communicate with fellow natives and bond with them. It enables the child to understand and appreciate the history of his ancestors, which defines what he represents. The importance of mother tongue in a child's upbringing can never be over-emphasized. The advocacy for mother tongue to be the lingua franca of all nations, especially in Nigeria, is very crucial now. Nigeria uses the English Language in the teaching and learning activities from pre-primary to tertiary institutions of learning, yet understanding things taught to many pupils and students has remained a struggle. No language in the world should beat the native language or mother tongue of a people, hence the advocate for using it from the home, especially in Nigeria. Using the mother tongue to raise children in early Childhood benefits the parents, teachers and the children in early learning.

1.4 Music Learning

Music learning is the ability of children to learn music within and outside of formal teaching and learning. Plato and Aristotle, the great philosophers, believed music can alter or change the listener's character, behaviour or disposition. To them, music plays a significant role in the upbringing of children so long as proper consideration of the type of music the children are allowed to listen to and perform is taken care of. Although music has a lot of great things that positively influence a child's lifestyle, it also has many negative influences it can give a child if not properly guided. Learning has had many definitions and impacts of what it could do from learning theories like the Skinners, Thorndike and Bloom. However, Bloom's theory touched on all aspects of the children's lives and learning. Bloom considered three areas: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains on which life activities thrive. He believes the cognitive domain deals with the mental skills that involve recognizing and recalling concepts, specific facts and procedural patterns that lead to developing intellectual abilities and skills. The affective domain deals with feelings, emotional growth, motivations, attitudes, values, enthusiasm, and appreciation. The psychomotor domain takes care of the physical activities, demonstrating learning. All these three domains of learning theory are what music learning thrives to achieve. When children get acquainted with music learning even from home, and it is learnt in mother tongue, the result is that the three domains of knowledge experience conspicuous development.

1.5 The Effects of Music Learning on Early Childhood

The effects of music learning through the mother tongue on early childhood children are unquantifiable. Most mothers start theirs while carrying the baby in their womb, especially if she is a singing mum. With this the baby is said to have started his music class, and that goes a long way to creating a bond between the child and the mother. Nnamani (2004) concurred that the average Nigerian child begins to respond to music right from the cradle. The child starts quite early to acquire some experiences in life through rhythmic activities he receives as he is on his mother's back or claps rhythms in-game songs and other songs the mother makes to him/her; and that as early as six months of age, some children begin to respond to music by moving to drum, and through these musical experiences around a child, musical sounds and patterns are already formed for the child before pre-primary schooling. As this continues, the child's brain is developing, his social relationship is growing, and his emotional stability is established, as do other aspects of his development.

Findings from the Structured Research Questionnaire and Interview

Research Question One

The research question which states thus: "Is mother tongue the best to be used in communication both at home and school more than English Language?" was evaluated using three text items and four options to choose from, Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 1. The table contains the test items, the number of respondents that chose the available options together with the worked-out percentages. More than 50% of the respondents (i.e., 53.3%) strongly agreed that mother tongue is best used for communication than English Language at home. Out of the 45 respondents, it was only 3 and 2 respondents (a total of 5 respondents) that disagreed and strongly disagreed with that assertion, respectively. Similarly, considering the 2nd test item of Table 1 which states that children understand with mother tongue faster than with English Language, 60% and 28.9% Strongly Agreed and Agreed, respectively with the test item. Only 4.4% and 6.7% disagreed and strongly disagreed with that, respectively.

Table 1. Results of Respondents to Research Question1 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 1 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Mother tongue is best used for communication than English Language at home	24	16	3	2	45
		(53.3)	(35.6)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
2	Children understands with mother tongue faster than with English Language	27	13	2	3	45
		(60.0)	(28.9)	(4.4)	(6.7)	(100)
3	The use of mother tongue in the family puts everyone at ease than with English Language	28	13	3	1	45
		(62.2)	(28.9)	(6.7)	(2.2)	(100)

As regards the 3rd test item of research question 1 which states that the use of mother tongue in the family puts everyone at ease than with the English Language equally followed the same trend of positive alignment. Specifically, 62.2% strongly agreed and 28.9% agreed with that. This left out less than 10% for those that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the test item. Overall, for majority poll in the four-categorical opinions expressed by the respondents strongly agreed in all the 3 test items. Hence, the Use of mother tongue is most preferred for communication by the members of the family than with English Language. It is easier to understand and makes everyone feel at ease in the use of it than with English Language.

Research Question Two

The research question two states: “Does the use of mother tongue make teaching and learning easier than with English language, with children in early childhood?” This question was equally evaluated using three text items with the four options to choose from. The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 2. It can easily be seen that over 90% (i.e., 62.2% and 31.1%) supports test item 1 of research question 2. Less than 10% (i.e., 4.4% and 2.3%) opposed the assertion. Equally, majority of the respondents strongly agreed (polled 60.0%) and agreed (polled 28.9%) to test item 2.

Table 2. Results of Respondents to Research Question 2 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 2 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Teaching and learning activities with the children is easier with Mother tongue than with English Language	28	14	2	1	45
		(62.2)	(31.1)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)
2	Children enjoy the class when Mother Tongue is used than when English language is used	27	13	3	2	45
		(60.0)	(28.9)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
3	Teachers and Pupils flow in communication with each other with the Mother Tongue than with English Language	27	15	2	1	45
		(60.0)	(33.3)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)

The same trend was repeated in test item 3 of Table 2. In fact, the 3rd test showed only 3 respondents (i.e., less than 10%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with it while the other 42 respondents (i.e., over 90%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the assertion.

Research Question Three

The research question Three states: “Does Music in addition with mother tongue make teaching and learning easier in early childhood classes?”

This question was also evaluated using three text items with the four options to choose from. The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 3.

Close to 90% (i.e., 55.6% and 33.3%) of the respondents support test item 1, which states that music makes teaching and learning activity enjoyable for both the children and the teachers? Almost 90% (i.e., 62.2% and 26.7%) of the respondents rejected the assertion which states that music makes teaching and learning very dull and difficult to understand for children. In the 3rd test item of research question 2, only 3 out of the 45 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that music puts the children at ease and makes learning faster and easier for the children. Over 90% (i.e., 64.4% and 28.9%) agreed and strongly agreed with the assertion. In sum, Table 3 proves that Music makes teaching and learning activities in Early Childhood Education easier, faster and fun for both the teachers and the Children.

Table 3. Results of Respondents to Research Question 3 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 2 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Music makes teaching and learning activity enjoyable for both the children and teachers	25	15	3	2	45
		(55.6)	(33.3)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
2	Music makes teaching and learning very dull and difficult to understand for children	3	2	28	12	45
		(6.7)	(4.4)	(62.2)	(26.7)	(100)
3	Music puts the children at ease and makes learning faster and easier for the children	29	13	2	1	45
		(64.4)	(28.9)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)

Overall, all the 3 test items for the 3 research questions were compared with the interview conducted in this study. It was observed that the findings from the respondents are in agreement with the interview conducted which validates the findings.

Summary, Recommendation & Conclusion

The advocate for making the Nigerian Mother tongues the first language rather than the English language is very important at this time. Making English a national official language is important if all the members of the Nigerian Nation must communicate, but, English Language should not be made the first Language for all the multi-ethnic members of the Nation and even forced the schools to use English Language for their teaching and learning activities from kindergarten to Tertiary institutions. Curriculum developers should have all the ethnic members as board members to decide on which books should be used in schools and such books should be written in the languages of the ethnic members so that even though the books are the same, the language for teaching and learning is done in the ethnic language of those involved, while the English language is studied and used as a second language generally and everywhere even in the offices.

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Phraseology and Language Attrition in an International School Context

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Abstract

First language attrition, the partial forgetting of one's mother tongue due to extensive exposure to a second language, is typically studied in migrants with limited native language input. However, this phenomenon is increasingly observed in international schools where English is the primary medium of instruction. This qualitative case study investigates the link between second language exposure and the decline of phraseological units in the native language within English-medium international schools. The study involves a semi-structured interview with a secondary school student in Azerbaijan. Continuous second language exposure has led to L2 interference at a phraseological level. Findings reveal that academic and sociolinguistic factors influence the deterioration of native language performance, depending on the quality and quantity of second language input. NVivo software was employed to assist in interview transcription, coding, and thematic analysis. The results illustrate the challenges faced by the participant in maintaining native language proficiency in an English-dominated environment, leading to language attrition, miscommunications, and altered phraseological units.

Keywords: attrition, crosslinguistic interference, phraseology, international schools

1. Introduction

Language attrition refers to the decline in native language proficiency due to reduced use, often occurring when individuals adopt a second language (L2) as their primary means of communication [1]. These changes in the proficiency of the first language (L1) are affected by sociolinguistic factors (gender, age, class, occupation, education level, etc.) [2] and the speaker's linguistic environment [1]. The existing body of scholarly work on language attrition exhibits a notable trend towards investigations conducted within immigrant settings, while relatively limited attention has been dedicated to exploring language attrition phenomena within the context of international schools where English serves as the medium of instruction. This study explores the connection between L2 exposure and its impact on native speakers' proficiency in using phraseological units in their L1, highlighting language attrition dynamics in educational settings. Phraseology encompasses the fixed expressions, idioms, and formulaic language patterns that play a crucial role in native-like language use. Phraseological attrition, within the context of language attrition, refers to the erosion of these linguistic elements. Research indicates that individuals who predominantly use an L2 may exhibit alterations in their use of phraseological units [3]. They might rely more on literal or non-idiomatic language, leading to less native-like language production. Phraseological attrition is particularly evident in bilingual and multilingual communities, where individuals navigate between multiple languages and cultural contexts. This dynamic interplay can impact their ability to maintain a rich repertoire of idiomatic expressions in each language.

2. Methodology

Qualitative research is employed in applied linguistics to explore the extent to which individuals interact with experiences and phenomena in specific contexts [4]. This study investigates the connection between the quality and quantity of L2 input and the understanding and use of phraseological units in L1 within an international school setting. To gain a deeper understanding of language attrition, a qualitative case study approach was adopted [5] which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon from a first-hand source.

An instrumental case study design was chosen to examine language attrition from a broader perspective rather than focusing on solving a particular case [5]. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, incorporating pre-designed closed questions while allowing flexibility for open-ended inquiries [6]. This approach encouraged the participant to share his insights beyond the structured questions.

2.1 Population and Sampling

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized, given the specific focus on high school students in international schools experiencing language attrition [5]. The educational background of the participant, an 18-year-old high school student, includes primary education with Russian as the medium of instruction, followed by a transition to an international school where English became the primary language of instruction. The shift to the international stream resulted in the removal of Russian from the curriculum for the past four years of secondary education. Provided that the participant is a school student, ethical considerations were paramount in this research to protect participants' rights and maintain research integrity [7]. The participant was provided with comprehensive information about the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. The participant was also informed that his involvement was entirely voluntary. Ethical approval was granted by the school principal, ensuring the study's anonymity and adherence to ethical standards.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was centered on semi-structured interviews, exploring various aspects of language attrition, including daily language use, changes in L1 proficiency, challenges with idioms and phraseological units, L2 influence on the native tongue, and attitudes toward language attrition. Conducted in a one-on-one setting, these interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the participant's experiences and perceptions.

NVivo, a transcription software with versatile capabilities, was selected for its efficiency in transcribing qualitative interviews [5]. This choice simplified the transcription process, reducing the potential for errors compared to manual transcription. It ensured systematic segmentation and categorization of transcribed textual data, enhancing accuracy and consistency [8].

Thematic analysis, a widely accepted method in qualitative linguistic research, served as the cornerstone of data analysis [9]. This systematic approach is particularly well-suited for exploring intricate patterns and thematic nuances within qualitative data. It also aligns with the complexity of language use and attrition phenomena in linguistic research [10].

The coding process began with a deductive approach, applying predetermined codes based on research questions and objectives. Codes such as "Use of English (L2)", "Use of Russian (L1)", "Attitude", and "Language Attrition" are assigned to relevant segments of text. "Language Attrition" is further categorized into sub-codes: "Challenges", "L1 Interference", "Impact", and "Examples". This systematic approach ensured the consistent categorization and organization of data [8]. Table 1 demonstrates the retrieved codes and sub-codes, and the number of references in the interview.

Table 1. Codes and sub-codes

Codes and sub-codes	No of references
Use of English	3
Use of Russian	5
Attitude	2
Language attrition	20
Challenges	3
L1 Interference	2
Impact	9
Examples	6

An inductive approach was subsequently employed, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. This iterative process involved repeated reading and coding of interview transcripts, uncovering recurrent patterns and meaningful connections.

Themes were derived from coded data, and continuous discussions with the data enhanced the precision and clarity of identified categories (Figure 1). The overarching theme, "Decline in L1 Proficiency", underscores the central focus of the research. Sub-themes include "Impact on Communication", "L1 Interference in L2", "Decreased Input in L1", and "Efforts to Maintain L1".

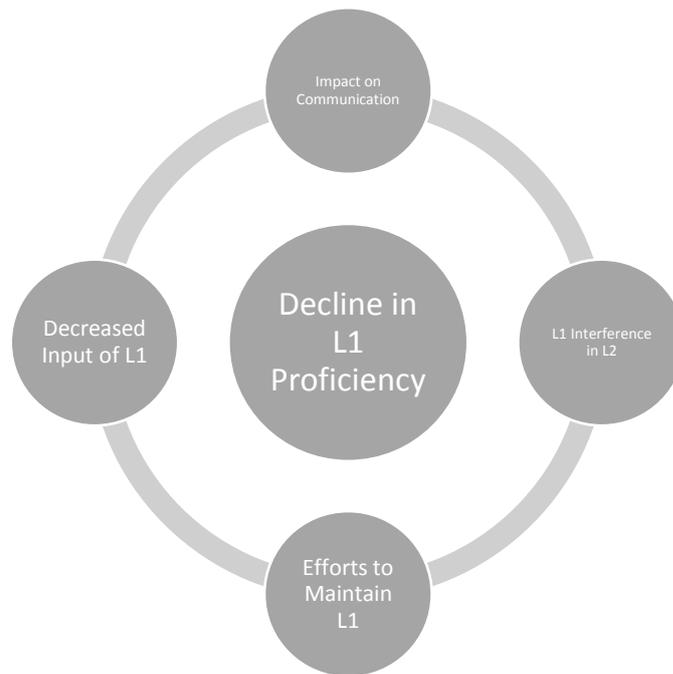


Figure 1. Themes

3. Discussion

This study contributes to the existing literature on language attrition and cross-linguistic influence (L2 to L1) by examining the participant's experiences within an international school context. The findings align with prior research indicating that L2 exposure, particularly in academic settings, can impact an individual's native language [1] [11].

The participant's self-identified decline in Russian proficiency, especially in writing and idiomatic usage, provides evidence of language attrition. What stands out in the participant's narrative are instances where language attrition resulted in miscommunication and confusion. For example, the participant shared, "I might say that something smells funny. And in Russian, I would say, 'смешно пахнет'. And he couldn't understand a word I was saying". This miscommunication occurred due to the direct translation of the phraseological unit "to smell funny" into Russian, which is interpreted as "to smell ridiculous". This illustrates how language attrition can lead to phrases that make sense to the speaker but bewilder the listener, showcasing the real-world consequences of language attrition and lost meanings in translation.

Similarly, the participant recalled a situation where their choice of words in Russian led to misunderstandings: "One time my dad was trying to pick me up, and I tried to say that I was down the road. And in Russian, I said 'я был внизу по дороге', which also didn't make any sense to him". This phraseological expression's direct translation, "to be down the street", led to an argument with the participant's father. In Russian, this phrase literally means "to go down the slope", but for the participant, who retained the English definition, it meant "some distance away from the same street". These instances of language attrition highlight both the decline in linguistic proficiency and the challenges in effectively conveying intended messages.

The influence of L2 on the participant's L1 is evident in occasional interferences and misunderstandings, reflecting the complexities of maintaining proficiency in a multilingual context. Furthermore, the participant's attitudes toward language attrition reveal a pragmatic approach, emphasizing the practicality of using English for academic and future professional endeavors.

These findings underscore the challenges faced by the participant in preserving L1 proficiency while studying in an English-dominant environment, highlighting the intricate nature of language attrition [1] [12]. As English increasingly becomes the medium of instruction worldwide, the implications of language attrition gain significance in educational contexts.

4. Conclusion

The participant's experiences highlight the challenges of maintaining proficiency in L1 while predominantly engaging with L2. The study underscores that the quality and quantity of L2 exposure significantly impact native speakers' L1 proficiency, aligning with the concept of crosslinguistic influence [13] [14]. The influence of L2 on L1 is evident through linguistic interference, leading to miscommunications and altered phraseological units in L1 [15] [16]. This research emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between languages in bilingual contexts and the need for further exploration of crosslinguistic influence mechanisms and preservation strategies in multilingual educational settings.

Despite limitations, such as a single-participant focus and convenience sampling, this study offers foundational insights for future research in similar settings. The qualitative approach complements quantitative studies and highlights the significance of individual experiences. Recommendations include broader and more diverse investigations into language attrition within formal education, comparative studies across languages and contexts, and the implementation of language support programs in international schools to recognize and nurture multilingualism.

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The Discourse of Discrimination and Prejudice: A CDA Study of Japanese EFL Students' Writings

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Abstract

A group of Japanese students were asked to write essays about discrimination and prejudice as part of an EFL academic writing class. The presentation discusses the analysis of "discrimination" and "prejudice" as social representations, examined through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. This is part of a study that seeks to analyse the level of naturalization of socio-culturally relevant concepts and its relationship to argument-building. Here, the first stage of this research is presented: How "discrimination" and "prejudice" are socially represented by the students in the context of EFL learning, and specifically, EFL academic writing. The results and discussion focus on the textual difficulties the students had when negotiating their identity as Japanese and their identity as English learners.

Keywords: EFL, academic writing, social representations, discrimination, prejudice, CDA.

1. Introduction

This presentation is part of a study that seeks to analyse the social representations of discrimination, prejudice, and related topics in texts written in English by Japanese undergraduate students in order to explore those representations through the study of discourse, and, thus, have a better understanding of Japanese society and the everyday discourse of discrimination and prejudice.

At first, I was expected to deal with the negotiation between the Japanese identity and the EFL learner identity of the students, and how this was shown textually. However, because of the nature of the texts, the implications of the study of identity and all its dimensions, and the expected length of the presentation, it was decided to show the CDA analysis and the discussion implied.

Still, this kind of research of everyday discourse by non-native speakers of English might help develop teaching strategies for the purpose of writing in a foreign language, by considering that a topic could be more suitable than others to teach verbs in the present tense -assuming that topic will bring out more material than existential verbs, just to give an example.

Analysing the discourse of students will help us comprehend how naturalized some unfair social representations are in their writings, despite their main premise being on the line of emancipated thought, and mainly, how this happens textually. From a more practical point of view and in relation to teaching, there is the problem of how an argument would be flawed when containing contradictory representations. A person who is able to think critically will probably reproduce unfair representations less frequently because their arguments will be well-built. A logically constructed argument might fight a negative attitude because the argument will show that a social representation is an ideologically contextualised interpretation and not an utter definition.

Briefly, not only argumentative strategies but also the teaching of linguistic features might be improved when assessing the study of social representations.

This presentation shows the first part of a broader research. Here, I will present the social representations of discrimination and prejudice and related topics in the writings of Japanese EFL learners.

2. Social Representations

Representations are ways in which we categorize the world around us in order to express ourselves in relation to that world. Serge Moscovici introduced the concept of Social Representations in the early 60's as:

[...] a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them

with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history. [1]

Social representations change when society changes, and they are contextualized. Also, social representations are neither bad nor good. Whether social representations are positive or negative, it is related to which social constructions in favour or against the subject or object which is being represented are carried by the ideology which frames the given social representation.

3. Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination are interrelated concepts in which prejudice would be a negative attitude, and discrimination is the behaviour that that attitude triggers. Both exist in relation to an Other, different from the Self. Several scholars point out that in the dominant-subordinate dichotomy of discourse, the Other is usually unnamed and defined by generalities taken from the negative characteristics of the out-group to which the given Other belongs. Discourse analysis allows us to study social representations by analysing, for instance, pronouns, verbs and other parts of speech related to a given Self and Other.

4. CDA

Fairclough has a three-dimensional view of discourse and discourse analysis (in the diagram below) in which the text analysis will imply a description of a given text (e.g. lexicalization, patterns of transitivity, etc); the processing analysis will be concerned with the text built inside a given discourse practice (e.g. discourse of discrimination, the discourse of prejudice, etc); and the social analysis will deal with the discourse practice and the sociocultural context which affects that discourse (e.g. conservative ideologies, capitalist society, etc).

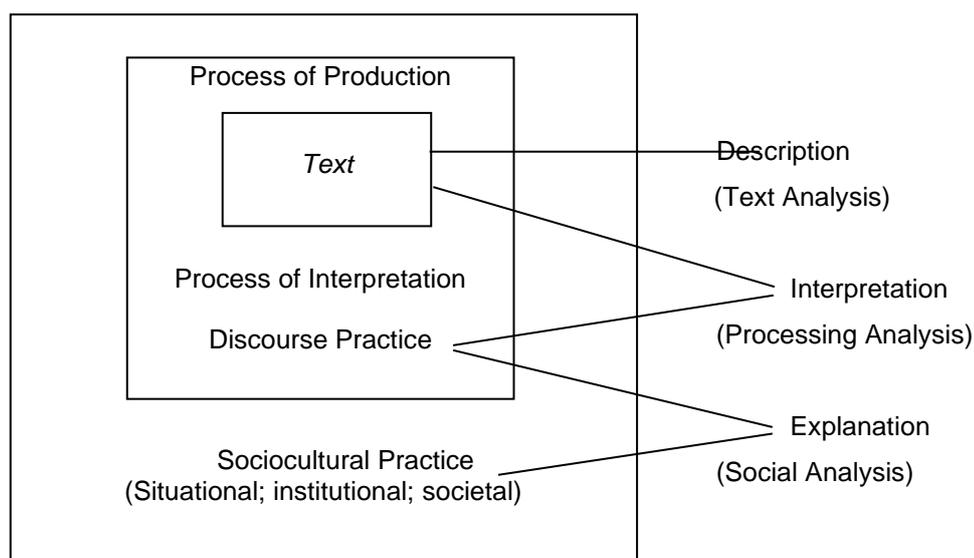


Fig. 1. Diagram taken from Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language [2]

4.1 Text Analysis - Description

Text analysis is understood as the analysis of linguistic features, including the content and the form of the texts.

4.2 Processing Analysis - Interpretation

Processing analysis is understood as closely related to context and intertextual analysis. Context is the situation in which the text was created. The analysis of the connections between one text and other texts will conform the intertextual analysis. Analysing intertextuality can help us comprehend how the social practice of discourse is impregnated in any 'new' text.

4.3 Social Analysis

As seen in the diagram, the social analysis is concerned with the sociocultural practice within which the text is produced. After the stages of description (text analysis) and interpretation

(processing/intertextual analysis), the next stage would be to explain the social and cultural conditions which framed what was said in the texts analysed.

5. Methodology

The analysis in this presentation was carried out with an explorative, qualitative approach. The main disciplinary rationale is Critical Discourse Analysis, previously presented.

5.1 Data Collection

The texts were collected in an EFL class of academic writing at a public Japanese university. An extract of the whole sample was taken for the purpose of the writing of this presentation. Twenty-six writings were randomly selected.

5.2 Data Analysis

The analysis was based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), mainly focused on:

- a) Syntax, the sentence structures chosen to deliver an utterance.
- b) Lexicalization, the specific lexical items which were used to build the meaning of concepts.
- c) Local semantics, the local coherence of a text given by levels of implicitness, specificity and strategies related to meaning.
- d) Global semantics, the topicalization of information considered important.
- e) Transitivity, "specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in the language and the structures by which they are expressed" [3]

6. Analysis of Social Representations

6.1 Of the Topics

The instruction stated that the students had to write their texts considering either discrimination, prejudice, or both as the main topics. In this research, I did not separate the texts into subgroups according to the main topic for the analysis. The reason is that the topics overlapped. Some of the students' writings included the two topics in a single text, and there were some students who did not use any of the main topics explicitly in any syntactic form; therefore, I decided to continue taking all the texts into account for every main topic.

6.2 Of the Social Representation of Discrimination

"Discrimination" was explicit in several of the texts, and it was implicit in a few of them. When I say implicit, I mean that some texts did not include the word "discrimination" as a noun or any other syntactic form (e.g., "discriminate" or "discriminatory"). When taking a closer look at the verbs used with "discrimination", they were almost always existential. "Discrimination" "is" an act, a problem, a word, etc. Interestingly enough, not many material verbs were related to "discrimination". "Discrimination" does not cause harm or affect people. In most of the texts which included the topic, "discrimination" was built up as a very abstract concept and not a reality with consequences. As an example, in the following sentence, transitivity-wise, the use of the mental verb "think" weakens the "responsibility" between the sender -most people/I- and the phenomenon -discrimination:

Text 2 – In Japan, most people think that discrimination is bad. I think so too.

6.3 Of the Social Representation of Prejudice

"Prejudice" was not utilized that often. It was, in fact, mentioned only twice. In both cases, it was used at the beginning of the text and then, the students continued with a related topic, not using the word "prejudice" again. In one case, the related topic was "disabilities" and, in the other, it was "gender".

6.4 Of the Social Representations of Related Topics

A related topic would be a topic which was mentioned in the texts besides "discrimination" and "prejudice". Not all topics were listed. For example, two texts mentioned bullying, but the recurrence of the topics mentioned was over 20% – 100% being "commented on in all the texts".

a. Inequality. 61.5%. This social representation was the most mentioned in the texts after "discrimination". It is relevant to note the use of the prefix in-. The word "equality" was used only a few times and only in negative sentences. This social representation was mainly related to the topic of "education" and "gender".

Most of the time, "inequality" was utilized in the topic sentence of at least one paragraph of the texts where it was used. The forms "unequal" and "unequally" -though written as "inequal" and "inequally"- appeared only in one text.

b. Woman/Female. 46.1%. “Gender” was represented in dichotomies such as “female” and “male”, and “man” and “woman”. In the case of “woman” as a social representation, it was topicalized more frequently than “discrimination”, for instance. The verbs used were often behavioural as shown in the following sentence:

Text 15 – Many women are forced [to do] housework for a long time.

c. Education. 38.5%.

Text 4 – I think the quality of education are rely to money that children’s parents earn is inequality.

Text 13 – But if we want to get a good education we have to [have] a lot of money.

Text 26 – There is inequality of education.

“Education” was represented in various syntactical and lexical ways, and it was almost always related to “money” and “wealth”. Also, as referred to when discussing “inequality”, it was often related to that social representation as well.

In this case, the range of SFG features I have been using for the analysis varied grandly. Thus, it seemed more relevant to show examples.

d. People with disabilities. 23.07%. The social representation of “people with disabilities” was also referred to as “people with disadvantages”.

Text 9 – [...] people who have disadvantage are not equal.

In an EFL context, we always should ask ourselves if what is written is really what the students wanted to say or if it was the vocabulary that they had at hand. In the sentence that follows, the student contrasts “people who have disabilities” with “people who keep their health”.

Text 20 – However, people who have disabilities have chances that they get a job less than people who keep their health.

The transitivity relation among people, keep, and health is a material process. It is an active voice, in the indicative mood, and it is, again, placed syntactically in a comparative clause.

7. Discussion

Social representations are used to understand the world. Representations, in simple words, are the characteristics people attribute to given categories to make sense of their surroundings and to be able to communicate with other people.

As noted in the introduction, this presentation showed a part of a broader research, in a summarized version.

I have also studied the social representations of “discrimination” and “prejudice” in texts written by Chilean EFL learners.

It was interesting to see in the texts how the cognitive process of categorizing was used to explain “discrimination” as “part of human nature”, just like Chilean students did. Nonetheless, there were some huge differences. For example, in the case of Education, Chilean students did relate it to wealth, but they wrote about it less frequently and they directly placed the responsibility on the government. What they often brought up regarding “having money/wealth” was “class”.

In the case of disabilities, this was not alluded to by Chilean students at all. We could imply that Japanese students are more aware of others’ surroundings -adding to that opinion my own positioning as a Chilean person who lived in Japan.

8. Final Remarks

The last example given in the analysis embodies the premise of the broader study mentioned in the introduction: How this research can help us comprehend how naturalized some unfair social representations are in their writings, despite their main premise being on the line of emancipated thought, and how this happens textually.

Again, we should go through the process of presenting the class with their own writings and discuss those in the feedback process, and maybe ask “is this what you wanted to say?”. But however, we choose to provide them with feedback about their writings, CDA would be an advantageous approach to apply to EFL teaching, as for the reasons mentioned above.

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Kunming Dialect Spoken by the Native Speakers with Different Ages and Social Backgrounds from the Kunming City, China: A Case Study from the Tonal Aspect

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Abstract

The Kunming dialect, a subdialect of Yunnan, originated in southwest China. Since the 1950s, China has promoted standard Mandarin. Kunming's native speakers have witnessed changes, particularly in tones (Lu, 1990). This study investigates Kunming dialect's tonal shifts through experiments. The study has three objectives: (1) To investigate the tonal changes of native speakers from different ages at Kunming city; (2) To compare the Kunming dialect spoken by native speakers from different social backgrounds; and (3) To analyze the influence of standard Chinese pronunciation on these respondents while pronouncing the tones of Kunming dialect. The study will be analyzed using Mini-Speech-Lab software, incorporating Labov's (2001) language change theory and Shi Feng's (2008) experimental sound approaches. Its objective is to identify the linguistic rules and social factors influencing Kunming dialect's tonal changes and variations, providing valuable insights to prevent the dialect from becoming endangered.

Keywords: Standard Chinese language, Kunming Dialect, Tone variation, Age

1. Introduction

Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in southwestern China, mainly consists of the Wuhua (五华), Panlong (盘龙), Xishan(西山) and Guandu (官渡) districts. The Kunming dialect, a Southwestern dialect, emerged during the early Ming dynasty in the 14th and 15th centuries (Hammarström, Forkel, and Martin, 2017; Zeng, 2018). The Kunming dialect has experienced phonological changes, particularly in tonal features, due to the influence of Standard Chinese (Putonghua) promoted by the Chinese government since the 1950s (Lu, 1990). Dialectal heterogeneity is observed among different age groups and social background of native speakers. This study explores tonal patterns in Kunming among elderly, middle-aged, and young native speakers, addressing three research questions:

1. What are the tonal patterns found in the Kunming dialect spoken by the native speakers from different generations?
2. What are the tonal patterns found in the Kunming dialect spoken by the native speakers from different social background?
3. To what extent does the Standard Chinese language interferes the tonal patterns of the Kunming dialect spoken by the native speakers?

2. Literature Review

The Kunming dialect traces back to 1422 (Lu, 1990) in Lanmao's 'Yunluè Yitong.' Several phonologists, such as Yang Qiong, and Li Wenzhi (1905), have used phonological methods to describe Yunnan dialects. Initially, the Kunming dialect had five tones: Yinping (阴平), Yangping (阳平), Shangsheng (上声), Qusheng (去声), and Rusheng (入声) (Zhang Yulai, 1999). Later, Ding Shengshu, Dong Tonghe, and Yang Shifeng (1940) applied modern phonetic theory and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to investigate its phonetic features, revealing that the Kunming dialect had four tones: Yinping, Yangping, Shangsheng, and Qusheng, with the Ru Sheng (入声) tone merging into the Yangping(阳平) tone.

Subsequent scholars like Lu Kailian (1990), Yan Xiaoyun, and Wu Jicai (1991) introduced a 5-tonal notation system and provided additional annotations for the Kunming dialect's tones, as represented in Table 1.

Table1. The tone type and value in Kunming dialect

Tone Type	T-value in Kunming dialect	T-value in standard Chinese	Example
Yin Ping	44	55	诗 (shī) 梯 (tī) 方 (fāng) 高 (gāo)
Yang Ping	31	35	时 (shí) 题 (tí) 石 (shí) 笛 (dí)
Shang Sheng	53	214	使 (shǐ) 体 (tǐ) 古 (gǔ) 五 (wǔ)
Qu Sheng	212 / 21	51	是 (shì) 帝 (dì) 汉 (hàn) 壮 (zhuàng)

Cai Xirui (2012) conducted experimental phonetic research on the tonal patterns of the Kunming dialect and found that variations in the rising tone occur across different generational cohorts, primarily influenced by the impact of standard Chinese influence.

Regarding the variations, Yutong Kuang (2022) conducted a study on both synchronic and diachronic variations of the Kunming dialect among different age groups. The results revealed that the tone in Kunming dialect has variations.

3. Methodology for Experimental Tonal Study

3.1 Participant

The selection of samplings was conducted in March of 2021 in Kunming. A total of 9 speakers come from urban in Kunming. To facilitate the comparison of experimental data, an additional speaker, Zhang Rude, from the Modern Chinese Dialect Sound Database. Therefore, the participants of the experiment study were total of 10 speakers. The background of all these participants is showed in the Table 2.

Table 2. The Demography of Native Speakers

Speaker	Gender	Age	Education	Career	Frequency of Speaking Standard Chinese Language
EF	Female	65	Secondary education	Accountant	Occasionally
EM1	Male	68	Secondary education	Worker	Rarely
EM2	Male	70	Tertiary Education	Corporate Employee	Rarely
MF1	Female	42	Tertiary Education	Bank Clerk	Frequently
MF2	Female	45	Tertiary Education	Media Professional	Frequently
MM	Male	37	Tertiary Education	Government Employee	Frequently
YM1	Male	25	Tertiary Education	Doctor	Frequently
YM2	Male	24	Tertiary Education	Corporate Employee	Frequently
YF	Female	20	Tertiary Education	Student	Frequently
SA*	Male	70			

(*SA recorded voice was obtained from the Modern Chinese Dialect Sound Database in 1997)

Participants were categorized into three age groups: elderly (aged 60 or above), middle-aged (30-59 years old), and youth (below 30 years old). The speaker, SA, who recorded in 1997, was over 50 years old and thus falls into the elderly group for comparison in this study.

3.2 Speech Marital

16 words are used for this experiment listed in the Table 1. These words were extracted from the "Chinese Dialect Investigation Word List". This list has been developed by the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2020. Each word represents one of the four tonal categories of the Kunming dialect. These respondents were required by the researchers to read aloud each word three times and their voice will be recorded. The total amounts of the tonal patterns have 324 samples, then 16 tonal samples from the standard speaker were included, bringing the size sampled to 340.

3.3 Data Collection

The Cool Editor software was used for recording participants' voice, the parameters set at 11025Hz, mono channel, and 16-bit format. Acoustic data extraction was carried out using the "Mini Speech Lab" software, which typically selected nine points from each tonal line. To standardize tonal patterns on a common scale, a relative normalization procedure was applied to derive the T-value formula (Shi, 2008): $T=[(\log x - \log \min)/(\log \max - \log \min)] \times 5$.

The resulting pentatonic scale values were calculated as follows: values between 0 and 1 were considered as 1, values between 1 and 2 as 2, and so forth, resulting in a final pentatonic scale measurement of 5 T-values (Shi, 2008).

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 The First Tonal Pattern

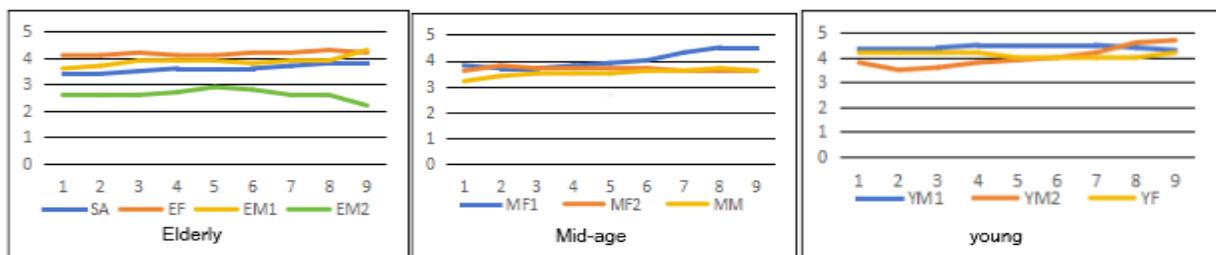


Fig.1. The First tones about Kunming dialect

Pitch variations in the first tone across different age groups are shown in Fig.1. The younger participants exhibited notably higher T-values compared to the middle-aged and elderly groups, indicating an upward trend in pitch values. Specifically, from table 3, 75% of the elderly participants had T-values of 44, with the remaining 25% having T-values of 33.

Table 3. The First tonal Pattern

The first tone T-value	The participants from younger group	The participants from the middle-aged group	The participants from the elderly group
Kunming dialect	44 (66%) ; 55 (33%)	44 (100%)	44 (75%); 33 (25%)
Standard Chinese language	55	55	55

Therefore, it can be concluded that the T-value pronounced by the elder speakers is lower than the T-value of the young speaker. T-value gradually increase with changes in age groups.

4.2 The Second Tonal Pattern

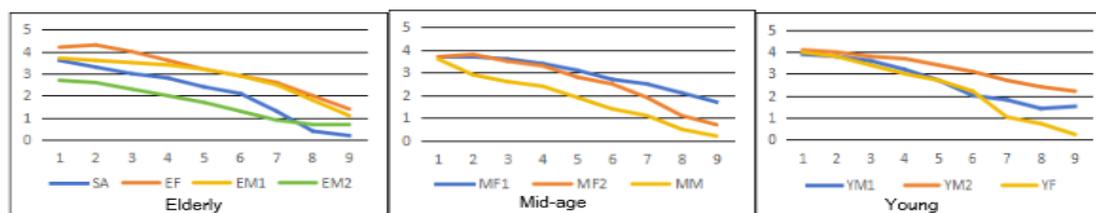


Fig.2. Fig.3. The Second tones about Kunming dialect

Based on Fig.2, there is no significant variation in the pitch value of the second tone among the participants from different age groups. Overall, the pitch value of the second tone quite stable. In this experiment study, except for the EM2 sample had a pitch value of 31, the measured pitch values for other participants were 42.

4.3 The Third Tonal Pattern

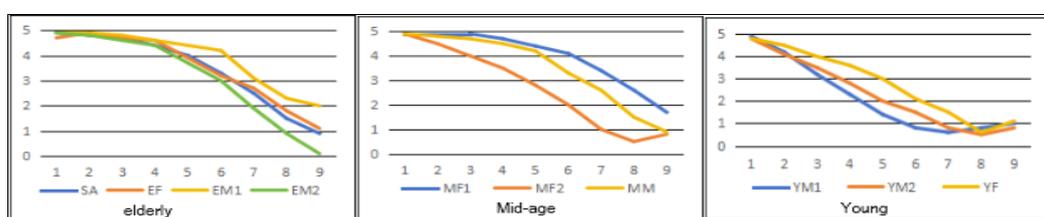


Fig.3. The Third tones about Kunming dialect

From the Fig.3, the third tone of the Kunming dialect significant variations existed among the participants from the three age groups. The tonal patterns of the participants from the elderly group, showed an upward convex trend in the third tone; the participants from the middle-aged group, especially in the MF2, showed less pronounced convex pattern. Conversely, the participants from the younger group showed a concave trend. Meanwhile, both MF2 of the participants from the middle-aged group and younger group showed a rising tonal pattern at the end, but it did not reach the value of 2. The value of the tone can be marked as 53 or 52. The third tonal pattern of the standard Chinese language are falling then rising tones. It can be found that the third tonal value produced by the participants from the younger group is a contour pattern similar as the standard Chinese language.

4.4 The Forth Tonal Pattern

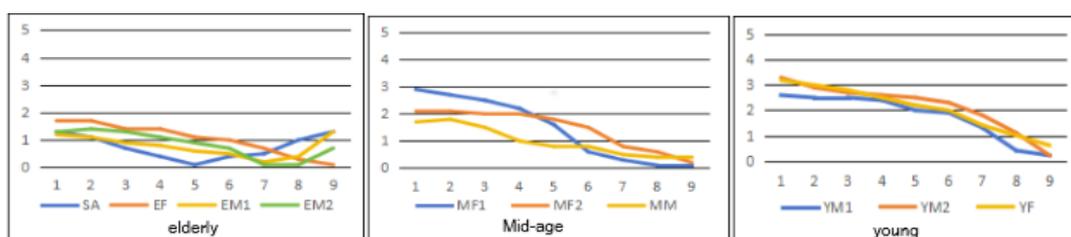


Fig.4. The Forth tones about Kunming dialect

In Fig. 4, participants from the elderly group exhibited a tonal-value of 212 for SA, EM1, and EM2, resembling Lu's (1990) fourth tonal pattern. However, Lu (1990) noted that some might produce the Kunming dialect's fourth tone as 21 for convenience. In this study, only the elderly group showed a rising trend at the end of their tonal patterns. The middle-aged and younger groups had low falling-tonal values like 21 or 31, lacking the contour pattern of 212. This suggests an internal variation in language.

Regarding T-values, the main difference is in starting pitch values: the younger group started at 4, middle-aged at 3, and the elderly at 2. T-values gradually increased from 2 to 4, going from a half-low pitch to a half-high level. The standard Chinese language's fourth tone is a high-falling tone, 51. Therefore, the younger group's T-value closely resembles the starting point of the standard Chinese fourth tone.

4.5 Social Background and Career Factor

This study found that younger and middle-aged participants frequently use standard Chinese as their primary social language due to China's language policy post-1980s. Consequently, their Kunming dialect tonal values closely resemble standard Chinese across all tones.

Special cases were observed in the elderly group (EF) and middle-aged group (MF2). One elderly participant (EF), an accountant, uses standard Chinese for client communication, resulting in tonal values resembling the younger group. However, two elderly participants (EM1 and EM2), working as ordinary employees, rarely use standard Chinese in social interactions. MF2, in the media industry, must use standard Chinese at work, affecting her Kunming dialect's tonal patterns. So, the frequency of standard Chinese usage influences Kunming dialect tonal variations.

5. Conclusion

This study aligns with the findings of previous research by Lu (1990), Cai (2012), and Kuang (2020). Through experimental analysis we examined the tonal patterns of Kunming dialect speakers across different age, and social backgrounds. Key conclusions include:

1. The Kunming dialect consists of four tone categories, which share similarities with standard Chinese but differ in tonal values: First tone (44), Second tone (42), Third tone (52), Fourth tone (31).

2. Tonal variations were observed among participants from different age groups, with younger generations showing closer to standard Chinese.

3. Specific tonal variations were identified shown as follow: The T-value in the first tone increase with changes in age, it is similar to standard Chinese's first tone (55). The third tone of the Kunming dialect displays a rising contour at the end in young speaker, influenced by standard Chinese. The rising-falling-rising tonal pattern (212) seen in the older generation is shifting towards a low-falling pattern (21 or 31) and younger speakers in the group are closer to the fourth tone (51) in standard Chinese.

4. Tonal variations in Kunming dialect are influenced by both internal and external factors. External factors include frequent use of standard Chinese, particularly among the younger generation. Internal factors relate to societal changes.

5. Social background, including daily use in standard Chinese, also affects tonal variations, particularly among the younger generation with higher education levels.

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Language for Specific Purposes

Effects of Multimedia Learning on ESP Learners' Reading Comprehension and Cognitive Load: A Case of Winning, Surviving, or Losing?

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Abstract

*Although multimedia technologies have proven to be effective educational tools for language learning, most of the studies in this area have been conducted in EFL/ESL contexts. However, there is a need for an increased understanding of the contribution of multimedia technologies to ESP courses, where language use is limited to the professional environment, and the learners are heavily influenced by time and resource limitations. This study was conducted to investigate the role of implementing multimedia on ESP learners' reading ability and cognitive load in an Archival Science ESP course. The participants consisted of 48 archivists working in the National Library and Archives of Iran in two experimental groups selected based on convenience sampling. Two multimedia-assisted task-based and task-based-only methods were employed in a 10-session ESP course. Following a mixed-methods design, the data were collected and analyzed through using independent samples *t*-tests comparing the means of the two groups on the reading comprehension tests and the cognitive load self-rating scale in the quantitative phase of the study. Moreover, an inductive thematic analysis approach was employed in the qualitative phase to analyze the data gathered through stimulated recall sessions considering the cognitive load the participants had experienced while they were engaged in multimedia-assisted task-based ESP learning. The quantitative findings suggested that multimedia learning was significantly effective in improving ESP learners' reading ability; however, it generated a higher level of cognitive load in the learning process. The qualitative findings revealed that technology-related problems, learner-related problems, content-related problems, and instruction-related problems were the most important factors leading to an increase in the cognitive load in the multimedia-assisted task-based ESP condition.*

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Multimedia Learning; Reading Comprehension; Cognitive Load (CL).

1. Background

English for specific purposes (ESP) is a language teaching approach in which the content and objectives of the course are defined based on the specific needs of the target learners [1]. A significant characteristic of ESP courses is that the nature of the content, the language needed to present it, the learners, the materials, the approaches to teaching and assessment, and the context of teaching are unique in each specific field. Practitioners in the field of ESP always try to employ new approaches and techniques in their classes to make language learning more enjoyable for learners and more responsive to their needs.

With the advancement of technology, different language learning software have been developed, and a large part of educational material is presented in the form of multimedia content on related platforms. Although technology provides ESP instructors and learners with better opportunities for language teaching and learning [2], its effectiveness should be examined in different ESP contexts with different learners having diverse learning needs and characteristics.

In most ESP contexts, learners work and study at the same time under great time and workload pressures. Hence, engaging learners in technology-assisted language learning can make the learning environment and educational materials more accessible everywhere and at all times [3]. However, there are some concerns regarding the efficiency of presenting digital content to learners because of the limitations of human working memory (WM) and the possible cognitive load (CL) that technology-assisted and multimedia learning can impose on the learners [4]. Hence, more research is required to examine the effects of multimedia content on the level of mental effort that learners need to employ to process the information and to help ESP instructors and material developers to design and implement optimal instructional materials to overcome the potential limitations in this regard. Accordingly, the

purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of using multimedia in an ESP course on the reading comprehension of Iranian archivists and the cognitive load they perceived in this process.

2. Method

2.1 Research Questions

This study targeted the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between using multimedia-assisted task-based vs. task-based-only language teaching approaches on improving the reading comprehension of Iranian archivists in an Archival Science ESP course?
2. Is there any significant difference between using multimedia-assisted task-based vs. task-based-only language teaching approaches on the mental efforts of Iranian archivists in an Archival Science ESP course?

2.2 Instruments

The following instruments were used to achieve the purposes of this study:

- A researcher-made reading comprehension pretest including 20 items;
- A reading comprehension posttest similar to the pretest in terms of content, difficulty level, and readability (the mean Flesh readability quotient of 16.65);
- The cognitive load self-rating scale developed by Paas [5] in a 9-point Likert scale format;
- Stimulated recall sessions.

2.3 Participants

The participants consisted of 48 male and female Iranian archivists working in the National Library and Archives of Iran attending a mid-career course. They were between 30 and 45 years old and were either graduate or postgraduate students or held an MA or PhD degree. Almost all of them were at the low-intermediate level regarding general English and the technical language of Archival Science. They were members of two intact classes randomly assigned to two experimental groups.

2.4 Materials

A course handbook prepared by the researchers using authentic technical content in the field of Archival Science at the right level of difficulty was used to teach both classes. The related multimedia content consisted of some audio and video files, pictures, and texts selected based on Mayer's recommendations.

2.5 Procedure

In the pre-treatment phase, the homogeneity of the participants was checked using the Preliminary English Test. In the first session, the participants of both groups received a reading comprehension pretest. The first experimental group (EX I) received multimedia-assisted task-based language instruction while the second experimental group (EX II) received task-based-only language instruction in a 10 weeks mid-career ESP course.

In the first condition, the instructor taught the materials and monitored the learners' progress on Schoology. The instructor uploaded the textual version of the lessons on the platform with the related multimedia files to facilitate the learners' understanding of the content. She also projected each text accompanied with the related multimedia content on the classroom screen to discuss the new words with the learners. Next, she checked their understanding by involving them in different receptive and productive tasks. The treatment in this group was not limited to in-class activities since the learners had to continue their work on each lesson in Schoology anywhere, anytime they preferred.

The treatment in the second condition consisted of pre-task, task-cycle, and post-task phases. In this group, each session began with brainstorming the target topic. Then, the instructor wrote each word separately on the board and asked the learners to provide its meaning based on the task they had performed before. After providing the intended meaning of the words in the specific professional context of use, she shifted the focus of the lesson to the technical text. The final stage involved some question-and-answer activities. The learners were also required to do some matching, selecting, sorting, and completion tasks as homework.

The participants of both groups were also required to rate the mental effort they had experienced during their learning process on a self-rating scale at the end of each session. At the post-treatment phase, the reading comprehension posttest was administered to both groups and all the participants of the EX I took part in the stimulated recall sessions.

3. Results

The results of an independent samples *t*-test indicated that EX I outperformed EX II in terms of reading comprehension ($t(46) = -2.13, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ (two-tailed)) at the posttest.

Table 1. Independent Samples *t*-test for the Reading Comprehension Posttest Scores

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper					
Equal variances assumed	0.66	0.41	-2.13	46	0.03	-1.72	0.80	-3.34	0.09
Equal variances not assumed			-2.14	45.74	0.03	-1.72	0.80	-3.33	-0.10

Moreover, another independent samples *t*-test demonstrated that the EXI had experienced a greater CL, while learning ESP through the multimedia-assisted task-based approach ($t(46) = -2.14, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ (two-tailed)).

Table 2. Independent Samples *t*-test for Scores of the Cognitive Load Self-rating Scale

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper					
Equal variances assumed	0.57	0.45	-2.14	46	0.03	-5.75	2.68	-11.16	-0.35
Equal variances not assumed			-2.14	45.37	0.03	-5.75	2.68	-11.17	-0.34

An inductive approach of thematic analysis was used to analyze the CL data. At this stage, 20 codes were extracted which were later reduced to four major themes: *Technology-related problems*, *Learner-related problems*, *Content-related problems*, and *Instruction-related problems*.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings indicated that multimedia-assisted task-based language teaching facilitated reading comprehension of ESP learners. This might be because of the potential of multimedia learning in involving multiple senses of the learners in the learning process [6]. Moreover, the nature of multimedia content makes it possible to present difficult and challenging technical concepts using video clips, audio commentaries, animation, etc. When learners have access to multimedia content, they can make a link between what they see in the textbook or hear from the instructor, and the images, pictures, and sounds provided to them and extract the meaning of the technical terms and texts more easily [7].

The higher CL perceived by the participants of the multimedia-assisted task-based group can be justified by referring to the principles of cognitive load theory. The obtained results show that language learners may find it difficult to remember the intended content when dealing with different types of data at a time in multimedia learning due to an unintended increase in the CL imposed on their WM. As highlighted by Martin [8], working memory overload could negatively affect the learning process, because in such a situation, learners are not able to understand the new input. This can result in misinterpreting the content and failing to encode the data effectively in long-term memory. On the other hand, in line with Sweller [9], the use of technology-enhanced instructional materials prevented the participants from effectively engaging in the process of schema construction and automation as a result of the CL they experienced in this learning condition. Moreover, presenting the instructional material through different forms of media may force learners to become involved in more extraneous processing, which in turn can distract them when they need to be focused on two or more forms of media

simultaneously [10]. In addition, multimedia-assisted learning might impose a greater burden on learners' cognitive and metacognitive processing capacity; hence, there might be an increase in the CL they perceive during the learning process and a decrease in their learning outcomes.

The results also demonstrated four factors affecting the CL the participants had experienced during the treatment. Technology-related problems could have led to extrinsic CL by requiring them to acquire the input by using a new virtual learning platform and following a relatively difficult and unfamiliar method of language learning. Learner-related problems might have also contributed to extrinsic CL by involving learners who suffered from poor general English, low self-confidence and motivation, great mental engagement, and tiredness to use a new method of language learning that required them to invest more time and mental energy in learning. The specific characteristics of technology-based instruction, the employed digital materials, and technophobia could have also resulted in both intrinsic and germane load.

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Main Characteristics of ESP Teachers' Classroom Language Communication

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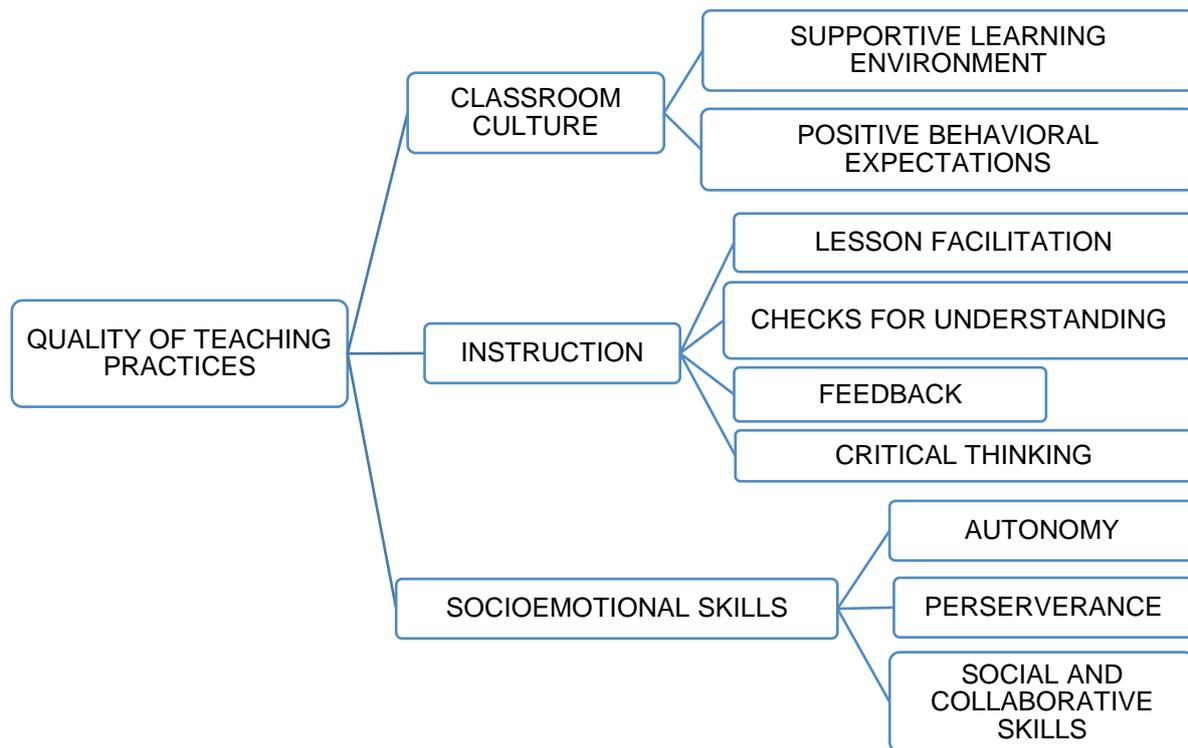
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Abstract

*The target goal of the current paper is to thoroughly analyze and introduce the characteristics of ESP teachers' classroom language communication in the light of socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge and personality characteristics. The content of the language used by the teacher will be thoroughly elaborated and introduced according to three main qualities of teaching practices common to all EFL courses: these include the **classroom culture, instruction and socioemotional skills**. The concept of classroom culture in ESP context implies the teacher to create a supportive learning environment, where students can feel emotionally safe and supported. The teacher also promotes positive behavior in the classroom by acknowledging students' achievements that meet or exceed expectations. Within the instructional phase the teacher facilitates the lesson to promote comprehension by explicitly articulating the objectives, providing clear explanations of the concepts and connecting the lesson with subject-specific content knowledge and students' experiences. The teacher checks for understanding to ensure most students comprehend the lesson content. The teacher also provides feedback to deepen student understanding, she may as well provide specific comments or prompts to help identify misunderstandings. Thus the ESP teacher builds students' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to actively analyze the subject-specific content of the lesson. In view of socioemotional skills, three aspects are focused: learner autonomy, perseverance and social, collaborative skills. The ESP teacher provides students with opportunities to make choices and take on meaningful roles in the classroom. Students make use of these opportunities by volunteering to take on roles and expressing their ideas and opinions throughout the lesson. The teacher promotes students' efforts, has a positive attitude toward challenges, and encourages goal setting, thus fostering a collaborative classroom environment.*

Keywords: ESP, classroom culture, instruction, socioemotional skills.

A number of interconnected trends suggest that ESP is again emerging as a key strand in the ELT context. As English gathers momentum as the main language of international communication, it is perceived as the language of career opportunity, so the pressure grows for teaching to be more directly employment-related [1]. Although better teaching practices are needed to tackle the learning/teaching crisis in the ESP instruction, most education systems do not regularly monitor them, either because they do not recognize the importance of such practices, or do not know how to adequately monitor them. Our observations in the current paper have been based on a recent classroom observation tool named "Teach" observer manual, which has been developed under the supervision of World Bank Group education experts, and after launch, has undergone a rigorous validation process over two-year timeframe. It is intended to be used as a system for diagnostic and professional development to help teachers worldwide improve their classroom practices. Thus, having successfully passed the "Teach" reliability exam and done an extensive observation and comprehensive research in the field of teaching languages for specific purposes, our current aim is to highlight the main characteristics of ESP teachers' classroom language communication identifying and defining most useful qualities of teaching practices in ESP instruction. The qualities of teaching practices are traditionally organized into three primary areas: Classroom Culture, Instruction and Socioemotional Skills. We might represent the classification of the qualities of teaching practices in Figure 1 given below:

Fig. 1. Quality of Teaching Practices in ESP

Classroom Culture: The teacher creates a culture that is conducive to learning. The focus here is not on the teacher correcting students' negative behaviors but rather the extent to which the teacher creates:

- a supportive learning environment by treating all students respectfully, consistently using positive language, responding to students' needs, and not exhibiting gender bias in the classroom
- positive behavioral expectations by setting clear behavioral expectations, acknowledging positive student behavior, and effectively redirecting misbehavior.

Instruction: The teacher instructs in a way that deepens student understanding and encourages critical thinking and analysis. The focus here is not on content-specific methods of instruction, but rather the extent to which the teacher:

- facilitates the lesson by explicitly articulating lesson objectives that are aligned to the learning activity, clearly explaining content, and connecting the learning activity to other content knowledge or students' daily lives, and by modelling the learning activity through enacting or thinking aloud
- does not simply move from one topic to the next, but checks for understanding by using questions, prompts, or other strategies to determine students' level of understanding, by monitoring students during group and independent work, and by adjusting his/her teaching to the level of students
- gives feedback by providing specific comments or prompts to help clarify students' misunderstandings or identify their successes
- encourages the students to think critically by asking open-ended questions and providing students with thinking tasks that require them to actively analyze subject-specific content. Students exhibit critical thinking ability by asking open-ended questions or performing thinking tasks.

Socioemotional Skills: The teacher fosters socioemotional skills that encourage students to succeed both inside and outside the classroom. To develop students social and emotional skills the teacher:

-
- instills autonomy by providing students with opportunities to make choices and take on meaningful roles in the classroom. Students exhibit their autonomy by volunteering to participate in classroom activities
 - promotes perseverance by acknowledging students' efforts, rather than focusing solely on their intelligence or natural abilities, by having a positive attitude toward students' challenges by framing failure and frustrations as part of the learning process, and by encouraging students to set short and long-term goals, and
 - fosters social and collaborative skills encouraging collaboration through peer interaction and by promoting interpersonal skills, such as perspective taking, empathizing, emotion regulation and social problem solving. Students exhibit social and collaborative skills by collaborating with one another through peer interaction [4].

The next important issue that needs to be addressed in relation to qualities of teaching practices is the content of the language that the ESP teacher uses in the whole instruction process. Thus, within the classroom culture **supportive learning environment** the teacher does not yell at students, scold them, shame and ridicule to discipline them. Instead, the teacher shows outward sign of respect toward students. For example, the teacher uses students' names, says "Please" and "Thank you" or shows some other culturally relevant sign of respect. In his/her communication with students the teacher consistently uses positive language, for example, encouraging phrases such as "Great job!" or "You can do this!", "You are such a talented group of students!". The teacher promptly responds to students' needs in a way that specifically addresses the problem at hand. Another tough issue common to all ESP teaching instruction is gender bias, which is conditioned by relevant number of male or female involvement in the current sphere of specialization. It should be noted that in this regard the ESP teacher should not exhibit gender bias and should not challenge gender stereotypes either. The teacher provides students of all genders with equal opportunities to participate in the classroom activities and has similar expectations for all students. For example, the teacher calls equally on all genders to answer difficult questions.

As for **positive behavioral expectations**, so the ESP teacher can be effective at prompting positive behavior by setting clear behavioral expectations throughout the lesson for classroom tasks and activities. For example, upon introducing a group activity to the class, the teacher explicitly states the expected behavior for students in the group. This may include, "Use a quiet indoor voice" or "Take turns in speaking". If students are working independently, the teacher gives directions on what to do when they complete the activity. The teacher says, "Please quietly get up, bring your worksheet to me, and read while you wait for classmates to finish." The ESP teacher may also acknowledge students' positive behavior that meets or exceeds expectations with the following statement: "I just noticed that members of Group A are taking turns to speak and are proactively working on the next assignment". When a problem arises, redirection of misbehavior effectively addresses the problem at hand and focuses on the expected behavior, e.g., if the students are talking loudly and being disruptive during a lesson, the teacher says, "Remember to use quiet voices," and the students quiet down. Alternatively, the teacher is not observed setting clear behavioral expectations, but students are well-behaved throughout the lesson.

Within the process of actual **instruction**, the ESP teacher is supposed to facilitate the lesson to promote comprehension by explicitly stating the specific lesson objective and aligning the lesson activities to the stated objective. For example: near the beginning of the class the teacher states, "Today we are going to observe...". Each lesson activity is clearly related to the objective or the learning goal initially stated by the teacher. The teacher's explanations of the content should be clear, logical, easy to understand and may be accompanied by authentic subject-specific illustrations and various representations. The teacher meaningfully connects the lesson to the subject-specific knowledge of the students or their professional interests and experiences. The teacher also connects the lesson to a prior content previously observed by them. So, the connection between the current lesson and other content knowledge or students' professional expectations and visions should be purposeful and clear. In some other cases the ESP teacher is supposed to model the learning activity by enacting all parts of the procedure demonstrating each step of the process or by enacting the procedure thinking aloud. Modelling can take place at any time in the lesson including at the end. If the learning activity is procedural in nature, modelling will include an enactment of the procedure for learners to observe, however, if the activity focuses on developing a thinking skill, a complete model will include a think aloud. The teacher may also demonstrate his/her thinking process as part of modelling, for example if the task is to learn the meaning of new terms in the text, the teacher not only provides the definitions, but also demonstrates how she uses context clues to find the meaning of certain subject-specific words or terms. In a similar situation, students and the teacher may co-construct knowledge by enacting a procedure together to get the final product.

In the next stage of instruction, the ESP teacher is supposed to check for most students' understanding. For example, the teacher asks students to demonstrate their knowledge by having all students share their answers, e.g., by asking each student to read out the sentence or statement they wrote using this or that subject-specific term. Thus, the teacher systematically monitors most students by circulating the classroom and approaching individual students or groups to check their understanding. The teacher observes most students' work, clarifies concepts, and asks questions. It is common for an ESP teacher to substantially adjust teaching for students. When students have misconceptions, the teacher may initiate back and forth exchanges to help them understand all points of misunderstanding, which provides students with more opportunities to learn. The ESP teacher may also provide more challenging tasks for those who already have an advanced understanding. In the next phase of providing feedback the ESP teacher may be highly effective if his/her specific comments or prompts contain substantive information that will help clarify students' misunderstandings. For example, the teacher says, "Do you remember what happens when we...?", or "Let's look at your notes. Now let's look at your answer. What do you need to change to find the correct answer?" In order to develop students' critical thinking skills, the ESP teacher asks students a number of open-ended questions and at least one of them builds upon students' responses by asking students to justify their reasoning, further explain, or clarify their ideas. The teacher asks, "How do you think, why...", "What facts or ideas make you think that...", "What do you think happens next?", "What would happen if...?". Thus, the teacher provides substantial thinking tasks and activities.

In terms of **socioemotional skills**, the ESP teacher aims her efforts at the development of learners' autonomy, perseverance as well as social and collaborative skills. The teacher explicitly provides students with at least one substantive choice that is related to the learning objective. For example, the teacher allows students to choose between writing an essay or doing a presentation, or in another case doing an individual project or peer project. The teacher provides the learners with opportunities to take on meaningful roles in the classroom, in which they are responsible for parts of a learning activity. For example, the teacher gives a student the opportunity to write something on the board and explain it to the rest of the class how s/he tackled the main challenge to solve the issue. In ESP context students may be occasionally offered to share a related experience when the teacher is explaining a concept. In order to boost learners' perseverance, the ESP teacher frequently acknowledges students' efforts toward mastering new skills or concepts and identifies these efforts explicitly. For example, when students solve a difficult problem, they had been struggling with, the teacher praises and highlights the efforts they made to solve the problem. The teacher says, "You have progressed so much on....", "If you keep practicing and using the strategies we learned in class, you'll master them all very soon!". The teacher has a positive attitude towards students' challenges and helps students understand that failure and frustration are normal parts of the learning process. In a similar situation, when a student is struggling with a problem set, the ESP teacher says: "Let's think about how we can go over this". The teacher also encourages the students to think of different resources they could turn to for help, for example asking a friend for advice or looking for answers in various online and offline resources. The ESP teacher should also encourage students to set short- and long-term goals. The teacher may reference both short- and long-term goals at the same time, particularly when encouraging students to see a short-term goal that would help them achieve a long-term goal. Within the ESP context these goals may be directly connected with the learning objectives and outcomes of the ESP course curriculum, as well as the learners' target language learning needs, lacks and wants. The last aspect of socioemotional skills development process to be observed in the current paper is learners' social and collaborative skills development. Thus, within the ESP course instruction the teacher should promote substantial student collaboration by asking them to work together to produce a product, solve a problem, complete a worksheet, or present a new idea, create a diagram, illustrate a set of terms and term combinations, etc. The teacher promotes also students' interpersonal skills by encouraging perspective taking, empathizing, emotion regulation, or social problem solving.

To conclude, the quality of teaching practices is the backbone of success in any EFL course. The current research might be a great value to ESP teachers who need to relate their teaching of English directly to the vocational and professional needs of their learners. Overall, careful and thorough consideration of the practices highlighted in the current paper in the ESP context might bring to impressive results in the field of the teaching and learning, particularly in the development of learners' professional language communicative competence.

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The Experience of Using Tandem Language Learning In Professional Higher Education

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a series of subject and language-training tandem projects aimed at teaching adult learners how to respond to emergency situations in Estonian and Russian. The study discusses the effectiveness of using simulations in language-training for emergency response. Participants from three universities of applied sciences, including Tallinn Healthcare College, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, and Tallinn University of Applied Sciences, were involved in the language projects conducted between 2018 and 2023. The projects employed a tandem approach, pairing learners with native speakers to enhance their foreign language skills. Simulations were used to provide a realistic and immersive learning experience for the participants.

Keywords: *adult learners, tandem language learning, integrated subject and language learning, emergency, immersion*

1. Introduction

In the context of last year's crisis and prevailing social and political uncertainties, the development of professional skills and the ability to respond appropriately in crisis situations have become paramount for students studying socially significant specialties such as healthcare and law enforcement. Alongside language learning, these students face the challenge of acquiring the necessary linguistic proficiency to communicate effectively in their professional environments. As a result, there is a growing need for pragmatic and effective methods of teaching non-native languages for specific professional purposes. This paper aims to share the experience of implementing the tandem method of language learning within the framework of teaching Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) in professional higher education. Specifically, it explores the effectiveness of using simulations as part of language training to enhance learners' ability to respond to emergency situations.

Given the current socio-political climate and the urgent need for professionals to possess both linguistic proficiency and crisis response skills, the tandem method of language learning, coupled with simulation-based training, emerges as a pragmatic and effective approach within the context of LSP instruction. This paper presents the advantages and necessity of utilizing the tandem method to address the specific language needs of students pursuing socially significant professions. By incorporating simulations and group-based training, this approach enables learners to develop the necessary professional skills and effectively respond to crisis situations while learning a non-native language. Overall, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on language education by highlighting the value of the tandem method and simulations in teaching non-native languages for specific professional purposes. It provides practical insights into the implementation of this approach and underscores its significance in the context of professional higher education.

The tandem language learning projects conducted from 2018 to 2023 involved learners from three universities of applied sciences: Tallinn Healthcare College, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, and Tallinn University of Applied Sciences. These projects employed a tandem approach, pairing learners with native speakers to enhance their foreign language skills. The simulations utilized in these projects provided participants with a realistic and immersive learning experience. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in the participants' ability to effectively respond to emergency situations in both Estonian and Russian languages.

2. The Theoretical and Methodological Background of the Projects

Tandem learning has been recognized by researchers as a prominent approach in the field of education, primarily utilized to facilitate the language acquisition process among students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds [see 1-5]. This method has gained significant recognition within the framework of inter-student exchange programs, including international collaborations, owing to its remarkable effectiveness in enhancing proficiency in the target language, as well as fostering an understanding of its intricacies and cultural nuances. At its core, tandem learning involves a partnership between two students, typically from different cultural and linguistic communities, who engage in reciprocal language learning and practice. This collaborative arrangement allows participants to assume the roles of both a learner and a teacher, with each individual sharing their respective native language with their tandem partner. Through regular interaction and structured language exchange activities, learners gain exposure to authentic communication contexts, enabling them to develop a comprehensive understanding of the studied language and its associated cultural patterns.

Moreover, the reciprocal nature of tandem learning ensures a balanced exchange of knowledge and expertise between the participants. As learners take turns assuming the roles of both a student and a teacher, they benefit from the unique perspectives and insights offered by their tandem partner. As observed by A. Healey, tandem language learning sessions create low-anxiety learning environments that resemble the process of acquiring a first language [4, 6]. This dynamic interaction fosters mutual support and encourages a cooperative learning environment, where students can actively engage in constructive feedback, correction, and clarification. M.-T. Batardière and C. Jeanneau emphasize that through collaborative navigation of the challenges associated with language acquisition, learners develop a profound sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning. This process subsequently reinforces their motivation and self-confidence [3].

3. The Tandem Language Learning in Practice

Participants in the projects included language trainers (Estonian and Russian), specialty trainers (lecturers teaching first aid), and tour guides (conducting guided tours in a museum). The project involved students from three universities of applied sciences: police service cadets from the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, nurses, care workers, and paramedics from the Tallinn Health Care College, and social workers and engineers from the Tallinn University of Applied Sciences. During the period from 2018 to 2023, the participation of students in the projects varied as follows:

- in 2018, there were 44 students (7 native-speaking Russian + 37 native-speaking Estonian participants) involved, and language cafes were conducted;
- in 2022, the number of participants increased to 48 (14 native-speaking Russian + 34 native-speaking Estonian participants), and a tandem language learning camp was organized;
- in 2023, the project expanded further, with a total of 60 (27 native-speaking Ukrainian and Russian + 33 native-speaking Estonian participants) students taking part in online and onsite language classes, individual work, and a tandem language learning camp.

The students' language proficiency levels exhibited diversity within the project. Some had a basic level of proficiency in the Russian language, while others demonstrated basic to intermediate proficiency in Estonian. Additionally, bilingual students also participated, bringing their unique language skills to the project.

The tandem approach was employed in all language projects conducted between 2018 and 2023. These projects encompassed a variety of activities and formats, including language cafes, tandem language learning camps, online and onsite language classes, individual work, and bilingual guided tours. The goals of these projects were multifaceted. Firstly, they aimed to overcome the language barrier in both Estonian and Russian by utilizing the tandem language learning method. Secondly, the projects sought to enhance students' ability to effectively communicate in work-related situations in both Russian and Estonian languages. Furthermore, the projects aimed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration between police cadets, engineering, social work, nursing, paramedic and care work students, while also cultivating the participants' professional and language skills.

The topics and activities during the tandem language projects encompassed a range of professional and linguistic knowledge and skills. These included reacting adequately in crisis situations, communicating effectively in both languages with difficult clients, providing instructions on administering first aid, engaging in work-related communication such as describing a person's appearance, asking and giving directions.

Based on student feedback and study [7] improvements were made to the projects over time, including incorporating more general language, changing the venue, increasing the volume of classes, adding more topics and active learning opportunities, and conducting additional language practice. The

current year's project, titled "Providing First Aid 2023", implemented these enhancements and featured a combination of auditory and online classes, individual work on Moodle, and tandem learning activities focusing on personal data and description, giving directions and offering assistance, and first aid terminology.

The culmination of the project was a tandem language learning camp held at the Kukruse Polar Manor in northeastern Estonia, known for its intriguing exposition about the manor's former owner, the world-famous polar explorer Eduard von Toll. The language camp spanned two days. On the first day, participants engaged in a guided tour and teamwork. In group activities, students were tasked with various assignments, including sharing personal stories that encompassed their interests, leisure activities, and physical appearance. They also practiced giving and following instructions in Estonian and Russian through a treasure hunt-like game, utilizing the vocabulary they had acquired. The second day focused on specialized training in both languages and collaborative problem-solving of work-related scenarios, culminating in presentations. Following the activities, students received feedback from both specialty trainers and language instructors. Additionally, students provided their own feedback regarding all aspects of the project.

The final assignment of the 2023 project involved tandem activities in both the specialty and language domains, and it encompassed assessing the casualty's condition and communication, making simulated emergency calls, communicating with the "emergency center", and applying first aid techniques for situations such as stroke, allergies, loss of consciousness, various types of wounds, fractures, and hypothermia. The first aid activities included conducting consciousness checks, performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) through chest compressions, utilizing an automated external defibrillator (AED) to manage life-threatening cardiac arrhythmias, and providing wound treatment.

To summarize, additional language training was provided through tandem learning, utilizing active and problem-based learning methods. Tasks were completed individually, in pairs, and in groups, with group discussions and role-plays incorporated. Student feedback on this year's project was inspiring, with positive assessments of features such as the immersive and challenging language out-of-comfort-zone active language learning environment, networking opportunities, and work-related simulations. Students also provided suggestions for improvement, such as extending the duration of the projects and ensuring an equal number of native-speakers of Estonian and Russian.

Conclusion

Through the use of tandem language learning, the students in the projects successfully overcame the language barrier and significantly improved their foreign language communication and collaboration skills, and practiced professional skills in real-life scenarios. The outcomes of the language projects demonstrated the tangible benefits of incorporating tandem learning and simulations into professional education.

The positive results of the projects, including students' outcomes and gathered feedback, validate the effectiveness of the tandem language learning approach. It is essential to highlight the importance of creating near-authentic environments that allow students to engage with their professional tasks and develop the necessary language skills. The advantages and necessity of utilizing the tandem method within LSP instruction are evident, with simulations proving to be a valuable tool for language teachers. Motivation and the benefits derived from practical training scenarios should be emphasized.

The incorporation of simulations throughout the language-learning events emphasized the significance of practical scenarios in language education. This approach not only facilitated the students' ability to overcome language barriers but also provided them with a supportive environment to confidently speak a foreign language without the fear of making mistakes, thereby highlighting the advantages of tandem language training.

In conclusion, the shared experience in this paper demonstrates the value of tandem language learning and the integration of simulations in teaching non-native languages for specific professional purposes. By adopting this approach, educators can better equip students with the language skills and competencies required for their future careers, enabling them to effectively respond to crisis situations and excel in their respective fields. The experience of using tandem learning in the LSP opens up further discussions and opportunities for the development and integration of the tandem learning method in professional higher education, benefiting both students and language instructors.

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Designing Engaging ESP and EAP Learning Materials

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Abstract

Learning materials are central for studying a language, as they allow students to follow courses and review contents after class. In many professional fields and tertiary academic disciplines, language specialists face a dearth of published instructional books, so that they need to produce their own teaching and learning materials. This is particularly the case in English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for academic purposes (EAP) contexts, where groups, courses, and learning goals are so specific that only tailored classroom materials can meet the demands of such teaching situations. This contribution presents an overview of features to design engaging ESP and EAP learning materials which are supposed to arouse students' interest, grab their attention, and keep them involved during course time as well as facilitate their self-study process at home. The author thus draws on his own experience of creating ESP and EAP materials for aeronautical engineering students at a university of applied sciences. It is hoped that English language instructors at other institutions will find inspiration for creating engaging materials for their own courses.

Keywords: ESP, EMI, higher education, materials design, engagement, motivation

1. Introduction

English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for academic purposes (EAP) in higher education are branches of English language teaching characterised by contextualised learning materials tailored to the needs of distinct groups of participants. Such learners are students of content subjects usually not related to language or communication, which means that their main interests lie in their disciplines. Yet in many tertiary institutions, students may select or enrol in English language courses, modules, and programmes to improve their foreign communication skills. Learning materials in such settings play a pivotal role in supporting the learning process and outcomes [cf. 1] and need to be designed with the target groups and objectives in mind.

This contribution aims at reviewing aspects of ESP and EAP learning materials that the author regards as engaging for students [cf. 2] and which enable students to identify with English as an important part of their education. The experience he draws from has been gathered for over 20 years of teaching aeronautical engineering students at a university of applied sciences. The elements found central in providing a rewarding learning experience for students are a clear structure; exercises with the corresponding answer key; a variation of contents, tasks, and activities; photographs, colours, and symbols; quotations and discussion questions; and the quality of materials.

2. Clear Structure

A clear structure facilitates the comprehension of and interaction with content. It also enables students to navigate through materials efficiently and locate single parts of documents. A page with a clear structure is not only more appealing to readers but also attests to diligence and care on the part of its author. Examples of non-textual structural features in materials design are headings, boxes, frames, tables, bullet points, or lines. These elements stick out visually and thus function both as eye catchers and markers of distinct information. In order to maintain a logical structure, it is necessary to repeat the same design features for the same category of information throughout a text, for instance by using boxes around warm-up questions for activities.

3. Exercises with an Answer Key

ESP and EAP materials also need to contain language exercises to provide learners with opportunities for practice. Sample materials created by tertiary ESP teachers in Spain, for instance, focused on specialist terminology and language skills [3]. Particularly in ESP and EAP, the accuracy of

written text is important in various professional and academic genres. Through an attention to linguistic forms and patterns, students can improve their writing skills and develop confidence as authors of texts.

The types and focus areas of specific language exercises will vary, although research on grammatical structures in ESP and EAP contexts suggests that “there seems to be more commonality than diversity” [4, p. 90]. At all events, language exercises should be accompanied by a complete answer key. An answer key enables learners to work with the materials independently in class and for self-study after a session. A further advantage of an answer key is that students may refer back to correct solutions at any time they wish, and they can rest assured that they have the model answer provided by the teacher, which may prove invaluable when studying for an examination.

4. Variation of Contents, Tasks and Activities

A broad range of contents, tasks, and activities may work as a precaution against tiresome monotony. Humans have a limited attention span for digesting information, which is why new impulses can redirect students’ attention and are hoped to create interesting and diversified learning materials.

Depending on the focus of a course, its contents will necessarily vary, yet it is helpful to include contents in different formats [cf. 5; 6]. If a certain topic is treated in class, it can be introduced with a video, accompanied by a written text, and concluded by a group discussion, for example. Content should be presented in a way that supports understanding, and often the treatment of a topic from multiple angles may lay the foundations for the recognition of details, interconnections, and contrasting views.

Furthermore, the variation of tasks and activities can maintain momentum in a course and create dynamics for interaction. Particularly the alteration of group sizes and constellations can turn ESP and EAP classes into engaging learning experiences [cf. 7]. Similarly, different types of tasks and activities with varying duration may also afford students the opportunity to work with alternating partners in interesting learning environments.

5. Photographs, Colours and Symbols

Visual elements like photographs, colours, and symbols accompanying pedagogical content can further add to the attractiveness of ESP and EAP materials for learners. Colour coding types of information, hierarchical levels, or parts of graphical representations tends to make materials appealing, as long as colours are used consistently and judiciously. Furthermore, photographs and symbols are likely to arouse interest as well, yet again there should be a logical connection between content and illustration.

6. Quotations and Discussion Questions

Quotations from literature [8] and discussion questions related to textual or audio-visual input may also improve the educational value of ESP and EAP materials. The theme of a course unit or lesson can be made more interesting by spicing it up with the words uttered by well-known persons or found in literary texts. Such quotations may add a different angle, humour, advice, experience, or motivation to a course or topic. Similarly, discussion questions encourage students to engage with a topic at a deeper critical thinking level and may result in new perspectives challenging and expanding learners’ own world view. Discussion questions further allow for practising spoken interaction and oral fluency, thus increasing liveliness and student participation in ESP and EAP classes.

It remains to be weighed whether quotations and discussions in ESP and EAP courses should include controversial topics, as some learners and teachers may feel uncomfortable with heated debates and the risk of negative emotions resulting from arguments that undermine their own convictions, opinions, and attitudes. Nevertheless, as communicative elements in a curriculum, ESP and EAP courses tend to be well suited for addressing controversial issues as a way of promoting freedom of speech, democracy, diversity, and human rights. These values, after all, are threatened by global events and developments, so that their support becomes crucial in liberal tertiary education.

7. Quality of Materials

Major factors contributing to the quality of learning materials mainly entail language, mechanics, and consistency. In other words, authors of course materials need to practise what they preach and should strive for correct language, punctuation, spelling, and capitalisation as well as for consistency of usage throughout their learning aids. Teachers are role models for learners and thus need to ensure that they stay credible concerning the requirements they impose on students’ work. In the end, the quality of learning materials may be decisive for students’ engagement with them. Poorly designed and written materials are likely to fail in their aim of offering rewarding learning experiences. For these very reasons,

it is doubtful that artificial intelligence (AI) will replace tertiary educators as materials writers, as such AI tools would need to set examples of academic rigour and ethics that only humans are capable of implementing.

8. Student Involvement

Depending on the situated cultural expectations and contexts of learners and institutions, student involvement in materials design may be a viable option for ESP and EAP professionals. As Gollin-Kies et al. note, “it is now much easier to involve learners in locating their own resources for learning” and in “genuinely collaborative materials and course development” [9, p. 99]. However, some students may have reservations towards their involvement in materials writing, as they may deem this task the duty of a teacher, for which he or she is also employed or contracted and thus rewarded financially. In any case, what tends to be appreciated by student groups across various ESP and EAP contexts is their participation in the generation of ideas for materials and course design, so that they obtain the possibility of contributing without feeling compelled to take on a teacher’s responsibilities.

9. Conclusions

The elements of engaging ESP and EAP learning materials discussed in this contribution do not represent an exhaustive list but are examples selected from the author’s teaching practice. They are supposed to serve as a review of materials design features and inspiration for professionals in similar educational environments. All these features can be applied to class materials and stand-alone self-study materials alike. At this point, it is worth noting that materials design requires much time and effort, if the product is expected to reach certain quality standards. This contribution may help to reduce this effort by serving as a quick guide and reference to ESP and EAP materials design for tertiary educators.

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Linguistic Barriers in Obtaining a Driver's License for Foreign Citizens

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Abstract

This study aims to reflect on the role of language proficiency in acquiring a driver's license in Italy and the linguistic difficulties faced by non-native speakers. The secondary objective is to design freely available digital resources that can contribute to the acquisition of specific language skills necessary for obtaining a license. Obtaining a driver's license is a crucial step for the integration of foreign citizens into social and work life. Several studies demonstrate that limited access to mobility correlates with reduced ability to access various resources such as education, social services, and healthcare, impacting the health and quality of life of individuals, families, and communities [4]. It is important, therefore, to ensure equal opportunities for every citizen to obtain a driver's license. Therefore, it is fundamental to consider the role of language skills in achieving this objective. Despite the stable presence of non-native Italian speakers in Italy, a significant percentage of them express difficulty in attaining adequate Italian language proficiency for daily life needs. This is especially true for adult foreigners, who are precisely the ones who need to obtain a driving license. Real integration involves supporting new citizens and residents on multiple fronts, including linguistic support, recognizing that linguistic needs are diverse and manifold and integration relies on effective assistance in various language domains in which the learner interacts [10; 12]. The first part of the research focuses on identifying the linguistic difficulties that foreign individuals encounter in obtaining a driver's license. The aim is to identify potential linguistic obstacles present in textbooks, linguistic challenges during the theoretical exam, and practical tests. It is necessary to analyze the specific language required for obtaining a driver's license, including the associated vocabulary, in order to provide appropriate linguistic support. The linguistic analysis also serves the second objective of this study, which is the design and creation of freely accessible teaching resources that enhance the autonomy of foreign candidates in acquiring the specific language skills identified in the initial phase of the research. The underlying intention of this study is to develop content that can inform policies and practices aimed at improving accessibility and equity in the driver's license acquisition process.

Keywords: *Language proficiency; driver's license; foreign citizens; digital resources*

1. Introduction

We can understand the integration process as "the process of settlement, interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration," especially in its initial stages. At this point, migrants should be able to secure a place for themselves. As pointed out by Penninx & Garcés-Mascareña [11], securing a place is a very literal task for migrants. It involves finding a home, employment, income, schools for their children, and access to healthcare facilities. Furthermore, it entails finding a place in a social and cultural sense, as migrants must establish cooperation and interaction with other individuals and groups, become familiar with and utilize institutions of the host society, and gain recognition and acceptance within their cultural specificity. It is emphasized that this process is a "two-way process" in which both the individual and society actively undergo a process of change and adaptation. The host society "is not left unaffected, as the size and composition of the population change, leading to the emergence of new institutional arrangements to accommodate immigrants' political, social, and cultural needs" [11]. Within this process of change, various dimensions are involved, including legal, political, and economic aspects. Despite the concept of integration and the definitions given to it being a problematic issue, it is currently used in all documents addressing the challenges faced by individuals who, for various reasons, plan their life paths in a non-native country. European documents and policies regulating this process also use the concept of integration to define the settling process of an individual or a group of individuals in a new country. Therefore, throughout this work, we will use this term, fully aware that it is a problematic concept and has generated extensive debate, especially in academic literature [11].

A fundamental role in the integration process, as we have defined it, is played by the learning of the language of the host country. At the European level, some fundamental documents confirm the primary role of language learning in the integration of migrants. Within the Council of Europe, an institution whose stated mission is to "promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, which underpin its policy together with an enduring concern for social inclusion, social cohesion, and respect for diversity" [10], the LIAM project was initiated in 2006. The aim of this project is to produce materials for those involved in designing language integration pathways, as well as for all teachers who are engaged in teaching languages to foreigners. Within the LASLLIAM, published in 2022, the importance of adopting an ethical approach to language teaching is reiterated, considering each individual's multilingual repertoire as a value and recognizing its significance in shaping subjective identity. In this view, it becomes a source of richness and not an obstacle to learning other languages. Furthermore, within the introduction to the volume, it is emphasized that linguistic integration must respond to the right to access higher education and the right to "allowing migrants to develop their potential and participate actively in the life of the host country," taking on those linguistic skills required to navigate the public and work spheres [10]. Within the LIAM project, a series of documents aimed at those involved in teaching languages to groups characterized by vulnerability, such as refugees, were also developed. In 2016, the project for the creation of a Toolkit for the linguistic support of adult refugees was launched, with the aim of offering a series of tools, divided by thematic areas, that can be useful, especially to volunteers who provide linguistic support to refugees but do not have specialized training in language teaching. Another point of agreement among European documents and the literature on language teaching to adult migrants is the attention given to the real communicative needs of these learners. While focusing on the specific linguistic and communicative needs of learners is a fundamental aspect of designing any teaching path for any type of learner, its relevance becomes even more evident when dealing with these types of learners, whose social and psychological condition is characterized by a particular state of urgency [2; 9].

1.1 The Evolution of Language Teaching: From Form to Usage

In the 1970s, a shift occurred in the field of language teaching, redefining the focus of linguistic competence and the teaching methods derived from it. There was a shift from a definition of competence based on the mastery of linguistic forms to one based on the mastery of language usage. This implies that competence is defined based on the ability "to master not just a single variety of language, but a repertoire of varieties and registers, and to handle them appropriately to produce communicative acts suitable for specific situations" [5]. Consequently, the analysis of learners' communicative needs becomes paramount, serving as the starting point for designing educational programming and specific learning objectives considered as "discrete and capitalizable units" [5]. The choice of linguistic forms to teach is no longer based solely on linguistic criteria but primarily on external or extralinguistic criteria, identified through the analysis of the situations in which learners will linguistically interact and the type of actions they wish to perform within these situations [5; 3]. Only through the preliminary analysis of needs can one identify the most relevant situations and communicative acts for learners, to which the necessary linguistic forms can be correlated. Furthermore, the notion of need should be understood in a dynamic perspective, as the specific needs of learners evolve over time, based on new goals and linguistic competencies attained. This dynamism is even more apparent when discussing adult learners, who are characterized by greater social and psychological mobility, and it must be considered in course design. Another fundamental aspect in the teaching of adult learners is the degree of control that the learner perceives over their learning journey. It is essential that they actively participate in setting the goals of the educational path. In his works on adult learners, Malcolm Knowles [7; 8] argues, for instance, that an adult learner initiates or resumes an educational path only if they are involved in the discussion and negotiation of objectives, and if the learning process is based on their daily experiences, content they perceive as real and useful for their fulfilment [9].

2. Communicative Situations and Linguistic Needs

As previously emphasized, it is essential for those involved in language teaching to pay attention to the real communicative needs of learners. For adult foreign learners, in particular, a critical issue is their integration into the workforce within society [2]. Job insecurity not only leads to economic instability but is also linked to the isolation that characterizes the situation of many migrants and refugees. The risk is that a vicious cycle may develop where limited language proficiency hinders the search for and acquisition of employment, making it increasingly unlikely for migrants to establish social relationships that would allow them to enhance opportunities for language practice. As Beacco et al. [1] highlight: "approaches which separate language classes from the other dimensions of integration are far less likely to succeed than integrated approaches that embed language learning in the workplace or some other participatory

context and thus ensure that from the beginning the language of the host society is part of the linguistic repertoire that the adult migrant deploys in daily life." Despite the substantial volume of research in this field, ongoing research remains indispensable because it can genuinely determine the success or failure of the integration process. Bianco, R. & Ortiz Cobo, M. [2] underscore that focusing solely on employment is insufficient and demonstrate the multitude of communicative situations in which migrants must linguistically navigate. For example, they provide the testimony of a Pakistani refugee, Hamad, who emphasizes the need to obtain a driver's license: "The problem here is that if you do not have a car, you are disabled. I need a motorcycle to go to work. In winter, you cannot walk or cycle in the rain. Next year, I will go for my driving license. I need to speak Italian well to do it" [2]. Despite this point also being emphasized in the Italian adaptation of the Toolkit for the linguistic support of adult migrants, there are still no specific studies and resources available to address this need. Therefore, we aim to contribute to an initial analysis of this situation.

3. Method

To conduct an initial investigation into the impact of language barriers on the acquisition of a driver's license by adult foreigners in Italy, we have decided to use both the survey and the interview tools. These tools enabled us to gather some preliminary data for analysis. In the following sections, we will present what we consider to be the most significant findings.

3.1 Survey

The survey aimed to investigate the opinions of adult foreigners who, at the time of administration, were currently enrolled in driving courses. It was administered to six adults of foreign origin. The following areas were particularly examined:

- Motivations and the necessity of obtaining a driver's license.
- Difficulty in understanding the bureaucratic procedures for enrolling in a driving school.
- Difficulties encountered in following driving lessons and studying manuals.
- Perception of the language used in lessons being different from "common" language.
- The level of difficulty encountered in completing the exam quizzes.
- The level of difficulty encountered in practical driving lessons and the practical exam.
- Their perception of how their language proficiency influenced their driver's license acquisition journey.

Given that the survey was administered to only six individuals, the data is not considered suitable for generalization. Nevertheless, it reveals some interesting results that can serve as a starting point for future research. In all cases, participants responded to the question regarding their perceived competency in the Italian language with "quite well" (on the following scale: "I do not know Italian; I know little Italian; I know Italian quite well; I know Italian very well"). The first noteworthy result is that all participants defined the need to obtain a driver's license as "extremely important" (four participants) or "very important" (two participants) on a scale that included "Not important; somewhat important; Very important; Extremely important." Regarding the difficulty encountered in understanding and completing bureaucratic steps for enrolling in the driving course, it appears that this is not a particularly challenging aspect for the individuals who responded to the questionnaire. Out of the six participants, two reported no difficulties, three encountered few difficulties, and one participant encountered quite a few difficulties. Another interesting finding is that five out of six participants believed that it was necessary for the driving school instructor to explain technical terms better. While there is not total uniformity in responses, all participants indicated some degree of disparity between the language used in lessons and the "common" language. One participant perceived the language used in lessons as "extremely different" from common language, another participant as "very different," one as "quite different," and the remaining two participants as "slightly different" (the remaining participant did not respond to this question). Regarding the difficulty in completing the theory exam quizzes, the results are inconsistent. One participant claims to have encountered "many difficulties", one participant reported "quite a few difficulties", three participants "few difficulties", and finally, one participant claims to have encountered "no difficulties". However, it should be noted that two of the three participants who reported encountering "few difficulties" did not pass the exam. As for the practical exam, we only have the answer from one of the participants, as the others have not yet taken it. This participant reported encountering "a lot of difficulty" in the practical exam.

3.2 Interview

The interview was conducted with a volunteer who, within a humanitarian association, assists some foreign adults in the process of obtaining a driver's license. Below are the most significant excerpts from the interview.

Interviewer: *From your experience, do you think obtaining a driver's license is a necessity for the people you assist?*

Interviewee: *For all of them, having a driver's license would be essential. Some of them live far from their workplace in areas not served by public transportation, and they have to commute using bicycles or electric scooters in any weather condition, waking up very early to get to work on time. This, of course, limits their ability to seek or accept better jobs when the location is farther away and hardly reachable without a car.*

Interviewer: *In your experience, have they encountered difficulties during the process of obtaining a driver's license?*

Interviewee: *I have been assisting some people for a year now, and so far, none of them has obtained their driver's license. Only one attempted the theory exam, unfortunately without success. The others still have significantly inadequate preparation, even though they attend driving school lessons to which they are enrolled.*

Interviewer: *Do you think the difficulties are related to language proficiency?*

Interviewee: *Obviously, partial knowledge of the language makes it more challenging to understand the quiz questions. However, I observe that the Italian used in the quizzes, sometimes distant from what is commonly spoken in everyday Italian, is an additional cause of the mistakes they make. Sometimes, I am surprised by the language used in formulating the questions and the terms that are used. An example would be the use of the term "proiettore di profondità" to refer to high beams. There are many other examples as well.*

Interviewer: *Do you think it would be useful to create educational materials for language teachers to facilitate the understanding of the terminology used in the quizzes and driving manuals?*

Interviewee: *I believe having dedicated educational materials would be useful since they always have to rely on materials and texts written by Italians for Italians. However, I also think that for a foreigner who needs to learn or enhance their knowledge of our language, learning the terminology used in the driver's license quizzes could be a source of confusion.*

4. Conclusion

From the gathered information and the conducted interview, several significant conclusions emerge. Firstly, it appears that obtaining a driver's license is a pressing need for adult foreigners. This need is often linked to their daily mobility and job opportunities, particularly when residing in areas with limited or unreliable public transportation. As partially supported by the reference literature and primarily by the interview, these individuals frequently encounter challenges in passing the exams. While the survey responses do not reveal significant trends concerning aspects like the difficulty of the quizzes, the fact that even those who indicated having encountered "few difficulties" in completing them later failed the theory exam warrants revisiting and further examination of this issue. All questionnaire participants seem to express the need for clearer explanations of the technical terms used in lessons, and they perceive, albeit to varying degrees, a difference between "common" language and that used in lessons. In contrast, the interview clearly highlights the difficulty these individuals face in obtaining a driver's license, which is closely related to their language proficiency. The interviewed volunteer also emphasizes that the language used in the quizzes could pose challenges even for native speakers due to its specialized nature. However, he expresses doubts about the feasibility of using specific teaching materials to aid in understanding the linguistic content presented in practice lessons and driver's license quizzes. Overall, we consider these findings as a starting point for conducting further in-depth analyses in the future.

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Simplification in the Field of Environment and Climate Change: Exploring ChatGPT for Scientific Popularisation in LSP Classes

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Abstract

Due to the importance of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) [1] in our globalised society, Higher Education institutions have to prepare students for the acquisition of domain-specific knowledge in different field areas. The exploration of specialised corpora assumes a key role in that respect, as it provides access to domain-specific texts that allow the study and description of linguistic patterns and phenomena of a certain area. The use of comparable corpora as an important auxiliary for the analysis and description of LSP provides the students with valuable tools for data-driven learning (DDL) [2]. Working with domain-specific texts demands, apart from the identification of specific linguistic patterns, the ability to differentiate among a variety of communicative situations. These communicative situations require competence in the application of specific registers that may range between specific domain language and popular discourse. The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent ChatGPT can be used to simplify specialized texts. This paper intends to enhance students' competencies in assessing machine-generated simplified text segments in German and Portuguese from the field of environment and climate change policies. The quality assessment is based on a specific set of different categories that were taken and adapted from the Multidimensional Quality Model (MQM) framework. The application of MQM criteria for post-editing simplified ChatGPT text provides students with essential skills that help them improve their language awareness in handling machine-generated content.

Keywords: Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), domain-specific texts, machine-generated text simplification, environment and climate change policies, ChatGPT, German-Portuguese.

1. Introduction

This small-scale pilot study explores the benefits and limitations of using ChatGPT in teaching LSP. The aim is to study to what extent ChatGPT is suitable and adequate for text simplification of specialized texts. This paper intends to enhance students' competencies in assessing machine-generated simplified text segments in German and Portuguese from the field of environment and climate change policies, thus contributing to human evaluation in an academic context. The quality assessment is based on a specific set of different categories that were taken and adapted from the MQM framework. The application of MQM criteria for human annotation of simplified text produced by ChatGPT provides students with essential skills that help them improve their linguistic and cultural awareness in regard to machine-generated content.

In an era marked by swift globalization, the need for expertise in multiple languages across various fields has increased significantly. This has necessitated the instruction of language specialists with specialized knowledge in their respective domains [3] (p. 35).

In this context, multilingual communication has assumed a crucial role in industries that demand language skills for specific purposes, enabling seamless cooperation and information exchange in diverse linguistic environments. As the professional landscape becomes progressively intricate and professions continue to diversify, individuals are increasingly required to specialize according to evolving requirements. Recently, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought about a new paradigm in language teaching and learning: The creation of Large Language Models like ChatGPT, which has led to extensive research on its potentialities and limitations for language teaching and learning [4], [5].

2. LSP and ChatGPT

According to Scarpa (2020) [6], special languages are "language varieties found in documents with a predominant emphasis on the information they convey and directed to a more or less restricted target specialist community, ranging from experts to laypersons and having very specific professionally or subject-related communicative needs and expectations" (p. 3). From a wider perspective, LSP refer to the use of language for academic and professional interactions within specialized domains, such as science, technology, and business and "can be applied to education offered on any language or to multilingual education" [7] (p. 101). LSP are characterized by "distinctive terminological features" and "a specialised use of textual, syntactical and lexical features" [6] (p.3)

In the 21st century the integration of technology in LSP classes in higher education has transformed language education enhancing interactive learning and providing students with valuable digital skills for a specific domain. The technological upswing has significantly reshaped LSP by granting access to specialized discourse and communication through ICT [8]. Recently, the advent of AI-powered intelligent chatbots has sparked new discussions and debates in the field of language teaching and learning. Koehnke et al. [4] explore pedagogical benefits of using ChatGPT for language learning. The improvement in the field of Large Language Models like ChatGPT has made them increasingly well-suited for various natural language-related tasks, such as simplification, summarization and translation. The objective of this study centres around the topic of text simplification.

3. Text Simplification

It is commonly accepted that text simplification is a highly complex activity, as it is carried out at various levels – lexical, syntactical, textual and pragmatical. Extensive research has been conducted in the field of text simplification, with a strong focus on two primary methodologies for assessment: automated metrics and human evaluation metrics. These two approaches serve as key pillars in evaluating the effectiveness and quality of text simplification techniques. Automatic text simplification is a natural language processing (NLP) technique that aims at making spoken or written content more accessible. According to Saggion [9] it is "the process of transforming a text into another text which, ideally conveying the same message, will be easier to read and understand by a broader audience" (p.xiii).

In our research, we apply the human evaluation methodology within the context of LSP teaching. Our objective is to equip students with the skills required for becoming proficient editors, thereby enhancing their ability to handle linguistic and cultural aspects.

4. Method and Study Design

For assessing the quality of texts simplified by ChatGPT, we employed a Language Quality Assessment (LQA) model that can help measure the machine-generated output, and contribute to a more objective analysis. Such models aim to provide insights into how well machine-generated texts produce valuable results in terms of fluency, coherence, relevance, and other linguistic attributes.

For the present study, we applied the MQM (Multidimensional Quality Model) Framework, which is well-suited for human annotation of machine output, allowing for a multilevel evaluation of text quality across a set of different dimensions or criteria. Each dimension corresponds to a specific aspect of quality, such as accuracy, fluency, style, terminology, etc. The MQM framework was developed in response to the EU-funded QTLaunchPad and QT21 projects by Lommel et al. [10] as a framework for evaluating machine translation quality. Although text simplification usually implies the assessment of machine-generated output at intralingual level, we applied the MQM framework to provide students with competencies in the evaluation of AI generated simplified text. For our pilot study, we selected a limited set of MQM criteria that we consider adequate for the assessment of simplified texts.

Table 1. The following three categories were applied

Categories	Subcategories	Description
Linguistic Convention	grammar	- Errors in verb tenses, modes, prepositions, etc., affecting grammatical correctness.
	punctuation	- Missing or incorrect usage of punctuation marks, impacting sentence structure and clarity.
	spelling	- Spelling mistakes that can reduce overall readability.
	language variant	- Mixing different language variants (e.g., European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese), causing inconsistency.
Simplicity	not simplified	- text maintains high degree of technicality, making it less accessible for the general reader
	unnecessary simplification	- words/phrases from general language are overly simplified.
Accuracy	addition	- Inclusion of incorrect information, altering the intended meaning of a word/phrase.
	misinterpretation	- Alteration of the meaning of a segment due to the selection of incorrect words or structures.
	omission	- Omission of relevant information, potentially leading to incomplete or misleading content.
Style	awkward	- Usage of inappropriate complex sentence structures.
	inconsistent	- Inconsistent use of formal and informal language or lack of cohesion.

The scientific articles in the German language were collected from the website of the publisher Springer, which allows the search for scientific articles by field, such as Earth Sciences, Environment, and subfields, such as Ecotoxicology, Environmental Health. Part of the articles is made available in open access. The scientific articles from the mentioned website are available in five languages: English, German, Dutch, French, and Italian. Regarding the compilation of Portuguese scientific articles, the absence of a Portuguese language counterpart to the Springer publishing house imposed a different approach. Initially, a search was conducted on Google Scholar, employing specific search terms like "environmental sciences" (ciências ambientais) and "climate change" (alterações climáticas). Subsequently, scientific articles identified within specialized academic journals, such as the Revista de Recursos Hídricos / Journal of Water Resources, were systematically gathered. Furthermore, the abstracts in Portuguese language of these articles were extracted and gathered in a corpus. For the purpose of this pilot study, we compiled two domain-specific comparable text corpora in German and Portuguese for text simplification, each consisting of 30 original text segments and their simplified equivalents, the latter generated in ChatGPT. The segmentation of both corpora allowed for a more focused analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

In the following, we present and discuss errors found within the analyzed categories in both the German and Portuguese corpora, providing examples from both the original segments (OS) and their corresponding simplified segments (SS).

5.1 Linguistic Convention

In terms of Linguistic Convention, the evaluation of the German corpus, revealed errors in subcategory Grammar, such as an incorrect use of prepositions, which can be observed in segment 1.

(OS1DE) (...) was zum Ersatz sensibler durch tolerante Arten führen kann.

(SS1DE) Das kann dazu führen, dass empfindliche Arten *von robusteren Arten ersetzt werden. (Korrektur) Das kann dazu führen, dass empfindliche Arten durch robustere Arten ersetzt werden.

For the same subcategory, we also observed the incorrect conversion of passive voice to active voice. In German scientific texts passive verb structures are typical, as they convey information in a more

objective and formal manner.

(OS2DE) Die Struktur terrestrischer Lebensgemeinschaften wird durch anthropogene Beeinträchtigung verändert.

(SS2DE) *Doch menschliche Aktivitäten verändern, wie diese Lebensgemeinschaften funktionieren.

In the Portuguese corpus, similar errors to the German corpus could be found in regard to the choice of preposition, or active/passive voice. Example 1 illustrates the choice of active instead of passive voice, which confers the wrong idea of a personal action. Additionally, this example reveals an error of grammatical number "the temperature" instead of "the temperatures".

(OS1PT) As temperaturas de superfície foram extraídas da imagem Landsat

(SS1PT) *Tiramos a temperatura da superfície da imagem do satélite Landsat

(Correction) As temperaturas de superfície foram medidas a partir da imagem do satélite Landsat

The mixture of the language variants European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese occurred consistently along the corpus. This is a relevant fact, because in the instruction given to ChatGPT it was explicitly mentioned that the simplification should be verbalized in the European variant. In Portugal, the common designation for en. *researcher* is *investigador* and not *pesquisador*.

(OS2PT) A boa comunicação e dinâmica colaborativa entre investigadores, stakeholders e decisores é também fundamental

(SS2PT) É crucial que *pesquisadores, partes interessadas e tomadores de decisão trabalhem juntos

5.2 Simplicity

With regard to the second category, Simplicity, the German text segment analysis revealed two types of errors: a) overly simplified text, and b) omitted simplification. The first category means simplifying words or phrases that do not require simplification, resulting in a potential loss of content and misrepresentation through an overly reduced complexity.

(OS3DE) die Kenntnisse zur Entstehung, Konzentrationsvariabilität und Wirkung von Ozon kurz und kritisch bewertend zusammenzufassen

(SS3DE) *die Informationen zur Entstehung, Schwankungen in der Konzentration und die Wirkung von Ozon kurz und kritisch zu bewerten

In other cases, ChatGPT missed opportunities to simplify words or phrases, which could enhance accessibility. For example, adjectives such as *global* or *heterogen* could have been replaced with another German adjective.

(OS4DE) Darüberhinaus ist die Ozonbelastung zu einem globalen Problem geworden.

(SS4DE) Zusätzlich ist die Ozonbelastung zu einem globalen Problem geworden.

(OS5DE) (...) insbesondere heterogene Prozesse

(SS5DE) insbesondere durch *heterogene Prozesse

In the Portuguese segments, most of the identified errors belonged to the first category. In example 5, the deictic *montante* (upstream) and *jusante* (downstream) are unnecessarily reformulated by the phrases: *parte de cima* (upper side) and *parte de baixo* (underside), which are confusing for the reader in relation to a river description. A possible simplification, if needed, would be *do lado da nascente* (headwaters) and *do lado da foz* (rivermouth).

(OS3PT) três localizados no rio Mondego (montante, intermédio, jusante)

(SS3PT) três no próprio rio (*parte de cima, parte do meio e *parte de baixo)

Nevertheless, we could also identify a word - *biodiversidade* (biodiversity) - in a segment that would be clearer for the lay audience if it would have been paraphrased by *variedade das diferentes espécies de animais e vegetais*.

(OS4PT) a preservação da biodiversidade destes organismos nos ecossistemas aquáticos está diretamente relacionada com a conservação e preservação dos cursos de água em que habitam

(SS4PT) proteger a *biodiversidade desses seres significa cuidar dos rios onde vivem

5.3 Accuracy

The third category, Accuracy, relates to semantics and implies a change in the meaning of a word or phrase, which can impact the factual correctness and integrity of the conveyed information.

(OS5DE) das industriell geprägte Zentrum Hamburgs

(SS5DE) *das Industriezentrum Hamburg

In the Portuguese corpus, we identified two categories of errors: Lack of accuracy by misinterpretation (example 5) and by omission (example 6). In example 5, we notice that "several" (*vários*) has changed to "many" (*muitos*) in the simplified segment, which alters the original information.

(OS5PT) Vários autores destacam a importância dos macroinvertebrados bentônicos

(SS5PT) *Muitos especialistas dizem que os pequenos seres vivos que vivem no fundo dos rios

In example 6, the omission of relevant information in the simplified segment prevents the full comprehension of the message. In the original text, it is said that this kind of information can help "decision making" (*adequada à tomada de decisões*), whereas the simplified segment only states that "better information" (*melhores informações*) can be obtained.

(OS6PT) disponibilidade de informação adequada à tomada de decisão

(SS6PT) obter informações melhores

5.4 Style

The fourth and last category, Style, refers to inadequate complex sentence structures and lack of cohesion. In the Portuguese corpus, we found text segments in which the demonstrative pronoun *isso* ("that") did not refer to the corresponding message.

(OS7PT) A gestão da água em cenários de alterações climáticas é uma oportunidade para rever metodologias, criando soluções inovadoras

(SS7PT) Lidar com a gestão da água em tempos de mudanças climáticas é uma chance de encontrar novas maneiras de fazer *isso

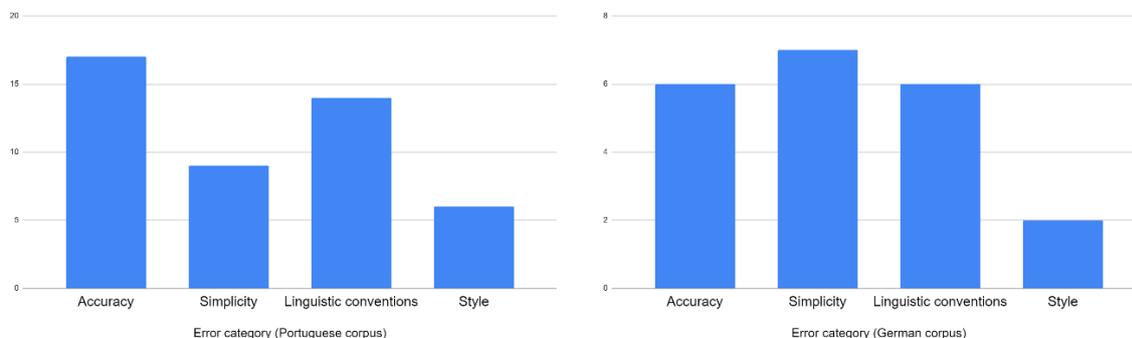


Table 2. Results of error analysis in the Portuguese and German corpora

6. Conclusions

The results of this small-scale pilot study show that ChatGPT provides assistance in simplifying domain-specific texts from the field of environment and climate change. AI-generated text simplification can serve as an informational resource about a specialized text, providing basic information on a text. However, the output analysis showed that human annotation is still an essential prerequisite for high-quality text simplification. The obtained error list of the examined language pair clearly indicates that human error annotation is indispensable and must be carried out carefully, in order to assess the suitability of the AI-generated text across multiple categories. Human text simplification involves the expertise of individuals who understand the target audience and the context of the content. When instructing students on how to apply a set of categories to evaluate a machine-generated simplified text, we aimed at equipping them with fundamental tools for linguistic and cultural text comprehension. This empowers them to apply their world knowledge effectively in the process of quality assessment, thus developing their cognitive abilities at various linguistic levels.

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Culture Language Translation Methods and Teaching Strategies in Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio

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Abstract

Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio, written by Pu Songling during the Qing Dynasty, is a renowned collection of supernatural tales deeply rooted in Chinese culture. This study examines teaching of culture language in literary works from the perspective of translation and teaching strategies. The cultural terms found in "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio" are categorized into five distinct groups: ecological cultural terms, material cultural terms, institutional cultural terms, spiritual cultural terms and linguistic cultural terms. These categories, integral to Chinese language teaching, serve as mirrors reflecting not only the core values intrinsic to Chinese language culture but also the unique characteristics of traditional Chinese relics, natural ecosystems, humanistic philosophies, and cultural landscapes. This literary masterpiece thus becomes an invaluable textbook for imparting cultural insights through classical literature. The research aims of the study are, firstly, to determine the suitable translation methods for translating language cultural terms in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, to help those learning Chinese as a foreign language learners understand the cultural connotations of the Chinese cultural terms. Secondly, it aims to reveal the significance for learners to understand the connotations of Chinese cultural terms. Thirdly, it aims to further elaborate the translation methods that can be employed on appreciation of the theme and acknowledgment of the traditional Chinese sociocultural system and humanistic spirits, will help learners understand the surface and deeper meaning of Chinese cultural terms. This study adopts qualitative method to collect data, by testing the ability of target readers' understanding of this novel to reveal the extent of their understanding of culture language connotations, and the either positive or negative influence determined by translation methods employed. Regarding the positive influence aspect, the study seeks to enhance learners' comprehension of the novel's themes and content, ultimately enabling them to attain a heightened level of appreciation. This improvement is achieved through the integration of appropriate teaching strategies.

Keywords: *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*; cultural terms; translation methods; translation strategies; appreciation ability; cultural connotation

1. Introduction

Culture, the shared beliefs, behaviours, and values of a group, is fundamental in foreign language teaching. According to Edward Tylor (1871), "culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by (a human) as a member of society" (p.1). Understanding culture provides a framework for language, making communication more efficient and minimizing misinterpretations. Culture language teaching in foreign language education is crucial for fostering cultural awareness, enhancing language proficiency, and preparing learners for effective cross-cultural communication. *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, also known as *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*, a renowned classical literary work written by Pu Songling (1640-1715 AD) of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911AD). This classic work is a collection of 491 supernatural stories, anecdotes, and folklore that ridicule the officialdom and expose the darkness in the realistic society of the early Qing dynasty. It is an excellent resource for Chinese as a foreign language teaching, in which the abundant cultural terms will be greatly aid Chinese language learners in better understanding Chinese culture.

1.1 Problem Statement

The challenge in teaching *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* to learners of Chinese as a foreign language lies in effectively translating and conveying its rich cultural content. The collection's abundance of cultural terms requires suitable translation methods and teaching strategies to ensure that learners not only understand the surface meanings but also grasp the deeper cultural connotations. There is a lack of comprehensive research on the impact of various translation approaches and teaching methods in this context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how to enhance learners' cultural insights, comprehension of themes, and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture within the framework of this literary masterpiece.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of study focus on integration of culture language teaching within the context of literary works, emphasizing the significance of translation methods and teaching strategies in enhancing learners' cultural insights and language skills. The three objectives are listed below:

(1) To identify effective translation methods for cultural terms in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* to aid Chinese as a foreign-language learners in understanding cultural connotations.

(2) To reveal the significance for Chinese as a foreign-language learners to understand the connotations of Chinese cultural terms.

(3) To explore translation methods that promote learners' comprehension of themes, enable recognition of traditional Chinese sociocultural systems, and facilitate a deeper understanding of Chinese cultural terms, enhancing their overall cultural and linguistic proficiency.

1.3 Research Significance

This study provides valuable insights into efficient translation methods and teaching strategies for conveying cultural terms in literary works like *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. These findings benefit educators, curriculum designers, and learners seeking to improve cultural and linguistic proficiency. They align with the broader objective of fostering cultural awareness and cross-cultural competence. The research bridges the gap between language learning and cultural understanding by exploring translation methods that enhance comprehension of themes and traditional Chinese sociocultural systems. Ultimately, this informs pedagogical practices in foreign language education, enriching the learning experiences of Chinese as a foreign-language learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Terms

Cultural term refers to the concepts, relations, tools, phenomena or generally to physical and spiritual aspects of living in a particular society which is closely related to the specific culture of that nation. Mostly cultural words are easily recognizable on the basis of their obvious differences with the target language culture, being particular to source language, and being problematic in the process of translation (Newmark, 1981, p.94-95). Newmark (1988) believed that certain words could be replicated to represent a specialized language or terminology used by a speech community focused on a specific topic. In the realm of culture translation, Chinese linguist Zhou Zhipei introduced the concept of "cultural words" and classified them into two categories: the word (phrase) that carries the meaning of a cultural trait particular to a certain socio-cultural community, that is, whose reference is a unique thing or conception, and therefore that has no corresponding equivalent in other communities, when it is used in cross-cultural communication, it is referred to as word of cultural uniqueness or a cultural word (Zhou, 2003, p. 491). In *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, abundant cultural terms can be found. For example, the term "邑宰 (yi zhai)" usually translated as "County Magistrate" in English. It refers to an official in ancient feudal China responsible for managing and governing a county. The official titles present administrative systems of ancient China, offering readers valuable insights of into the historical and cultural context of the Qing Dynasty.

2.2 Categories of Cultural Terms

Eugene A. Nida (2001, p. 82) divided language-culture into ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture. Newmark (1988, p.9) classified cultural terms into five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, social organizations (organization, customs, ideas, activities, procedures, concepts), gestures and habits. Zhou Zhipei further divided culturally loaded terms (phrases) into three types: those with "different classification, different association, and different cultural norms" (Zhou, 2003, p. 492). Building upon the cultural term classifications of Nida, Newmark, and Zhou Zhipei, this study categorizes the cultural terms found in the English translations of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* into five major categories: ecological cultural terms, material cultural terms,

institutional cultural terms, spiritual cultural terms and linguistic cultural terms. “ecological’ cultural term” encompass geographical and ecological features in the source culture, such as unique names for flora and fauna, geographical terms, and climate-related terminology. An example of this category is 兰麝 (lan she)” which is often used to describe a delicate and pleasing fragrance, where “兰 (lan)” refers to the scent of orchids, and “麝 (she)” refers to the aroma of musk. “Material cultural term” refer to unique vocabulary related to clothing, food, housing, transportation, and leisure activities, including everyday objects, tools, utensils, and even units of measurement in the source culture. For instance, “尺(chi),” translated as “foot” in English, is a unit of length in the traditional Chinese measurement system, equivalent to 10 inches. “Institutional cultural terms” includes words related to political institutions, seasonal customs, social behavioral norms, ethics, standards, and both written and unwritten rules. Examples from *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* include official titles, terminology related to the imperial examination system, and vocabulary associated with wedding and marriage customs like “青庐 (qinglu)” and “吉服 (ji fu)”. “Spiritual cultural terms” often consist of abstract vocabulary that reflects a nation’s philosophical thinking, ideology, and religious culture. Examples include Chinese concepts like “阴(yin),” “阳(yang),” “道(Dao).” “linguistic’ cultural terms” are words that reflect the phonetic and written characteristics of a language community. Idioms, allusions, proverbs, rhetoric, word formation, and character construction, with their unique formal and semantic features, carry a wealth of historical traditions and customs. For example, the proverb “黑面如漆 (hei mian ru qi),” which means “as dark as lacquer,” is used to describe a pitch-black complexion.

2.3 Connotations of Cultural Terms

From the definition of Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (2023), “Connotations refers the suggesting of a meaning by a word apart from the thing it explicitly names or describes”. The concept of connotations of cultural terms relates to the additional layers of meaning, emotions, and cultural significance attached to words beyond their literal definitions. These connotations are context-specific and can vary between cultures, influencing effective communication and translation. Understanding cultural term connotations is vital for cross-cultural interactions and promotes cultural awareness.

3. Methodology

This study adopts Culturally relevant teaching and enhancement test to delve into cultural terms within *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* and their impact on learners, to improve their ability of literary appreciation.

3.1 Culturally Relevant Teaching

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) is a pedagogy grounded in teachers’ practice of cultural competence, or skill at teaching in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting. Teachers using this method encourage each student to relate course content to their cultural context (Gay, 2010). Constructivism theory laid the foundation of CRT. In the context of teaching Chinese culture using *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, group discussions and an enhancement test play essential role in improving respondents’ comprehension of cultural terms. Firstly, the teacher selects a set of cultural terms that hold significant cultural connotations and divide learners into small groups of 4-6. Secondly, within each of these groups, the teacher assigns one of the selected categories of cultural terms for exploration. These categories encompass ecological, material, institutional, spiritual, and linguistic cultural terms. Clear and detailed instructions are provided to the learners, emphasizing that the goal is to explore the cultural connotations and significance of the assigned terms. Thirdly, the group discussion session is carefully structured and designed to last around 30 minutes. During this allotted time, learners are actively encouraged to discuss and analyze the distinctions between the literal and free translation versions of their designated terms. This exercise serves to help them better comprehend and effectively convey the cultural connotations of these terms. Fourthly, the teacher plays a dual role during the discussion, as a facilitator, the teacher guides and moderates the discussion, ensuring that it remains focused and encouraging active participation from all group members. As a resource provider, the teacher offers reference materials, including excerpts from *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, multimedia resources such as images, videos, or audio clips, as well as reference materials that can significantly aid in comprehension. This teaching methodology provides a comprehensive framework for learners to not only grasp the meanings of cultural terms but also to gain a deeper understanding of their cultural context, enriching their overall learning experience.

3.2 Enhancement Test

The enhancement test consists of 20 questions related to selected cultural terms, including both the literal and cultural meanings. The test is designed to be bilingual, with the first 10 questions conducted in Chinese and the subsequent 10 questions requiring English translations of the terms. This format allows learners to demonstrate their comprehension in both languages. The respondents, consisting of 84 learners who has passed the HSK level 4, with the first 10 questions conducted in Chinese, providing responses in Chinese, and the subsequent 10 questions requiring English translations of the terms. Each group was given a time limit of 30 minutes to complete the test. The list of selected cultural terms is provided below:

Table 1. Categories of cultural terms in the test selected from *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*

Categories of cultural terms	Secondary categories	Words selected from <i>Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio</i>	English translation	Translation method	Marks of each
ecological cultural terms	plants	Q6 葭苈 “jia fu” refers to the thin membrane inside the reed, and metaphorically, it refers to more distant relatives	closely related	literal translation	10%
		Q13 麝兰 “she lan” refers to musk and orchid fragrance	the scent of musk and orchid	literal translation	
material cultural terms	utensils	Q7 鼎铛油镬 “ding dang you huo” refers to boiling oil in a cauldron or wok to scald someone	cauldrons and works filled with boiling oil	literal translation	15%
		Q4 鬋凤 “huan feng” refers to “phoenix hairpin”, which is a women’s hair ornament.”	phoenix ornaments	literal translation	
		Q18 箫管 “xiao guan” is a kind of musical instrument made of bamboo	flageolet	literal translation	
institutional cultural terms	official titles	Q2 孝廉 “xiao lian” refers to the specific title of a graduate passed a vigorous exam in Qing Dynasty	Provincial Graduate	free translation	5%
	social values	Q5 初学涂鸦 “chu xue tu ya” refers to a beginner’s scribbblings, with many revisions and corrections, to describe the early stages of studying	write very indifferent prose	free translation	5%
	customs festivals	Q20 寒食 “han shi” known as the Cold Food Festival, one of China’s traditional festivals	the Cold Food Festival	literal translation	5%
spiritual cultural terms	religion	Q3 随喜 “sui xi” is a Buddhist term, which means visiting temples and playing with others	went out to greet them and took them on a tour of the precincts	free translation	25%
		Q10 广寒 “guang han” refers to the moon palace	Cold Palace	literal translation	
		Q11 寿籍 “shou j” refers to the thin booklet in Chinese superstitions and legends that records people’s lifespan	longevity file	literal translation	
		Q16 散花天女 “san hua tian nv” refers to the Goddess in Buddhist sutra stories.	Apsaras Scattering Flowers, beautiful fairylike beings	literal translation + addition	
		Q19 物化 “wu hua” is a euphemism for death	transformed	literal translation	
linguistic cultural terms	allusion	Q4 结草以报 “jie cao yi bao” means to repay kindness even after death	grateful	free translation	15%
		Q8 曹丘 “cao qiu” is synonymous with someone who recommends or introduces others	Maecenas	substitution	
		Q9 关壮缪 “guan zhuang mu” Guan Yu, a renowned military general during the Three Kingdoms	the God of War, Guan Yu	free translation	
	metaphor	Q1 喧如鼎沸 “xuan ru ding fei” describes roaring like a boiling cauldron	seething cauldron	literal translation	10%
		Q15 黑面如漆 “hei mian ru qi” describes a person’s face as black as pitch	a face as black as jet	free translation	
	actions	Q12 启睑拔视 “qi jian bo shi” refers to pull open the eyelids to take a look	lift up his eyelids and take a look inside	literal translation	10%
		Q17 反身鹗顾 “fan shen e gu” refers to someone turn around and look at it ferociously	cast a piercing gaze around him	literal translation	
total marks					100%

4. Research Findings and Results

From the responses of target respondents, the research outcome can be summarized as below:

The mean score answered questions in English (29.8810) was higher than the mean score that responded in Chinese (27.0833). This suggests that learners performed better on questions related to English translations of cultural terms compared to those in Chinese. The variation in scores across questions could be attributed to the familiarity of the cultural terms, the clarity of the translation methods employed, and the non-native Chinese respondents’ level of proficiency in Chinese.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Chinese	84	10.00	50.00	27.0833	8.50968
English	84	10.00	50.00	29.8810	8.81456
Valid N (listwise)	84				

Fig.1. Descriptive Statistics of two groups test results

Based on the results of the 20 questions related to selected cultural terms, questions 4, 5, 7, 12, and 16 received the highest mean scores, indicating that respondents performed well in understanding both the literal and cultural meanings of the terms in these questions. On the other hand, questions 10, 15, 18, and 19 received the lowest mean scores, suggesting that respondents struggled more with these questions. These questions fall into the categories of spiritual and linguistic cultural terms, such as religious related terms like “广寒 (guang han)” and “物化 (wu hua)”, and metaphors expression “黑面如漆 (hei mian ru qi)” highlighting the challenge of cultural understanding for learners who do not share the same cultural background. Despite the use of appropriate translation methods as teaching aids, these questions illustrate that difficulties in cultural comprehension persist. This, emphasizes the importance of addressing cultural nuances and providing context in cultural teaching, particularly when dealing with terms deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. It suggests that educators should employ strategies that extend beyond translation, engaging learners in activities aimed at promoting cross-cultural understanding and awareness.

5. Conclusion

This research focus on the significance of effectively teaching cultural language in the context of Chinese classic literary works such as *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. While categorizing cultural terms and employing suitable translation methods are crucial, it is essential to integrate cultural language teaching with other teaching methods for a comprehensive approach.

(1) Contextual teaching

Providing additional explanations or exercises to enhance their comprehension is crucial. For example, when learners are studying the cultural term “吉服 (ji fu)”, which refers to a formal dress worn in special occasion. Instead of just explaining its literal meaning, instructors could provide context by showing images of ancient Chinese dress with “吉服.” By incorporating this term into sentences or short stories describing its historical significance and usage, learners can grasp its meaning within real-life scenarios, fostering a deeper understanding.

(2) Cultural immersion

Considering a cultural immersion activity where students watch a classic Chinese film that features traditional ceremonies and rituals, such as a wedding scene. During this experience, students encounter cultural terms associated with these ceremonies, like “嫁妆 (jia zhuang)” referring to a bride’s dowry. This immersion not only exposes them to the term but also helps them understand its cultural connotations and significance in the context of Chinese weddings.

(3) Addressing cultural loss

Learners can examine the issue of cultural loss through misinterpretation. For example, translating the Chinese concept of “阴阳 (yin yang)” as “negative and positive” may overlook its profound cultural and philosophical depths. Instructors can prompt students to explore the broader ideas of balance, harmony, and interconnections conveyed by “阴阳,” emphasizing the importance of precise interpretation and avoiding cultural oversimplification.

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Educational Leadership through Positive Education - Reigniting Imaginative Curiosity in Language Teacher Training

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Abstract

The concepts in this paper link to wider socio-economic and technological trends and to the emerging realities and opportunities of an ever-more connected planet. The future will see the transformation of the teacher into a guide, mentor, critical voice, evaluator and pioneer of what is possible. This is intimately connected with leadership paradigms. A key aspect of fostering such innovative educational leadership will be the integration of Positive Education principles and techniques. This paper therefore looks at the key factors in undertaking this. It refers to extensive work with language teachers internationally undertaken by the authors and the issues identified in working at the forefront of change. A critical task is to re-appropriate a sense of strategic direction in altered landscapes. There is a profound revolution occurring in educational systems all over the world. In an environment of escalating crises and development of pervasive advanced technologies, many challenges to traditional teaching models are evident. In addition, levels of stress and anxiety among teachers are reaching unprecedented levels. The emergence of many negative feelings in schools and among teachers creates the need for a more comprehensive, professional teacher profile - as one who facilitates learning through humanity and simply delivering lectures. Teachers are at the forefront but many are stressed and overwhelmed by fears and problems. There is a need to recapture passion, curiosity and human values.

Keywords: *PI Leadership; Positive Education; Change Management; Educational technology.*

1. Overview

Education can be broadly conceptualized as a process of socialization achieved through transmission of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. In this broader perspective, a range of social agents and institutions (family, peers, media, workplace, political, religious and other civil society organizations), as well as formal and non-formal education systems, are all involved in this process of socialisation. Education, whether formally or informally constituted, is part of a matrix of learning systems designed to facilitate transition to social autonomy, engagement and participative involvement in society. While formal education is by no means the only, or even the most important, channel for such socialization, educational systems and schools remain key to this process. They act as key formal agents that articulate explicit public policy into the learning paradigm intended to maintain and reproduce society and its relationships. In general terms this leads us to two key conceptual formulations. One is the role of *leadership*. The other is *power*. And in the world of formal education and structure, these two dimensions engage powerfully with wider notions of identity and expectations for the maintenance (or transformation) of stratified social relationships.

Educational systems are therefore intimately connected not only to wider systems of identity and authority as understood and expressed in the State, but are also subjected to the more general stresses and tensions in the socio-economic system. As schools have been compelled to become part of the economic system, subject to its rationale, they have also been subsumed into business models of operation where monetary efficiencies outweigh all other factors. This creates new paradigms of social relationships and behaviors within the school system. However, beyond socio-economic development rationales, national education systems also have fundamental social, civic and political functions related to the formation of citizenship (and to the strengthening of national cohesion and identity). This is especially so in the teaching of languages. In doing so, schools have a crucial role in promoting the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to enable learners:

- to develop a sense of shared destiny through identification with social, cultural, and political environments.
- to become aware of challenges posed to the development of their communities through an understanding of issues related to patterns of social, economic and environmental change.

- to engage in civic and social action in view of positive societal participation and/or transformation based on a sense of individual responsibility towards their communities.

This places a focus on the need for renewed and invigorated educational leadership in a transformed world. It means a rediscovery of the joy and potential of openness and creativity in looking at how language learning (and other subjects) relates not to an assumed world of standardized ‘normality’ but rather to other identified areas in the matrix of globalization and intercultural competence. This new orientation opens the possibility of alliances, methods and strategies based on human rights, evidence-based best practice, autonomy, Artificial Intelligence, collaborative teaching/learning and a global approach to meaningful inclusion.

2. Leadership, Motivation and Global Contexts

All current school reform efforts aim to improve teaching and learning. But there are huge differences in how this is done. All approaches, however, depend on the motivations and capacities of leadership. Leadership essentially concerns itself with organizational improvement. In more precise terms, leadership concentrates on establishing widely agreed, valued and worthwhile directions (both strategic and tactical) for the organization and implementation of everything that is required to stimulate, motivate, guide and support people to move in those directions (Fullan, 2016). A generic definition of leadership – especially impactful and effective leadership – is quite elementary: it is about direction and influence. Thus, if *stability* could be described as the goal of what is called “management”, it can be said that *improvement* is the goal of leadership.

Teachers work with students at a time of profound change. This change is partly at personal level with students who are discovering themselves, learning about personal responsibility, and finding their place in the world. Partly the change is at school/structural level where education is exciting, challenging, and endlessly shape-shifting. Knowing what the issues are - for students, teachers, parents, society and policy makers – requires collaboration to achieve optimal outcomes for all involved in the learning process. And partly the change is at policy level where significant issues impact. These can include:

- Uncertainty regarding the school mission and values
- Restricted government financial support, coupled with increased oversight
- Lack of meaningful strategic planning
- Weakened linkage with expected outcomes, especially in terms of employability
- Uncertainty manifested in disruptive behavior and absenteeism.

At such a time, teachers and administrators need to define clearly the principles guiding their institutions and their responsibilities to the community and to society. With the dizzying transformation of pedagogy, teachers require more professional support and development. The pace of change demands significant levels of creativity, flexibility, agility, and advocacy. It is also critical to realize that the external environment in which education exists and functions is changing profoundly. The rate of this change is actually accelerating and all schools face pressures and external factors that will transform the environment completely over the coming decades.

Education in today’s world represents a powerful and evolving set of relationships, a networked web of public, private and social factors that respond to an ever-increasing set of change factors. From being the most visible element in the assertion of rank, hierarchy and power in past centuries, education now is a market of competing ideas and visions concerning its role in the communities of which it is part. Schools increasingly search for scarce resources among other competing interests. In this context, schools face the importance of the critical role of partnerships, linkage and strategic joint ventures to achieve shared goals in a transformed external environment.

Globalization and the impact of ever more sophisticated information and communications technologies means that students and teachers can discuss, encounter and contact each other over vast distances instantaneously. It also means that the reach and scope of such technologies is now available across the planet. Such a transformation, in such a relatively short time, poses huge challenges for traditional structures and institutions. People can now compare and contrast issues, debate and contrast situations and have access to examples of diverse approaches and standards rapidly.

Throughout all Member States of the EU - and indeed in countries all around the world - there is growing concern about the capacity of traditional education systems to change, adapt and provide an appropriate foundation for lifelong learning. It has become urgent for governments to review the ways in which schools are organized, the content of curricula, modes of delivery, design and location of places of learning and the integration of advanced information technologies into the overall educational

structure. In such an environment, it is important to evaluate and re-assess the role and function of schools in our society and the relationship between education and families, employment, business, enterprise, culture and community.

3. Towards Positive Education

Developing an assertive positive approach is transformative for teaching methodologies, inclusion and teacher motivation. The Positive Education approach and value-system in stills not just optimism but purpose. And purpose - like motivation - is the foundation for all learning. This will be illustrated with many concrete examples and model strategies. In this paper we have referenced workshops, seminars and training sessions conducted internationally since 2020 where issues around teacher needs have been linked to new opportunities based on affirmation and support in a pioneering series of structured events. Giving hope and encouragement is a first step in advancing a new model of teacher training to value validated competence in contexts of meaningful and sustainable transformation.

All the data and information above come together in one single affirmation and confirmation: only being a teacher with a certain level of academic skills who delivers a lesson and checks his/her task list without aspiring or trying any schemes of continuous professional development is not a profile that works in the demanding school, educational context of today. Educators need to move beyond and become mentors, coaches, educational leaders, motivators, and catalysts. They must challenge by example as well as facts anything that may obstruct learning and its natural evolution.

Positive Education is not simply a trend or a mindset but a new scientific field which stemmed from Positive Psychology after years of research, implementation and experiments. Dr Suzy Green and colleagues define Positive Education as "applied Positive Psychology in education" (Green et al., 2011, p. 16). It looks like Dr. Martin Seligman (the founder of the Positive Psychology movement) knew very well that Positive Psychology would be in a way "redundant" if it were to remain as just another "academic subject or science." Positive feelings are useless if they cannot be conveyed, generated or shared, and that is, perhaps, the main reason why Dr Seligman stayed for almost nine months at Geelong Grammar School in Australia, where he was invited to find implementations of Positive Psychology practices in school classrooms. The school staff and the teachers became the leading evangelists of positive ideas within classrooms, leading to the creation of many PosEd (Positive Education) programs worldwide. The director of studies at Geelong Grammar School at that time, Justin Robinson, epitomized all the above ideas and concepts in one phrase: "Positive Education is not taught! It is caught!" (The Positive Education Podcast).

Transitioning from educating to "positive educating" requires personal and professional change, development and, sometimes, even growth. It is a process that may be long or short but requires minimum personal interventions and sufficient training from any teacher who decides to follow it. If we are to simplify but accurately approach the meaning of the process above, we could affirm that an educator does not need a university degree to be kind and zestful (one of the virtues and character strengths as defined by Positive Psychology). Still, teachers need scientific training to know how kindness and zest can benefit their students and how they can help them find these. Below, we attempt to analyze the changes needed for educators personally and professionally. It is important to stress that the personal transition should precede the professional transition.

The personal transition for any prospective positive educator starts from three pivotal individual steps.

- **Self-Reflection** - An ongoing, personal, individual process which helps educators realize where exactly they stand regarding the concept of Positive Education and if they would like to follow it. One of the frameworks which can be used as a point of reference is the "Reflective Cycle" by Richard Gray, which describes the three basic steps of this never-ending, ongoing and consistent procedure. Educators become receptors of information and input; they reflect on it and then introspect by filtering and judging it according to their standards, thoughts, experiences or goals. The result of this process can yield the first conscious, individual decision for an educator to go or not go down the positive education pathway.
- **Self-Intervention** - Once the educator decides consciously to follow the PosEd pathway, it is essential to realize that his credibility, passion and confidence for implementing positive practices lies in his own experience with all these practices. Thus, the PosEd practitioner must apply many, if not all, of these practices to himself before practicing with others. The educator needs to test the effectiveness of positive practices, boost his competency in applying them and regularly reflect on their improvement. The Positive Educator needs to practice what he preaches.
- **Taking Action and Becoming the Embodiment of Positive Education** - Reece Coker defined the importance of practice through embodiment regarding Positive Psychology practitioners in his diagram "3 Pillars of Practice" (Index 2). The practitioner and the scientist must be fully updated

regarding their scientific field of interest, constantly practice all the theories at the frontline and, above all, become the embodiment of their science. Imagine a "positive educator" who is rude to his students, shows no empathy for them, and his attitude creates stress and anxiety. No matter how many degrees, qualifications, or distinctions have on positive feelings and psychology, it is impossible to transmit positive feelings with negative attitudes.

4. Shaping Positive Education in Language Learning

As we mentioned above, the practices of positive Education in the classrooms can be long, and the ones above are indicative. However, a clear, sufficiently broad, thorough and relatively easily implemented framework for positive practices is the framework of character strengths and virtues, as defined by Peterson and Seligman in 2004. (Index 3) Anything practiced within this circle by the positive educator can promote the creation of positive feelings, help students appreciate reality around them, become more mindful and find sufficient motivation and encouragement.

The education reforms called for in 21st century education initiatives have been characterized as radical. International efforts to reformulate education for 21st century teaching and learning are well-funded initiatives by coalitions including governments, not-for-profit organizations, and large corporations. It is legitimate to put forward a critique of the emergence of 21st century learning showing that a preoccupation with competencies and skills can be interrogated for that to which 21st century learning gives voice, but also for that which it silences. The fundamental question of the purpose of education, or for what do we educate, is virtually absent in most discussions of 21st century learning. Values underline methods and the bridge between these can be the approach offered by Positive Education which affirms students in paradigms of continuous development. It is not only about a techno-optimistic belief in progress currently prevalent in the discourse of 21st century learning. We need to progress towards an ecological, humane and life affirming understanding that roots education in a life code of value and in a living community of relations large enough to embrace the multidimensionality, responsiveness, and responsibility at the heart of the pedagogical relation.

The last two decades have produced ample evidence of the extent to which ICT permeates social structures, economy and generation of knowledge itself. Social change is shaping our understanding of the role and potential of ICT – which can affect an emerging emancipatory dialectic. Historically, the teacher played a major part in this framework, given that these were the people who taught those that did not know. This 'banking conception' of education was one in which the student was an empty container that had to be filled with content, opposed to a candle to be lit (Freire, 1970). Traditional economic systems and market driven learning policies have undergone a fundamental challenge in terms of relevance and ability to meet the needs of individuals and communities. The 2008 crisis puts a new focus on innovation – this has a direct impact on learning for those working in inclusive education, in particular disability. One of the central questions in international contexts is how to work with the needs of specific communities to create a new matrix of opportunities for inclusion. This affects learning specialists and educators in terms of professional training, best practice and standards in community diversity. Social inclusion and educational provision can provide a dynamic synergy of perspectives and possibilities.

Finally, Positive Education is a method based totally around not simply conformity to prevailing ideas of potential employment and the labour market with its bold new emphasis on skills and competence. It is about a technologically enabled voyage to the limits of the human experience wherein innovation is a core value and community a valued concept. It is about enabling students to encounter and re-appropriate the joy of imagination and curiosity by believing in themselves – and in the ability of their society to develop in more productive ways. This is how language learning takes on the rich contours of deep learning with communication, listening and that joyous enquiry at the heart of everything.

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Development of Doctoral Students' Academic Skills in the Framework of the Study Course "English for Research Professionals"

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Abstract

Studying foreign languages for academic purposes prepares students for the specific academic requirements at the tertiary level of education. English as the language of international exchange aims not only to improve students' level of English, but also to develop the language skills necessary for the academic environment, such as reading research articles in the students' scientific disciplines, understanding vocabulary of the field, listening to lectures, taking notes, discussing scientific problems, presenting the results of their research, critical thinking, time management, etc. As regards the situation of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) in Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU), the study course "English for Research professionals" is included in the 1st year of the doctoral study programme curriculum. A blended learning approach has been implemented in the course. The aim of the present article was to investigate the development of academic skills of doctoral students in the framework of the study course "English for Research Professionals"; therefore, a survey was carried out to investigate doctoral students' opinions regarding essential academic skills in foreign languages. The findings showed that reading, reviewing and evaluating scientific literature; using formal academic style in writing; and presenting the research results in front of the peers were selected as the most required academic skills. The survey also examined the participants' perceptions of whether these academic skills were developed in the study course "English for Research Professionals" in the blended learning format. Conclusions of the findings are presented in the end of the article.

Keywords: *English for academic purposes, academic skills in foreign languages, blended learning*

1. Introduction

Doctoral programmes at universities focus on training adult students to perform research in a specific subject field. Foreign languages for academic purposes as a part of the doctoral studies' curriculum prepare doctoral students for the specific academic requirements at the tertiary level of education and adds an international dimension to the studies. English as the language of international exchange aims not only to improve students' level of English, but also to develop the language skills necessary for the academic environment and research activities to publish papers in peer-reviewed international scientific journals. In addition, the labour market in recent years has put an emphasis on the necessity of soft skills (i.e., critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving, etc.). Therefore, doctoral students are required to have a combination of professional knowledge and skills, academic skills, and soft skills to achieve success in their professional and academic careers.

As regards the situation of EAP at Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU), the study course "English for Research professionals" is included in the curriculum of the university's doctoral study programmes, its duration being one semester in the 1st year of studies. As a part of the course, doctoral students develop the language skills necessary for the academic environment, such as reading research articles in the students' scientific disciplines, understanding vocabulary of the field, listening to lectures, taking notes, discussing scientific problems, presenting the results of their research, etc. It should be noted that in the last three years, a blended learning approach has been employed. Online classes happen using the BigBlueButton (BBB) virtual classroom of the university's Moodle platform. In addition, a wide range of communication technology is available for academic staff to provide online content, such as the chat on the University page, Goggle docs, Kahoot, Miro, Padlet, and Mentimeter.

Doctoral study programmes entitle students to participate in extra-curriculum activities, i.e., international scientific conferences, thus motivating students to enrich their knowledge and develop academic English language skills. Doctoral students are encouraged to present the results of their

research activities in annual international scientific conferences organized by the university. For example, the annual conference “Students on their Way to Science” (<https://www.sws.llu.lv/>) for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students is traditionally organized at the university with participants from many countries over the years such as Latvia, Lithuania, France, the UK, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece, Canada, the USA, Turkey and others. The conference — the working language of which is English — is aimed at dissemination of scientific research results, sharing experience, improvement of foreign language skills as well as cross-cultural competence, and establishment of international contacts.

2. Literature Review

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a branch of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) which in the literature [1] has been divided into English for General Academic purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic purposes. The first type refers to the skills associated with study activities: for example, reading research articles, listening to lectures, taking notes, time management, etc. The second type integrates general academic skills in foreign languages with the specific subject tasks involving cooperation with the corresponding subject department. The importance of developing academic skills is mentioned by such authors as Alexander, Argent and Spenser, [2] who mention that EAP courses should have a broader scope and meet doctoral students’ expectations to develop skills necessary for the academic community, and de Chazal, [3] who considers that the role of EAP is to provide students with standard academic skills and awareness of broad academic conventions. Ozola, Sinkus and Grasmane [4] believe that such language skills and aspects as research skills, public speaking, written communication, collaboration skills and critical thinking are necessary for the international scientific space to describe and present doctoral students’ research findings. The researchers Alexander, Argent and Spenser [2] suggest that student autonomy and critical thinking are developed along with learning a foreign language. English in EAP is the language of academic discourse; moreover, EAP courses focus on vocabulary, grammar and discourse features typical of the scientific texts and academic communication. The researchers [2] also argue that in EAP courses, information is conveyed and students are assessed mainly through written texts; however, according to the authors’ experience, developing public speaking skills has been increasingly practiced in recent years in EAP courses.

Relevant research was carried out by Watson and Lyons [5] to determine knowledge, attributes and skills that the mechanical engineering industry would like to see in engineering PhD students. The survey was based on the list of skills that were selected through analysis of job advertisements in the industry and was carried out among the working engineering PhD students. The results showed that such soft skills as learning independently, working in teams, written and oral communication, solving problems, and working independently were considered the most important skills, while marketing products and processes, managing others, and identifying customer needs were the least required skills for PhD students. The fact that students put communication skills in the 3rd place signifies how important language skills are in the world of work.

As the blended learning approach was used in the study process, advantages and disadvantages of the approach are worth mentioning. El-Mowafy et.al. [6] believe that blended learning should be used in professional higher education courses as it is the most appropriate way to satisfy the need of industry and profession and enhance student learning by maximizing the understanding of theoretical principles; gaining knowledge and development of technical, practical and professional skills; and ensuring students’ active involvement in the learning process.

The following are other advantages of blended learning described in research literature (Garrison, Vaughan [7], Namyssova et.al. [8], Linder [9], Yılmaz, Malone [10], Sinkus, Ozola [11]); higher levels of student achievement can be reached; students can access materials easily; students’ attitudes towards learning can be improved, students can work at their own pace and be ensured they fully understand new concepts before moving on; and learners can have more autonomy, self-regulation, and independence in order to succeed. Moreover, education is becoming personalised, replacing the model where a teacher stands in front of the classroom and everyone is expected to stay at the same pace. Students’ simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience for university is facilitated; a student-centred approach can be used, teachers can support individual students who may need individualised attention, academic language skills and English communication skills can be developed, self-directed learning skills are promoted, and students become more confident in talking about their professional activities and research. As regards the disadvantages of blended learning, such experienced shortcomings come into mind, according to the authors’ opinion, as loss of the opportunity to communicate with the teacher and peers face-to-face, technical issues and internet connection problems, insufficient IT skills of both teachers and students, and time-consuming preparation for online classes on the behalf of teachers, etc.

3. Materials and Methods

The aim of the study was to examine doctoral students' opinions regarding the academic skills' preparation level in the course "English for Research professionals" at the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU).

Following literature review on the topic and in order to achieve the aim of the research, a case study was used as the research method. It consisted of two stages: firstly, the respondents were asked to vote for the skills they considered important for a researcher and should therefore be developed in the study course "English for Research Professionals". After the first stage, the academic skills were ranked according to their priority in the respondents' opinion, and the least mentioned skills were excluded from the next stage. Secondly, at the end of the course, after having studied academic English during one semester, PhD students (n=26) participated in a survey to determine the respondents' opinions based on their self-assessment as to which of academic skills they had developed most during the course. The doctoral students' English language proficiency levels ranged from B1 to C1 (most students had levels B2 and C1).

4. Results and Discussion

The study course "English for Research Professionals" at LBTU has been designed for doctoral students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in research work. It focuses on improving scientific writing, presentation and oral skills (discussion and fluency building); research vocabulary building; and ability to search for and select relevant information using authentic research literature.

As it was described above, a two-stage study design was implemented. The first stage of the research involved an online voting poll activity during the online lesson of the study course "English for Research Professionals". The E-Voting poll activity on the Moodle course enabled the doctoral students to vote via their smartphones or laptops and to have the results displayed on a graph in real time. The respondents had the possibility to choose multiple answers from the list of academic skills which was designed by the authors on the basis of the above literature review. The total number of answers was 120. The results in the order of priority are shown in 'Figure 1' below.

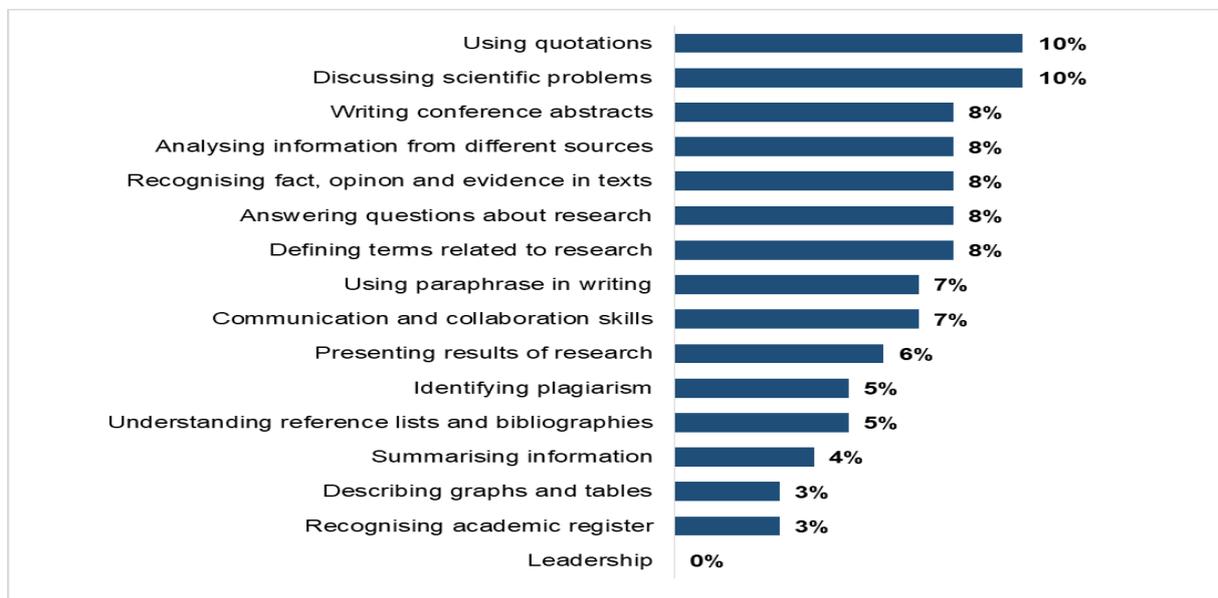


Fig.1. Doctoral students' opinion regarding the essential academic skills for a researcher

The findings identified fifteen important skills that a researcher should acquire, such as discussing scientific problems, using quotations, defining terms related to research, writing conference abstracts analyzing information from different sources, etc. It can be concluded that doctoral students consider skills related to describing and presenting their research findings to be of great importance. It is interesting to note that only one skill, 'leadership,' was not mentioned by the PhD students and, therefore, was excluded from the next stage of the present research. One explanation could be that the PhD students did not associate development of the academic language skills with leadership at work.

During the second part of the research, the PhD students participated in a survey which took place at the end of the course. Twenty-six PhD students (n=26) were asked to assess the level of their own academic skills' preparation in the framework of the course "English for Research Professionals." Students' reflections help them understand what they have achieved and assess if any progress has been made. The results of the survey are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Academic skills' preparation level in the English course: PhD students' self-assessment

Academic skills	Self-assessment of preparation level, %				Mean	Std. deviation	Rank
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
1. discussing scientific problems	7.7	15.4	53.8	23.1	2.92	.845	5
2. using quotations	11.5	30.8	15.5	42.3	2.88	1.107	6
3. presenting results of research	11.5	23.1	53.8	11.5	2.65	.846	8
4. defining terms related to research	7.7	46.2	38.5	7.7	2.46	.761	11
5. recognizing academic register	7.7	15.4	38.5	38.5	3.08	.935	3
6. answering questions about research	11.5	38.5	34.6	11.5	2.48	.872	10
7. understanding reference lists and bibliographies	7.7	19.2	38.5	34.6	3.00	.938	4
8. describing graphs and tables	11.5	42.3	34.6	11.5	2.46	.859	11
9. recognizing fact, opinion and evidence in texts	7.7	19.2	19.2	53.8	3.19	1.021	1
10. identifying plagiarism	0.0	38.5	42.3	19.2	2.81	.749	7
11. analyzing information from different sources	3.8	15.4	42.3	38.5	3.15	.834	2
12. communication and collaboration with groupmates	3.8	19.2	30.8	46.2	3.19	.895	1
13. summarizing information	11.5	38.5	26.9	23.1	2.62	.983	9
14. using paraphrase in writing	7.7	30.8	50.0	11.5	2.65	.797	8
15. writing conference abstracts	7.7	57.7	23.1	11.5	2.38	.804	12

By analyzing PhD students' academic skill mean values and standard deviation, it can be concluded that they have developed the following skills better than other skills in the course:

1. recognizing fact, opinion and evidence in texts (mean 3.19, SD 1.021)
2. communication and collaboration with groupmates (mean 3.19, SD .895)
3. analyzing information from different sources (mean 3.15, SD .834)
4. recognizing academic register (mean 3.08, SD .935)
5. understanding reference lists and bibliographies (mean 3.00, SD .938)
6. discussing scientific problems (mean 2.92, SD .845)

The student reflections and self-assessment are very useful to analyze the effectiveness of the aspects and topics studied during the course and raise awareness of the areas that should be improved upon during the EAP course in the future. The results of the survey made it possible to compare students' and teachers' expectations from the course. The best result in the respondents' opinion was received by the academic skill "*the finding specific information while reading texts*", which could be explained by the importance of reading scientific texts in the subject field. The second priority was given to "*communication and collaboration with groupmates*". Doctoral students were actively participating in the discussions (they often worked in groups in BBB breakrooms of the Moodle platform). The result correlated with the point expressed by other authors on the collaboration in the EAP courses; for example, Duff [12] argues that academic discourse socialization is a socially situated process to help students become members of this academic discourse community. It is important for PhD students to communicate and collaborate not only with a teacher, but also with peers to become aware of the complicated nature of academic discourse and simultaneously to develop their English language skills. The next three skills, "analyzing information from different sources", "recognizing academic register" and "understanding reference lists and bibliographies," refer to reading and writing scientific papers, which is in the core of the study course. The last one, "discussing scientific problems," focuses on the development of PhD students' speaking skills and signifies that students were given an opportunity to practice the skill during the lessons.

The results of the study show that the following skills received lower evaluation by the doctoral students:

- writing conference abstracts (mean 2.38 SD .804).
- describing graphs and tables (mean 2.46, SD .859),
- defining terms related to research (mean 2.46 SD .761).

This might be due to the complexity and specifications of the tasks to be accomplished. Therefore, in the future, more emphasis should be placed on practicing writing conference abstracts, describing graphs and tables, and defining terms related to research during lessons. Moreover, further studies would be necessary to explore how to improve these underdeveloped skills.

5. Conclusions

1. An EAP study course should have a broad scope and meet doctoral students' expectations to enrich their knowledge and develop skills important to become a member of the international academic community.
2. The results of the survey of the doctoral students' self-assessment show that the following skills have been better developed during the course: 1) recognizing facts, opinions and evidence in texts, 2) communication and collaboration with groupmates, 3) analyzing information from different sources, 4) recognizing academic register, 5) understanding reference lists and bibliographies, and 6) discussing scientific problems.
3. The skills that doctoral students have mentioned as the ones they have prepared most are the essential skills that allow them to successfully participate not only in research activities and the academic community, but also in various complex circumstances and spheres of life as they relate to critical thinking, the ability to relate to other people in society, and working productively in teams.

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Language Teaching Strategies

Development of the Learners' Social Responsibility Skills in the English Teaching Context

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Abstract

Current paper deals with the problem of the development of students' social responsibility skills in the process of language teaching. Appropriate methods, topics, exercises and practical tasks are introduced to observe the peculiarities of the development of students' social responsibility skills alongside with their language acquisition.

The paper clarifies the idea that only with the presence of student-centered instructional context it is possible to form and develop the above-mentioned competence, simultaneously ensuring effectiveness of the teaching process.

Methods for teaching social responsibility are different. Here the role of the teacher is essential. He/she should make a careful elaboration of the lesson plan, considering the children's age, interests, as well as the topic of the lesson, goals, expected outputs and different other pedagogical and educational components.

Within the framework of this article, we try to present our observations related to the issue of formation and development of social responsibility of students at elementary and secondary stages of learning, particularly through interaction.

It becomes clear that today social responsibility is a life-skill, a value that helps a person, in this case, a school student, to recognize his own skills, to gain independence, self-confidence, the ability to live and orient himself in different socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: *social responsibility, interactive environment, life skills, cooperative learning, student-centered teaching environment.*

Social Responsibility describes the awareness, understanding and appreciation of people and surrounding environments. Socially responsible students try to engage with people and the world around them in ethical and respectful ways. Social responsibility includes four core tenets. They are:

- **building relationships**
- **contributing to the community and caring for the environment**
- **resolving problems**
- **valuing diversity** [5].

The classroom is a conducive learning environment where not only the acquisition of knowledge is valued, but also life skills: communication, collaboration, critical/creative thinking, learning to learn, social responsibility, etc. Various methods and processes are aimed at developing students' social responsibility skills in the classroom: brainstorming, task-based learning, authentic dialogues and conversations, presentations, role-playing, debates, etc. As one of the life skills of the 21st century, it helps students acquire the skills to live and act harmoniously in a multilingual and multicultural world, as well as the ability to relate and cooperate with others, along with language acquisition. It develops skills that will be essential for the learner in the future: how to select the right choices in different life situations, make decisions, and finally, live in inner and social harmony.

Today, the development of social responsibility of students is at the core of general education, particularly in language education. Important international program guidelines address this issue. In "The Cambridge Life Competences" published by Cambridge University Press, social responsibility is discussed in detail, with the help of carefully developed descriptors, the sub-competencies characterizing its development are covered. The document considers the gradual development of

students' social responsibility skills according to the stages of education: pre-educational, elementary, secondary, higher and professional [1].

Next, the three main sub-competencies of social responsibility are presented:

Understanding of personal and social responsibility as part of a particular social group – Refers to the identification and understanding of the importance of personal and social responsibility at different levels or situations, from the partial to the global. Presupposes that learners should fulfill their personal and social responsibilities as a member of a social group and/or as a global citizen and take responsibility for their actions.

Demonstrating intercultural awareness - This refers to the learners being able to describe and analyze the characteristics of their own culture and that of others, and make comparisons in a positive and respectful way. It also includes the opportunity to collaborate with people from other cultures. Culture in this context can refer to the cultures of different countries or the cultures of different ethnic/social groups and organizations.

Understanding global/universal issues - Involves identifying, discussing and understanding a range of perspectives on global issues, such as health, human rights and environmental topics. Learners will be able to understand how their behaviour can positively or negatively contribute to the identified issues [1].

In the General Language Education Program of the Republic of Armenia the social responsibility of learners is also emphasized, it is included in the topics presented in the content core and in the corresponding language material, through the context of the concept of **identity**. Naturally, social responsibility should be emphasized in the teacher's lesson plan, where he/she elaborates and specifies the purpose and expected outcomes of each lesson, guaranteeing meaningful and effective language learning.

Role of the Language Teacher Supporting Social Responsibility

To support social responsibility of the learners, we must provide an inclusive instructional environment in class. For this account we can use the following tools:

- assign classroom jobs' use
- role-playing in social situations
- large and small group activities
- class stories
- class meetings
- discussions, debates
- different kind of social activities, events, etc.

Students today understand the importance of developing skills. They know the value of being an all-rounder and understand the value of social cohesion. That is why students also need to work on their social responsibility and realize their duties as responsible citizens.

So, how can teachers play a crucial role in making students aware of social responsibility. They can teach responsibility to students in the following ways.

- **Primary school learners:** Teachers can help their students learn the concept of giving back to the local community. They can take pupils out for volunteering activities or organize drawing competitions based on their social responsibility.
- **Secondary school learners:** One of the ways to let pupils know the importance of social responsibility is by giving them enough resources and keeping them informed. Teachers can provide students access to websites and other informational/media resources that evaluate the environmental and social impacts of different kind of human activities.
- **High school learners:** Teachers can offer projects about environmental concerns and what students can do to make the environment better. Also, they can encourage students to participate in debates concerning social responsibility [3; p.46].

These are some ways through which teachers can encourage students to participate in solving various issues concerning the environment. To make social responsibility more engaging for students, teachers can encourage them to take internships or projects with an organization working for the welfare of society and the environment. The development of the learner's social responsibility supposes the evaluation of the following principles:

Accountability
 Transparency
 Ethical behaviour, respect for human rights
 Respect for the rule of law
 Respect for international norms of behaviour [5]

Within the framework of this article, we try to specify the issue of formation and development of social responsibility of the learners at the elementary and secondary levels of education, and particularly through interaction.

Elementary Level

We can testify, that junior schoolers are curious by nature. It means that it is necessary to create an environment in class that will stimulate their curiosity, internal motivation and as a result they will be integrated into the learning process. Above all, it is necessary to help children communicate with each other respectfully, maintaining the order of speech, mutual tolerance and respect. Children are free, they can ask each other questions, trying to understand different phenomena, analyze situations and evaluate facts.

Non-academic technologies are very effective at this stage of learning, as children strive to learn with the help of songs, fairy tales, short stories, simple texts and games. Role-playing games are especially effective. The teacher must make appropriate choice when choosing the topic to integrate the personal/social responsibilities and rights of the learners in the society into the language lesson. They can be offered roles: brother or sister, son or daughter, classmate, friend, team member, and match them with the responsibilities of each role: share responsibility, be considerate, respect others' feelings, be fair, respectful, consider others' opinions, help the one who is more vulnerable, follow the rules, etc.

To provide effectiveness in class the teachers must carefully and purposefully select the topics for each lesson. Topics must be available and interesting to children, taking into consideration their age, social background, interests and hobbies. Besides, the teacher must elaborate and specify the goals of the lesson and expected outputs.

For example, introducing the topic “**House**” we can work out the following goals:

- Expand the vocabulary describing the house, room, housework.
- Develop the ability to use simple expressions describing the house, room, household chores in written and oral speech.
- Import and reinforce grammatical material relevant to the topic.

As for recommended forms of activities we offer:

- Wallpaper: My house/room
- Watching a video: Homework
- Role play
- Work with pictures.

As a result, in association with language skills the learners acquire a caring attitude and responsibility towards the house and things.

The topic “**Me and my friends**” is also appropriate to this stage of instruction. We suggest the following goals:

- Expand the thematic vocabulary related to friends, friendship, acquaintance.
- Import and reinforce very simple and short phrases representing himself and his friends.
- Develop the skill of introducing oneself and one's friends in simple words and short sentences.
- Introduce and reinforce grammatical material relevant to the topic.

Contents of the lesson can embrace the following questions:

- My classmates
- Who is my friend?
- New acquaintances, etc.

As for recommended forms of activity we offer:

- Wallpaper: My Friend
- Role play: Acquaintance in the yard, library/corridor etc.

As a result, the learners develop their language knowledge and acquire an attitude towards the importance of friends and friendship.

Teachers can introduce different situations in class, making learners more motivated. Students can also work in pairs or groups to role-play the given situations, for example:

- A classmate at school or a family member at home does not fulfill their duties responsibly. mom is busy with housework, one of the children immediately stops the game and helps mom, and the other one still annoys her. -**To form a caring attitude towards one's own place of residence, community. To form respect to work and to different professions.**
- In the store, the older brother is doing shopping for the family, and the younger one stubbornly demands his brother to buy a game channel for him. -**To form awareness of the importance of spending money sparingly while shopping, buying only what is necessary and suitable.**
- It's winter, children don't accept their mothers' advice: they don't go to school in warm clothes and get sick. - **Create an awareness of the importance of wearing clothes appropriate for the season and the weather of the day.**
- They see that some children are polluting the nature while eating ice cream in the park, not throwing the ice cream paper in the trash. - **Give examples (also from own experience) of basic rules of behaviour in one's own place of residence, caring for the community, entertainment places.**

With similar situational tasks children should be helped find the mutual connection between the acquired knowledge and personal life experience, so that the knowledge does not remain as a simple memorization of theoretical ideas, but becomes practical, connected with life.

In an outclass contexts teachers can enhance social responsibility in students if **they teach them the art of preserving, for example:** to teach to respect the environment and to make it a better place. First of all, the teacher must make the children be aware of their surroundings and learn the art of preserving. They can encourage students to keep their surroundings clean. Teachers can help them understand the need to preserve water and other non-renewable resources of energy. The habit of switching off the lights and fans before leaving the classroom should also be encouraged.

As a citizen of the 21st century, the above-mentioned processes are aimed at helping students to acquire skills to live and act harmoniously in a multilingual and multicultural world, as well as the ability to relate and cooperate with others.

Secondary Level

Students at this age are more motivated, especially when the presented tasks and practical works are consistent with their age characteristics and interests. Therefore, it is necessary to personalize the learning process, that is, teachers should connect the taught material with the personality of their students and their daily life. The closer the children are to the content of the language material being taught, the more motivated they will be integrated into the learning process.

Today, as a result of ICT communication, students have more awareness of the world around them. Being motivated, they will be able to explore themselves and people in different social contexts. Hands-on learning in the classroom and outside of school in extra-curricular environments should be promoted. Again, the right choice of topics is important. We should choose topics that have gained more and more popularity in the media, for example, "Climate change", "Animal protection", "World cuisines", "Company on social networks", etc.

The topic "**Climate change**" can be studied in the context of regular class, open class or event, it can include:

- reading, discussion of texts
- video viewing and discussion
- making of posters, slides
- various discussions, debates
- short reports
- quizzes, contests, etc.

We can introduce the above topic to the class through exercises or practical tasks, for example:

- State in three sentences what actions you want to support the fight against climate change.
- Present how you save resources at home and at school, for example: water and energy.
- Write a letter to national or global authorities calling for urgent proposals to overcome the climate crisis.

As a result, along with language knowledge, **students acquire information on the importance of participating in different actions for preserving our planet from disasters and cataclysms.**

The topic “**Animal protection**” is also interesting for children. Within the scope of this topic, we can:

- expand and strengthen the vocabulary and grammatical structures related to the topic
- develop oral and written language
- organize a role-play on the themes "On the farm", "In the forest"/"In the zoo".
- organize a visit to the zoo, and then ask children to prepare a short report, poster or PPT show on the topic "My favourite animal".

As a result, along with language knowledge, **students acquire the responsibility of caring for animals, the ability to preserve the environment and realize its importance.**

At this stage, projects are also effective, their topics should be consistent with the students' age interests, preferences, and the language material should be in accordance with their knowledge and skills. Students can work in pairs, groups.

While introducing the topic "**Cuisines of the world**", we emphasize the development of the social responsibility of students within the framework of presenting the idea of the diversity of cuisines and cuisine as a part of national culture.

Students will learn:

- the language material related to the topic
- the names and composition of famous dishes of one's own country
- the most popular dishes of the target language country and other countries
- information on the lives and activities of famous chefs.

As a learning method, the followings will be effective:

- role-playing
- poster on the theme "Cuisines of the world"
- project: Creation of a cooking video/Organization of a multicultural dinner
- visit to the cafe/restaurant, follow-up discussions.

As a result, **students realize the importance of interculturality and multiculturalism as the most important competence of a modern citizen, their ability to perceive and value the diversity of cuisines in the given cultural context will be formed.** In parallel, they will re-recognize their national values and acquire abilities not only to appreciate, but also to represent them.

While teaching the topic “**Holidays**”, we emphasize the development of the social responsibility of students within the framework of the idea how to be respectful towards others and their cultures. We can suggest the following goals:

- Introduce the idea of holidays as an important part of culture.
- Expand vocabulary and structures describing holidays/anniversaries/national/international holidays.
- Import and reinforce grammatical material relevant to the topic.
- Familiarize with the similarities and differences of national holidays held in the country of the target language and in Armenia.

Contents of the lesson can embrace the following questions:

- anniversaries
- national holidays (in the studied country and in Armenia)
- international holidays.

As for recommended forms of activity we offer:

- role playing
- cross-cultural research project: "Holidays"
- PPT presentation: "My favorite holiday"
- writing a short simple letter to an online friend "My birthday"
- video viewing/discussion.

As a result, **the learners deepen their responsibility for the preservation of national culture, holidays and acquire a respectful attitude towards other cultures and holidays.**

In an outclass contexts teachers can enhance the learners' social responsibility skills encouraging them to participate in **voluntary activities**. They can take students to an old-age home or introduce them to various other organizations that work for the betterment of society.

Teachers can encourage their students to **make contributions**: to collect their old books, gadgets, clothes, and other items and donate them to needy people.

In the modern changing world problems regularly arise that the students are also concerned with. Willingly or unwillingly, they address the opportunities, issues and challenges of a fast-paced, multicultural world. Therefore, teachers should help students recognize and realize their rights and responsibilities. As a result of our professional experience and observations in the schools of the Republic of Armenia, we are convinced that in this context it is essential to introduce the topics, language material, situations, dialogues, as well as authentic texts that will promote social responsibility in the classroom. The selection should be made carefully and purposefully, taking into consideration the learners' needs. Experience shows that students are happy to integrate into discussions on social topics, using the target language in parallel.

We, teachers must be flexible in choosing topics. Social responsibility issues should be included in weekly lesson planning as they provide a meaningful learning context for the language use. It is simply necessary to have a friendly, non-judgmental environment in class, where everyone's opinion is respected and valued. The student must realize that he/she is not a passive learner, but an active social actor, therefore they have the right to express their own opinion, and that making a mistake is not a defect and they will not be criticized or judged for their wrong answer.

There is a continuing debate about the amount of time teachers should spend talking in class. Overuse of Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is inappropriate because the more teacher talks, the less chance there is for the students to practice their own speaking, and it is the students who need the practice, not the teacher. [4, p 38]

Main language educational document in Europe, the CEFR emphasizes communication in language teaching, considering "action-oriented approach" as the basic approach within the communicative language teaching [2; p.27].

Thus, methods for teaching social responsibility are different. The teacher should make a choice, considering the children's age, interests, as well as the subject of the lesson, goals, current objectives and expected outputs.

As a life skill of the 21st century, social responsibility is of key importance and only purposeful and carefully elaborated interaction will generate motivation in class, fostering the learners' language communicative skills and their diverse life competences as well.

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Beliefs of Rural Primary Teachers About the Communicative English Teaching Transformation in North China

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Abstract

Traditional drill-based English lessons are often viewed by Chinese students as a dreary learning process. Recently, there has been a growing awareness of this, and some more communicative and task-based alternatives to traditional pedagogy could be the antidote. However, it remains underexplored to what extent this is being developed at the grassroots level. A large proportion of primary students in China live outside major metropolitan areas with bare academic attention because of urban-oriented education policies. This gap makes it even more imperative to investigate the condition of alternative pedagogies implementation in a rural context. Teachers' beliefs can reflect their attitudes towards a teaching method, so knowing how teachers theoretically and practically perceive innovative approaches could be useful. Therefore, this study aims to investigate in-service teachers' beliefs about novel teaching with communicative tasks in one North-China rural area. Semi-structured interviews with 6 interviewees from a questionnaire survey were used. The results show that communicative teaching has started unfolding both in classrooms and at all echelons of the education system in the target area, and those practitioners all present positive attitudes. Still, they have not formulated a specific perception of approaches, which means that teachers need more training opportunities to learn theories and practice. Exam-oriented assessment is also a factor impeding innovation. The current research helps to explore the state of local pedagogy reform and teachers' voices, which indicates some possible directions for foreign language education development. Eclecticism that advocates combining both traditional and novel means might be a feasible option.

Keywords: *conflicts in policy reform, communicative approaches, teachers' beliefs, EFL pedagogy, rural China*

1. Introduction

As globalisation took off in the 1970s, the status of English as the primary international language was reinforced, playing a critical role in global affairs [1]. Learning additional languages, especially English, became a prevalent trend worldwide, and "learning for communication" gradually spread to many traditional teaching contexts, such as Asia. China, as the largest English learning market in the world, is one of the typical contexts and worthwhile to give adequate attention in terms of its current practice.

There are signs showing China's effort, such as the Reform of the English Curriculum Standard, but some challenges still remain. One is the rural-urban gap in Chinese education, which causes a considerable disparity in the educational resources between students in cities and the countryside [2]. Regional differences are also a significant problem. Students in developed areas can receive a better education in a more suitable environment. Therefore, it's necessary to consider English policy implementation in China regionally and locally rather than one-fits-all. Rural area is the focus here, which has received scarce attention yet.

Teachers play a critical role in language education. Knowing how teachers, the practitioners implementing teaching methods and strategies, consider and practice these new pedagogical trails is an efficient means to investigate the status of language policy implementation in the target area. With these considerations, this study investigates the status quo of English education and teachers' beliefs about the new policy implementation in rural China.

2. Literature Review

2.1 China's Curriculum Standard Reform

In 2022, China's Ministry of Education (MOE) published the latest English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education. This aligns with the "Double Reduction" policy issued in 2021, which aims to ease the burden of study for students in compulsory and secondary education [3].

The new standard emphasis is on four "core competencies":

- Language Competence (i.e., the ability to exert language and non-language strategies to comprehend and express);
- Cultural Awareness (i.e., the ability to understand excellent Chinese and foreign cultures and transcultural consciousness);
- Thinking Quality (i.e., characteristics and features of the learner's mindset); and,
- Learning Competence (i.e., the ability and awareness to positively and properly utilize learning strategies, expand learning means and improve learning efficiency).

These competence definitions, although seemingly broad, manifest that China's educational officiality is striving to transform English education from traditional and grammatical to communicative and used-based.

2.2 Teachers' Beliefs

Many scholars have defined "beliefs" theoretically but in different research realms. For example, Pajares raises that "belief is based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact" [4]. Beliefs can also refer to a means that people contextually manipulate their knowledge on a cognitive level [5]. Others also focus on how beliefs affect people's actions. These two aspects, knowledge and practices, are quite significant in discussing teachers' beliefs.

Teachers' beliefs generally touch on educational aspects: investigating teachers' beliefs in language teaching is to elicit their attitudes, judgement, and perception toward a particular language teaching method, model or theory [6]. A multitude of factors may play a role in formulating and alternating teachers' beliefs. Many theorists acknowledge that previous learning and teaching experience is a crucial factor affecting teachers' beliefs. Other factors include socio-educational contexts (e.g., class size and time, institutional situation and educational policy) and teacher training programs.

It will help improve teachers' practice and training programs to understand teachers' beliefs, which are individually differentiated and changeable [7]. Hence, teachers' beliefs of the language policy conduction and implementation are indispensable for the current study.

2.3 Factors Influencing Policy Implementation

Teachers are one of the central roles. Some main issues are teachers' language proficiency and qualifications, large workload and limited time and teachers' understanding of the principles. These are often attributed to teachers but may also be connected to the language educational system.

Many also emphasised the significance of teacher education and training. Also, language policies and curricula cannot be neglected: teachers under top-down policy implementation are at the lowest position in the power conduction and usually have to follow instructions from those higher roles [8]. These restrain teachers from deciding which methods or activities should be used to some extent.

Students' status has been centralized in the classroom for decades, so it's essential to highlight their roles as well. Similar to teachers, students' language proficiency is also a consideration. Teachers in previous studies have reported that students do not have adequate language competency to benefit from communicative pedagogy. Other issues are also highlighted, such as low motivation, passive style, resistance to activities, etc.

In this study, a relatively new stance was added – parent-related factors. Parents play a critical role in students' academic development in school [9] which is highly relevant to young learners' language development, including multilingual competence [10]. However, little attention has to date been paid to its position in China's FL learning context.

3. Methodology

This study is part of a Master's dissertation and was conducted in a rural North-China region with a qualitative research method. Considering the research aims and the desirability of obtaining a suitable sample size, participants were recruited to satisfy two criteria: 1. they must be in-service to ensure that participants are aware of the latest English teaching situations; 2. they must have experience teaching English in local rural primary schools. Six teachers who showed their consent in an online survey participated in the semi-structured interviews. The interview was a follow-up phase from mid to late August. Semi-structured interviews were designed to investigate the teachers' beliefs about new

approach implementation and influential factors because it is "sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus" [11].

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then translated into English. The researcher inspected appropriateness and made some adjustments after both transcription and translation work. This study used thematic analysis, which is a method that "focus[es] on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes" [12]. Teachers' perspectives on communicative teaching approaches and influencing factors discovered by previous studies were referenced for the coding work. Finally, there are 341 codes within four categories: basic cognition, policy implementation, teacher agency, and suggestions.

4. Results and Discussion

In the semi-structured interviews, all six teachers showed positive attitudes towards the novel communicative teaching options. When they were asked about the differences between the communicative and traditional ones they used, most of them were able to point out certain ideas. For instance, T1 thought traditional teaching is to learn more "systematically", while communicative is to "learn as native speakers" and "be in the context". Another teacher T3 mentioned a merged way of using both sides in practice: "Our current so-called audiolingual has been improved [...] we previously proposed a task-based method [...] teachers assign a task [...] [asking] students to read [the text] [...] audiolingual teaching is merging with situational approaches". This indicates that these participants are trying to accept and apply the new pedagogy, even though they have not figured out a clear understanding of it.

Also, there are obstacles to new policy implementation emphasized in the interviews. One is the exam-oriented scheme, which has been discussed many times in previous findings. Nevertheless, based on China's condition, the conflict between communicative language education and the current assessing system, especially the *Gaokao* (a national college entrance exam), is inextricable. The latter cannot be cancelled or replaced in the short term due to its speciality: *Gaokao*, as one of the representatives, has been looking for "a selection mechanism relatively fair and objective" for decades. Another is teachers' misconceptions about the word 'communicative'. T1 thought that it demands more communication between teachers and students. This comment reveals that this teacher was still thinking from a teacher-centred angle. "The so-called communicative teaching has no communicative functionality [...] [because] some teachers' understanding is one-side and not profound enough, [...] including me", T6 criticized. Other factors are also mentioned indirectly, such as teachers' language proficiency, students' individual differences, and students' motivation.

Benefited by the semi-structured form, many teachers presented some unexpected insights, and one surprising facet is about the parents of learners. This topic used to be frequently connected to learners' first language development and bi- or multilingual acquisition. However, under China's traditional parenting style, parents conspicuously leverage Chinese students' studies, including English learning. A tight bond between parents and class was shed light on by T4: they highly care about their children's academic performance in school. However, those parents, who are primarily exam-oriented, "usually focus more on students' scores than on communicative competence", T5 commented. Teachers shared that some parents initially could comprehend these new policies until they got some positive feedback from teachers or their children. Apart from the parents' attitude, their language proficiency is another consideration. T6 contributed to this point: "Generally, those parents in the target rural area had not received tertiary or secondary education, and some had not even completed elementary school." Thus, they even have no idea what is English communicative competence, so they can't get involved in this process.

5. Conclusion

The findings from the current study illustrate that although many teachers might not be well prepared to embrace the new teaching alternatives, they presented optimistic attitudes toward these. Regarding the new policy still being conducted from the top hierarchy following a top-down manner, teachers still need time to know and practice. Moreover, this study revealed a series of problems and proposed solutions. For example, teachers' competence deficiency, misconceptions and limited agency, students' low proficiency and motivation, parents' over-emphasis on scores and insufficient communication chances are all influential. However, these are all closely related to the policies and institutions. The foremost suggestion given here is to promote and refine the teacher training system. Furthermore, based on China's condition, it is better to mediate and balance the connections between the exam-oriented assessing system and communicative teacher approaches. Research results also suggest that the influence of parents' attitudes and roles is also considerable. Within the EFL context, learners

normally spend the most extracurricular time in the family. Thus, parents might be critical in young learners' FL (i.e., English) development. Therefore, how parents as a factor interact with other factors in language policy-making and implementing process needs more exploration and explanation.

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The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on Developing EFL Iraqi College Students Performance in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the impact of vocabulary learning strategies on the development of (EFL) Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension, utilizing questionnaires as a primary tool for data collection. The study focuses on the challenges faced by Iraqi students in comprehending English texts due to their limited vocabulary knowledge and it explores the effectiveness of the various vocabulary learning strategies in addressing these challenges. The participants of the study are a group of students at the second stage in English Department of Misan University. The researchers employed mixed-methods, incorporating quantitative measures such as pre- and post-tests to assess reading comprehension skills and qualitative data through interviews to evaluate the students' perceptions of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings indicate that the systematic use of vocabulary learning strategies significantly improves EFL students' reading comprehension abilities. These strategies offer a valuable resource for educators seeking to enhance the language learning experience for Iraqi college students and potentially for EFL learners globally. This research contributes to the field of language education by shedding light on the practical methods to enhance reading comprehension, thereby fostering language proficiency and academic success among EFL learners.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Iraqi EFL Students, Reading Comprehension Performance

1.1 The Significance

This research has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of English language education in Iraq. By identifying effective vocabulary learning strategies tailored to the specific needs of EFL students. The research equips educators and institutions with valuable insights to optimize language instruction. This, in turn, can lead to substantial improvements in reading comprehension skills, which are pivotal for academic success among college students. Moreover, the research is not confined to the borders of Iraq. It has wider applicability, offering valuable insights for EFL educators and learners worldwide. The identified strategies can be adapted and applied in diverse EFL contexts, making it a potential resource for a global audience. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of cultural and contextual relevance in language instruction. By considering the specific linguistic and cultural context of Iraq, it emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive teaching materials and approaches. This is essential in bridging the gap between language instruction and students' unique backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Lastly, the research encourages further exploration of EFL education in Iraq and the broader Middle Eastern context. It serves as a catalyst for more in-depth investigations into the specific challenges and effective strategies for language acquisition and comprehension in this region, ultimately expanding the knowledge base in the field of EFL education.

1.2 The Aims

This research paper aims at:

1. finding out the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies on developing EFL Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension.
2. How do sociocultural and educational factors in Iraq influence the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies for EFL college students' reading comprehension?

1.3 The Research Questions

The research paper aims to address the following questions:

1. How do particular vocabulary learning strategies improve the reading comprehension of Iraqi college (EFL) students?

2. How do sociocultural and educational factors in Iraq influence the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies for EFL college students' reading comprehension?

1.4 The Limits

The research is limited to the Department of English Language - College of Basic Education / Misan University in the academic year 2022-2023.

2. Theoretical Background

Schmitt (1997:1) provides a definition for vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as the methods and behaviors that aid language learners in gaining and retaining vocabulary knowledge. On his part, Gu (2020:3) states that the effectiveness of choosing and using of vocabulary learning strategies depend on the task, the learner, and the learning context. Gu's view includes the task-dependent strategies of learning from context, dictionary use, vocabulary notetaking, rote rehearsal, encoding, word formation, semantic networks and vocabulary in use.

In the realm of reading comprehension, Alderson (2000:128) characterizes reading as an enjoyable, immersive, and personal activity that can provide great pleasure and absorption.

3. Literature Review

Many academic studies have delved into the complex relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the mysterious realm of reading comprehension in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These studies have yielded insights of substantial significance, shedding light on the pivotal role played by vocabulary acquisition techniques in the comprehension of written text. One such study conducted by Groot (2016) traversed the terrain of vocabulary learning strategies in the EFL arena. Groot's meticulous research delved into the intricacies of this relationship, ultimately revealing a positive correlation between the employment of vocabulary learning strategies and the performance of EFL learners in the domain of reading comprehension. This discovery is profound, as it underscores the tangible benefits that can be derived from a strategic approach to vocabulary acquisition, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and implementing these strategies within the EFL educational framework (Laufer, 2003:509).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension. A questionnaire serves as the primary data collection tool.

4.2 Participants

The sample comprises 60 fourth-year Iraqi students enrolled in English as a foreign language program at Misan University, encompassing both the Department of Basic Education College and the College of Education during the 2023 academic year. In addition, a total of 150 college teachers specializing in English as a foreign language were part of this research, and the researcher aims to extend the findings to this group as well.

4.3 Research Instrument

4.3.1 Questionnaire

To effectively accomplish the objectives of this study, a meticulously designed questionnaire has been crafted with great care and attention to detail. This questionnaire serves as the primary instrument employed to gather the essential data required for the research. The formulation of this questionnaire involved a thoughtful and deliberate process, ensuring that it aligns seamlessly with the study's objectives. This well-structured survey tool has been meticulously tailored to elicit valuable insights, opinions, and information from the participants, enabling the study to collect and analyze data that will contribute significantly to the achievement of its intended outcomes. The questionnaire is designed to be clear, concise, and easy to understand, ensuring the participants can respond accurately. In the context of this research, its primary objective is to ascertain the perceptions of educators regarding the use of vocabulary learning strategies and its impact on enhancing the reading comprehension performance of EFL college students in Misan, Iraq. The construction of the questionnaire draws upon a range of sources, with a particular emphasis on relevant literature, including books, journals, and

articles pertaining to the research problem. This well-informed approach ensures that the questionnaire is rooted in established research and best practices.

To measure the attitudes and opinions of the participating teachers, a Likert Scale, adopted from Margono (2004:176), was employed. This scale involves a set of statements that teachers can respond to, offering three response options: (1) Strongly Agree (SA), (2) Agree (A), and (3) Disagree (D). The questionnaire consists of 15 items, each one addresses the teachers' perceptions of vocabulary learning strategies and other related factors that contribute to the process of learning English. Teachers were given this questionnaire and allotted 5 to 10 minutes for completion to ensure efficiency. The study sampled a total of 20 teachers, each of whom received the questionnaire, with the aim of collecting the most comprehensive and accurate information. Subsequently, the researcher collected the completed questionnaires from the participants to analyze the data and draw meaningful conclusions.

4.4 Data Collection Procedures

1. Pilot Testing: Before administering the questionnaire, a pilot test is conducted with a small group of EFL students to assess the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire items. Based on feedback and statistical analysis, necessary revisions is made.

2. Informed Consent: Prior to distributing the questionnaire to the selected participants, informed consent is obtained, ensuring that participants are aware of the research's purpose and voluntarily agree to participate.

3. Questionnaire Distribution: The questionnaire is distributed to the participants either in person or electronically, depending on their preference and availability.

4. Data Collection Period: The data collection process is extended over a specified period, and participants is given adequate time to complete the questionnaire.

5. Data Management: All collected data are stored securely and anonymously, with access restricted to the research team.

4.4.1 Scoring Scheme

To ensure the objectivity and reliability of results, it is imperative to employ precise scoring procedures, as emphasized by Harrocks and Schannover (1968:76). To align with the study's objectives, the questionnaire has been designed to elicit responses on a three-point scale: (1) Strongly Agree (SA), (2) Agree (A), and (3) Disagree (D).

4.4.2 Statistical Means

Statistical Methods Utilized:

To address the study's objectives, the following statistical tools were employed:

1. Percentage
2. Pearson Correlation Coefficient

$$R = (\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y) / \sqrt{[(\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2) * (\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2)]}^{0.5}$$

5. Results

In this research paper, the researchers explored the use of vocabulary learning strategies among EFL Iraqi college students and their relationship with performance in reading comprehension. The data collected through the questionnaire shed light on the strategies employed by the participants and their attitudes toward these strategies.

Our findings indicate that the majority of participants somewhat agree with employing new words in sentences to aid in remembering them (Mean Score = 3.1). This suggests that many students acknowledge the value of contextual usage for vocabulary retention. However, the moderate standard deviation of 0.7 indicates a range of opinions, with some participants expressing stronger agreement than others. Furthermore, participants expressed a relatively high level of agreement with the use of self-quizzing to verify word retention (Mean Score = 3.4). The low standard deviation of 0.6 suggests a more uniform consensus among participants in favor of this strategy, implying its perceived effectiveness.

Acquiring words from movies and television shows was viewed positively, with a mean score of 2.9. However, the higher standard deviation of 0.8 indicates a wider range of responses, with some students finding this strategy more effective than others.

These results underscore the diversity in approaches to vocabulary learning among EFL Iraqi college students. While some strategies like self-quizzing are widely accepted and considered effective, others, such as acquiring words from media, may be more context-dependent.

- L (1): Strongly Disagree
- SA (2): Somewhat Agree
- A (3): Agree
- D (4): Strongly Disagree

The insightful data presented in Table 4, which showcases the utilization of vocabulary learning strategies by students, offers a compelling perspective. This is evident as each item within the table reflects a weighted mean exceeding the theoretical benchmark of 2. These results hold significant implications, firmly establishing the students' effective deployment of vocabulary learning strategies. The fact that the average weighted mean is calculated at 2.77 further accentuates this point, surpassing the theoretical mean of 2.60.

In essence, this data underscores that students are not merely employing vocabulary learning strategies, but they are doing so with a notable level of proficiency. The consistent weighted means above the theoretical baseline serve as strong evidence of their adeptness in this regard, suggesting that these strategies are effectively contributing to their language learning and comprehension. This insight sheds light on the efficacy of these strategies within the context of the study and highlights the students' competence in their application. It uncovers a myriad of approaches employed by Misan students studying English to enhance their vocabulary.

6. Conclusion

This research has provided a robust evidence that students actively employ vocabulary learning strategies as an integral part of their language learning journey. These strategies are not just a passive aspect of their learning process but are actively utilized with a degree of efficacy that significantly contributes to their reading comprehension skills.

Item analysis within the questionnaire has highlighted specific strategies that students favor, such as learning from movies and TV or seeking moments of silence to grasp unfamiliar words. These findings underscore the diversity and adaptability of these strategies within the student community, reflecting the dynamic nature of language learning.

In the specific context of Misan, Iraq, this study contributes significantly by filling a notable gap in the research landscape. It represents an initial step towards understanding the nuances of vocabulary learning strategies within this context, offering a foundation for future investigations and potentially reshaping language education practices.

In essence, this research underscores the vital role of vocabulary learning strategies in the development of EFL reading comprehension skills among Iraqi college students. It not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also holds the potential to inform more effective pedagogical approaches, ultimately benefiting both students and educators in the journey of English language acquisition.

Students actively employ vocabulary learning strategies as an integral part of their language learning journey. These strategies are not just a passive aspect of their learning process but are actively utilized with a degree of efficacy that significantly contributes to their reading comprehension skills. There are specific strategies favored by students, highlighting the diversity and adaptability of these methods within the student community. Encoding, word formation and vocabulary notetaking are the most effective learning strategies employed by the students.

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Language Teachers' Training Courses. The Need for Practical Strategies and Resources in the Light of Today's Evolving Educational Landscape

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Abstract

Teachers of languages face several hurdles in today's classrooms. These include, but are not limited to, diverse student needs, limited instructional time, large class sizes, assessment pressures, limited resources, motivating students and sociocultural and linguistic diversity. To overcome these challenges, teachers need to adopt flexible teaching strategies, incorporate student-centered approaches and leverage technology appropriately in order to create effective language learning experiences. In such an evolving educational landscape, language teachers' training courses need not only address the specific requirements of teachers that may vary depending on the context, the language being taught and the proficiency level of their students but also several other key areas, designed to provide teachers with practical strategies and resources they can apply in their classrooms. This is essential, even in the light of the fact that in many countries students are shunning foreign language learning, especially due to a perceived lack of relevance and a limited exposure to authentic language use, making it crucial for teachers to provide authentic language experiences in class, to integrate technology effectively, to foster a positive learning environment and, above all, to connect language learning to the students' personal interests and goals.

Keywords: *Language teaching; teacher training; classroom challenges.*

1. Introduction

Societal changes over the past years have indeed had a significant impact on language classrooms, reshaping teaching methodologies, curricula, and even the role of teachers. The list is endless - from the proliferation of technology, especially the internet and mobile devices which has revolutionized access to language resources and authentic materials enabling learners to engage with language in real-world contexts beyond the classroom, to the emphasis on communicative and task-based approaches which prioritize practical language use over rote memorization, to the growing focus on learner-centered pedagogies that have reshaped teaching methods, to a greater awareness and acknowledgment of cultural diversity and the importance of intercultural competence with a growing need to prepare students for communication in multilingual and multicultural contexts - shaping a contemporary language teaching and learning landscape that is dynamic, inclusive, and attuned to the demands of a rapidly evolving world. It is impossible for me, due to the word limit, to delve into all these societal changes that have influenced language education over the past years and I will therefore only focus on those which I consider are key changes that have the greatest impact on language teaching and learning.

To begin with, it is a known secret that globalization has led to increased interconnectedness and cultural exchange. Language classrooms are today compelled to emphasize cross-cultural communication and real-world language use to prepare students for global interactions. Consequently, teachers need to incorporate authentic materials from various cultures and encourage language learners to engage in virtual exchanges and collaborative projects with peers from different countries in their bid to help students reach a communicative competence, including sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills, which goes beyond mere linguistic proficiency. The digital revolution has also transformed language teaching and learning. Educational technology, such as online language learning platforms, language apps and communication tools, has not only provided learners with more accessible and flexible opportunities to practice and acquire languages but it has also obliged educators to create interactive and multimedia-rich materials, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes (Levy, 2009) [1].

Multilingualism and Diversity is another societal change that has left its mark on the language classroom. The rapid increase of multiculturalism and multilingualism within societies has led to a greater emphasis on multilingual education with the result that language teachers have to acknowledge and value the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their students whilst promoting plurilingual approaches that leverage learners' existing language repertoires while introducing new languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015) [2]. Societal changes have also shifted language instruction from grammar-focused methods to task-based and experiential learning. Language classrooms today need to emphasize practical, real-world tasks that require learners to use language for meaningful purposes, in line with the principles of constructivist pedagogy, encouraging learners to actively build their linguistic skills through authentic communication (Ellis, 2003) [3]. Further to this, the demands of the 21st century have led to the incorporation of skills like critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication into language classrooms. Such skills need to be integrated into language lessons in order to prepare students for success in the modern workforce and society (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, n.d.) [4].

2. Challenges and Hurdles in Language Teaching and Learning.

It is only natural that due to the above-mentioned changes, language teachers today face a range of challenges and hurdles that can impact their teaching approaches, strategies, and overall effectiveness. To begin with, while technology has brought numerous benefits to language education, the digital divide can hinder some students' access to necessary devices and internet connectivity, leaving teachers no other choice but to find ways to integrate technology effectively while considering students' varying access levels. To make matters worse, in many classrooms teachers encounter students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making it extremely challenging to meet the needs of all learners and requiring the implementation of strategies that promote inclusion and equity (García & Wei, 2014) [5].

I personally believe that one of the major challenges language teachers face today is balancing the need for standardized assessments with the desire to assess authentic language skills, assessing both linguistic accuracy and real-world communication skills. Whereas standardized assessments often focus on discrete language skills such as grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension and aim to provide a consistent way of measuring language proficiency across different learners and contexts, on the other hand, authentic language skills encompass the ability to engage in meaningful conversations, understand cultural nuances, convey ideas effectively, and adapt language use to different contexts. These skills are crucial for real-world communication but can be harder to assess in a standardized manner. What is certain is that for assessment to be effective, it must recognize the diversity of learners and allow for differences in styles and rates of learning. For language teachers, finding the right balance between standardized assessments and authentic language skills is no easy task and requires collaboration, adaptation, and a commitment to fostering holistic language proficiency in learners.

Today's philosophy of the language classroom is that students are to be exposed to as many different varieties as possible, but this presents a very big challenge with assessments and examinations!! They are often too conservative because as a rule assessment and examining boards are notoriously conservative. In fact, there exists a discrepancy between what needs to be done (and what teachers strive to do) in the language classroom because of assessments, examinations, etc and what the second language acquisition and applied linguistics experts are suggesting: that we need to reflect in our teaching what's really going on in the world in terms of multilingualism, truncated repertoires, multi-translingual practices, etc. This poses a heavy burden on language teachers due to the strong monopolization of the testing organizations to the assessment polices [6].

Another hurdle faced by language teachers is maintaining students' motivation and engagement, especially as students' progress through more advanced levels. Such an ongoing process requires flexibility and creativity on the teacher's part, given that as students become more skilled and experienced, their motivations and needs often change. This makes it fundamental for teachers to connect language learning to real-world scenarios that interest and matter to students and to show them how the language skills they're acquiring can be applied in their personal and professional lives. Teachers strive to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life application given that students are more likely to engage with and retain information when they see its relevance to their lives. And to make matters worse, in contexts where the target language is not widely spoken, creating opportunities for authentic language exposure and communication outside the classroom can be quite difficult. So, the challenge and the goal of the language teacher is to create a diverse and engaging language learning experience that prepares students for the real-world applications of the language, even if they can't easily access native speakers in their immediate environment.

3. Language Teachers' Training Courses in the Light of Today's Evolving Educational Landscape.

To overcome these challenges, teachers need to adopt flexible teaching strategies, incorporate student-centered approaches and leverage technology appropriately in order to create effective language learning experiences. In such an evolving educational landscape, language teachers' training courses need not only address the specific requirements of teachers that may vary depending on the context, the language being taught and the proficiency level of their students but also several other key areas, designed to provide teachers with practical strategies and resources they can apply in their classrooms. This is essential, even in the light of the fact that in many countries students are shunning foreign language learning, especially due to a perceived lack of relevance and a limited exposure to authentic language use, making it crucial for teachers to provide authentic language experiences in class, to integrate technology effectively, to foster a positive learning environment and, above all, to connect language learning to the students' personal interests and goals.

In the light of all this and in very practical terms, language teachers' training courses should be designed to equip educators with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to navigate today's evolving educational landscape. I will try to, very briefly, mention those which I consider crucial for language teachers, starting from the ability to implement pedagogical shifts that enable them to create more dynamic, engaging, and effective learning experiences for their students. Teachers should understand the move towards student-centered learning and how to implement it effectively. This involves learning about differentiation, personalized learning plans, and strategies to motivate diverse learners to engage in activities that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and exploration through hands-on activities, discussions, debates and projects that actively involve them in the learning process. By integrating contemporary theories of language acquisition, cognitive psychology, and educational technology, teacher training can guide aspiring educators in designing lessons that inspire active participation, critical thinking and real-world application of language skills. This involves strategies like project-based learning, flipped classrooms, gamification, and incorporating multimedia resources. Additionally, the training should foster the development of effective classroom management techniques, communication skills and the ability to create inclusive learning environments that value diversity.

Another mainstay in a language teacher training course is technology integration. Teachers need training on integrating technology into language teaching. This has become increasingly important in today's educational landscape. Technology offers a wide range of tools and resources that can enhance language learning experiences, engage students and improve their language proficiency. I consider proficiency in using language learning apps, online platforms, virtual classrooms and tools for creating interactive content a must for language teachers given that technology can make language learning more interactive and engaging. Interactive multimedia, online quizzes, language learning apps and virtual reality simulations can captivate students' attention and motivate them to actively participate in their learning process. It also provides teachers the opportunity to create a balance between traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning as it involves designing blended learning experiences that leverage the strengths of both approaches. Furthermore, online resources not only provide access to authentic materials such as news articles, videos, podcasts and social media content that expose students to real-world language usage, colloquial expressions and cultural nuances that are essential for developing practical language skills, but they also enable collaborative activities beyond the classroom walls. Students can communicate with native speakers through video conferencing or language exchange platforms, engage in online discussion forums and collaborate on digital projects, fostering language use in authentic contexts and making language learning more relevant to students.

Language teachers should also be trained on how to facilitate collaborative activities that promote communication and language practice among their students. Collaborative learning exposes students to authentic language use in real-world contexts. It encourages students' interaction with peers, providing them with the opportunity to practice communication skills, negotiate meaning and use language naturally, mirroring the interactions they'll encounter outside the classroom. Collaborative learning brings together students from various backgrounds, providing exposure to different accents, cultural perspectives and communication styles. This diversity enriches language learning by reflecting the multifaceted nature of language in its social and cultural contexts. Such a practice gives more importance to the use of languages in different contexts, focusing more on the interconnectedness of language and culture in a fluid and complex system rather than insisting on reaching a level of proficiency as close as possible to that of a native speaker. After all, we need to keep in mind that apart from all the cognitive advantages of speaking different languages, language teaching and learning's ultimate aim is to enable learners to express themselves in diverse situations and circumstances. This also explains the need for teachers to be trained to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity in language teaching by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into lessons and fostering an inclusive classroom environment. Language is influenced by cultural norms, values, and social dynamics. Being

aware of such nuances helps teachers guide students to use language in culturally appropriate ways, avoiding unintended offense or misunderstanding, respecting different cultural backgrounds, avoiding stereotypes, biases and misconceptions about different cultures while fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Another fundamental aspect of initial professional development for teachers of languages is engaging in reflective practice. This involves systematically analysing teaching experiences, considering student feedback, and critically evaluating teaching methods to enhance the quality of teaching. Incorporating reflective practice into teaching is a dynamic process which involves regularly setting aside time for self-assessment, journaling, and seeking feedback from peers or mentors. Teachers need more than ever before engage with their students, ask the right questions, motivate students to learn in a way that lasts, and above all they need to be able to look at their own abilities and the way that they connect with their students. Teachers need not only understand well what they do in class but also why they do it. In other words, they have to be reflective practitioners and be able to use critical reflections to improve instruction by identifying weaknesses and strengths and improving their practice. For this reason, as prospective educators prepare to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms, they must be equipped with adaptable and effective teaching strategies. Reflective practice offers a powerful tool for trainee language teachers to critically assess their instructional techniques, classroom dynamics, and interactions with students. By engaging in this introspective process, trainees can pinpoint their strengths and areas needing refinement, thereby fostering a continuous cycle of growth and development. Such self-awareness empowers future language teachers to tailor their approaches to suit diverse learning styles and changing educational paradigms. Moreover, incorporating reflective practice within teacher training cultivates a mindset of lifelong learning, encouraging educators to stay abreast of emerging pedagogical trends and technological advancements. By nurturing the habit of reflective practice, language teacher training courses contribute not only to the professional maturation of educators but also to the enhancement of language learning experiences in an increasingly diverse and dynamic educational world.

4. Conclusion

Language teacher training courses should be dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of the education landscape, emphasizing practical application and ongoing professional growth. To make language teaching and learning pertinent to the students' needs, language teachers have to keep abreast with all the developments and changes taking place both within and outside the classroom. In such a scenario of an ever-evolving landscape of education, language teacher training courses must embrace dynamism and responsiveness and align with the changing needs of the field. By emphasizing practical application and fostering ongoing professional growth, such courses should strive to equip teachers with the skills and insights necessary to thrive in diverse and dynamic classrooms. As pedagogical trends shift, language teachers must be adept at implementing innovative strategies and technologies, making it imperative for training to incorporate these advancements. Moreover, a student-centered approach, coupled with a commitment to cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, ensures that educators can create engaging and supportive learning environments. Ultimately, a dynamic and responsive approach to language teacher training cultivates adaptable educators who are poised to meet the challenges and opportunities of modern education.

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Using Supplemental Instruction for Teaching English Grammar

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Abstract

Supplemental instruction (SI) usually means students helping and tutoring younger peers in courses or difficult parts of courses. In the English department, at Uppsala University, a different form of supplemental instruction has been implemented. The tutoring is still there but supplemental instruction is included in the high school student teachers' course in English language structure and linguistics and consists of teaching English grammar. The SI leaders are future high school teachers in their third term of English, and they teach or tutor student teachers in their first term (the future primary school teachers). The initial aim was to make sure that the students continue to be interested in grammar, since they have already studied it for two terms. Trying out teaching and explaining grammar was something new and definitely relevant to their future careers. The teaching of grammar through SI has been very much welcomed by students at the English department. They point out that through SI they have become more interested, not only in grammar and teaching it in the future, but also in writing about the importance of grammar and grammar teaching in their research papers. The status of grammar teaching needs to be raised in Swedish schools, since there is a widespread opinion that grammar teaching is outdated and something you can do without.

Keywords: Supplemental instruction, SI leaders, high school student teachers, grammar teaching

1. Introduction: A Special Form of Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental instruction (SI) is practised at most universities all over the world and may be understood as support given by students to improve younger peers' success in courses or in particularly difficult parts of courses. Several teachers and researchers have reported on the effectiveness of supplemental instruction in different learner groups (see for example, [1] and [2]). In the English department at Uppsala, a special form of SI has been used. It is part of the future high school teachers' course in language structure and linguistics. In this paper I outline the form of SI that I have implemented and describe its impact on students' interest in grammar.

The SI leaders are student teachers in their third term of English. The purpose of introducing SI was to get the students interested in grammar, not only by studying more grammar in the third term, but also by trying out teaching and explaining grammar (see [3]). The high school student teachers, i.e., the SI leaders, teach, or tutor, first term students in English grammar, phraseology and sentence structure. The first term students are future primary school teachers. This group of students was chosen because their grammar course is more practical and contrastive and not very different from what the SI leaders themselves will teach in the future. The material used was the SI leaders' course book, [4] and various chapters from handbooks on how to teach English grammar. Also, I provided important articles from educational journals for background reading for the SI leaders, see [5], [6] and [7].

Grammar teaching is not generally focused on in Swedish schools or in the curricula from the Swedish National Agency for Education, see [8]. There is a widespread opinion among teachers and students that grammar teaching is outdated and unnecessary. In a survey on English grammar teaching in senior high schools in Uppsala ([9]), most teachers commented that traditional grammar teaching has more or less disappeared. They teach grammar primarily by providing feedback on students' written work (for further information on teachers' attitudes to grammar teaching, see for example, [10] and [11]).

2. English as L3 in Swedish Schools

It is important to note the multicultural and multilingual learning environment that exists in Sweden and that teaching English must be adjusted to ethnically diverse classrooms. These language classrooms can consist of students who learn English not as a second language (for many students, this is Swedish) but as a third language; see [12] and naturally the grammar teaching must take this into account. In many cases, typological closeness (see [13]) is the most important factor, which means that

L2 Swedish influences L3 English to a greater extent than the students' L1s. Tutoring students with English as an L3 was practiced within supplemental instruction, since there is a growing population of university students with different L1s than Swedish. To prepare for this, the SI leaders consulted a handbook [14], which includes around twenty-five different languages as well as problems that the L1 speakers of these languages could feasibly have when learning English. Several SI leaders in my study had some or a good knowledge of for example, Arabic or Persian themselves.

3. A Learner English Corpus

Another result of the high school student teachers' increased interest through SI in teaching grammar is the compilation of a learner English corpus. The student teachers were interested in studying what grammar errors occurred in their future students' writing in order to know what to focus on in their teaching and to write about these grammatical problems in their research papers. During their school placement the student teachers collected essays which were made into a corpus of learner English, *The Uppsala Learner English Corpus*, or *ULEC*. The corpus consists of essays from Swedish junior and senior high school students aged between 12 and 19, and from school years 6 to 12 (for a more detailed description of the corpus, see [15]). The essays in ULEC have different topics and are between 200-300 words in length. The essays were written on computer without any supplementary tools such as spelling or grammar checkers. Currently, the corpus comprises approximately 300,000 words.

4. Do Swedish High School Students Know Any Grammar?

Different student projects have tried to find an answer to the question of whether Swedish high school students know any grammar. The question was given an affirmative answer in many cases but in the essays from ULEC, errors were found, both at the junior and at the senior high school levels. The most common errors identified were incorrect use of the apostrophe (*the worlds radio programs*), article usage (*in USA, the society changes*), subject-verb agreement (*everybody understand*), incorrect orthography (*the second world war, English*) and conditional sentences (*If you like ghosts, I don't like you*). When comparing texts from ULEC with texts from a corpus of university students' English (*USE, Uppsala Students' English*, [16]), the errors were almost identical at university level. As a result, the same grammatical categories were focused on in the student teachers' teaching and tutoring as SI leaders. See Table 1 for a summary of the most frequent errors in the learner corpora. Conditional sentences constituted a major problem and hardly any correct constructions were found, not even at university level. The more complex form with the past perfective aspect and modality (*would have studied*) - that is, the third conditional - is rare. The only correct example of the third conditional from the ULEC data (with *should*) is from a year 9 student: *Because if they had been real someone should have seen it*.

Table 1. The most frequent errors in the learner corpora

	ULEC	USE
Subject-verb agreement	8/1000 words	2/1000 words
Article usage	8/1000 words	1/1000 words
Conditional sentences	6/1000 words	3/1000 words
Writing the apostrophe	10/1000 words	1/1000 words
Sample size	13750 words	15740 words

Conditional sentences were particularly focused on in the SI leaders' teaching and tutoring. Not only had the complexity of the constructions to be taken into account but also the issue of transfer from Swedish. Conditional sentences in Swedish are formed with *skulle* (very similar in sound and form to *should*, see [17] and the example above from a year 9 student).

In Table 2, the SI leaders' evaluation of supplemental instruction as a part of their own grammar course is summarized. All students thought they had revised and studied grammar in a good way and twenty-three out of twenty-five students answered that "[they] enjoyed explaining grammar and seeing that the students understood".

Table 2. The high school students' opinions about the value of supplemental instruction (based on 25 students)

I have become more interested in studying grammar	21/25
I will focus more on grammar in my future teaching	19/25
I will show my students that it is important to know grammar	19/25
I have become more interested in doing research about the value of knowing grammar and the importance of teaching grammar	22/25
I have revised and studied grammar in a good way	25/25
I enjoyed explaining grammar and seeing that the students understood	23/25

5. Conclusion

As SI leaders, the high school student teachers get to do several things that are important and relevant to their careers: they have to revise grammar and they have to think about how to explain grammar (the level and the usage of terminology). Certain features, such as conditional sentences, were a challenge to teach both as regards explanations and the time required for the presentation and the feedback. In their evaluation of SI, the high school student teachers pointed out that, through SI, they have become more interested, not only in grammar and how to teach it, but also in writing about the importance of grammar and grammar teaching in their research papers. As pointed out earlier, the initial aim was to get the student teachers, the SI leaders, more interested in grammar by trying out teaching and explaining grammar. What I found was that that these SI leaders gained a much better understanding of grammar, thereby developing confidence as well as improving literacy skills more broadly.

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What All Can a Classroom Where We Learn Slovenian Language Be?

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Abstract

As part of the Year Plus module offered by the University of Ljubljana to its international students, around 350 students learn Slovenian each year. The largest number of these students (since 2016) has been students coming from the Western Balkan countries. The aim of the module is to support students in learning and progress in their knowledge of Slovenian. They need it for their studies, but it also helps to facilitate and integrate more quickly into Slovenian society and adapt to life in Slovenia, either during their studies or in the longer term, as some of them plan to continue their life in Slovenia. Slovenian language course is held once a week for three lessons in a classroom in groups of up to 20 students. This is not an optimal solution. That is why learning of Slovenian is supplemented by a range of additional activities that enable more lively and active contact with Slovenian, with people in Slovenia and their lives, with Slovenian society, all of which is possible because learning Slovenian takes place in a Slovenian-speaking environment.

From the classroom, learning Slovenian moves to different places in Slovenia, to the tops of the hills around Ljubljana, to theatres, cinemas, museums, galleries, concerts and fairs, to the Parliament or the House of the European Union. It also extends to Slovenian literature, music, architecture and cuisine, areas that are also represented in the teaching of Slovenian abroad (e.g. in the Slovenian lectureships at universities abroad). These activities can be classified as activities that enable the development of intercultural competence (Byram 1997), but they also represent a form of experiential learning (Kohonen et al. 2014). While presenting activities where we encounter a different approach to language teaching outside the classroom (Benson and Reinders 2011), we will also look at how these activities are received and responded to by the students.

Keywords: *Year Plus, learning Slovenian, additional activities*

1. Introduction

Language learning outside the classroom (Benson and Reinders 2011 [1]; Richards 2022 [9]) is nowadays mainly thought of as a complement to traditional language teaching in the classroom, using various online tools, apps, media, social networks, i.e. mainly as a complement to teaching in a virtual environment. However, the purpose of including additional activities that take place outside the classroom, as well as the purpose of our paper, is the opposite. We want to complement Slovenian language teaching and its perception as classical language teaching in the classroom with a live experience. This is also because, at least since the covid-19 pandemic, we have noticed that the classroom is no longer classical and traditional, as it is constantly using various ICT technologies. Therefore, in our case, activities outside the classroom really mean activities that actually physically take place outside the classroom, i.e. in the real world, or that complement the Slovenian language course in a way that builds on and complements it and goes beyond the narrow field of learning Slovenian as a foreign language. Such activities are organised within the framework of the Year Plus module, which is briefly presented below.

2. Year Plus and Additional Activities in The Slovenian Language Course within the Module

The University of Ljubljana offers the Year Plus module to its international students who are regularly enrolled in first-cycle, second-cycle or single-cycle Master's programmes in the first year of their studies in Ljubljana. The programme is not intended for students on mobility, i.e. students on study exchange, as they are offered different opportunities to learn Slovenian.

The majority of students enrolled in the Year Plus module come from the countries that were formed in the former Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia, Bosnia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro. These students are joined to a lesser extent by students from other countries of the Slavic world,

especially recently from Russia and Ukraine, but each year we also have a group of students who are not speakers of any Slavic language.

Each academic year, since 2016, approximately 350 students have been enrolled each year, which means that so far around 2500 students have studied Slovene as part of the module Year Plus. Learning and knowing Slovene is essential for students studying at the University of Ljubljana, as Slovene is the only language of instruction in almost all subjects at the University.

In addition to learning Slovenian, the Year Plus module also allows international students to extend their first year of study by one year if they meet certain conditions (30 ECTS in the first year instead of 60 ECTS), so they can complete their first year in two years instead of one.

The module mainly consists of two courses, Slovene as a Foreign Language - tutorial 1 and tutorial 2, which together comprise a total of 120 hours of classroom instruction in Slovene, yielding a total of 6 ECTS. Classes are held once a week for 3 three lessons (2,5 hours) in groups of up to 20 participants. As this type of organisation is not optimal, we try to complement the classroom teaching with a variety of activities that take place outside the classrooms.

In the academic year 2022/23, in addition to the regular classroom work, which also includes independent work in the e-classroom and homeworks, we organised a range of additional activities for students, which were either compulsory or optional for the participants. To be eligible for the final exam (oral and written), participants had to have 80% attendance, complete all the compulsory additional activities and three optional activities each semester.

As compulsory additional activities, students had to attend four phonetic lessons in the phono lab or by zoom, performed a speech in Slovene and attend a workshop or lecture on the rules of academic writing in Slovene during this academic year.

Beside that students had to choose three optional activities per semester (six altogether during the academic year) from the extensive list below. The list included a walking tour of Ljubljana, a visit to a book fair, a self guided tour of a chosen museum or gallery, a guided tour of the Museum of Contemporary History, a workshop on Slovenian popular music (in two parts), a workshop on the use of online language resources and tools for Slovenian, a trip to a Slovenian town (three visits were organized and guided: to Škoja Loka, Kamnik and Novo mesto), a literature workshop, reading Slovenian literature (according to a list, prepared in advanced and regularly updated), watching a theatre performance, watching a Slovenian film (several Slovenian films were suggested on the list), a visit to the House of the EU, a Friday hiking club (five hikes in the hills around Ljubljana), a lecture on Slovenia, its architecture and cuisine, and a translation workshop.

All additional activities listed were prepared, organised and implemented by the Slovenian teachers who teach Slovenian as part of the Year Plus module.

3. Why Additional Activities?

The reasons for introducing so many additional activities for the participants of the Year Plus module are manifold. First of all, there are purely practical reasons: the additional activities were introduced because the timetable could not allow two two lessons slots per week for the Slovenian language tutorial. Therefore, in addition to the 45-hour course, held in the classroom, it was necessary to provide 15 additional contact lessons outside the classroom. Equally important, if not more so, were the pedagogical, psychological and sociological reasons for introducing additional activities.

The activities mentioned in the previous section enable students to develop their intercultural competence. The activities expose them to different aspects of Slovenian society and culture and allow them to experience parts of life in a Slovenian-speaking environment. They can compare Slovenian society with their own culture, look for positive and negative aspects of it and adapt to life in Slovenia.

In this way, their learning of Slovene language becomes experiential (Kohonen 1992 [3]; Kohonen et al. 2011[4]). In an authentic environment, they get to know parts of Slovenian reality, which they try to integrate into intensively during their stay and studies in Slovenia. At the same time, they also have the opportunity to test their knowledge of Slovene language acquired in the classroom in an authentic environment, i.e. to test their communicative abilities in Slovene both when communicating with foreign speakers (their classmates) and with native speakers of Slovene. In most cases, the activities mentioned above are events and activities that international students would find difficult to encounter on their own, without the guidance and direction of their teachers, and might not pay attention to them or be able to experience them.

During activities outside the classroom, participants socialize even more intensively with their peers and start to form a supportive social network. This also offers psychological support to individuals in need, which is particularly important when starting their studies and stay in Slovenia. In the evaluations of the Year Plus module, students report the great value of attending Year Plus, especially in terms of making contacts, and they report the socialisation opportunities of spending time together with peers who have similar experiences, needs, expectations and, last but not least, similar or identical problems

at the beginning of their stay and studies in Slovenia. They also report a feeling of a safe environment that is created by the implementation of the Year Plus.

4. Additional Activities to Learn Slovenian Outside the Classroom

In the literature (Benson and Reinders 2011 [1], Nunan and Richards 2014 [6], Nunan 2014 [7], Richards 2015a [9], 2015b [10], Lin and Reinders 2018 [5], Reinders 2020 [8]), considerable attention has been paid to forms of language learning outside the classroom. More recently (Reinders 2020 [8]), the focus has been mainly on activities that take place in a virtual environment (from connecting language learners on online social networks, to the various uses of digital media, to virtual project work). However, especially since the pandemic, we have noticed that more and more digital tools are penetrating the (classical) classroom itself, and that there is thus more and more teaching taking place in a virtual environment, our idea was the opposite: to complement the classical classroom with as many activities as possible that take place in the real world, in an authentic environment, where language learners are able to interact as much as possible directly with both native and non-native users of Slovene. Given the diversity of the activities presented, it is clear that interaction is more and less central in some of them, but all of them provide an opportunity to get to know the Slovenian reality and thus promote intercultural dialogue and the development of intercultural communicative competence.

Additional activities that are experiential in this way can also be a starting point for independent or autonomous learning. Participants can build on and complement them on their own, according to their interests: visit more museums or galleries, read more texts in Slovenian, listen to more Slovenian music, watch more Slovenian films, visit more Slovenian places, etc. They can also report all this to their teachers in different forms (e.g. report, report, diary, worksheet), who will make sure that they respond appropriately to the activity.

5. Student Responses to the Additional Activities of the Year Plus

Since the very beginning of the Year Plus (2016), we have also been monitoring student responses to the part of the Year Plus that takes place outside the classroom. Thus, twice a year, at the end of each semester, students are asked to report on the activities they took part in and how they would rate these activities. The response to the evaluation studies varies from year to year, but the number of respondents always exceeds 100. The average ratings of the extra activities are consistently high (between 4 and 4.6 out of a possible 5 (the highest score)). In the academic year 2022/23, the ratings of the extra activities mentioned at the beginning of the paper were the highest ever, with an average of 4.6 out of a possible 5 (the highest score).

In this academic year, we also asked students which three activities they had taken part in that they considered to be the most meaningful complement to their regular Slovenian course. The results showed the following.

Participants rated visits to Slovenian towns as the most meaningful additional complementary activity. Four such visits were organised in the academic year 2022/23. Teachers accompanied students to Ljubljana, Škofja Loka, Kamnik and Novo mesto. The participants seemed to have little knowledge of Slovenian towns, including Ljubljana, even though they are studying there, but wanted to get to know them and learn more about them. We are therefore planning to visit various places in Slovenia in the future, and we will not avoid tourist attractions such as Bled or Piran, as students want to get to know them but do not organise their own visits to these places. The workshop on Slovenian literature and the guided reading of Slovenian literature were rated similarly highly as visits to Slovenian places. This is to be expected, as literature and its reading is a standard complement to classical language learning. Visits to museums and galleries were ranked third most meaningful, perhaps because students were mostly able to organise them themselves or went to museums and galleries on their own when they had the time and inclination to do so.

The same applies to Slovenian film viewing, as this is an activity that requires students to leave their comfort zone as little as possible: they watch the film in the comfort of their own home, when they have enough time to do so. In addition to the above, the most meaningful activities were sports hikes on the hills on the outskirts of Ljubljana, a translation workshop in which they translated contemporary Slovenian short fiction into their first languages, and an overview lecture on Slovenian culture, architecture and cuisine.

6. Further Development and Forms of Work at Year Plus

In the light of our experience and the results of the surveys carried out so far, we consider that the above-mentioned additional activities constitute a meaningful and qualitative complement to the regular work in the Slovenian language course within the Year Plus module. We will therefore continue to do so

in the future. We will need to do more to integrate these activities into the course itself, especially in terms of better preparing students for the implementation of each activity. We are aware that preparation for the activity itself is one of the key stages of experiential learning. Similarly, more energy will need to be invested in the phase of direct response to the activity, which is also an important phase of experiential learning.

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Cultivating Effective Communication Skills in TOEIC Classes: Moving Beyond Drills

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Abstract

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was first administered in Japan in 1979 as a tool to measure the English proficiency levels of businesspeople for hiring and promotion purposes. Soon after, it was adopted worldwide and utilized in educational institutions [1] to assess student progress and enhance employability rates. Previous research has questioned the validity and reliability of TOEIC as an instrument to measure students' English communication abilities. Some authors argue that due to its limited scope, de-contextualized questions and heavy focus on business situations, the test fails to accurately assess students' use of real language [2], [3], [4]. Despite many higher education institutions advertising their commitment to nurturing global communication competencies, students are demotivated to find that university courses rely more on the "teaching for the test" method employed in high schools than on teaching communication skills [5]. Teachers are faced with the difficult task of having to strike a balance between the university requirements and student expectations. In this paper, we propose several tactics and activities TOEIC teachers could use in addition to the traditional drills to offer a more engaging, collaborative, and ultimately beneficial learning experience.

Keywords: TOEIC, communicative strategies

1. Introduction

The TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) is a widely recognized standardized test designed to assess the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers, particularly in a professional or business context. It serves as a measure of one's ability to understand and use English effectively in various workplace situations. Originating in Japan in 1979 to address the need for improved English communication skills among Japanese individuals [1], the TOEIC test has played a pivotal role in evaluating English proficiency, especially in business and professional settings. In today's globalized world, where much of the business literature is published exclusively in English, possessing a working knowledge of the language is considered an essential factor in employability [6]. Moreover, the TOEIC test has been recognized for its effectiveness in assessing reading and listening skills, which are paramount for effective communication in business situations [7].

2. The Challenges

In institutions of higher education where TOEIC is a mandatory component, educators encounter a series of challenges. Some of these challenges are externally imposed, such as the need to ensure high student retention rates and satisfaction while delivering quality instruction. Additionally, educators may face difficulties related to selecting appropriate preparation textbooks and may be arbitrarily assigned to teach TOEIC preparation courses with limited or no specialized knowledge in the subject. On the other hand, internal challenges are also prominent, including the management of large, multi-level classes, which may include unmotivated students who struggle to perceive the practical necessity of the TOEIC test or those who lack elementary English proficiency.

3. The Impact

TOEIC practice and preparation can exert both positive and negative influences on learners. Research has indicated that integrating test content into university curricula can yield beneficial outcomes, especially when based on a thorough analysis of students' English language needs. However, it can also have adverse effects when students perceive the test as high-stakes and when teaching objectives are not aligned with the test content [12]. A pilot study among English teachers at a

Japanese university revealed ambivalent TOEIC washback effects [13]. While some of the positive effects included increased student motivation to study English, improved TOEIC scores, and a clear curricular focus for business majors, there were negative opinions as well. These mentioned test fatigue, performance anxiety, a focus on language skills unrelated to TOEIC, and demotivation among students with lower proficiency levels. Research further suggests that learners may become demotivated when they recognize a substantial gap between their abilities and the skills required to excel on the test [1]. Additionally, the lack of engaging and context-rich materials can lead to boredom and a loss of motivation. Consequently, motivating lower-level students to engage in TOEIC practice emerges as a major challenge.

4. Two Approaches: Contextualization and Metacognitive-Based

4.1 Contextualization

One viable approach to address this challenge is contextualization, which involves integrating foundational language skills with college-level content [16]. Frequently, TOEIC practice materials lack context and prove daunting for inexperienced students. Exposing them to authentic resources such as newspaper articles, video clips, or podcasts that are contextually relevant to their daily lives and interests can potentially rekindle motivation. Authenticity in this context implies using meaningful, relevant, and interesting materials that replicate real-world tasks, all conveyed in natural language [17].

4.2 The Metacognitive-Based Approach

Another strategy is the metacognitive-based approach [18], which comprises three key components:

- Bottom-up instruction: This component enhances students' linguistic competence by deepening their declarative knowledge.
- Interactive instruction: It improves students' communicative competence by engaging them in collaborative tasks.
- Test-strategy instruction: This part provides students with specific advice regarding the challenges associated with each test section; it features mock-test practice within the real test's time constraints.

In addition to traditional teacher-centered instruction, the bottom-up learning aspect can be achieved through the integration of vocabulary and grammar learning apps or interactive quizzes featuring word families, parts of speech, grammatical tenses, and related topics. Incorporating elements of gamification and technology into TOEIC practice can be motivating for low-level students. Research by Steinkuehler and Duncan suggests that gamified activities and digital resources can increase learner engagement and motivation [19].

Interactive instruction involves students in collaborative tasks such as role-plays, discussions, and debates on various topics, reinforcing the knowledge gained during passive instruction. Task-based learning approaches, as suggested by Willis and Willis, involve students in real-world language tasks that mimic TOEIC scenarios. This approach encourages low-level students to apply their language skills in practical situations, making TOEIC practice more relevant and motivating [20]. Furthermore, promoting peer support and collaboration can foster motivation among low-level students. Research by Vygotsky highlights the significance of social interaction and learning from peers. Group study sessions, peer editing, and collaborative projects related to TOEIC content can be motivating and effective [21]. It is a way to shift the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered learning by involving the entire class in language production activities.

Test-strategy instruction can be accomplished by explaining and practicing various TOEIC test sections within the allocated time limits. It is advisable to alternate among these three types of activities to prevent student boredom and burnout.

4.3 Positive Feedback and Developing a Growth Mindset

Providing positive feedback and encouragement is crucial for motivating low-level students. A study by Hattie and Timperley emphasizes the importance of constructive feedback and praise in fostering student motivation [22]. Recognizing and rewarding students' efforts can boost their confidence and motivation. Encouraging low-level students to develop a growth mindset, as discussed by Dweck [23], can boost motivation. Teachers can emphasize that language proficiency is not fixed but can improve with effort and practice. This mindset shift can motivate students to persist in TOEIC preparation.

Conclusion

The TOEIC test stands as a critical instrument for assessing English language proficiency, particularly in professional and academic contexts. Its significance extends beyond employment opportunities to encompass university admissions and language program implementations. Nevertheless, the challenges confronted by low-level students during TOEIC preparation are substantial, including issues related to demotivation, resource constraints, and the need for relevant materials to address these challenges effectively. Innovative approaches such as contextualization and metacognitive-based strategies offer promising pathways to engage low-level students, making TOEIC practice more motivating and relevant. Moreover, emphasizing a growth mindset, incorporating gamification and technology, and fostering peer collaboration can contribute to a more positive learning experience. Despite the hurdles, with careful consideration of learner needs and the integration of effective strategies, TOEIC practice can become a valuable tool in enhancing the English language skills and employability of low-level students. As this field continues to evolve, ongoing research and pedagogical innovation will be essential to unlock the full potential of TOEIC preparation for this specific learner category.

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Using Mentimeter in an LSP Italian Class to Consolidate Grammar and Vocabulary and to Elicit Peer Feedback: A Practical Showcase

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Abstract

This paper shows ways in which the use of Mentimeter in an LSP Italian class can aid the creative revision of grammar and vocabulary and facilitate the provision of regular peer feedback. In it I draw from my experience of teaching Italian to a small class of complete beginners who study Product Design at the Glasgow School of Art. My decision to start using Mentimeter regularly in this intensive module sprang from a dissatisfaction with a traditional book-based approach, which seemed to keep students very passive and felt limited and repetitive. With this course's ILOs being both 'general' (with topics such as, for instance, finding accommodation) and 'specific' (with content related to the students' field of Product Design), the employment of Mentimeter maintains student engagement high and fosters 'the co-construction of knowledge' (Moorhouse and Kohnke, 2020). As my practical examples demonstrate, Mentimeter enables students to: 1) strengthen vocabulary and grammar knowledge through variation; 2) easily take part in formative and 'friendly' assessment; 3) reflect daily on their own and their classmates' learning. Furthermore, Mentimeter helps teachers 'gain valuable insight' into their students' understanding of the target language (Zhang, 2022).

Keywords: Vocabulary and Grammar Learning, Peer Feedback, Technology in Language Learning, Enhancing Student Engagement, Mentimeter

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on my experience of using Mentimeter - a web-based presentation tool used for live classroom polling, quizzes, surveys, etc. - to consolidate vocabulary and grammar and to provide regular peer feedback in an LSP Italian course. Our MEDes Italian Stage 1 course, which I have taught with other colleagues for over ten years, is a five-week intensive module taking place in April and May. It is available only to second-year students from the Glasgow School of Art, students who in the following academic year will do their year abroad at Milan's *Politecnico*. The students' main subject is Product Design and they all are complete Beginners in Italian. Within a total contact time of approximately 70 hours, this LSP course aims at equipping students with the linguistic skills needed to cope confidently with everyday social and survival situations in the target language. Students should also develop language skills in areas related to their field of studies, and by the end of the course be able to understand short reading and listening materials on both daily and design-related topics.

Traditionally, teaching on the MEDes Italian Stage 1 course has employed a booklet specifically designed by our tutors, and a course Moodle with additional listening and reading materials; on Moodle there are also quizzes and H5P activities the students complete at home by the end of each week. However, in the academic session 2021-22, I decided to start creating interactive presentations with Mentimeter, and to use them in class regularly. A few months before the MEDes module was due to start, I had attended a presentation on Mentimeter by our Learning Technologist; it struck me how easily this app enables tutors to design interactive question types or quiz competitions with which to assess students informally and creatively. Mentimeter is available to all staff in our university, and students access your presentation by simply going to menti.com and entering the code shown on your screen.

2. Why Mentimeter?

My decision to trial Mentimeter in this LSP course came also as the result of various considerations. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, I had noticed among our MEDes students a certain reluctance to complete lexical and grammatical exercises from our booklet. Feedback from students indicated that most felt overwhelmed by the amount of vocabulary and grammatical elements they had to master in

the space of five weeks. There were also comments about exercises in different chapters of our booklet being a little monotonous, and on the fact that the feedback received after completing quizzes on Moodle was 'dry' and often 'too technical' for non-specialist students. Furthermore, in the academic year 2020-21, our MEDes course had taken place entirely online on Zoom. While clearly there were some disadvantages in running the whole module remotely, I felt one of the positives of Zoom was the option to create polls which could test the students on various aspects of the target language. This formative and regular assessment offered students an alternative to listening to the tutor or completing tasks in breakout rooms; it made online learning more varied and reflective. With the above factors in mind, I thought different Mentimeter presentations would be an effective way to review grammar and vocabulary; to increase student engagement and encourage active participation in class; and, to elicit peer feedback that would immediately be friendly and intelligible. I will now give practical examples of the question types and quiz contests I have used in the last two years, showing how they can make a language class livelier and solicit meaningful responses from students.

3. Practical Examples – Mentimeter to Revise Grammar and Vocabulary

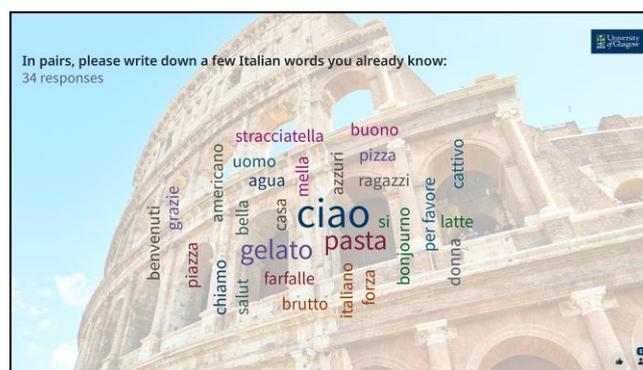


Figure 1. Word Cloud on brainstorming Italian vocabulary

I like using a Word Cloud as the very first activity on Day 1 of this course. It's a good icebreaker as it makes students work in pairs or small groups, and immediately incites them to be co-constructors of knowledge, rather than quiet receptacles. Students may be surprised by the amount of Italian vocabulary they already know and will recognise as familiar some of the words inputted by their classmates. Reading out together every term in the Word Cloud, tutors can begin to point out some of the pronunciation rules which will be explained in that same lesson, as well as spelling mistakes common among English native speakers. For example, I remember a conversation about 'Lucca' and 'Luca', where students thought the name of the town and the boy's name were spelt and pronounced in the same way.

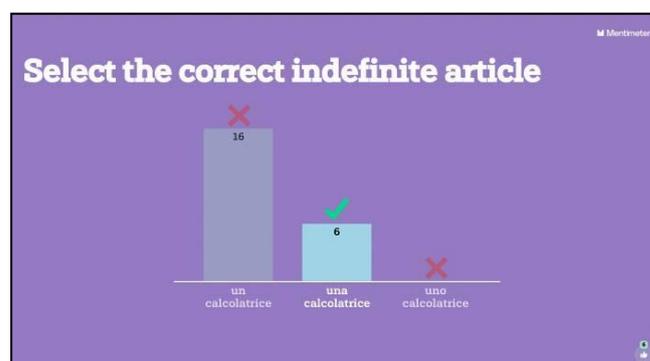


Figure 2.1. Multiple Choice on indefinite articles and classroom vocabulary

Mentimeter's Multiple Choice quizzes allow tutors to combine informal testing on grammatical points – indefinite articles in Figure 2.1 – with a focus on a specific lexical set – for example, that of objects within the classroom (in the above slide, 'calculator'). Each option in this type of quiz can also be linked to a picture (Figure 2.2), and I have used this to survey the mood of the class at the beginning or at the

end of a lesson. These personal questions will likely reduce learning anxiety and help build trust between teachers and students. By gathering what hopefully are ‘honest responses’ (Zhang 2022, page 2) tutors can gain some insight into the learners’ mental and physical experiences within the classroom.

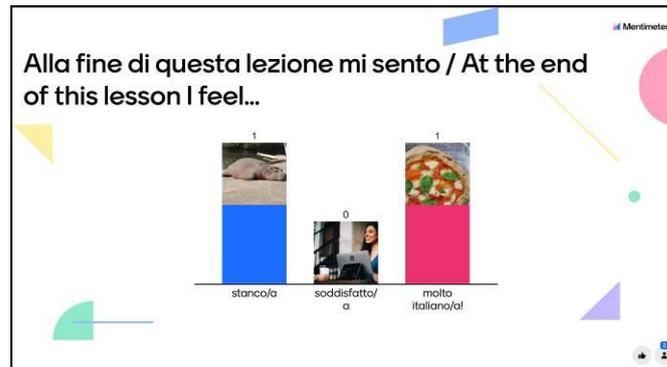


Figure 2.2. Multiple Choice on students’ mood

Other examples in this paper show that a ‘Learner Response System’ like Mentimeter engages the audience through the variety and flexibility of its questions, and their ‘non-judgmental’ nature. The ‘Traffic Lights’ or ‘This or That’ options are visually stimulating and don’t immediately reveal whether an answer is correct or not. Students will see their response end up in either a majority or a minority group, and this can stimulate further discussion on the point in question. In Figures 3.1 and 3.2, the learners who are not sure whether that plural form is correct can ask their peers to clarify their doubts. Figure 4 shows that 86% of participants selected the wrong answer; such a result may actually benefit weaker or struggling students, who will feel they are not alone on their learning journey. The students who got the correct answer (‘blu’) could explain that this adjective is invariable and therefore agrees with all genders and numbers, unlike the other option ‘verde’; learners again cooperate to build knowledge and understanding together.



Figures 3.1. and 3.2. Traffic Lights on plural forms and family / friends / nationalities vocabulary



Figure 4. This or That on adjectives and physical appearance vocabulary



Figure 5. Type Answer on combined prepositions and furniture vocabulary



Figure 6. Truth or Lie on agreements, shapes and colours

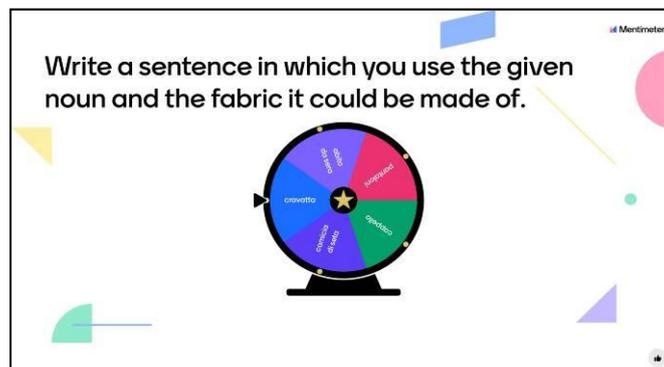
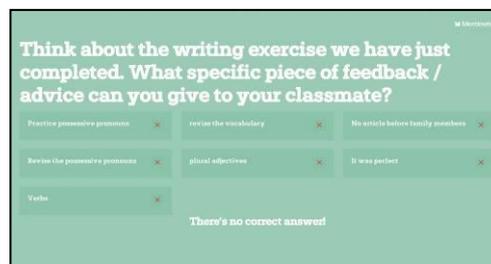
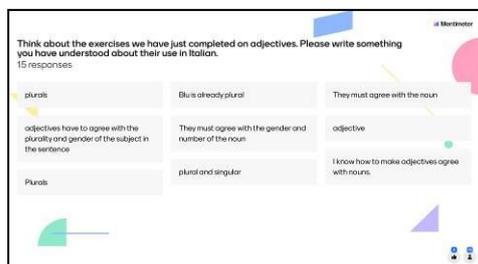


Figure 7. Spin the Wheel on clothing and fabrics

Figures 5, 6 and 7 show possible, ingenious uses of the 'Type Answer', 'Truth or Lie' and 'Spin the Wheel' questions. These exercises fit well into an LSP course designed for Product Design students who will go on exchange to Italy. In fact, each sentence in the Type Answer quiz has vocabulary related to furniture and home accessories, while Spin the Wheel asks students to write a sentence with a clothing-related noun and a type of fabric. In the course of their studies, students may actually design some of the items revised through these two activities. Similarly, the Truth or Lie quiz presents different shapes and colours in every slide, and helps students consolidate their knowledge of these lexical sets so important in Product Design. This exercise also requires students to focus both on grammatical rules (noun – adjective agreement in Figure 6) and on the 'ontological truth' of the picture they see: the triangle could be 'green' ('verde' - the agreement would be correct), but it's actually 'pink' ('rosa').

4. Practical Examples – Mentimeter to Elicit Peer Feedback

The last few slides in this paper exemplify the feedback students in our MEDes course have given to their peers immediately after completing together a specific activity in class.



Figures 8.1. and 8.2. Peer feedback on use of adjectives and on writing about family

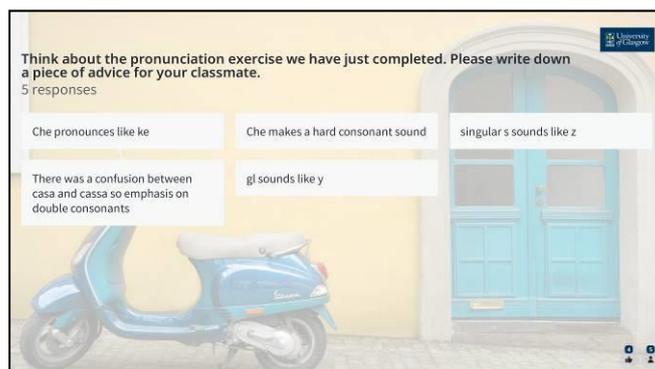


Figure 8.3. Peer feedback on pronunciation

Figure 8.3 shows feedback written by students on Day 2 of their course, after they were introduced to the main rules of Italian pronunciation and had practiced in pairs. Only five students out of twelve wrote down a piece of advice on pronunciation, something that may suggest the others were not yet confident enough to do so. However, these five responses are valid and easily intelligible; I believe they provide the whole cohort with key points useful to improve their performance in this area. In Figures 8.1 and 8.2 we see different levels of engagement with peer feedback. Some of the responses appear incomplete or a little superficial: for instance, when students only wrote ‘plurals’ with regard to their understanding of the use of adjectives, or when they described their partner’s performance as ‘perfect’. Other answers are much more detailed; possibly, they come from participants who had learned another language in school and are therefore more confident with specific terminology and rules. Nevertheless, I believe each single response can effectively benefit the whole class and make it more aware of ‘life hacks’ to remember on their learning journey; even a simple word like ‘plurals’ will help students remember that Italian adjectives have a number, unlike their English counterparts. Thus, mobile-assisted peer feedback gives all students the chance to ‘actively share their understanding of the learning material’ with their peers, fostering their ‘active engagement’ in the language classroom (Xu & Peng 2022, page 1042).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the practical examples in this paper demonstrate the effectiveness of regular Mentimeter use to revise grammar and vocabulary creatively and to elicit immediate feedback exchanges among peers. The numerous types of questions Mentimeter supports enable teachers to increase interaction and stress-free participation, to track their students’ learning and understanding easily and daily, and to stimulate fruitful discussion and reflection within the LSP language classroom.

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The Cultural Responsiveness of the Communicative and Task-Based Instructional Approaches to African English Language Learners in a College ESL Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

In the United States school education system, there are students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). ELLs are multilingual students who speak any other language apart from English at home. While majority of the ELLs are born in the United States, a few of them are immigrants from different parts of the world who later joined the US school system (Zong & Batalova, 2015) [18], and this study focuses on the latter student population at a college level. Various second language teaching approaches are often utilized by language teachers to make their classroom instructions effective. Lightbown & Spada (2013) [6] state communicative, task-based and content-based instructions, which appear to be commonly used when compared to the grammar translation and audiolingual approaches. The former instructions provide a ground for students to interact, converse, and communicate using the target language, and the students are expected to actively engage in the class discussions and interactions while the teacher facilitates them (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) [6]. However, little is known how culturally responsive the communicative and task-based instructions are to African ELLs in a college English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom in the Midwest. In order to address this gap, five African ELLs were selected based on convenience sampling and data were gathered through semi-structured interview and focus-group discussion. After analyzing the data through Miles & Huberman's (1994) [8] qualitative data analysis procedures, the following findings were reported. The cultural identity of the African ELLs did not seem to align with the principles of communicative and task-based instructional approaches, as the ELLs were raised to speak less but to listen more, avoid eye contact, and keep their head down when conversing as a sign of respect to the teachers. These elements of African cultural identity appeared to inhibit the ELLs from participating freely and actively in the English conversations, interactions, and group works in a college ESL classroom in the Midwest, United States. The study concludes that the communicative and task-based instructions should be culturally responsive to meet the unique needs of the African ELLs in a college ESL classroom.

Keywords: *English Language Learners, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Communicative and Task-based Instructions, English as a Second Language*

1. Introduction

In the United States public education system, learners who come from homes where English is a second language are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) [9], the number of ELLs has been growing from year to year; in fall 2010, there were about 4.5 million ELLs, but increased to 5 million by fall 2020. In a similar vein, a small number of ELLs are believed to attend the postsecondary institutions in the United States. The ELLs are often placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) class, before joining or while attending the mainstream class, to get language assistance so that they achieve English proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards. While majority of the ELLs are born in the United States, a few of them are immigrants from different parts of the world who later joined the US school system (Zong & Batalova, 2015) [18]. The study focuses on the latter student populations who are attending college education in the Midwest. In the ESL class, teachers often utilize various second language teaching approaches for quality classroom instructions and often use communicative, task-based, and content-based teaching approaches, as they provide a ground for students to interact and communicate using the target language and enable the students to actively engage in the class discussions while the teacher acts as a facilitator (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) [6]. These teaching approaches don't align with Freire's (1993) [3] banking model, where teachers deposit information into the students instead of inviting them to participate in the knowledge construction system based on their cultural and linguistic knowledge. This may be the reason why communicative, task-based, and content-based teaching

approaches are highly favored and suggested by second language acquisition experts. However, little is known how culturally responsive they are to African ELLs in college, and hence the study addresses this research question: How culturally responsive are the communicative and task-based instructions to African college ELLs in the Midwest? The qualitative study on which this paper is constructed is significant, as it can inform educators, policy makers, teachers and other education stakeholders about the cultural responsiveness of the communicative and task-based instructional approaches in a college ESL class in the Midwest.

2. Learning in the Second Language Classroom

Learning in the second language classroom takes place in various settings and environments. Lightbown & Spada (2013) [6] explain that there is the “natural acquisition context” (p.123) in which the students learn the target language in a context where most of the other students are native speakers of the L2, and the instruction targets the native speakers of the target language rather than the language learners. In this kind of classroom, the language learners tend to learn more from their teachers’ and peer’s interactions. On the other hand, in the “structure-based instructional environments” (p.123), the authors argue that teachers teach the second or foreign language to language learners, where there is much emphasis on the language rather than the meaning carried by the language. In their instructions, the teachers focus more on teaching the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the L2. In such a context, the students often do not have ample opportunities to practice the second/foreign language and use it for communication purposes outside the classroom. Rather, passing the language assessment is their priority.

On the other hand, communicative, task-based, and content-based instructional approaches enable the second language learners to learn the target language in an authentic and communicative way. There is much interaction and conversation in the classroom, where the topic of the discussion aligns with the learners’ interests. Thus, the main principles of communicative and task-based instructional approaches include effective communication, learner-centered work, and focus on meaning, whereas in the content-based instruction, subject matter such as history, anthropology, and geography are taught through the medium of the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) [6]. This instructional approach focuses on the language and its use in different subject matter, where the grammatical accuracy is not the priority. Thus, there are different second language learning contexts and approaches where the emphasis of their language learning varies.

3. Literature on Challenges Facing English Language Learners (ELLs)

There are several challenges facing ELLs who migrated to the host country like the United States. Firstly, it may be difficult for them to get integrated into the dominant culture without losing a sense of their own cultural identity. There is an argument that some ESL classes have been used to assimilate ELLs to the dominant culture without leaving a room to practice their own culture and language as the minority groups (Oh, 2012) [10], and hence integrating the ELLs’ cultural and linguistic experiences into the school curriculum was far from being achieved. This is not to say that the ESL teachers are not aware of the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy. Yoon (2023) [17] states that teacher trainees learn the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom instructions, but don’t implement it due to their belief that the ELLs should learn the formal English without switching to their home language, and writes, “pre-service teachers identified the importance of recognizing a student’s home language as an asset, but they believed teaching standardized English was necessary” (p. 2). Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach that considers the students’ cultural and linguistic capital and provides a ground for teachers to include different kinds of differentiation and inclusive approaches in their instructions for their culturally diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 2009) [5].

The other challenge facing ELLs who migrated to the host country is that they come from a different education system. For example, Joyce et al. (2010) [4] in their study about university immigrant students in Australia found that the immigrant students were in greater tension and nervousness due to the different education system from what they are used to, and hence the authors described the university as “culturally alienating place” (p. 169).

In addition, keeping ELLs in an ESL classroom for an extended time may be advantageous in terms of learning English as a second language, but they may feel a sense of exclusion socially and psychologically as they are not part of the mainstream class (Olsen,1997) [11]. For example, Davila (2012) [2] reported that high school Vietnamese refugee students, for being in an ESL class, missed the chance to engage with their peers, native English speakers. The latter would help them to improve their English skills and navigate finding scholarship and job opportunities after leaving high school. Due to lack of such interactions, the ELLs were compelled to withdraw psychologically, meaning they could not concentrate on their ESL lessons, and faced social isolation i.e., lack of engagement with the school

community. Moreover, Orosco & O'Connor (2013) [12] reported that ELLs can benefit from culturally responsive instruction in an elementary classroom, as it gives them an opportunity to reflect on their cultural and linguistic experiences. In a similar vein, Williamson (2022) [15] reported the significance of integrating ELLs' cultural and linguistic practices into the preschool and early elementary classrooms for their academic success. However, little is known how culturally responsive the communicative and task-based instructional approaches are to African ELLs in a college ESL classroom.

4. Methodology

This study drew upon qualitative methods for data collection and analysis and employed a qualitative single case study methodology (Yin, 2014 [16]; Stake, 2005 [13]) bounded by time and place, as a way to understand the cultural responsiveness of the communicative and task-based instructional approaches to African college ELLs; this methodology was used because it helps to address the specific case which was bounded by the 2020-2021 academic year, by African ELLs participating in the college ESL classroom where communicative and task-based instructions were used. The study is set in the Midwest, United States, which was selected based on purposive sampling. The participants in the study are four African college English Language Learners who were selected on convenience sampling; they are from Eritrea and Democratic Republic of Congo. Their pseudonym names are Isaias, Hayelom, Peter and Solomon. While the first two participants are from Eritrea, the rest are from Democratic Republic of Congo.

Data were collected through semi-structured interview and focus-group discussion in March and May 2020. These methods enabled the participants to tell stories without being restricted to just responding to closed questions (Maxwell, 2013) [7]. All interactions were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcribed data were shared with the research participants (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018) [1]. Data were analyzed through Miles & Huberman's (1994) [8] qualitative data analysis procedures and interpreted through the social constructivist framework; this theory emphasizes on collaborative way of learning and knowledge construction based on people's interactions with each other's cultural and societal values (Vygotksy, 1978) [14]. It rejects one way of knowledge construction and cultural dominance.

5. Findings and Discussion

The participants felt that the English language teaching approaches being used in their ESL class were not culturally responsive. The task-based and communicative instructional approaches did not seem to give the English language learners comfort because culturally they were raised to be good listeners rather than good speakers. During a group work, the participants did not contribute much to the discussion due to their cultural values that emphasize on speaking less, keeping head down when conversing and avoiding eye contact. Also, their cultural values did not appear to prepare them to face criticism, which is often practiced during interactions, and hence makes them worry about what would happen in a communicative ESL class, and if the teacher would ask them to speak in class. They explained that they would do better if it was not a group work, one of the principles of communicative and task-based instructional approaches. Isaias, one of the participants, states:

ንኣብነት ናይ ጉጅለ ሰራሕ ነይሩ፡ ምስ ኣባላት ጉጅለ ብግቡኡ ዘይረዳዳእ ኮይኑ ስለ ዝተሰምዓኒ፡ ኣብ ዝኾነ ጉጅለ ተጻገቢረ ነቲ ናይ ጉጅለ ሰራሕ ክሰርሕ ኣይከኣልኩን። ስለዚ፡ ቢቃ ባዕለይ ሰራሐሉ። ካብ ካልእ ባህሊ እየ ዝመጻእኩ። ከምኡ'ውን እቶም ካልኣት ተማሃሮ ኣብ ቤት ትምህርቲ ንፉፅ ከም ዘይኮንኩን እንግሊዝኛ ክሃረብ ክፍትን ከለኹ ላህጃ ከም ዘለን ከይፈርዱኒ እፈርሕ። ኣሉታዊ ርእይቶታት ብዙሕ ኪጻወር ዘይከእል ብኸምዚ'የ ዓብዮ፡ ንነብሰይ'ውን ኣብ ከምኡ ዓይነት ኩነታት ከእትዎ ኣይደልን። ስለዚ፡ እዚ ኣብ ቤት ትምህርቲ ናይ ብሓቂ ብዙሕ ጸቕጢ ይገብረላይ። ንቤት ትምህርቲ ክዳሎ ከለኹ ከይተረፈ ብዛዕባኡ እሓስብ። መምህር ኣብ ክፍሊ እንታይ ክሃረብ ይሓተኒ ይኸውን፡ እቶም ተማሃሮ ኣንታ ላህጃ ኣለካ፡ ብዙሕ ከም ዘሸግረኒ ኣይፈልጥኝን እንተባሉኹኹ። ግን ምስ ሓይ ተማሃራይ ጥራይ ክረዳዳእ ከለኹ ዝሓሸ ዝገብር ይመስለኒ፡ ቅድሚኡ ክፍሊ ግን ኣይኮነን።

[For example, there was a group work, and I couldn't join any group to do the group work because I felt like I would not communicate properly with the group members. So, I just worked on it on my own. I come from a different culture. Also, I fear that the other students may judge me that I am not good at school and that I have accent when I try to speak English. This is how I grew up that I cannot entertain negative comments much, and I don't want to put myself into that kind of situation. So, this puts really much pressure on me at school. I even think about it when I prepare myself for school. What if the teacher asks me to speak in class, what if the students say, oh you have an accent, I don't know it bothers me a lot. But I think I do better when I communicate only with one student, but not before the class].

The other theme that emerged was that the participants explained that if it is mandatory to participate in a group work in an ESL class, they would feel comfortable if the group members were immigrants from Asia and Mexico, not ELLs born in the United States. They justified their response by saying that Asian and Mexican immigrant ELLs shared their cultural values like speaking less, avoiding eye contact and communal work where they help each other in completing the task. Peter explains:

I usually prefer to do group work with Asians and Mexicans because they are very cooperative and understanding. I think we share some components of cultural values. They don't judge me but help me to do the work when I am unable to do so.

In conclusion, second language teaching approaches, such as communicative and task-based instructions aim at teaching second language in a communicative, interactive and authentic manner. This could be an effective way of delivering instructions in a college ESL class, as the second language learners get the opportunity to use and practice the target language. However, the findings show that the cultural identity of the African ELLs in this study did not seem to align with the principles of communicative and task-based instructional approaches, as the ELLs were raised to speak less but to listen more, avoid eye contact, and keep their head down when conversing as a sign of respect to the teachers. These elements of African cultural identity appeared to inhibit the ELLs from participating freely and actively in group works, presentations, and interactive activities in the college ESL classroom in the Midwest. The study suggests that the African ELLs' cultural and linguistic capital should be considered along implementing the communicative and task-based instructional approaches. The teachers may not know the African ELLs' cultural values but should make an effort to learn them and consider those values when using the communicative and task-based instructional approaches; as Vygotsky (1978) [14] argues, this gives the ELLs an opportunity to reflect on their own cultural and linguistic experiences and contribute to the knowledge construction in their ESL class.

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Tense, Aspect and Verb Form Errors in EFL Academic Writing Produced by Italian Learners

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Abstract

Errors in writing produced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners of different mother tongues have been widely analyzed. Most studies have considered and categorized different types of writing errors and several facets within the same area of analysis (morphology, syntax, lexicon, etc.). Fewer studies, however, have specifically investigated errors in the form and use of verbs, which are quite frequent in the written production of EFL learners. The present paper deals with verb-related errors, with a main focus on tense and aspect. Given their own semantics, these grammatical categories are part and parcel of the communicative competence of EFL learners, as their misuse may easily lead to misunderstandings. The paper is based on the analysis of exam essays written by Italian students on a Primary Education Master's degree providing qualification for the teaching of English in Primary School. The high frequency of verb-related errors detected in the corpus, especially those concerning verb tense and aspect, suggests that despite the huge amount of time commonly devoted to the teaching of grammar to Italian EFL learners, the form and use of English verbs still seem to be problematic, and appears to indicate the need for a revision of approaches to the teaching of grammatical features.

Keywords: EFL writing; writing errors; tense and aspect; English verbs; verb-related error analysis

1. Introduction

Errors in the written output of learners of a Foreign or Second Language (FL, SL) have long been the focus of academic research. Such research has dealt with the topic from different perspectives, ranging from the discussion of the relevance of errors to language acquisition (e.g. [6]), to the description and classification of errors (e.g. [7]), up to qualitative and quantitative studies specifically reporting on writing errors made by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners with different mother tongues (e.g. [3], [4], [12], [13]). To my knowledge, only a limited number of studies have especially focused on verb-related errors in EFL writing (e.g. [1] [11], [14], [15]). Yet, the use of verbs is a core part of the grammar of any language, English included. This paper is meant to contribute to the provision of further data in this area by describing the type of verb-related errors made by 148 Italian university students in the context of summative assessment of their EFL writing.

The teaching of grammar has always represented a controversial issue amongst both scholars and practitioners (e.g. [8]). Although the importance of grammar in FL educational contexts seems to be undisputed, there is no general consensus over the actual usefulness of grammar instruction *per se* for a solid achievement of formal accuracy and, most importantly, for the fostering of language learning (e.g. [5], [9], [10]). Indeed, the wide body of studies investigating EFL writing errors provides ample evidence that, irrespective of their mother tongue, EFL learners make a considerable number of grammar mistakes – including verb-related errors – when they write in English, even after years of instruction and at advanced levels of overall proficiency.

A case in point is that of Italian EFL learners. In Italy, 90% of students learn English from the beginning of schooling until the end of upper secondary school, when they are expected to have reached B2 competence. At all levels of pre-university schooling, EFL classes are largely focused on the teaching of grammar, with plenty of mechanical drills being employed as the most familiar type of grammar exercises. And yet, upon starting their university career, Italian students still struggle with English grammar, which is one of the reasons why they see writing as a daunting activity ([2]). The vast majority of freshers do not have the B2 level they are supposed to have gained, and, what is more, most of the times they have difficulties performing grammatical tasks even at lower levels. The purpose of the present paper is to address this issue by reporting the findings of a study which explored the errors related to a specific grammatical item, namely the English verb, in EFL academic writing produced in the context of an Italian university.

2. The Study

2.1 Corpus and Methodology

The question underlying my study is “What type of verb-related errors do Italian EFL learners still make after 13/14 years of English instruction?”. To answer this question, I compiled a corpus of 148 essays written by first- and second year students on a single-cycle Degree in Primary Education during several computer-based exam sessions held between June and September 2023. I divided the corpus into two smaller subcorpora, which I called SFP1 and SFP2 respectively. SFP1 includes 80 essays produced by first-year students, for a total of 9,648 running words. The essays in SFP1 are about a variety of topics, such as ‘A particularly boring or happy day’, ‘Your musical tastes’, ‘The place you live in’. SFP2 includes 68 essays produced by second-year students, for a total of 10,063 words. The topics are also varied, and mainly suitable for the production of an argumentative text (for example, ‘the importance of giving rules to your children’, ‘the role of parents in choosing their children’s careers’), yet with the possibility of including examples from the writer’s own life. The essays were collected directly from the e-learning platform where they had been produced, and then saved as Word files.

With reference to the student writers, it is important to highlight that in Italy an MA in Primary Education automatically qualifies for the teaching of English in primary school. In other words, students who graduate in Primary Education are the ones that will teach English to 6 to 11-year-old children. During the 5-year Degree, student teachers attend five English laboratories (one per year) of 32 hours each. At the end of each Laboratory, students take an exam (either written or oral, depending on the year of attendance) for which they are not given any mark, but only a fail or pass.

After reading all the essays, I decided to divide the detected verb-related errors into the following 8 error types: 1) Wrong use of 3rd person sing. -s morpheme (e.g., *Nobody **listen** or **try** to understand.* (SFP2)); 2) Wrong subject-verb agreement (e.g., *Every famous person is perfect and **have** a perfect life.* (SFP2)); 3) Wrong verb form, where I included incorrect forms for the infinitive of purpose (e.g., *I will spend 3000 euros **for to repeat** the experience of last year.* (SFP2)); wrong forms after a preposition/adverb/conjunction (e.g. *Instead of **explain**...* (SFP1)); after expressions like *it’s difficult, it’s important*, etc. (e.g., *Is important **teach** the rules.* (SFP2)); after a modal verb (e.g., *Friends are the best thing that **could happened** to you.* (SFP1)); wrong form of irregular verbs (e.g., *Now I have **understand** that ...* (SFP2)); wrong form of subject verb (e.g., ***Educate** people can give everyone the possibility to use and live...* (SFP2)); nouns used instead of a verb (e.g. *We had to stop many times to **recovery** the energy.* (SFP1)); 4) Wrong use of participles (e.g., *Children will so **exciting!*** (SFP2)); 5) Wrong verb pattern (e.g., *I will want **that children proving** new and typical food.* (SFP2)); 6) Omission of verb (e.g., *I **proud** of you.* (SFP2)); 7) Wrong use of auxiliaries (e.g., *They asked us if we had a video of that morning, but we **hadn’t**.* (SFP1)); 8) Wrong tense/aspect (e.g., *It was raining so much that we had to stay all day in the b&b we **rented**.* (SFP1)).

2.2 Findings

In SFP1, 62 out of 80 essays (78%) contain at least one verb-related error, with an average of 3 verb-related errors per essay. In SFP2, 63 out of 68 essays (93%) contain at least one verb-related error, with an average of 4 errors per essay.

Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 below provide a summary of the findings.

Table 1. Total number of verb-related errors

Corpus	Verb-related errors other than tense/aspect	Errors related to tense/aspect	Total number of occurrences of verb-related errors
SFP1	101	99	200
SFP2	223	79	302
Whole	324	178	502

Table 2. Total number of occurrences in the corpus per error type

Error type	Total number of occurrences per error type
Wrong use of 3rd person sing. -s morpheme	41
Wrong subject-verb agreement	29
Wrong verb form	142
Wrong use of participles	11
Wrong verb pattern	48
Omission of verb	11
Wrong use of auxiliaries	42
Wrong tense/aspect	178

Table 3. Most frequent error types in SFP1

SFP1	Most frequent error other than tense/aspect	No. of occurrences
	Wrong verb form	41
	Most frequent error related to tense/aspect	No. of occurrences
	Present Simple instead of Past Simple	21

Table 4. Most frequent error types in SFP2

SFP2	Most frequent error other than tense/aspect	No. of occurrences
	Wrong verb form	101
	Most frequent error related to tense/aspect	No. of occurrences
	Past Simple instead of Present Simple	19

2.3 Discussion of Findings

As we can see from Table 1 above, occurrences of verb-related errors in SFP2 are much higher than in SFP1 (302 vs 200). The Table also shows the differences between the two subcorpora. In SFP1 the number of verb-related errors other than tense/aspect is much lower (101 vs 223), and the number of errors related to tense/aspect is only slightly higher (99 vs 79). Table 2 provides data about the number of verb-related errors per error type in the whole corpus. As we can see, the highest number can be found in the 'Wrong tense/aspect' category (178 occurrences) and the 'Wrong verb form' category (142 occurrences). Tables 3 and 4 show the most common error types in the two subcorpora respectively. As for errors other than tense/aspect, in both subcorpora the most frequent error concerns the form. SFP1 contains fewer instances of 'Wrong verb form' than SFP2, thus confirming that in the 2nd year of their university studies, students still make errors like *For going to the restaurant for eat fish i need much money*, or *In this way the children construction their personality*, or *This year we would to do the same camp*. (SFP2). Tables 3 and 4 also show that in SFP1 the most common error related to tense/aspect concerns the use of the Present Simple, in particular its being wrongly employed instead of the Past Simple, as in *It was such a relief inside the castle, but I'm not well, so my boyfriend decided to take my bag. The castle was so full of people and I'm very short that we accidentally separated, so we lost each other. I don't have my phone with me because it was in my bag*, or *Last year I go to concert with my friends. The concert is amazing!! The situation is unique and I cry and sing* (SFP1). In SFP2, instead, the most common error related to tense/aspect concerns the use of the Past Simple, but still in relation to the Present Simple, as in *These are the rules for parents with their children. The had to be patient with their kids. They had to learn to understand their needs. When children grow up parents had to hear them. It's also important that parents don't choose who their kids had to become" or "Last year I knew my boyfriend online and now we lived together*. (SFP2). The findings suggest, therefore, that two basic tenses like the Present Simple and the Past Simple are still a problem for the students who wrote the essays in the corpus. It is worth highlighting that the lower frequency of errors with other tenses and verb structures (such as, for example, Present and Perfect conditional in if-clauses, or perfect tenses in the duration form) is only to be related to the fact that they are rarely used in both subcorpora, and when they are, they are normally wrong, as in *If I hadn't decided to stay at home I would have going out with my boyfriend* (SFP1), or *If the parents used simple rules since children was little it was better* (SFP2), or, again, *I took my dog on 28th September 2022. [...] It was born for 12 months* (SFP1), and *My mum and dad for all their life helping me to tough what I would have like in my life*. (SFP2).

The overall larger amount of error occurrences in SFP2 might in part be due to the slightly higher number of words in the 2nd-year sub-corpus. Yet, one would expect an increase of grammatical accuracy from one year to the next, rather than a decrease or a levelling off. In the case of the student

teachers that wrote the exam essays in the corpus, it must be said that the English Laboratories they attended during the first and second year respectively before taking the final exams had been exclusively devoted to the consolidation of their language skills. Indeed, even though the five 32-hour English Laboratories that students attend during the single-cycle MA in Primary Education are supposed to be mainly devoted to the consolidation of the language skills mostly useful for the teaching profession and to the presentation of approaches and methodologies for the teaching of English to young learners, the low level of language proficiency students show when they enter university requires the first two years to be entirely dedicated to the revision of what students are supposed to have learnt in the previous 13 years, including, more than anything, the revision of grammar. And yet, as the Tables above show, they still struggle with (basic) grammar features after 13/14 years of English instruction.

3. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The size of the corpus analyzed in this study does not allow any generalizable conclusions. Still, the data presented herein seem to suggest that despite long exposure to the teaching of grammar, Italian EFL learners do not seem to have achieved a level of grammatical accuracy that one might reasonably expect after many years of instruction. This may be due to a number of reasons that can only partially be ascribed to L1 (First Language) interference ([5]). Other reasons might need to be taken into account. For instance, the fact that as a result of its being used as the lingua franca of the globe (ELF), English has become a moving target, which has made the gap between what learners are taught at school and what they experience outside become bigger and bigger. Italian EFL learners are at the same time ELF users, and they may have realized, more or less consciously, that not all grammatical errors have the same weight in communication. This does not mean that grammar teaching should be removed from the EFL classroom. What the present and similar studies instead suggest is that alternatives to traditional methods should be found. First of all, rather than being isolated in a vacuum, grammar needs to be integrated into the EFL class – and possibly in other disciplines' classes, as it happens with the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology. Second, grammar needs to be contextualized. As Collins ([5:300]) suggests, “[Let students] create contexts for given forms, rather than forms for given contexts”. Third, students need to know the reasons why an accurate use of the form has an impact on meaning and communication. They need to be made aware, for example, that the use of the wrong verb tense/aspect may hinder communication, generate misunderstandings, or even non-understandings, especially in writing, which does not allow a direct and immediate negotiation of meaning. Fourth, “if exercises are used to practice a form, [the teacher should] make sure that they reproduce language likely to be found in naturally occurring discourse situations” ([10: 480]). And finally, if we want our students to improve their writing skills (which implies a good command of grammar), we need to “teach grammar *in* writing, not *for* writing” ([9] :78).

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Media and Language Learning



Teaching Critical Thinking Against the Background of Basic Linguistic Research on the Lexis of Crisis Communication in Opinion-forming Mass Media

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Abstract

In the context of new global challenges in the form of various crises, whether the migration crisis (due to war, drought, etc.), climate or pandemic crises, the ability to think critically about issues is becoming more important than ever before. War not only affects life directly in the country where it is taking place, but also resonates in neighbouring and/or distant countries as well. War conflict causes human tragedies; fleeing to safety becomes a trigger for migration, which in turn provokes reactions in the place of their stay, thus influencing the mindset and behaviour of the countries that host migrants. It is worth examining these phenomena more closely, dispassionately and with emotional distance. The lexis of crisis communication is a resource worthy of investigation within English lexicology and stylistics and linguistics in general. It is a suitable opportunity to engage several aspects of linguistic training at once, namely literature search, anchoring of basic terminology within a systemic linguistics framework, and the establishment of research objectives with procedures with their subsequent application to the actual research process in the final qualifying bachelor thesis within the framework of bachelor study of Teaching English Language and Literature. By mastering essentials of academic research work, learners (students) are able to manage skills connected to data collection and their processing by means of classification, description, explanation, analysis, comparison, reasoning, and logical interpretation. As long as students can think and work autonomously and independently, they will be able to approach the problems they face in the future creatively and critically. This study highlights, among other things, the necessary shift from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred activities on how this can be achieved. The study was supported by financial support from the Slovak grant Lexicogenetic Potential of Media Political Discourse on the Crisis VEGA 1/0748/21.

Keywords: *Lexis crisis communication, critical thinking, war lexis, mass media*

1. The Turn from Teacher-Centred Activities to Learner-Centred Approaches

The approach towards language teaching has been changing in the course of time. The English language has become a global lingua franca [1] and as such becomes enormously not only attractive for students to learn, but also it becomes an integral part of lifelong learning skills. The active, autonomous and self-confident student capable of critical thinking is the goal of the teacher's efforts. The turn of attention from a teacher to a learner in the form of shifting activities to the learner is an appropriate device to achieve a given goal, through which the learner can grow academically, cognitively, and personally as well. There are several methods how to achieve those intentions. Conceiving the final bachelor's thesis involves a combination of many appropriate methods to develop the aforementioned hard and soft skills. Supervising the student while writing her bachelor's thesis combines all the necessary methods.

2. Methods

Supervising any thesis inevitably combines various approaches, such as project-based learning linked to the problem-based learning together with a discovery-based learning at the same time [2]. It must be stressed that the bachelor's thesis is the first truly extensive academic text after writing their term papers, on which students have to work independently and over a long period of time. Time management, including consultation with a supervisor, must be a firm part of their work. And so setting objectives together with supervisor is usually the first step to success. It was decided to first observe theme-based articles in selected electronic British newspapers aiming at Russia's war against Ukraine,

then organisational basis and methodological details of the overall research process [4]. For example, the principles of literature processing (correct forms of citation and paraphrasing), finding and consulting the authoritative British dictionaries (OED, Cambridge, etc.), the discipline of two-phase data collection, etc. The role of a teacher in this learning process is to lead, explain, manage, and facilitate [5].

2.1 Research Aims and Definitions of Terms

At the very beginning of teacher-learner cooperation it is necessary to set objectives and then start a fact-finding mission in a library and to define terms and contextualize them within a general linguistic topic. That is why it was an absolute must to explain and define terms such as *lexis and lexis crisis communication*. *Lexis* according to Jesenská (2019) is the interrelated system of vocabulary in the form of words, expressions, and syntagmas. In other words, they constitute mutually well-related system of free (lexical and functional) morphemes and lexical units [6]. Genčiová (2020) explains *lexis crisis communication* as sharing information on any crisis situation (be it war, pandemic situation, migration waves or climate changes) among authorities, mass media or individual interlocutors [7]. For the context of the bachelor thesis, other significant terms had to be defined and explained as well. However, due to the limits of this paper, we refrain from presenting them in this study (synonymy, lexical stylistic devices – metaphor, irony, eu/dysphemism, etc., journalistic style, functional language style, etc.). The next objective was to find out frequency of 'war' lexis and analyse its synonyms and stylistic devices followed with findings word-formation processes which the lexeme 'war' undergoes (see part 3.).

2.2 Data Collection

The collection of relevant data was excerpted from the reliable British daily (see 2.3 below) in the first phase of research. *Sketch engine*, the specific research corpus tool for processing the data, was important in the second phase of research. All excerpted war-related articles from *the Guardian* (2.3) had to be inserted into the tool and processed in accordance with criteria that had already been predetermined (3.).

2.3 The Guardian

The British newspaper *Guardian* was chosen as a reliable and globally accessible source of data due to the other several significant criteria [3]. It is the British quality daily with a long historical tradition reporting on current issues such as migration crisis, pandemic situation of Covid-19 and/or ongoing Russia's war. In aforementioned issues the daily has set up a separate column and/or section for quick accessibility to the readership [8]. The rubric *Ukraine invasion* has its firm place among other current headlines and sections. It also places a high value on the quality of work, verification of information and credible investigative reporting.

3. Research Description, Explanation and Comparison of Results

The time framework of observing and excerpting the data from *the Guardian* was limited to the two weeks with an interval of one year. The war-related articles were excerpted from Feb. 24th to March 2nd, 2022 and a year later, from Feb. 24th until March 2nd, 2023. The student's aim was to map the synonyms of lexeme 'war' and to find out and analyse the collocations including the examined lexeme together with metaphors in selected articles and process it by the means of Sketch Engine. The amount of data was enormous in both years (see the table 1 and table 3 below).

Table 1. Quantitative data analysis in *the Guardian* (data taken from [8] and [3])

<i>The Guardian</i>	No of articles	No of words in total	No of norm pages	Frequency of lexeme 'war'	Other lexemes found in Sketch engine with high frequency functioning as synonyms to 'war'
2022	358	297.061	1.005	884x	<i>Ukraine</i> 2.384x, <i>Russia</i> 2.063x, <i>Putin</i> 1.342x
2023	69	65.910	223	396x	<i>invasion</i> 146x, <i>conflict</i> 80x, <i>attack</i> 59x, <i>aggression</i> 32x
In total	427	362.971	1.228	1.280x	

It turned out that we had to filter a lot. The analysis has shown that out of 67 results which thesaurus in Sketch engine provided as synonyms of 'war', only 13 were semantically related [3]. However, under other circumstances, findings would be different. In the context of Russia's 2022 invasion to Ukraine synonyms to 'war' in the *Guardian* articles were *Ukraine* (attacked country), *Russia* (current aggressor), *Putin* (as the main person responsible for the invasion) – all three showing a high frequency of occurrence. Other synonymous expressions found by means of Sketch engine were: *aggression*, *assault*, *attack*, *conflict*, *crises*, *fighting*, *invasion*, *operation*, *offensive*, *strike* [3]. After this we went on with seeking collocations with found synonyms. Thus, expressions as *Putin's invasion / war / attack /*

operation were found in articles (yr 2022). Concerning the lexical stylistic devices, metaphors, metonymy, irony and other were found as well (see table 2 below).

Table 2. Qualitative data analysis in *the Guardian* (data taken from [8] and [3])

<i>The Guardian: lexical stylistic devices</i>	Dysphemism	Simile	Synecdoche (metonymy)	Metaphor
2022	'...Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is an unprovoked outrage and a heinous violation of international law...'	'...of Blaming Nato and the EU for Putin's invasion of Ukraine is like blaming a child for a bully attacking him when the kid says he'd like to join his mates as a member of the local football club'	(totum pro parte) 'This is Putin's war, not Russia's, but how can Russia speak? ' (pars pro toto) 'dipped their hands in the blood of Putin's war'	'Ukraine invasion: How Vladimir Putin built his career on waging war - The Russian president's career is steeped in blood '
2023	'António Guterres, said Russia's invasion one year ago had brought " living hell " to the Ukrainian people through "widespread death, destruction and displacement".'	'Even before Russia's full-scale invasion, I often heard people refer to Ukraine as Europe's back yard '	'... the Kremlin wheeled out children ...'	'Putin's genocidal war is turning my country into a graveyard '

There were cases when several devices were found in one sentence. For example, hyperbole, dysphemism, and metaphor: 'Meanwhile, elsewhere on the political right, there is something even more awful: the meek apologism for Putin seen lately in the **endless excuses** [hyperbole] for the Ukraine invasion proffered by Nigel Farage - who **moronically** [dysphemism] reduces Ukraine's plight to the consequences of Nato and the EU **poking the Russian bear with a stick** [metaphor]' [3]. The bachelor student herself was capable to identify all those devices. In 2023 became metaphors a firm part of discourse as well, e.g., there is personification, metonymy (synecdoche), and irony included in the following sentence: 'At the climax of the pageantry in Moscow to mark the first anniversary of the start of Vladimir Putin's full-scale war in Ukraine, **the Kremlin wheeled out children** [personification, metonymy] from Mariupol in occupied south-east Ukraine to "**thank**" their invaders [irony]' [3] and [8]. In terms of quantitative analysis of the stylistic devices the most common was euphemism when 'war' was referred to as *antiterrorist operation, aggression, invasion, (military) operation*, etc.

Table 3. Lexical stylistic devices (quantitative analysis) in *the Guardian* (data taken from [8] and [3])

<i>The Guardian: lexical stylistic devices</i>	Yr 2022	Yr 2023
Euphemism	249	50
Metaphor	6	2
Dysphemism	4	2
Personification	2	2
Hyperbole	3	0
Synecdoche pars pro toto	3	0
Synecdoche totum pro parte	1	0
Rhetorical Question	1	0
Simile	1	1
Irony	1	0
Total	271	57

Regarding the word-formation processes of 'war' lexeme, it turns out that derivation prevails (see table 4):

Table 4. Word-formation processes of 'war' (data taken from [8] and [3])

<i>The Guardian: WFPs</i>						
2022	'war' 888x	'anti-war' 33x	'post-war' 14x	'pro-war' 2x	'cyber-war' 2x	'pre-war' 1x
2023	'war' 396x	'anti-war' 13x	-	-	-	'pre-war' 4x

Other words including the morpheme 'war' were also found in the corpus in 2022 and in 2023, too. These were *warfare, warship(s), warplanes, warheads, warmonger, wartime, war-torn, war-winning, war-hit, war-era*, and *warrior(s)* [3], [8]. Majority of those were coined by means of compounding when putting together two free morphemes (*wartime, warheads*, etc.). In total, for both years, 15 cases of derivation and 10 cases of compounding were found.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The paper describes the cooperation between the supervisor and her English language student based on mutual trust and open mindset towards new ideas when writing final BA thesis on *lexis of crisis communication in quality papers* against the background of basic linguistic research to make the student apply critical thinking on the current issue of Russia's invasion to Ukraine. This aim was to achieve by the following steps: setting objectives, finding appropriate primary and secondary literature, defining basic terms in the linguistic context, data collection from preselected newspaper (*The Guardian*), data processing (observation, excerption, filtering, sorting, description, analysis, explanation, comparison, interpretation, taking a stance and expressing an opinion). Student's enthusiasm and academic input was enormous. She found out, that even though Great Britain does not share the common border with Ukraine, the first week of war, *The Guardian* published over 300 war-based articles and during the same time a year later nearly 70 articles, though there were other significant issues to be reported about (at least a year later). The BA student working on her bachelor thesis made very good use of this opportunity to learn skills she did not know before. She was able to set objectives, identify and observe chosen phenomena in selected newspaper, process collected data by means of quantitative and qualitative analysis when applying Sketch engine tool, classify, order, sort out, compare, etc. Her problem-solving skills got improved by using creativity, cognition, and academic approach. She has to be able manage her time and work. And though following her supervisor's advice step by step, it was not always properly understood. However, the point is not to write a flawless thesis, but to find her own path during the process of learning when keep on trying. Her statistics was too simplistic (see tables 1, 3, and 4) because she did not apply the frequency per million words – in that case the data from 2022 would be comparable to the date from 2023. Also her potential to recognize all word-formation processes and lexical stylistic devices was not adequate enough. In this she still had shortcomings. However, she worked hard indeed, to face all research challenges herself bravely and conscientiously. She became capable to read native speakers' newspapers on current issues, take a clear stance and form an opinion, come to conclusions, present and defend her thoughts and ideas in the academic English in front of university defense committee composed of her university teachers, and accept attitudes of others. After reading her supervisor's and opponent's reviews, she managed to prepare for her defense as well as possible. And she was successful, as the aim is not to be perfect, but to follow academic ethics and keep on effort. The decision to shift the focus and responsibility of the work from the teacher to the student was ultimately a good one for both parties involved.

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Project-Based Learning



Photovoice as a Tool to Foster the Global Skills of Candidate Teachers

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Abstract

This article offers reflection on the procedures and outcomes of Photovoice workshop which was organized at Matej Bel University (MBU), Slovakia with selected diaspora communities in Banská Bystrica. The workshop was conducted in cooperation with the University of Delaware (Delaware, USA) and Dickinson college (Pennsylvania, USA). These institutions were the main initiators and leaders of the Photovoice project, in close cooperation with the Idaho Museum of International Diaspora (Idaho, USA). The decision was later made to implement the Photovoice method as part of ELT methodology courses at the Department of English and American Studies in order to integrate more innovative and active participatory techniques in candidate-teacher education. It was hoped that these techniques would trigger students' global skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity, as well as other key 21st century competencies. The workshops were carried out at the end of the summer term of the academic year 2022/2023 with the Ukrainian student cohort studying at Matej Bel University, and with Ukrainian professors teaching or conducting research at MBU. In this article we focus solely on the cohort of Ukrainian students and the opinions they gave us regarding the Photovoice method and its possible use with their learners during their teaching practice. The Photovoice workshop proved effective in enhancing participants' global skills, which was viewed via participants' reflections on their experience in the workshop. In light of the project's success, there is potential to showcase the products which workshop participants created locally, nationally, and globally through exhibitions and online platforms. The study is the outcome of the research project KEGA 016UMB-4/2021 Global skills and their implementation in foreign language teaching in secondary schools as a means of developing students' key competences and the professional identity of future teachers in the context of the 21st century.

Keywords: PhotoVoice, global skills, Global Cultures and Global Diaspora Curriculum, Ukrainian students.

Introduction

The 21st century teacher should be able to adapt flexibly in the classroom. Such a 21st century teacher is able to lead genuine communication with his/her learners, collaborate with them, and learn in the process. These skills are developed through early teacher training (practicum at middle and high schools) and during teachers' first years in teaching profession. Higher education (HE) institutions today are expected to reflect on the essential skills which trainee teachers will need to have gained by the end of their studies. In this article we focus on experiential methods which can increase students' motivation, higher-level thinking skills, and creativity, as opposed to more traditional teaching methods. Experiential learning also develops soft skills (empathy, active listening, teamwork, self-reflection, etc.) and other social skills. Specifically, this study explores the value and benefits of using the Photovoice (initially qualitative research) method and how it reflects the Kolbs' Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) [6] which consists of 4 elements, namely Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. Photovoice resembles a kind of experiential learning (active learning strategy) and therefore we classified it into the category of experiential methods. When using experiential methods in teaching, the students are not just passive listeners, taking notes and only having a sporadic opportunity to give their opinion, but instead are active agents in the learning process. During ELT methodology classes (lectures, seminars, practicum lessons) students from Faculty of Arts (Matej Bel University, MBU) are taught to plan their lessons logically, coherently and creatively and to be flexible should a problem unexpectedly arise during the lesson, all in line with globally, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

The Photovoice Method in Teacher Training Education

The Photovoice method has never been used in the Department of English and American Studies (MBU) before. It attracted the author's attention due to its benefits for communities and for individuals, and because of its experiential character — all of which are beneficial factors in the foreign language classroom.

“Photovoice is an innovative way to reflect, talk, learn, share, and make a difference for one's self and others; a straightforward method fostering patient, family, and community dialog. Photovoice puts cameras in the hands of people with valuable lived experience so they can explore and share their perspectives on health, family, community, and their futures.” [4]

Using photovoice, teachers or other instructors can encourage discussion, investigate experiences, highlight social-justice issues, collaborate for change, identify needs, and more. This can support communicative language teaching in the classroom, while also developing learners' global skills. Implementation of the Photovoice method is begun with students learning about Photovoice, taking and discussing photographs and reflecting on their experience (fostering their visual literacy), writing captions (genre is not limited) about the selected photographs taken, options to choose photos for sharing, options to invite people to share in discussion, option to present and exhibit. [4]

There is a hope that Photovoice can be used as a platform or tool for people coming from different cultural backgrounds...people of different views, perspectives and opinions to reveal and open up their stories, their life journeys, stories can be shown...it has potential to facilitate cross-cultural learning, understanding and respect as well as to create opportunities to celebrate individual stories via produced images in the context of our beautiful global culture. [3]

Photovoice method can be used effectively in education in order to support learners' global skills which include communication and collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, intercultural competence and knowledge of citizenship, emotional self-regulation and wellbeing, and digital literacies [5]. The decision to implement Photovoice workshop as part of teacher training programs is aligned with the university's public diplomacy project titled Internationalizing Global Cultures and Diaspora Curriculum (IGCDC). The purpose of this public diplomacy project is to advance a global cultures and diaspora curriculum program through combined experiences and expertise of the IGCDC faculty – a core group of multidisciplinary experts from academia, cultural organizations, public and government sectors, and U.S.-based non-profit organizations. The IGCDC curriculum was conceived and designed by Idaho Museum of International's Diaspora executive director and founder, Dr. Palina Louangketh, from Idaho, USA, whose vision is spread her curriculum worldwide in order to inspire transformational change in society (IMID, 2023). In this article we reflect upon the experiences of Ukrainian students who came to Slovakia because of war. The human journey story and lived experience of diasporas worldwide serve as a foundation for creating this special curriculum program. This interconnection between diasporas and the broader community fosters a peaceful and compassionate relationship for future generations to model after. Photovoice as part of IGCDC offers pre-service and in-service teachers with a number of possibilities to foster both students' productive and receptive skills alongside the 4Cs (creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration).

Photovoice Method and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

The Photovoice method reminds us of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) [6] which consists of 4 elements, namely Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. All four elements resemble the learning process which happens while applying the Photovoice method in the classroom.

The first stage (concrete experience) builds on the hands-on experiences of learners. In our case the learners were Ukrainian candidate teachers who were learning to work with the Photovoice method through their own experience. During this stage, the students learnt new skills, use the cameras to take pictures and develop photos, displaying the photos on the screen and printing them. The second stage (reflective observations) involved discussing the selected images with peers, creating a caption about the image, sharing feelings about the image, asking questions, learning from each other's experiences and opinions. Through experience, the students' learning began. The Ukrainian candidate teachers in our case reflected on what elements of Photovoice methods could be used in their classrooms and for what purposes. The third stage (abstract conceptualization) fostered candidate teachers' competence in taking action, going beyond their own experiences and integrating photovoice methods into their lesson plans and future projects. The last and fourth stage (active experimentation) put the candidate

teachers' experience to the test in the real world as they took what they have learnt during Photovoice workshop to the microcultures of their own classrooms and experiment with their own learners. [4]

Photovoice Workshop Procedure

The academics from University of Delaware (UDEL) and Dickinson College instructed the cohort of participants (16 undergraduate Ukrainian students, candidate teachers) about the Photovoice method. A presentation accompanied by visuals documenting products which were created by previous participants were used in order to demonstrate the diversity of topics and diversity of images taken. Participants were given practical examples and time for asking questions. The students signed GDPR documentation which permitted this article's author to process their data. Having been given direction by instructors of the Photovoice method, the students were given cameras and time to depict either themselves, their colleagues, their peers, or material objects located within their immediate environment. Participants were given one hour to take photos and to think about the following questions while taking the photos:

- How did you feel when you arrived in Slovakia from Ukraine?
- What did you leave behind in Ukraine?
- Who do you want to become?
- What lies ahead for you after leaving Ukraine? [2]

After one hour, the students returned to the classroom and returned the cameras to their instructors who chose a few photos from each participant. Workshop instructors downloaded digital images onto a computer, and each participant selected their favorite images to print using the Cyanotype process. After that the participants wrote captions about one selected image (poem, a short paragraph, a few-lines long story, random sentences, etc.). Once the images were developed, participants of the workshop were asked to consider the following additional questions:

- Why does this image matter to me?
- Why might it matter to people around me (family, friends, city, nation)?
- Why might it matter to the world? [1]

The abovementioned questions were posed in order to make students think outside the box (stimulating both emotions and cognition), taking into consideration the significance of the image on a personal, local, and global level. The students had some time to share their experience in groups and to suggest the ways to use what they have learnt in their future practice with middle-school and high-school learners. The students also agreed to the possibility of having their captioned photos exhibited in the future.

Methodology

We were primarily interested in the effects of the Photovoice workshop on candidate teachers' global skills and what benefits it brought them in terms of their professional and personal development. In order to explore this, we asked our participants to write a short reflective essay answering the following questions:

- What new things have you learnt during the photovoice workshop?
- Could you reflect on this new experience in more detail?
- Did the workshop provide you with some tips for your future career, something you could use with your learners?
- Did the workshop improve your global skills which you will use in the future?

To be more precise, the data gathering procedure was divided into the following phases: seeking permission from students to analyze and anonymously publish excerpts from their essays, as well as the photos which they developed, the administration of essays, the organization and analysis of collected data from essays. The answers were collected and clustered into the following categories: Global skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital skills); Learning something new and having opportunities; An international and cultural experience; Teachers' personality and approach; Self-expression (intrapersonal development); Cooperation with others (interpersonal relationships).

Results

Based on the analyzed essays and the data collected from them, we have come to some valuable findings which revealed quite a lot about the professional and personal development of candidate teachers. The results revealed that Ukrainian undergraduate students benefited from the workshops in many ways. They gained valuable insights from foreign instructors and took part in intellectually engaging lessons, improved their intercultural communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, and a range of other global skills as can be viewed below:

I found the workshop to be an enriching and empowering experience. It provided a unique platform for self-expression through the lens of photography. I believe that the workshop's emphasis on participatory and inclusive practices was rather beneficial. (Respondent no. 1)

Our survey also showed that students were curious about the world and showed interest in being more engaged with the world:

The instructors introduced us to an amazing kind of art - photography and its methods, which were mind-blowing. I learnt a lot about how to share my story with the world through the powerful language of photography, how to express myself. (Respondent no. 10)

Perhaps most important was that students learnt something about themselves through producing their own images and exploring different communicative expressions which were used during the workshops. They also had the chance to explore the intensity of the image via their own practice and hands-on experience:

The workshop allowed us to be actively involved in the process of making photographs. It was a perfect blend of theory and practice. It was very interesting for me to make pictures! Also, it was a transformative experience to see how a single photograph can evoke emotion! (Respondent no. 5)

The highlight of the workshop was the practical component, where the participants had the chance to put their newfound knowledge into action. (Respondent no. 3)

The results of our small-scale survey also revealed that the students' openness, communication skills, empathy, worldview and self-awareness significantly improved after participating in the Photovoice workshop.

The instructors introduced us to the use of angles for photography to create importance, drama, contrast, a peaceful atmosphere, etc. Like they said photography is a language that everyone can communicate in. I gained confidence in using photography to communicate the meaning in an image way. The workshop gave me an insight into my peer's stories which I really appreciate. (Respondent no. 7)

The students had a chance to experience, reflect, produce, share and find ways of taking action and implementing some elements of the Photovoice method in their own teaching, which was in line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation):

I would definitely use it in my practice. Photography allows children to see the world from different sides, they can use photos to tell stories and discussing photographs encourage critical thinking. In conclusion, attending the Photo Voice workshop discovered my passion for photography, leading me to purchase my own camera! (Respondent no. 5)

Implications for Future Research

The following are the recommendations drawn from this study: A similar study may be done in the future taking into consideration the beauty and truth in the images, and how the journalists or photographers communicate ideas about the world and about how images help us understand the world (Boix Mansilla, 2016); More faculty members could participate in Photovoice workshops and cascade their knowledge to their students – candidate teachers; Faculty members can consider integrating the key principles of the Photovoice method in their teaching; A more in-depth study can be undertaken with more participants in the future.

Conclusion

The Photovoice workshop was a cultural and international experience for students. They appreciated the personality and approach of the instructors who created a conducive environment for learning and supported student self-expression. Besides global skills, students' self-expression and self-reflection skills were also fostered. Photovoice as a method helped foster students' tolerance and cultural awareness. The students' cultural and emotional intelligence was also elevated. The type of learning enhanced through Photovoice was attractive for students. The workshops were well-organized, logical and consistent, and most importantly, they were intellectually challenging and stimulating for all groups. Photovoice workshops provided new opportunities for both students and teachers in the context of their personal and professional development.

The findings of this survey provide a basis for integrating more experiential and activating methods into higher education. The Photovoice workshops paved the way for the kind of learning which future teachers need to be prepared for their life in our interdependent/globalized world. Using Photovoice as a method in education of candidate teachers can create basis for global citizenship education, moving away from traditional teacher-centered approaches towards more student-centered ones, taking into consideration globally and culturally responsive pedagogy. To sum up, the Photovoice workshop allowed participants to discover the power of photography as a means of self-expression and social advocacy. We hope that Photovoice will be used more in the future as a valuable pedagogical approach, not only in teacher training programs but also in other study fields at the Faculty of Arts because of its power to engage students in learning about themselves and about the world.

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Development of Global Skills through Projects

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Abstract

Project-based learning is a comprehensive teaching concept that leads to the holistic development of the learner's personality. It is a method that effectively develops learners' key competences and fulfils the basic objectives of the educational dimension for the 21st century [1]. It focuses on the learner's independent work, transforming extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation. The main objective of project-based learning is to link school with real practice, develop critical thinking, change the way knowledge is acquired and integrate knowledge into a coherent system. The ability to present and argue factually, while respecting other learners, is an equally important part of the objectives of project-based learning. The learners are given the opportunity to learn about themselves and work on strengthening their confidence in their own knowledge and skills [2]. Moreover, each school subject offers many opportunities for project work and at the same time creates a unique platform for the implementation of cross-curricular relationships. The aim of our study is to identify those global skills that project-based learning enables to develop more intensively in lower secondary education.

The study is the outcome of the research project KEGA 016UMB-4/2021 Global skills and their implementation in foreign language teaching in secondary schools as a means of developing students' key competences and the professional identity of future teachers in the context of the 21st century.

Keywords: *project-based learning, global skills, critical thinking, teamwork, creativity*

Introduction

Contemporary society, which is saturated with information and knowledge from all areas of human activity, requires the use of methods and teaching practices that ensure the effective cognitive, global, and communicative development of learners, thus fully preparing them for diverse situations in personal and professional life. Although the project method began to appear systematically in our educational process in the middle of the last century, it is still one of those methods that have an irreplaceable place in the teaching of all subjects, foreign languages not excluded. In general, the project method is based on the fundamental assumption that learners learn most if they carry out meaningful activities that are not only related to the development of communicative competence in the English language but are linked to all areas of their global development [1]. Moreover, the learners put their whole personality into the work of the project, which makes each project unique. During the preparation and implementation phase of the project, the learner develops several important global skills, which overall can be considered a significant benefit of project-based learning in the English language classroom.

1.1 Characteristics of Project Method

The effectiveness of project-based learning is based on the use of several didactic methods such as integrated thematic teaching, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, problem-based learning, and task-based learning. Learners are largely allowed to use their own creativity and to explore a topic in detail from their own point of view.

Project-based learning is one of the organisational forms of teaching where learners are not exposed to the teacher's presentation sitting in their desks. At the same time, project work also brings about a shift in teacher role (guide, facilitator, consultant) as well as learner roles (discoverer, self-manager).

One of the most important factors of project-based learning is the intrinsic motivation of the learners in the implementation of the project [5]. The search for stimuli and topics for the creation of projects can be carried out by the teacher together with the learners, which will again increase the motivation of them to participate in the implementation of the project. A topic that is meaningful and stems from the learners' interests brings a natural curiosity and desire to discover and learn about new facts and aspects of life. The interest and deep identification with the project topic stimulate learners to solve the problem and present the result of their project work. Thus, the project is *an extended piece of work on a particular topic where the content and the presentation are determined principally by the learners themselves*. Several authors stress that the final product, in whatever form, is not the most important aspect of project

work. Equally important are the problems and obstacles they must overcome during each phase of project work because it is on this path that they develop their personality [2].

In general, tasks and activities in English language classes can be classified into three categories:

- tasks aimed at developing linguistic and communicative competence through controlled, semi-controlled and free activities focusing on all aspects of language (vocabulary, grammar functions/structures, pronunciation) and language skills (receptive and productive).
- tasks aimed at developing communicative competence and cognitive development through content (working with information, knowledge, facts,) and cognitive processes (analysis, synthesis, generalisation, evaluation, exemplification, critical thinking), the use of authentic material, the selection of learner-centred text topics, simulations of real-life processes and the development of learners' cultural awareness.
- tasks involving the previous two aspects (communicative development and cognitive development) as well as the global development of the learner's personality (interpersonal and intrapersonal skills), including interculturality [6].

Thus, the potentialities of project-based learning are multidimensional, which is a unique starting point for the development communicative competence as well as all aspects of the learner's personality in terms of soft and hard skills, considering the age of the learner at each level of education.

1.2 Stages of Project Development

As we have already mentioned, project-based learning is a complex educational concept that is effective when there is a sequence in the preparation and implementation phases of the project. Incorrect methodological procedure is the most common problem encountered in the planning and implementation of a project, resulting in the basic principles and objectives of project-based learning not being fulfilled [4].

From a general point of view, the objectives of project work are implemented in four successive stages, each of which has its own indispensable role, and the teacher should not omit any of them. Each stage provides excellent opportunities and space to promote the communicative competence, increase the cognitive level of the learner and the awareness of interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skills that it also develops [2].

1.2.1 Project Initiative

In the first phase of project-based learning, the problem and the purpose of the project are formulated. The selection of the individual problems should be based on a consensus between the learners and the teacher, and the choice of the main topic must be based on the social and cultural background of the learners.

At this stage it is important to assign and then discuss the topic, specify the project task, define the main objectives, and recommend resources. The project topic should meet the requirements of interdisciplinarity, age appropriateness and usability. It is the teacher who has an important role to play in motivating learners.

At the same time, already at this stage, the teacher can adequately develop skills such as communicative competence, creativity, critical thinking, and self-control.

1.1.2 Project Planning

Project planning is the second stage of project-based learning, which involves forming individual learner groups, agreeing on a timetable, defining sub-goals, fleshing out the assigned topic, and gathering information that will form the core of the project. In the project planning phase, the process and resources needed to carry out the project are determined. The main problem (theme) is analysed, and sub-tasks are created, the solution of which will lead to the fulfilment of the main objective. A timetable is drawn up and information is gathered which forms the main core of the project.

The role of the teacher is not as dominant as in the first phase - the teacher acts more as a consultant and advisor to ensure that the learners working on the project in the same team cooperate with each other. This is the stage at which the learners already take full responsibility for managing the project work. This stage offers opportunities to develop collaboration, self-management, problem solving, reasoning and critical thinking.

1.1.3 Finalizing the End-product

In the third stage, the learners work intensively while the teacher is in the role of advisor, facilitator, guide and manager, creating the environment and conditions suitable for the implementation of project-based learning. In this phase, learners work with resources, collect information, evaluate it, discuss,

argue, compromise, consider comments and finalize the end-product. At the same time, a solid platform for developing self-confidence, teamwork, responsibility, critical thinking, and presentation skills is created.

As mentioned earlier, an important part of successful project planning is dividing learners into groups in which they will work on the project. The teacher should respect the criteria according to which they are divided into working groups:

The groups are formed by the learners themselves on the basis of the relationships between them, taking into account their knowledge, pace of work, mutual liking, language competence and abilities.

The groups are formed by the teacher deliberately following one of the following criteria:

- compensatory criterion - a combination of better and weaker learners, with the expectation that the weaker ones will catch up with the better ones when the project is carried out.
- criterion of similar interests, skills, knowledge, and abilities
- differentiation-cooperation criterion - each group is composed of learners who have different abilities, knowledge, and skills. It is assumed that learners will be able to complement each other in the implementation of the project.

Each criterion has its potentials and limits, and it is up to the teacher, who knows their learners, to decide which criterion to apply to ensure that the learners meet the objective of the project work and at the same time to enable their personal development.

Experts recommend that the teacher should vary the way in which groups are formed. It would create reasonable conditions to prepare learners to cope with real-life situations in which the individual has to adapt flexibly to new conditions.

1.1.4 Project Evaluation

This is the final but extremely important stage of project-based learning. In this stage the evaluation of individual projects takes place. Project-based learning does not tolerate standard methods of grading, thus forcing the teacher to come up with new, more innovative forms of assessing learners' work. Assessment should be comprehensive and consist of evaluation of different aspects - the degree of acquisition of new knowledge, the level of presentation of the project, the ability to cooperate in its creation, and the form and content of the project itself. This stage allows the development of important skills - critical thinking and reflective thinking.

Table 1. Overview of the skills developed during each of stage

skills/phase	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
interpersonal	communication skills	team management cooperation empathy	presentation skills team skills, conflict resolution adaptability	communication skills interpersonal competence
intrapersonal	creativity self-control	organisation skills flexibility self-control self esteem self-management responsibility	self esteem emotional self-regulation creativity self-confidence digital literacy	critical thinking reflective thinking

2. Research

The aim of our research was to find out whether teachers at the second level of primary school are aware of the potentiality of project work in the field of personality development of learners or whether they consider project work only as a method that develops the communication competence of the learner. We are interested in which soft skills teachers purposefully develop in a selected age group using the project method.

2.1 Research Method

As a research method we chose a group interview targeting the following areas of project work:

- interpersonal versus intrapersonal skills
- the absence of certain skills in a selected age group
- limitations in developing some skills.

2.2 Research Questions

- Do you consider the development of soft skills to be important during English lessons?
- How do you rate learners' attitudes towards project work?
- Which skill did you find most difficult to develop during any phase of project work?
- Which skills does project work allow you to develop naturally?

2.3 Research Sample

We included 9 teachers (age 28-54) in lower secondary education, who at the time of the research were teaching 7th grade (12–13-year-olds) and were intensively using the project method in their English language classes. The interview was conducted in May 2023.

2.4 Discussion

Do you consider the development of soft skills to be important during English lessons?

All teachers agreed that every subject, including English, must contribute to the development of the learner's personality. They see the potential of the project method in the fact that it not only connects all subjects but also forms a very suitable starting point for developing not only the English language but also global skills. What they evaluate very positively is the fact that the project method makes the awareness and development of these skills very natural, often without the learners themselves being aware of it. Three teachers emphasised that after the presentation and evaluation of the projects, they often lead learners to become aware of what skills they have learnt (apart from the English language) after the presentation and evaluation of the projects (3-4 phase). They do this through questions, statements, and discussion, and in this way, they also make them think about the importance of soft skills. They admit that such reflection also takes place in Slovak.

How do you rate learners' attitudes towards project work?

Project work is also a common method in other subjects, but due to the Project Explore textbooks used, learners work on more short-term projects in English lessons than in other subjects. Teachers agreed that the age group has a very positive attitude towards projects. They stressed the importance of Phase 1, which significantly influences learners' motivation. Teachers have to be flexible in the sense that if a learner is not interested in a particular topic, they can adapt it in a certain sense. In this age group it is sometimes difficult to form working teams, as learners prefer to work in pairs with a friend.

Which skill did you find most difficult to develop during any phase of project work?

Teachers consider developing presentation skills to be the most difficult skill to develop due to the number of projects (an average of 6 projects during the school year) and the lack of class time. They consider developing critical thinking equally challenging, which is related to a misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "criticism", which learners eliminate to point out negative phenomena without justification, and frequent ignoring of positive phenomena.

Which skills does project work allow you to develop naturally?

Teachers agreed that each phase allows for the development of certain skills. Already in the first phase, creativity is developed when learners, after announcing the topic, they think about the end-product and suggest different alternatives. At the same time, communication skills are also developed. Teachers find it challenging to eliminate the use of the mother tongue. In the second phase it is team and self-management. The learners must agree who will be responsible for what and follow a work plan. In this way, project work provides an ideal platform for developing management skills and responsibility for a common outcome.

In the next stages, the teachers agreed on the importance of presentation skills. Overall, learners have few opportunities to perform in front of an audience and should practise this skill as often as possible as it also boosts their self-confidence. However, it is time-consuming. The final stage is a platform for developing critical thinking skills, the ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their project and those of other classmates. Teachers explained that they often do this in written form, with learners reporting on a handout what they have done well and what they would have done differently. They do the same when assessing classmates' projects.

Conclusion

Discussions with teachers show that they fully recognise the potentialities of project work in English language classes. The projects that the learners work on are closely related to real life situations and interests. It is this aspect that results in a positive motivational-stimulating effect on learners' work in finding concrete solutions to a problem. At the same time, it can be stated that teaching English through projects provides a very natural environment for the formation of the learner's personality and the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The aim, topic, and process of creation of the project offers a very suitable platform for their global development. Thus, project-based learning is a modern form of foreign language teaching and learning that appropriately complements the more traditional notion of the educational process while responding to the needs and demands of the 21st century.

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Project-based Language Learning: A City Trip Combining TBLLT, Blended Learning and Social-Media (or not?)

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Abstract

As part of the Dutch as a Foreign Language course, every year, final-year students from the Faculty of Engineering at the French-speaking University of Mons (UMONS) in Belgium organise an immersion day for themselves in the city of Leuven, situated in the Dutch-speaking region Flanders. This “amusing trip” is actually a well-thought-out educational project, based on task-based language teaching and blended learning, a tool to reach the learning objective of the course: learning Dutch. This context increases their will to communicate by making their language productions useful and crucial. The project unfolds over the course of an entire semester and the responsibility is completely in the students’ hands: looking up information about Leuven delivers the target language culture and the need for reservations and appointments puts them in contact with role models in Leuven and makes them achieve successful experiences throughout the entire project. Since 2004, smartphones and Facebook have been part of the project. In May 2023, however, the students shattered the formula by questioning the relevance of Facebook. This paper presents the principles which were taken into account to develop the project, as well as the different phases of the project. It also reflects on the further integration of social media and devices in language programmes or projects in the post-corona era.

Keywords: Authentic communication, Motivation, Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching, Blended Learning, Culture.

1. Introduction

The final-year students from the Faculty of Engineering at UMONS have the option to study Dutch as a foreign language. During this intensive course, the language competences are achieved through TBLLT, task-based language learning and teaching [1].

Taking into account the importance of internationalization [2] and intercultural experiences [3], the students visit Leuven in Flanders. In order to empower the students and raise their willingness to communicate, the teacher becomes a supervisor and the students get the responsibility of the city-trip, known as a motivational strategy for learners [4,5,6].

The students take the 6 types of tasks, formulated by Willis [7], to a higher level, because their trip to Leuven is no simulation and this stimulates their imagination [8]. It is a very concrete, authentic project in which every individual participant plays his or her role. The tasks are as follows: listing and brainstorming, ordering and sorting, matching, comparing, thinking and problem solving, stimulating more interaction and even the more complex task, sharing personal experience and story-telling.

In order to be learner-centric, the activity requires blended learning: it combines e-learning individual exercises with face-to-face classroom activities and computer mediated instruction in the language lab. Since 2014, Facebook is used during the city trip to cope with students’ communication habits and the desire for online social presence [9].

Taking into account the pre-task, the task itself and the post-task, the project takes place over a whole semester and it is becoming a project, while it meets most of the criteria of a project [10]:

- Challenging a problem or question: the students have to organise a city-trip to Leuven.
- Sustained Inquiry and students voice, choice and agency: as students are responsible for the organisation, they have to look up all the information by themselves, organise brainstorming sessions and take decisions together in order to make the required reservations. The teacher becomes an observatory instead of a teacher.
- Authenticity: the students organise a real city trip, get in touch with locals and make appointments with staff members of the KUL. Acting like tourists, students explore the local culture and the sightseeing opportunities.

- Reflection, critique and revision: during the post-task, students set up a meeting where they share their experiences with each other and evaluate the project, using a SWOT-analysis. The students' remarks form the basis of the next year's city trip.

During the post-task of 2023, the students stated, for the first time in 10 years [11], that the use of Facebook during the city trip was not "fresh" but "maybe too much". This paper reflects on the added value and necessity of devices during the different stages of the project.

2. Pre-task

The organisation of the city trip starts in the classroom. The students are informed that they are going to Leuven and that they have full responsibility for the success of this activity.

2.1 Receptive Skills

This part empowers the students, as each student chooses a few responsibilities and tasks: looking up information about the city, finding out where the KUL is, making suggestions about the transport to Leuven, finding a restaurant for lunch, etc. The only restriction is that Dutch is the language of their websites and books, as well as the language they must use to talk to each other, as this preparation is based on TBLT.

The pre-task puts the students in contact with the culture of Leuven and Flanders. It is the start of an intensive project, working on both their language skills and their intercultural competences [12].

2.2 Getting to Know the Academic Staff At KUL

In Leuven, the students meet a professor of the Faculty of Engineering Sciences of KUL, who is also an alumnus of the students' own faculty at UMONS. They get to know them by watching his Ted Talk. At first glance, this activity has nothing to do with the course: the professor speaks English and the presentation deals with the risks of big data mining and DNA analysis. After an intensive debate about this professor and their domain in Dutch, they get to know he's a former UMONS student. This information comes as a surprise, known as a motivational element in learning methods. [13]

2.3 Productive Skills

After having looked up all the necessary information, the pre-task for the visit to Leuven foresees class-wide group discussions to find agreements on the transport, lunch and practical arrangements. The final step calls the students into action by writing e-mails to the different entities in Leuven: making, changing and cancelling reservations, calling certain people in Leuven, inviting the professor to lunch, etc. As this may take several weeks, the pre-task raises the students' class attendance and it increases their willingness to communicate, knowing the entire group is counting on them.

3. Task

The main task consists of the visit to Leuven. After having met staff and students of the KUL, the city centre of Leuven becomes the classroom. In small groups, the students discover its highlights by answering a individual questionnaire and by performing various tasks, which are yearly adapted.

The different groups stay in contact with each other in a private Facebook group. By posting pictures, comments and self-made clips, they share their experiences with each other. This aspect also facilitates supervision for the teacher. This exercise combines written and oral communication with locals and with each other, in an authentic context and on social media.

In addition to the individual search, a communal photo search creates competition among the participants. Each group has about 15 pictures of people, texts, buildings, etc., they will see in the city. The task is to post the location of each picture as soon as possible. Dutch is no longer the goal, but it is crucial to winning the game.

4. Post Task

The post-task consists of a reflection on the visit to Leuven, during which the students get to know about each-others' whereabouts and challenges, but during which they also reflect on how to enhance the project. In order to stay as close to the students' world as possible, this reflection delivers very important information to the teachers. The post-task of 2023 was an eye-opener, as the students questioned Facebook's relevance for the trip. They testified that the combination of the search in the (unknown) city and written communication on Facebook were quite tough. Whereas students perceived Facebook as "young", "fresh" and "innovative" in 2013, they think of Facebook as "normal", "necessary to function" and "of common use for everyone" in 2023. Students also find TikTok "innovative" but "too

young” and “for high school”, Snapchat is “popular” but “outdated”, Twitter is “too formal” and “not used enough”, to name a few issues.

Nevertheless, the students say that they are all on Facebook but their motivation has changed since 2013: they declare that Facebook is not typical for students anymore, it is now used by “everybody”. By not being on Facebook, student miss out on real-life activities. There are many other media that can be used [14], but it should be a medium that is close to the students’ daily life. Some students suggest Messenger instead of a private Facebook group: it is also quite private, it has its own button on their phone, and they can communicate faster<;

5. Conclusion

Language and culture are very connected. The day trip to Leuven is a concrete example of how culture and authentic language assignments enrich language teaching. Bringing the world into the classroom through articles and culture increases students’ interest and involvement, but taking the students themselves into the world gives them the opportunity to practice the language in an authentic context by communicating with native speakers and gaining intercultural experiences.

Technology is indispensable in the elaboration of the city trip: during the pre-task, it enables students to interact with real persons and institutions outside the classroom, to look up practical information and make necessary arrangements, without having to leave the safe environment which their classroom offers them.

Regarding the use of devices and social media during the task itself, the discussions during the post-task showed a shift in Facebook’s reputation. Facebook is no longer “fresh” and “typical of young people”, but is “essential” to everyday life and “belongs to everyone”. For this reason, Facebook no longer increases students’ engagement during the task itself, while culture and authentic communication with natives do retain their value here.

If, during the immersion day, tasks on Facebook make the day trip too demanding, as some students stated in 2023, then which social medium would lend itself better to it? Or do students develop more cultural skills and language skills during the city trip without any tasks on devices and social media at all, keeping in mind that sometimes less is more?

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A Critical Look into Authentic Assessment of Language

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Abstract

Each day the policies and procedures involving the assessment of language acquisition impact the lives of millions of language learners across the globe. These testing protocols and customs carefully constructed by institutions of power have been adopted by most of society and directly align with the ideals upheld by language tests, namely those that have been standardized and utilized to determine the extent to which a person has developed proficiency in language. Researchers and theorists have been advocating for innovation within this discipline for some time as the current language testing practices that have been in place for decades hold one singular definition of what it means to be proficient, what kind of English is acceptable, and often it is linked to discriminatory practices such as monolingualism and native speakerism. Tests such as the TOEFL and IELTS often assess rote memorization and one's ability to identify correct grammatical structures rather than to produce this language organically. When test takers receive high marks and gain admission into institutions or work settings, many struggle to formulate meaning and interact within this new environment upon admission into that space [8]. Furthermore, the sociopolitical factors upholding outdated perceptions and notions of "proficiency" prevent innovation and personalization of language tests to fit the needs, strengths and goals of learners acquiring language. Frameworks such as Critical Language Testing (CLT), Translingualism, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE) all served as critical lenses guiding this research into a relatively new and innovative form of additional language assessment. Incorporating elements from more familiar assessment strategies such as task-based or content-based language assessment, authentic assessment of language presents inherent opportunities as well as notable challenges for both learners and instructors of language. Authentic Assessment has gained recent traction in a variety of language learning contexts as linguists throughout the world are drawing comparisons to first language acquisition and uncovering how authentic language assessments can be localized and globalized. Despite such advancements, authentic assessment remains in its early stages with significant room to innovate, grow along with the ever-evolving world of language learning.

Keywords: *Authentic Assessment, Alternative Assessment, Language Learning, Second Language Acquisition, Translingualism*

Defining Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment as a tool, as a means of pushing language learning forward naturally comes in different forms to represent the various learners of language in the world. When delineating what authentic assessment means, some scholars consider the instructional materials that would feel the most relevant or meaningful to the learner and what they plan to accomplish learning a language. To others, authentically assessing language becomes a lot more philosophical, having more to do with creating English tests that closely resemble authentic language use of the test takers. The principle differentiating task-based and content-based from authentic assessments is practicality outside of the testing environment. In order to be deemed an authentic assessment, the test must seek to "evaluate the knowledge and skills of learners with real evidence and approach the real world or real life" [9]. Within this paper, I use the research I have compiled in terms of how authentic assessment is being utilized to build upon these notions of what makes assessments authentic.

Origins of Authentic Assessment

When assessments are built on the foundation that only one superior form of English or utilizing language exists, and that this single form is the standard for everyone, other dialects, forms, cultures are dismissed and left out of the conversation and therefore are not considered when designing or constructing tests. Authentic assessments were introduced and initially advertised as being the solution to this widespread dilemma in 1989 when Grant Wiggins noticed that similar adaptations to standardized tests such as project-based or task-based language learning lacked understanding that diversified versions of the same language can exist. For example, most language learning environments prioritize learning Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) or Basic Intrapersonal Communication Skills (BICS), the two widely accepted forms of proficiency in second language acquisition [3]. Also referred to as Standard Academic English or SAE, Standard English proficiency is another, more formal form of English considered necessary for admission into academic or professional environments. Naturally, most standardized language proficiency tests are also constructed and administered in this specific form.

How Authentic Assessment is Being Implemented

Many have explored alternative forms of assessing progress in language acquisition beyond the traditional formats that replicate language proficiency tests with varying results and levels of success. James Brown and Thom Hudson offer over 20 important criteria to consider when constructing alternative language assessments. Most center around the theme of authenticity and meaningful construction of language with a specific purpose. The second and third criteria mention that language assessments should “involve tasks that are worthwhile as instructional activities” and “use real-world contexts or simulations” [2]. Authentic assessment endeavors to do just that, create opportunities for realistic and meaningful exchanges of language as a basis for evaluating progress toward skills in the target language.

For centuries, language instructors worldwide have been adapting their curricula and assessments to facilitate more realistic exchanges of language in an attempt to replicate more accurately what kinds of linguistic exchanges each demographic and/or context of students might encounter, eventually dismantling the systemic issues traditional language assessments in place currently. Only until recently have these forms of assessment focusing on authenticity and practicality outside the classroom become more mainstream and beginning to understand that in order to maintain reliability and validity, the content as well as the subsequent assessment of that content. Examples of authentic assessments that are commonly used in additional language learning environments are demonstrations, presentations, debates, experiments, portfolios, interviews, other projects and peer or self-evaluations.

In their book “Beyond Tests and Quizzes: Creative Assessments in the College Classroom”, Richard and Barbara Mezeske provide a plethora of research based alternative assessments teachers can adapt to fit the needs of students in their classrooms, many of which prioritize personalization and student involvement [7]. The Mezeskes determined that the more personalized an assessment can be tailored to each individual student, the higher their chances are of being able to perform well naturally. When it comes to personal response assessments, biases in the teacher assessment process can be minimized through evaluating using a *rubric* explicitly stating what learning outcome is being assessed and what constitutes an error or loss in points.

Implications

Despite its inherent advantages, authentic assessment does also present some challenges institutions instructing language as well as individual educators must consider. Namely, due to the nature of having to make each test meaningful to each student, authentic assessments are most reliable and valid when administered in a localized context. At the time of writing this paper, research delving into authentic assessment is limited to guides for teachers of additional languages to use and adapt to fit the needs of their students. This dearth in resources has led to minimal innovation over the years when it comes to new ways to authentically assess language learning. Additionally, due to the fact that alternative means of testing is relatively new, students might not have familiarity or confidence producing within the genre. “Students need to know how they will be tested and what will comprise the evaluation, which prevents unfairness in the evaluative process or the learning strategies and content” and this will be a process to transition for a lot of students [6].

Depending on the learning context authentic assessments are conducted in, some curricula or teachers may assess a monolithic approach to language learning, rather than pluralistic and some might still consider this to be authentic assessment. I hope to expand the definition of authentic assessment

to include the assessment of ‘Englishing,’ or the ability to use the English in one’s linguistic repertoire to communicate a desired message to be understood by the majority of people. Similar to Englishing, authentic assessment assumes the negotiating of meaning, anticipates translanguaging and focuses on the effective communication of meaning above all else which may directly or indirectly contradict the English being taught within certain contexts [4].

Authentic assessment as a practice attempts to replicate as effectively as possible a situation where information would be legitimately exchanged, and focuses on the successful, or understandability of the linguistic output. Theorists, educators and linguists adapting authentic assessment into practice understand that “[b]ilingualism is an integral part of students’ identities and should be respected and valued in the classroom” and natural conversations involve much more than SAE or a singular form of English [1]. Authentic assessors then would ideally anticipate translanguaging and a variety of Englishes in conversation with one another. Though it is technically the discretion of either the institution or the instructor if use of other languages would result in a loss in points, I would contend that a loss in points would not be truly authentic because in the “real world,” there are alternative solutions and more opportunities to get one’s point across than what would be provided in the confines of a language classroom. Previously, language tests have been used for keeping people out of certain circles of English (inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle) [5]; however, authentic assessment encourages more versions of the same language to co-exist, or a blurring of Kachru’s circles which is an important step toward cross-cultural communication.

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“The Work Is Tangible So You Can Actually See What You’ve Learnt”: Pedagogical Rationale and Student Evaluation of a Project-Based Learning Module

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the "I am an author" project, which was integrated into an upper-intermediate/advanced Italian L2 university subject to redefine the assessment of writing skills while also offering a novel experience of authorship. In the project, students delve into writing genres that appeal to young readers and craft an illustrated story in Italian, which can serve as a literacy resource for the local Italo-Australian community. The project draws on principles of Project-based Learning (PBL), insights from the Deep Approach to World Languages Education, as well as research on well-being in L2 learning. Data collected from two studies to examine students' evaluation of the project show that students particularly appreciated its novelty as an assessment task, and the opportunity to tap into their creativity to create a finished product that was personally relevant and socially meaningful, with these perceptions contributing to their commitment to the task and their overall well-being. The results confirm the effectiveness of PBL in fostering skill development and in providing identity-enhancing learning experiences.

Keywords: *Project-based learning, creativity, well-being, engagement*

1. Introduction

Project-based learning (PBL) is widely acknowledged as an effective teaching method, which can enhance both language skills and essential soft skills [3], [4]. Nonetheless, more research is needed to investigate how students perceive projects as a means of assessment and to understand the impact of teaching activities influenced by PBL on students' well-being.

The 'I am an author' project is an integral component of an upper-intermediate/advanced university Italian L2 course in Melbourne, Australia. In this project, students are tasked with crafting and illustrating a short story in Italian, which they subsequently self-publish in book format. Selected books may be offered online to a wider audience, addressing the dearth of easily accessible reading materials for young Italian-speaking children, especially in areas with substantial Italian migrant populations, such as Melbourne. This scarcity presents a specific challenge to Italian diaspora communities everywhere, including in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia.

Throughout the duration of the project, students are introduced on a weekly basis to the conventions of storytelling through a blend of reading and writing exercises. Additionally, they receive instruction on pertinent grammar and textual elements that should be incorporated into their final narratives, encompassing aspects such as narrative tenses, textual connectors, typical structural elements of short stories, and storytelling norms in Italian as a second language. At the conclusion of the semester, students are expected to submit a self-published book, accompanied by a final written reflection that explains their creative journey and their authorial decisions.

As part of the project, students are assessed on their creativity (20%), on their storytelling abilities and adherence to their chosen genre (40%), on their grammatical accuracy (20%), and finally on the structure and content of their final reflection (20%).

2. Theoretical Background

The design of the project drew on the principles of project-based learning, was influenced by the Deep Approach to World Language Education [6] and was also informed by previous research on well-being in language learning (see [2] for an overview). Oxford [7] defines well-being as an umbrella term that encompasses several constructs relevant to language learning: emotions and empathy, meaning and motivation, perseverance, agency and autonomy, positive appraisal over time, hardiness and effective habits of mind, intelligences, character strengths and positive self-factors.

The project aligns with the key standards of PBL outlined by the Buck Institute of Education [3]:

- **Challenging problem or question:** As previously observed, the project tasks students with addressing the need for bilingual literacy resources in Australia, a challenge that advanced language students can tackle using their language skills.
- **Sustained inquiry:** Students engage in experiential learning throughout the course by being exposed to texts and textual conventions of narrative writing. They assume a more active and autonomous role in their education, with the teacher acting as a facilitator.
- **Authenticity:** Students' finished work at the end of the project directly addresses the shortage of learning resources in Australia (see section 1).
- **Community engagement:** The local Italo-Australian community is the primary target of students' work.
- **Student voice, choice and agency:** Students are given freedom in choosing their own topic and are autonomous in creating and producing their work.
- **Reflection:** Students have to submit a reflective journal at the end of the activity.
- **Critique and revision:** Feedback is mostly received at the end of the project, but students are encouraged to discuss earlier drafts of their work with other students and the teaching staff throughout the semester.
- **Public product:** Selected short stories can be chosen for publication and made available online.

The project's emphasis on personal relevance, authenticity, and meaningfulness aligns seamlessly with the central principles of the Deep Learning Approach to Language Education. This approach values students' unique voices and perspectives in the language learning process, promotes critical reflection, encourages meaningful language usage, and aims to establish a profound connection between learners and the language. By incorporating these aspects, the project also seeks to positively impact their overall well-being beyond the confines of the language classroom.

3. An Overview of Key Findings from Two Studies

This section summarises and integrates key findings from two mixed-method studies examining students' evaluation of the project [1] and its impact on well-being [2], which were conducted with the 2017–2018 and 2019–2020 cohorts, respectively. These findings may be useful for teachers interested in implementing the project in their classrooms. Due to space constraints, we focus solely on qualitative data here, both because we wish to give voice to participants' experiences and because qualitative data allow us to capture the complexity of the findings in a way that quantitative data alone cannot. The integration of the data sets from both studies led to the development of three key macro-themes, which will be used here to present the findings. The notations S1 and S2 are used to label quotes from the first and second study respectively.

3.1 A Novel Assessment Task Fostering Creativity and Skills Development

The first study showed that most students viewed the project as an engaging way to assess their Italian skills:

Overall, it was a really positive experience that allowed me to explore and show my knowledge of Italian in a different, more creative way (S2)

Students had positive attitudes towards PBL and more broadly towards learning by doing. Most students also viewed the project as an engaging way to assess their writing skills, while also helping them develop other non-linguistic skills such as creativity, time management, organisation skills, problem solving and critical thinking, in keeping with previous studies on PBL [4].

The project gave me creative freedom as well as practical knowledge and skills (S1)

I felt content as I love writing, drawing and being creative. It was refreshing to be able to use different skills in tertiary education (S2)

Many students described the project as memorable and expressed that it continued to resonate with them long after its completion:

I still remember completing it and exactly what I wrote about, not to mention the feeling of handing it in (which was great). I often find myself asking other younger students of Italian if they too have to do the same task and what they chose to write about (S2)

3.2 Tangible, Meaningful and Personally Relevant Learning

The first study unveiled, among other things, that students particularly valued the opportunity to employ Italian to address a real-world concern, i.e., the scarcity of literary resources, and took pride in their ability to effect change by leveraging their language skills and producing something tangible through their work:

The work is tangible so you can actually see what you've learnt (S1, see also [1])

It was a more tangible example of my work that combined creativity with language knowledge and it was something that I knew could be enjoyed or at least interacted with by a larger audience. (S2)

These findings were corroborated in the second study on well-being, which demonstrated the project's effectiveness in enhancing multiple dimensions comprised in this construct, such as positive emotions, engagement, meaning, and motivation. More specifically, students' investment in the project was closely tied to its real-world relevance and intrinsic value, with both aspects contributing to students' intrinsic motivation [5] and investment in the project. The project was also found to have a positive impact on their overall perceptions of the value of language learning:

This project had a significant influence on my perception of the power of language learning beyond the classroom, and I credit part of my strong affinity for the language to this experience (S2)

I put more care and attention into it than I would any other piece of academic work, because it was more than just an assignment for me, it was a project both personal and academic (S2)

Comments like those above underline how the project ignited their enthusiasm for language learning by demonstrating its real-world applicability. It opened their eyes to the broader possibilities offered by language acquisition, reinforcing the importance of meaningful and relevant language education experiences.

3.3 An Identity-enriching Transformative Experience

Both studies showed that the project touched upon several identity-related constructs. More specifically, it was associated with a notable increase in self-confidence and a higher sense of accomplishment derived from creating a product which could be enjoyed by others:

I think having to hand in a hardcopy strengthened this sense of accomplishment as it is something that can be seen and held in hands (S2)

For some students, engaging in the project was a way to discover new skills and talents, and led to changes in their perceptions of themselves:

I didn't consider myself a creative person prior to the project. My brain is maths/science oriented and I generally don't get to do much creative stuff at university. The project went some ways towards changing my perception of myself - I think I do have the ability to be creative and the project made me realize that it's something I really enjoy. (S1)

4. Conclusions

The findings from both studies point to the effectiveness of the project as an assessment task aimed at promoting the development of a variety skills as well as students' general well-being. The data collected so far show that the project was perceived as a novel and creative way to assess their language skills. It provided a platform for creative expression, generated self-confidence, and a sense of accomplishment, and created a meaningful identity-enhancing learning experience (see also [1] and [2]). Our findings suggest that the project can be tailored for other languages and in various educational

setting and pave the way for more research examining student-centred, creative, and real-world projects in second language education.

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Special Education

STEM Engagement with Special Needs Learners: Inception of Special Needs Engineering Pedagogy

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Abstract

Declining STEM Education interest is a key challenge to fulfil the technical job market demand to drive the future economic growth. Interestingly, various institutions comprising Universities, Technical corporations, NGOs, Govt organization, etc. have been practicing STEM education promotion at primary and secondary levels. However, engagement with students from Special Needs Learners (SNL) is less covered leading to a very different social challenge involving EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion). The aim of this study is to understand possibility of implementing engineering pedagogy for special needs learner. The research was carried out through a STEM workshop in the department of mechanical engineering involving students with additional support needs in S3 (14-15 years old) from deprived area. In this workshop, students were introduced to different materials, how materials can be used to increase human quality of life, how engineers test materials and how materials can be used to achieve a sustainable environment and economy through both conventional and active learning pedagogy which included undergraduate level engineering laboratory course involving optical microscopy of microstructures for engineering materials. Results showed that 90% of the learners agreed that after the workshop they had learnt something new about materials and their effect on the environment. Interestingly, it is also revealed that active learning pedagogy is more effective for Special Needs Learners (SNL) compare to conventional theory-based pedagogy. Using an auto-ethnography approach it can be concluded that students enjoyed the workshop and the opportunity to visit the university and the laboratory facilities. They highly engaged throughout the workshop. It is expected that this finding paves the way towards developing Special Needs Engineering Pedagogy in higher education and such innovative pedagogy could be extended to special needs learners in other disciplines such as language learner among SNL community.

Keywords: Special Need, Engineering Pedagogy, Materials, EDI, Active Learning Pedagogy, STEM

1. Introduction

Declining STEM Education interest [1] is a key challenge to fulfil the technical job market demand to drive the future economic growth. On the other hand, in an intensely demanding and competitive employment market, the industry-readiness of graduates provides one of the important indicators showcasing the quality of university education as well as industry-oriented institutions of further and higher education. Since corporate expectation continue to escalate from university graduates in this 21st century, employers are constantly seeking graduates equipped with both soft and technical skills. Therefore, today's professionals need to be hold T-shaped skills sets which are highly sought by employers, where mastery of competencies has increased importance over focused academic discipline [2,3]. In such point of view, graduates with cross discipline competence [2], and soft skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, ability to adapt to change and communicate effectively [3,4,5,6] in a culturally diverse environment have distinct competitive advantage to succeed in addition to competency in technical expertise (hard skills). In 2012 Forbes [7] reported a rising gap between business and education and interestingly found that globally about 42% of employers believe that fresh graduates are adequately prepared for work while the industry concerns over impending skills gap. In this scenario, STEM education is one of the major enablers to provide such industry ready graduates. Interestingly, various institutions comprising Universities, Technical corporations, NGOs, Govt organization, etc. have been practicing STEM education promotion at primary and secondary levels [8,9]. However, engagement with students from Special Needs Learners (SNL) is less covered [10,11] leading to a very different social challenge involving EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion).

Unfortunately, in such cutthroat reality, very little support available for special needs learners where engineering education is a far reach as engagement opportunities are low. Therefore, following the UN SDGs 8-Decent work and Economic Growth and 10-Reduce Inequalities [12], the aim of this study is to provide equal opportunities and use the experience to pave the way towards developing Special Needs Engineering Pedagogy in further and higher education

2. Methodology

2.1 Pedagogical Approach

The research was carried out through a STEM workshop in the department of mechanical engineering involving students with additional support need i.e., SNL in level S3 (14 -15 years old) from deprived area. Special Needs Engineering Pedagogical hypothesis was carried out through two different approaches: (i) Conventional Classroom based learning, and (ii) Laboratory based active learning. In conventional classroom-based learning approached special needs learners were introduced to various engineering materials, their properties and applications through theory including graphical contents and through simple observation/manipulation related to strength, ductility, etc. Also, they were provided with an explanation on how materials are selected how they have been used to improve human being's quality of life. In addition, contents also included common mechanical properties of materials such as tensile, compressive, bending, torsion and shear strength similar to level 1 undergraduate engineering students. Then topics of material corrosion, smart materials and environmental impact including sustainability were introduced. Finally, they were asked their understanding with brief quiz-based feedback. The active learning approached including laboratory session were carried out through hands-on activity that included a metallographic preparation for microstructure analysis and a demonstration of tensile testing for different ferrous and non-ferrous materials. Similarly, as to the conventional session, feedback was received through brief oral questions during the active learning sessions. After completion of both approaches, overall feedback was received through written questionnaire as per following overall pedagogical approach shown in Fig. 1.:

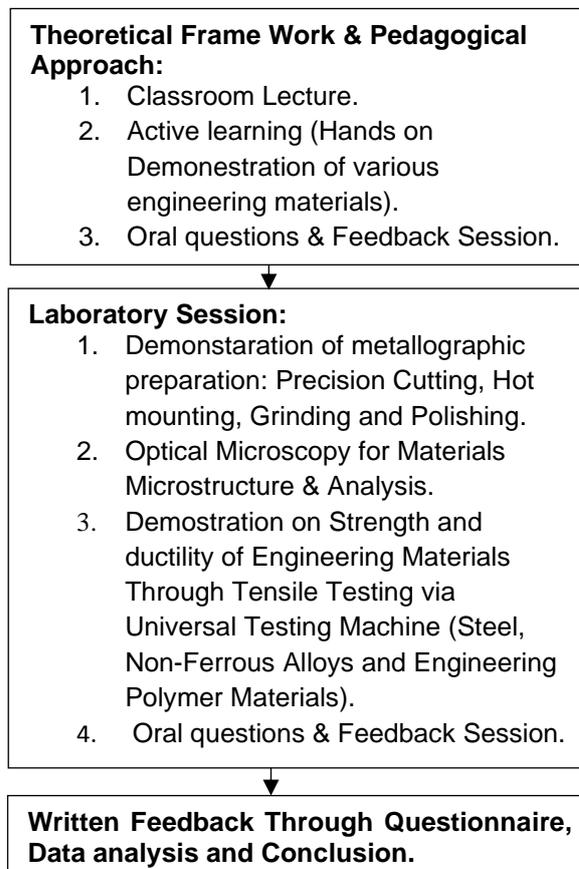


Fig. 1. Overall Pedagogical Approach.

2.2 Auto-Ethnography Approach

This approach is used for qualitative research and involves reflection from researchers [13] and it also enables researchers to become subjects of study while maintaining the flexibility to situate themselves in relation to the phenomenon under examination [14]. Based on this auto-ethnography approach authors judgment and experience agreed the following indicators of performance: 1-low, 2-Medium and 3- High.

3. Findings and Discussions

As previously mentioned, Special Needs Engineering Pedagogical hypothesis was carried out through two approaches: (i) Conventional Classroom based learning and ii) Laboratory based active learning. Table 1 shows Indicator Performance based on auto-ethnography approach for different Psychosocial Dynamics shown by SNL before and after their engineering experience.

Table 1. Indicator Performance based on auto-ethnography approach for different Psychosocial Dynamics shown by SNL during their engineering experience

Psychosocial Dynamics	Indicator Performance	
	Before the activity	After the activity
Enthusiasm	3	3
Interaction	1	3
Engagement	1	3
Anxiety	3	1
Worried	3	1
Enjoyment	3	3

When students arrived, they were very enthusiastic as it was their first time coming to a university, seeing a lecture theatre, and being taught by academics. However, they were quiet and some confessed they were worried as they did not know what to expect and how they will perform, once the activity started, they started to feel more comfortable and their engagement increased rapidly to the point that they started to ask questions. After 15 minutes through the activity students were fully engaged and once the activity concluded all they asked was when were they coming back to the university that it was the best day ever.

Regarding the technical aspect it was perceived that students were very active in listening; however, it was noticed their struggle to comprehend the concept. On the other hand, during the active leaning approached including laboratory session where students were highly engaged and appropriate feedback was received from the questionnaire. Interestingly, this leads to finding that Special Needs learners' pedagogical development responsive more towards psychomotor domain compare to cognitive domain. Hence, this innovative pedagogical technique could be applied for any learning field involving SNL, hence students from other disciplines. For example, in order to facilitate language learning for SNL student, focus would be needed towards mimicking practicing compare to listening exercise. After analysing the response from the questionnaire, Fig. 2. shows the overall feedback response through simplifying simple conventional questionnaire considering Special Needs learners' perspective.

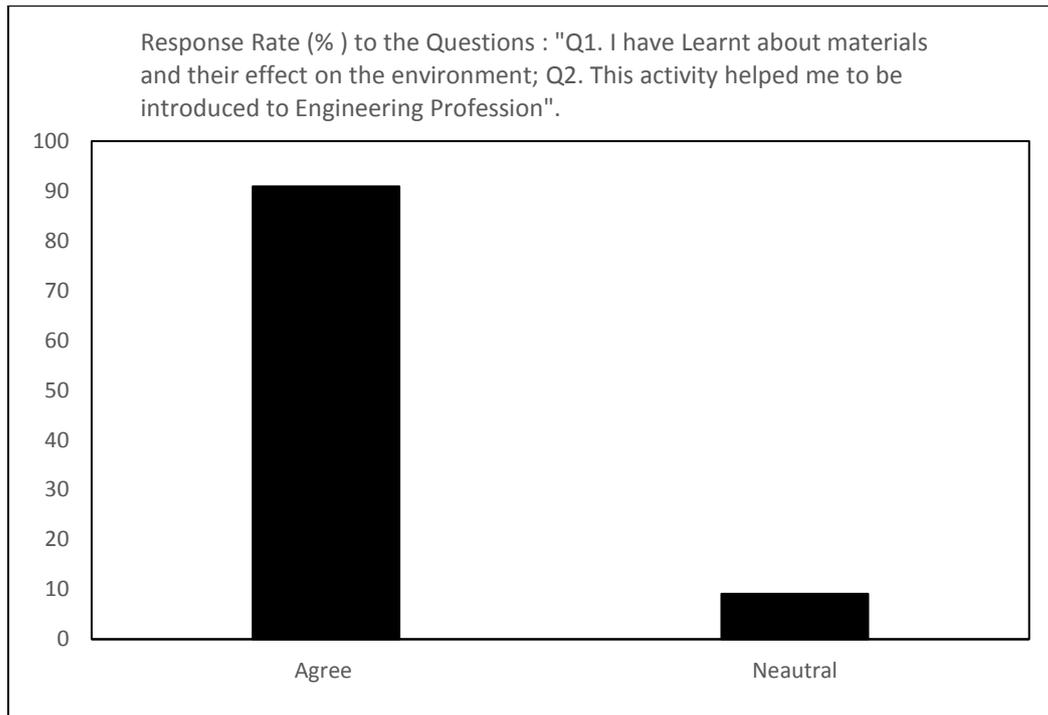


Fig. 2. Response to the both written questionnaires involving SNL perspective towards their learning about materials and engineering profession.

Results showed that both cases, 90% of the learners agreed that after the workshop they had learnt something new about materials and their effect on the environment as well as they were introduced with the engineering profession. Interestingly, it is also revealed that active learning pedagogy is more effective for Special Needs Learners (SNL) compare to conventional theory-based pedagogy. The pupils were highly engaged throughout the workshop which reflected from the following feedback of one of the students: *"I liked experience, we get to learn loads."* Also, another SNL commented: *"It was pretty good event. It was fun."*

4. Conclusion

Special Needs Engineering Pedagogical hypothesis was carried out through two different approaches: (i) Conventional Classroom based learning and ii) Laboratory based active learning. Interestingly, it is revealed that Special Needs Engineering pedagogy is feasible with carefully designed curriculum emphasising psychomotor based delivery. Such method could be further extended to language learners among SNL community. It is expected that such findings pave the way towards developing Special Needs Engineering Pedagogy in higher education to facilitate Special Needs learners in the professional field for their career progression and better life.

Acknowledgement

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Studies on Language Learning

Facilitating Elementary-Level University Students' Grammatical Competence through Children's Literature

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Abstract

This paper outlines a research study designed to document the contribution of children's literature in Spanish to the development of the grammatical competence of thirty students enrolled in one of two sections of an elementary-level Spanish course at a small four-year college in the southeastern United States. The study was completed in three consecutive phases. In the first phase of the study, students first learned the formation and uses of the preterit and imperfect tenses in Spanish via the course textbook and then practiced these concepts in class. The goal of this phase was to provide students with an overall conceptual understanding of the construction and purposes of these verb tenses. In the second phase of the study, students read El cuento de Fernando (The Story of Ferdinand) (Leaf, 1936), a book replete with example sentences containing verbs in each of these tenses. The goal of this phase was to deepen student's metagrammatical awareness concerning these two past tenses in Spanish while also strengthening students' knowledge concerning the formation of verbs in these tenses and the functions the tenses express. Students read and discussed the main themes in the book and then completed charts which helped build their conceptual understanding of the formation and uses of both verb tenses; the PACE model was used as a framework to design these activities. Following these activities, students participated in the third phase of the study in which they completed a questionnaire which asked them to document their awareness and knowledge of the uses of each past tense along their perspectives concerning the relevancy of the book to their understanding of both the forms and functions on both tenses. Preliminary findings suggest that the book facilitated students' emerging understanding of both tenses in that the book reinforced their knowledge of the formation of each tense while also allowing them to utilize contextual clues from the text to determine potential uses of each tense.

Keywords: Children's literature, Grammatical competence, Language proficiency Spanish language

1. Introduction

The language teaching field from the 19th to the mid-20th century was characterized by a series of methods, defined by Richards and Rodgers (2014) as "the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning" (p. 3). These methods tended to view grammatical competence as a prerequisite to developing proficiency in the target language. Such methods also typically taught grammar in a deductive fashion, meaning that learners were explicitly taught the rules governing a given grammatical structure. Then, beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, the field began to move towards approaches to language teaching, understood as "...theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 22). In contrast to methods, approaches were inclined to be less prescriptive in nature and, rather than perceiving grammar as an end unto itself, instead were disposed to view grammar as a means to an end (in this case, communication). For example, the goal of the Communicative Language Teaching approach is to advance students' interactional capacities in the target language, and grammar was thus seen as a means for learners to achieve this goal. Canale and Swain (1980) identified four necessary competencies to facilitate learners' communicative abilities in a given language: grammatical competence, sociocultural competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Canale and Swain (1980) explain that grammatical competence involves "the levels of grammatical accuracy that are required in oral and written communication" (p. 27). This perspective concerning the role of grammar in communication demonstrates that grammatical competence is a necessary but inadequate prerequisite for communicative success and that such instruction should reinforce the form-function connections between specific grammatical structures and the communicative functions these structures fulfill. One procedure for guiding learners in understanding these connections is the PACE model.

The PACE model (Presentation, Attention, Co-Construction, Extension) (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002) is one avenue for teaching grammar inductively in which students encounter a “text” in the target language, devise hypotheses concerning the connections between particular linguistic forms and the communicative functions these forms demonstrate, and subsequently practice incorporating. These connections into their own communicative repertoire. The model consists of four sequential steps:

- **Presentation:** Learners are first exposed to an oral or written text that contains examples of a specific grammatical structure in the target language. The purpose of the text is to contextualize the use of the structure and provide students with examples of how the structure is used to accomplish one or more communicative functions.
- **Attention:** The instructor helps students’ focus on the usage of a certain grammatical structure embedded in the text.
- **Co-Construction:** The instructor guides learners in a discussion during which they speculate on the rules governing the formation and usage of the grammatical structure.
- **Extension:** Students participate in a series of activities in which they become familiar with the rules governing the grammatical structure along with the communicative ramifications of the structure.

The purpose of the research study outlined in this paper is to expand the current literature concerning the role of the PACE model in developing language learners’ grammatical competence. More specifically, the study aimed to document elementary-level Spanish students’ perspectives regarding the contribution of children’s literature in Spanish and the PACE model to the development of their grammatical competence concerning the preterit and imperfect tenses in Spanish.

The research questions guiding the study were:

- To what extent does reading children’s literature in Spanish (not) contribute to elementary-level Spanish students’ awareness of the uses of the preterit and imperfect tenses in Spanish?
- What are elementary-level Spanish students’ perceptions regarding the relevancy of children’s literature in Spanish to their developing grammatical competence in Spanish?

Due to space limitations, this paper focuses on findings concerning the second research question.

2. Research Context

The current study took place in a second-semester Spanish course at a small postsecondary institution in the south-eastern United States. Participants in the study were enrolled in two sections of the Spanish course taught by the author during the fall semester of 2016.

The course unit consisted of three distinct phases. In the first phase, learners were acquainted with the rules governing the formation and uses of the preterit and imperfect tenses listed in the course textbook (Hershberger, Navey-Davis, & Alvarez, 2013) and engaged in a variety of activities intended to advance their understanding of the forms and functions of these verb tenses. In the second phase of the unit, students participated in several class exercises designed around the book *El cuento de Ferdinando* (Leaf, 1936) which contained abundant examples of sentences that contain both tenses. The activities included in the second phase utilized the PACE model as a conceptual framework. In this phase, participants first read through the book and engaged in a group discussion with their classmates in which they answered comprehension questions concerning the overall gist and supporting details concerning the plot of the book; the goal of this activity was to utilize the book in order to provide students with sufficient context to subsequently understand the sentences in the text conjugated in the preterit and imperfect tenses. Learners were then assigned to random groups and re-read specific pages in the book that included sentences in the preterit and/or imperfect tenses. In groups, learners completed worksheets in which they were given a list of verbs conjugated in the preterit and imperfect tenses and were asked to indicate whether the verb in a given sentence was conjugated in either the preterit or imperfect tense, the infinitive from which the form is derived, the subject of the sentence, and whether the form is a regular (-AR, -ER, or -IR) or irregular form of the specific past tense. Figure 1 below is a sample worksheet that students completed in groups.

<u>Verbo</u>	<u>Pretérito / Imperfecto</u>	<u>Infinitivo</u>	<u>Sujeto</u>	<u>-AR / -ER / -IR / Irregular</u>
había (2)				
llamaba (3)				
vivía (4)				
corrían (4)				
brincaban (4)				
le gustaba (5)				
tenía (6)				
era (7)				
era (8)				
preocupaba (8)				
temía (8)				
estaba (8)				
decía (9)				
respondía (9)				
dio (10)				
estaba (10)				
era (10)				
era (10)				
dejó (10)				
pasaban (11)				
crecía (11)				
volvió (11)				
habían (12)				
peleaban (12)				
topetaban (12)				

Fig.1. Sample Worksheet

In the third and final phase of the unit, students completed a post-unit questionnaire which asked them to describe the uses of the preterit and imperfect tenses in Spanish and to indicate their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the course unit along with their suggestions for improving the course unit moving forward. All students' names in the quotes included in the next section are pseudonyms.

3. Preliminary Findings

3.1 Strengths of the Course Unit

Some students commented that the children's book helped them better understand the forms and functions of the preterit and imperfect tenses in Spanish. For example, one student indicated that "it [the activity] was more fun than just reading sentences using them [the preterit and the imperfect] and it was helpful when you can see it [the tenses] in a story coming together" (Student #8, Class #1). Another student commented that "overall I believe the activity worked fine between going over the differences between the two forms and when to use them and then reading [*El Cuento de] Ferdinand* to see what we learned in action" (Student #5, Class #2). These quotes demonstrate that some learners believed that the activity helped contextualize the uses of both verb tenses and extended the form-function learning they initially gained from the activities surrounding the course textbook.

3.2 Weaknesses of the Course Unit

In regards to the weaknesses of the course unit, one student stated that "[I] had to look up many of the verbs' meanings. I could see how the verb was conjugated and knew which group it belonged to but not always what it was saying" (Student #13, Class #1). Another student asserted that "...at times it was hard to understand the story. This would cause confusion at times when trying to focus on learning [the] *pretérito* and [the] *imperfecto*" (Student #14, Class #02). These quotes affirm that some students believed that the book caused them difficulty in understanding the form-function relationships of both tenses due to the complex vocabulary included in the book.

3.3 Suggestions for Improving the Course Unit

Several students offered several propositions for strengthening the course unit in the future. For example, one student declared that "perhaps expanding the activity with a second book so that students can draw comparisons across the story's grammar" (Student #6, Class #1). Another student disclosed that "I think it would be good to have both the English and Spanish versions of each book in order to gain a better understanding of how Spanish reads" (Student #7, Class #2). These quotes signal that, among other considerations, instructors should reflect on the lexical complexity of the texts used in class

activities and exercises to ensure that this complexity does not detract from the pedagogical value of such texts in promoting students' grammatical understandings.

4. Conclusion

This paper explores the utilization of children's literature in combination with the PACE model as one viable possibility for advancing language learners' grammatical competence. It is hoped that this paper may inspire other educators and researchers to incorporate this approach in foreign/second language curricula and document the effectiveness of such an approach on the development on students' grammatical competence in order to expand the current literature on this topic.

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Speaker's Accent and Perception of Speech

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Abstract

One of the issues discussed in trans-disciplinary studies of speech perception that is also in the focus of this study is the effect of speaker's accent on the perception of speech. Prior research that has mainly been conducted with participants whose L1 is English focuses on perception of "accented speech" that is, of non-native speakers, defined as the breakthrough of native language phonology into the target language [8]. The findings of these studies suggest that accented speech is often considered as less prestigious than native patterns. Drawing on previous research, this study however aims to explore how subjects whose L1 is other than English perceive and evaluate speech that is delivered by native speakers of English (with standard English pronunciation) and how this compares to the perception of speech delivered by non-native speakers (L2 English accented speech). Participants in the study were 90 first year students, whose L1 is Croatian and who are studying at the University of Zagreb. Participants (all at CEFR-B2 level in English) were randomly divided into three groups, each exposed to the same short text in English. First group was exposed to the pre-recorded text read by an English native speaker (Standard British pronunciation) whereas the other two groups were exposed to the pre-recorded text read by non-native speakers of English with a rather pronounced L2 accent: Croatian in the second group and French in the third group. Listeners' task was to judge qualities of text they have listened to regarding its clarity, appeal, reliability, and interestingness on a five-point bipolar Likert-type scale. Listeners were also asked to evaluate how difficult it was for them to follow the text they have heard, as well as to evaluate their own English language proficiency level and satisfaction with own accent. Subjects' evaluations were statistically analysed and compared using ANOVA and t-tests. The obtained results show a significant difference in evaluations between the examined groups regarding all measured variables i.e., listeners evaluated the text read by the native speaker as more-clear, and also more appealing, interesting, reliable and easy to follow. Our study also suggests that most participants wished to improve their pronunciation which also corroborates the assumption that L2 speakers often aspire to native-standards of speech.

Keywords: perception of speech, accented speech

Introduction

Existing research on non-native speech accent is predominantly focused on exploring attitudes towards L2 speakers of English, that being associated with the fact that in the era of globalisation English has become a *lingua franca*, a sort of universal language used between speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A number of studies have been performed to investigate how varieties of English are perceived by the native speakers. Results of the studies suggest that communication judgment is frequently being governed by socioeconomic and cultural stereotypes, foreign-accented speech often triggering stereotypical evaluations or prejudices on the part of native speakers of English with L2 accented speech being judged as less prestigious than native one patterns ([9]; [11]; [4]; [6]; [1]). Gluszek & Dovidio [7] provide a review of empirical studies in support of the claim that non-native accent is often subjected to stigma in perception, with FA speakers being judged as less competent, less educated, and even less trustworthy than L1 accent speakers.

Existing research shows that negative evaluations of non-native speakers are not limited to the native speakers' judgments. Fayer and Krasinski [5] found that native Spanish speakers who listened to tapes of Puerto Rican learners of English exhibited more intolerance toward non-native speech than native English speakers.

Cargile, Takai and Rodriguez [2] used verbal-guise technique to explore Japanese students' attitudes towards two US speech varieties: California (standard) English and African-American vernacular English (AAVE). Whereas no significant differences were found between the students' ratings of the speech forms in terms of social attractiveness, California speech was evaluated significantly more positively than AAVE in terms of status and correctness.

McKenzie [10] investigated Japanese university students implicit and explicit attitudes of several native and non-native forms of English speech (UK, US, Japanese, Chinese, Thai Indian). The findings of his studies also indicate unfavourable evaluations of the status of L2 English, including Japanese English. The results of the studies show that Japanese students consider US and UK English the most correct, and therefore their speakers the most prestigious, whereas they express greater levels of solidarity with speakers of Japanese English. These results are in line with the findings of studies by Pantos and Perkins [12] and Sasayama [13] who indicate that both types of attitudes can coexist.

Coupland and Bishop [3] studies of explicit attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the UK also indicate that accent types that are associated with standard speech are strongly favoured in terms of prestige and attractiveness. The effect of region is also addressed, participants favouring their own variety. A large-scale study aimed towards defining underlying reasons of inter-individual variation in attitudes towards the foreign accent has confirmed the effect of specific personality traits (Extraversion, Neuroticism and Tolerance to ambiguity) in interaction with specific linguistic and socio-biographical factors (age, gender and education level, prior and current linguistic practices: multilingualism and growing up in an ethnic diverse environment).

Aim and Procedure

The aim of this research was to investigate the effect of speaker's accent (native or non-native) on the perception of the speech itself, its clarity, appeal, reliability and interestingness and easiness to follow.

Participants in the study were Croatian students, aged 19-20, studying at the University of Zagreb (N=90), all at CEFR-B2 level of English. Participants were randomly divided into three groups. The experimental design consisted of presenting groups with the same text but in a different variety of English: in first group the pre-recorded text was read by an English native speaker (with Standard British pronunciation) whereas in the other two groups the same text was read by non-native speakers: in the second group, the text was read by a Croatian speaker, and in the third group by a French speaker, both having a rather strong native accent.

All three readings were done by female speakers aged 20 to 23, each previously selected by 3 listeners as most representative of a distinct speech variety of English. The speech samples were very similar in length, ranging between 1,28 and 1,44 minutes. Prior to listening to the reading the listeners were not informed about the topic of the text. Listeners' task was to evaluate the text regarding its clarity, appeal, reliability, and interestingness. The evaluations were made on a five-point bipolar Likert-type scale. Participants were also asked to evaluate how difficult it was for them to follow the text they have heard. Listening comprehension was assessed separately through several comprehension-type questions. Participants were also asked to self-evaluate own English language proficiency and determine level of satisfaction with own accent. These evaluations were also made on five-point bipolar Likert-type scales. Evaluations were statistically analysed and compared using ANOVA and t-tests.

Results

Table 1 and figure 1 show the comparison between the results achieved in the group exposed to a native speaker of English (L1E) and the group exposed to a Croatian speaker (L2CR).

Table 1. The effect of reader's accent: L1 English (L1EN) and L2 Croatian (L2CR) on perception of features of the text: its clarity, appeal, reliability, interestingness and easiness to follow.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	St.d.	t	Sig.
Clarity	L1 EN	29	3,93	0,75	5,294	0,000
	L2CR	25	2,80	0,82		
Appeal	L1 EN	29	3,79	0,73	4,451	0,000
	L2CR	25	2,80	0,91		
Reliability	L1 EN	29	3,93	0,84	4,351	0,000
	L2CR	25	2,92	0,86		
Interesting	L1 EN	29	4,21	0,86	3,281	0,002
	L2CR	25	3,36	1,04		
Easiness to follow	L1 EN	29	3,90	0,90	4,115	0,000
	L2CR	25	2,76	1,13		

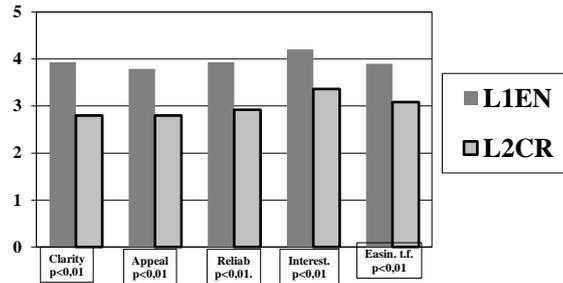


Figure 1. Comparison of Means: The effect of reader's accent L1EN and L2CR

The results indicate a highly significant effect of the nativeness of speaker's accent for all four examined features: clarity ($p < 0,01$), appeal ($p < 0,01$), reliability ($p < 0,01$) and interestingness ($p < 0,01$). In other words, listeners perceived the text read by a native speaker of English to be significantly more-clear, appealing, reliable and interesting than the same text read by a Croatian native speaker. They have also considered the text read by the native speaker easier to follow ($p < 0,01$).

The same tendency was observed with the group that listened to a French reader (table 2, figure 2). Listeners considered the text read by a native speaker of English to be more-clear ($p < 0,05$), appealing ($p < 0,05$) and reliable ($p < 0,01$) as well as more-easy to follow than the same text read by a French native speaker.

Table 2. The effect of reader's accent - L1 English (L1EN) and L2 French (L2FR) on perception of features of the text: clarity, appeal, reliability, interestingness, easiness to follow.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	St.d.	t	Sig.
Clarity	L1 EN	24	3,93	0,75	2,044	0,046
	L2 FR	29	3,46	0,93		
Appeal	L1 EN	24	3,79	0,73	2,315	0,025
	L2 FR	29	3,21	1,10		
Reliability	L1 EN	24	3,93	0,84	3,216	0,002
	L2 FR	29	3,21	0,78		
Interesting	L1 EN	24	4,21	0,86	1,707	ns
	L2 FR	29	3,83	0,70		
Easiness to follow	L1 EN	24	3,90	0,90	2,850	0,006
	L2 FR	29	3,08	1,18		

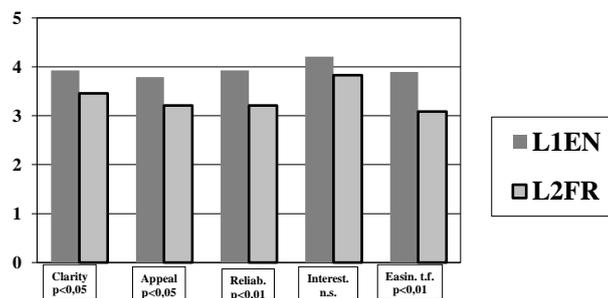


Figure 2. Comparison of Means: The effect of reader's accent L1English (L1EN) and L2 Croatian (L2CR) on perception of features of the text: clarity, appeal, reliability, interestingness, easiness to follow.

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the comparison of the results obtained in the group exposed to the reading performed by a French speaker of English (L2FR) and a Croatian speaker of English (L2CR). No significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the examined features (except for clarity).

Table 3. The effect of reader's accent: L2 French (L2FR) and L2 Croatian (L2CR) on perception of features of the text: its clarity, appeal, reliability, interestingness and easiness to follow.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	St.d.	t	Sig.
Clarity	L2 FR	24	3,46	0,93	2,634	0,011
	L2CR	25	2,80	0,82		
Appeal	L2 FR	24	3,21	1,10	1,415	ns
	L2CR	25	2,80	0,91		
Reliability	L2 FR	24	3,21	0,78	1,227	ns
	L2CR	25	2,92	0,86		
Interesting	L2 FR	24	3,83	0,70	1,864	ns
	L2CR	25	3,36	1,04		
Easiness to follow	L2 FR	24	3,08	1,18	0,982	ns
	L2CR	25	2,76	1,13		

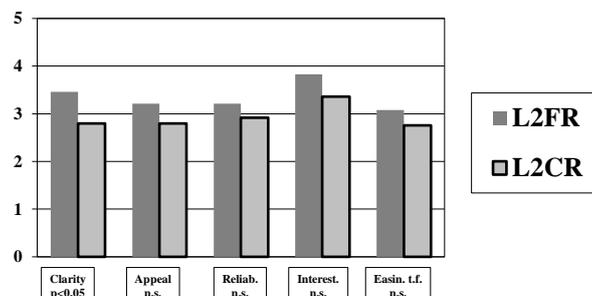


Figure 3. Comparison of Means: The effect of reader's accent L2FR and L2CR

Questions referring to self-evaluation of L2 competence and understanding of the text in question show no significant differences between the three examined groups. The results of the study also show that the students are generally satisfied with their pronunciation but also show interest in improving it.

Conclusion

The present study is, to our knowledge, first to have explored and established a link between the accent of a person who is delivering the text (native or foreign English accent) and the perception of the text itself among the population of L2 learners of English.

The results of the study show a significant difference in evaluations of the qualities of the text: its clarity, appeal, reliability and interestingness relative to the accent of the speaker (native and non-native English). Listeners evaluated the text read by the native speaker as more clear, more appealing, interesting, reliable and easy to follow.

Our study also suggests that majority of participants in spite of generally being satisfied with own pronunciation, wished to improve it. This finding corroborates the assumption that L2 speakers often aspire to native-standards of speech as found in existing research.

Further investigation is planned to study the effect of accent on perception of speech with the participants of different L1 and L2 languages.

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Forget What You Think You Know – The Real Story about What Works in Languages Classrooms

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Abstract

After teaching Italian in adult and university contexts with a communicative and explicit-grammar teaching focus for nearly 25 years, I was becoming increasingly perplexed as to why my students continued to make mistakes and not learn the correct forms of basic parts of speech (e.g., definite articles). This pedagogical crisis occurred around the same time that I heard Bill VanPatten speak about the failed promises of instructed second language acquisition (SLA) [9]. In a nutshell, he claimed that much of what occurs in typical languages classrooms has next to no impact on language acquisition – this resonated strongly with me and I decided to return to SLA research to understand more [10]. What I discovered has led to a complete overhaul of my teaching approach influenced heavily by Krashen's claims that approaches based on comprehensible input are superior to all others [2]. In this paper, I will present the compelling case for comprehensible input and describe how I have implemented this in the Italian Studies program at the University of Melbourne through the use of story-listening [7]. I will also discuss student responses to the approach and provide you with a range of suggestions on how to implement this in your own contexts.

Keywords: Teaching and learning; Comprehensible input; Italian language and culture

1. Back to Basics

As a language's teacher, have you ever found yourself wondering why your students don't seem to be progressing? Or why they continue to make the same mistakes over and over again no matter what you do? Have you found yourself constantly interrogating your teaching practice to see where you are going wrong? After teaching Italian for many years, this is exactly the predicament I found myself in – I'm calling it my pedagogical crisis. It is important to understand that I am a university languages teacher with a long history of interest in teaching and learning. I have constantly updated and upgraded my teaching programs and I take an innovative approach. I also hold qualifications in education. Finally, I have won a number of awards based on my teaching. I'm telling you this, not to boast, but to illustrate that even for someone with deep and enduring interest in pedagogy, I nevertheless found myself in the position to be questioning everything that I was doing. As often happens, it was at this moment of uncertainty and frustration that a serendipitous series of events occurred. First, I happened to come across online a keynote speech by Bill VanPatten given at the British Association of Applied Linguistics conference in 2018 [9]. VanPatten essentially challenges what is generally accepted about instructed second language acquisition in this keynote address, basically saying that most of what goes on in our classrooms under the orthodoxy of the communicative method has no real bearing on language acquisition. This prompted a return to research on second language acquisition, notably through the volume co-authored by VanPatten [10] which I would strongly recommend to all language's teachers. Second, I rediscovered the work of Stephen Krashen (<http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles.php?cat=6>) whose hypotheses for language acquisition now form the basis of my teaching. Of note is the emphasis on comprehensible input as the key ingredient for language learning – something, by the way, required regardless of what you believe about language acquisition, indeed “all current mainstream theories [...] accept input as the data for language acquisition” [10, p. 49]. This led me to the work of Beniko Mason [7] who has formulated an input-rich approach to language teaching called story-listening. After briefly summarising the positions of VanPatten, Krashen and Mason, I will detail how I have reconfigured my approach to teaching Italian.

2. Getting the Real Story

In a recent paper on instructed second language acquisition, Bill VanPatten [8] states that “instruction needs to be first informed by what we know about second language acquisition”. He goes on to say that “it is not clear to me at all that this is so” [p. 56], that is, often what occurs in the language’s classroom has no relation with what we know about language acquisition. In their book on second language acquisition, VanPatten, Smith and Benati [10] paint an interesting picture of the state of languages teaching. They particularly note that “it is not clear that instruction on formal features of the language speeds up acquisition” [p. 143] and that “teaching learners’ languages explicitly to help them along – has not borne the fruit of its efforts. It’s not clear that instruction really does anything” [p. 52]. If this is indeed the case, and my direct experience bears witness to these claims, then what should we be doing instead?

First, it would seem that it is important to bridge the gap between work on second language acquisition and our teaching practices. The renowned scholar, Stephen Krashen, first put forward a comprehensive agenda for languages acquisition in the 1980s [3]. Over the last 40+ years he has continued to explore language acquisition and confirm that his original hypotheses were supported by research. The comprehension hypothesis, the latest development of his original input hypothesis, is entirely compelling and elegantly explains what occurs for learners: “[t]he Comprehension Hypothesis claims that language acquisition does not happen when we learn and practice grammar rules. Language acquisition only happens when we understand messages...even after substantial grammar study, even very motivated students show only modest gains in accuracy” [2] VanPatten, Smith and Benati [10] reinforce this position when they state “[w]hat this means for teaching is that teachers (and learners!) can relax: Given access to input, interaction with that input, and time, learners will acquire an L2” [p. 196]. Mason and Krashen further highlight the situation: “[w]e have concluded that language acquisition happens in only one way: When we understand what we hear and what we read. Traditional language teaching is based on the assumption that we first need to LEARN grammar and vocabulary by study, practice speaking and writing, and get our errors corrected. In our view, this has never worked! There are no cases of people mastering languages through conscious learning alone” [7]. What this research tells us is that we need to offer students language that they can comprehend as the prime means of promoting learning. VanPatten, Smith and Benati [10] describe this as communicatively embedded input.

After carefully reviewing the literature on language acquisition, the second step is to adopt an approach which maximises students’ exposure to comprehensible input. How can we do this? My strong suggestion is to use story-listening in class, “originally used for English as a foreign language in Japan and now in use in several places through the world” [7]. Essentially, the teacher spends their valuable (and often limited) time telling the class stories using comprehension-aiding supplementation, which “does not consist of pre-teaching vocabulary but attempts to make new items more comprehensible by including drawings, gestures, explanations, and occasional brief translations” [7]. There are two vital aspects to story-listening that can cause some consternation given the long-standing orthodoxies of languages teaching: firstly, there is no need to supplement the story-listening activities with auxiliary grammar explanations, vocabulary review, or any of the typical activities that we normally find recommended in textbooks. Indeed, Mason and Krashen emphasise this point: “[i]n some classes, teachers provide additional skill-building exercises assuming it will help students “solidify” their knowledge of the new words. The time, however, appears to be better spent listening to more stories... In terms of total time spent, story listening is more efficient: Students gain more words per minutes from stories than from stories followed by exercises... And needless to say, listening to stories is far more interesting than doing exercises” [7]. Creating a class environment which is enjoyable and stimulating and minimises second language anxiety [1] goes a long way towards creating success in languages learning. Secondly, the aim of story-listening is to “help students develop a pleasure reading habit. There is consistent evidence that self-selected pleasure reading is by far the best way to acquire vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and writing style... this approach results in spectacular growth in language” [7]. All of this should be good news for languages educators, but, unfortunately, there remains much confusion around what actually works in the classroom – for a discussion of why this might be the case see [4]. In the next section, I describe how I have modified my teaching programs to provide an input-rich environment for learning.

3. Changing the Narrative

After more that, two decades teaching Italian using the prevailing explicit-grammar-communicative approach, I have completely abandoned any teaching of grammar, replacing this with story-listening classes and a comprehensive agenda for promoting self-selected reading. I am fortunate in that I teach in a university setting and have a high degree of freedom to design curriculum according to my needs and desires. As I hope is clear, however, my new curricula are underpinned by reference to published research, which, crucially, is shared with my students. One of the key ingredients to gaining students' engagement is to let them understand why you are doing what you are doing – in my experience, this has had a huge positive impact as students start to interrogate how and what they are learning. To briefly encapsulate my pedagogical innovations:

1. Story-listening – students have weekly story-listening classes where stories are told with comprehension-assisting supplementation after which they complete an activity which evaluates their understanding. These activities focus on global understanding rather than the dull, run-of-the-mill comprehension questions and can include things like drawing the story, retelling the story through creating a short play, a song, a comic strip, reconstructing the story from jumbled sentences, translating or rewriting the story in a different language, adding a new ending to the story, etc.
2. Reading – students are required to complete a weekly quota of reading which they record in an assessed reading log
3. Reflection – a requirement that is placed on the students is to reflect on the impact of story-listening and reading on their learning and to consider how this is similar or different from they, past experiences of instructed second language acquisition

3.1 Student Responses

My experience of recalibrating curriculum using an input-rich approach has been overwhelmingly positive. Students have taken to this approach wholeheartedly and consistently described two effects: an increased understanding of how the language works as a whole, rather than as isolated bits that you use to complete grammar exercises and a surprising increase in competence and confidence. Most notably, students describe the complete reduction of negative feelings often associated with the stress of the language classroom [1]. Most encouraging for me has been students' sheer joy in engaging with global comprehension activities during story-listening classes.

4. Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to fully capture the magnitude of the impact the shift to comprehension-rich pedagogy has had on my teaching practice in this short paper but I hope this will serve as an invitation to you to take a dive into some of the work that I've cited and to reconsider what you are doing. To finish with Stephen Krashen's words: "I can share two mystical, amazing facts about language acquisition. First, language acquisition is effortless. It involves no energy, no work. All an acquirer has to do is understand messages. Second, language acquisition is involuntary. Given comprehensible input, and a lack of affective barriers, language acquisition will take place. The acquirer has no choice. In a theoretical sense, language teaching is easy: All we have to do is give students comprehensible message that they will pay attention to, and they will pay attention to them if the messages are interesting" [3].

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Teacher Professional Development

Technology Use in EFL Preservice Teachers' Perceptions and Visions

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Abstract

It is increasingly important for teachers to adapt to changes in teaching and learning. Although reimagining teacher education is constantly needed, research on prospective teachers' perceptions of teaching English is lacking. To address this gap, a qualitative study was conducted, drawing on sociocultural perspectives of teachers and teaching. The study aimed to provide insights into how preservice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers envision ELT in the current era, based on their perceptions, experiences, and reflections. The study involved 35 EFL preservice teachers from South Korea, and data included interviews, observations, and fieldnotes. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, leading to three major findings. Firstly, the participants emphasized the importance of learner-centered teaching, interactions with students, individualization, and the use of technology in their perceptions and envisioning of ELT. Secondly, they highlighted the significant role of teachers in ensuring effective language teaching. Lastly, the participants expressed the need for comprehensive preparation in teacher education for preservice teachers. This study implies that teacher education should address the future prospects of EFL preservice teachers in the 21st century.

Keywords: EFL preservice teachers, teacher education, technology use

1. Introduction

It is crucial to envision and re-frame English language teaching (ELT) in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, teacher educators and institutional stakeholders are assured to inform about curriculum decisions to adequately prepare EFL preservice teachers for the post-pandemic period. Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies [1-4] have specifically focused on the perceptions and reflections of preservice teachers regarding their teaching and learning experiences. Preservice teachers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts have expressed a range of emotions and thoughts about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kim [1] conducted a study that focused on the redesign of an early childhood education preservice teacher education course in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that the participants had positive responses about using online tools in light of cognitive and emotional development, and online tools are thought of as effective tools for the interaction with children. Karimi et al. [2] investigated the beliefs and challenges of preservice teachers in Iran. The study identified several challenges, such as a lack of instructional capacities of combining theory and practice, professional identity development and construction, and a smooth connection between teacher education programs and higher institutions. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison [3] also investigated challenges and opportunities of virtual teaching in Chile. The analysis of 27 Chilean EFL preservice teachers' online surveys and interviews showed that the sudden shift to online teaching and the lack of interaction with students affected the professional development of preservice teachers significantly. Hojeij et al.'s (2023) study delves into the experiences of Emirati female preservice teachers who experienced their internship teaching practice in a virtual setting due to the pandemic. This qualitative investigation specifically focused on the management of virtual classrooms. The study involved 18 preservice teachers pursuing their undergraduate degrees in Early Childhood Education at a university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Findings highlighted that the preservice teachers perceived virtual learning as an advantageous opportunity. However, they encountered a significant challenge as they lacked prior training in managing online classrooms, requiring them to develop their own strategies. It was evident that providing training on the technology used for virtual learning is crucial for both teachers and students to ensure satisfactory learning experiences.

Although these studies shed light on the challenges and constraints faced by preservice teachers in practice, there is still a lack of research on their envisioning of ELT and limited information available on preservice teachers' prospective expertise, envisioning, and preparedness in ELT. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the envisioning of English language learning and teaching among EFL preservice teachers, with the goal of establishing a solid paradigmatic perspective in ELT. In particular, preservice teachers play a vital role in implementing and developing ELT in the current era. This study explored how EFL preservice teachers envision ELT, guided by one major research question: How did EFL preservice teachers perceive and envision ELT in the post-pandemic era?

2. Methodology

2.1 Context and Participants

This research took place within the context of the teacher education course – at a Korean national university. The study involved a group of thirty-five preservice teachers who were in their junior and senior years and were enrolled in this course. Fifteen participants (seven women and eight men) in age from 21 to 29 years old volunteered to be interviewed for the study. It is worth noting that all participants were pursuing a major in English language education with the goal of becoming English language teachers.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study included semi-structured interviews, observations, and fieldnotes. It was designed to be an open-ended interview, in which the participants could express their opinions and thoughts [5]. With a crucial role in gaining insights into the preservice teachers' perspectives, ideas, opinions and perceptions on the themes. Semi-structured interviews were performed with each of the participants, either in person or via phone. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes (an average duration of 30 minutes). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings. Interview questions focused on two main themes related to ELT: (1) envisioning of ELT and (2) the functions of English language teachers. The data analysis for this study was conducted through a qualitative and inductive approach. The purpose of the analysis was to discover recurring themes and/or patterns, which then were grouped together and categorized relative to the given topic.

3. Findings and Discussion

The participants held varying opinions regarding the visions of educational development and changes in ELT. Firstly, learner-centered teaching was emphasized. Some participants asserted that tasks served as motivators for learners, helping them focus on instruction and increasing their participation. Specifically, challenging tasks were deemed efficient in activating students' existing knowledge structures and engaging them in learning a language. One participant described her experience developing an online quiz for peers in their language class. This indicates a shift towards developing task-based instruction across various modes, including online, offline, and mobile, as a result of the pandemic. It is vital to ensure the development of effective teaching activities and materials by language teachers as well as collaboration with other educators.

Secondly, they unanimously agreed on the importance of interactions between teachers and students in ELT. They recognized that interaction and communication play a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Several participants emphasized the significance of interactions between students and teachers, teachers with other teachers, and students with their peers.

Thirdly, the theme of individualization was revealed from the interview data. Korean EFL learners were forced to handle their own learning at home because of the pandemic. Learning online encouraged the students to be more independent and self-regulatory. Consequently, the participants believed that they should provide instruction that allows for self-regulated and individualized learning. Moreover, they predicted that the post-pandemic era would bring more personalized learning to their students and stressed the importance of language teachers being prepared for a learner-centered, individualized curriculum and instruction. To achieve this, a key element of ELT should be the implementation of pair and small group work.

The participants in this study reached a consensus on the significance of acquiring technological expertise and serving as facilitators, learning partners, and mentors. They emphasized the importance of learner-centered teaching, interaction and communication, individualization, and effective use of technology in English language teaching (ELT). Therefore, it is crucial to promote the professional development of preservice teachers to empower them as active contributors in ELT. This ensures an effective response to emergencies and encourages teachers to engage in critical thinking, planning, decision-making, action-taking, and expertise sharing within the classroom environment [6-8]. For the enhancement of pedagogical and instructional skills and knowledge in ELT, preservice teachers can

benefit from in-service teachers' coaching and mentoring [9]. The use of practicums or student teaching to train preservice teachers is an effective and empowering method for developing professionalism in them. The practice-based field experience equips preservice teachers to navigate uncertain circumstances post-pandemic [10]. Moreover, it is essential to provide preservice teachers with simulations of microteaching opportunities in order to prepare them to be competent English language teachers.

Moreover, collaboration and cooperation play a vital role for prospective ELT teachers. Developing a sense of community is extremely important in the post-pandemic era. It was emphasized by the participants in this study that it is essential for preservice teachers to interact and collaborate with students and other teachers, as doing so enhances their sense of autonomy and agency and makes them feel empowered and confident. To foster innovation and expand the field of EFL, preservice and in-service teachers can share instructional resources and ideas [11-12]. Additionally, preservice teachers should strive to develop their communication skills by collaborating and interacting with students using various online and offline modes of communication in the 21st century.

4. Conclusion

It should be noted that participants in this study provided insight into the way they envision ELT, the function of teachers, and teacher education in the post-pandemic period. The pandemic, despite its challenges to all aspects of ELT, offered preservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on the difficulties present in the curriculum, instruction, and educational system. It allowed them to envision new approaches and re-examine ELT in the 21st century. Moreover, the findings highlighted the importance of preservice teachers assuming active roles as agents in the post-pandemic era.

The implications of this research can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, teacher education programs need to be reimagined or reconceptualized in the post-pandemic world. The effective utilization of technology and the enhancement of digital literacy emerged as significant concerns for preservice teachers. As a result, teacher education programs should address these concerns, ensuring a smooth transition and preparing preservice teachers to become efficient and effective educators. Furthermore, teacher education should emphasize the importance of achieving goals.

The implementation of language instruction by preservice teachers should be investigated in future research, and how their reflections and thoughts are applied in the classroom. It is essential to examine the practical aspects of their teaching practices. Researchers, educators, and professionals should consider how preservice teachers envision and perceive their futures in the post-pandemic era, promoting further exploration.

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Enhancing Educator Professional Development through the Child and Community Context Study

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving educational arena, the contemporary English language educator is being challenged to focus on rich hybrid and online experiences. Professional development and graduate programs for educators often address the more traditional aspects of integrating technology and course design. This study adds an innovative dimension beyond the classroom and online coursework by providing the opportunity to observe and study the community, parents and families of the students being taught. The Child and Community Context Study focuses on delving deeper into the lives of the students, their families, and the community in which they reside. Carefully designed activities are presented to strengthen all of these relationships and engage educators in significant accomplishments interacting with students and families.

Keywords: Community, Family, Parent involvement, Professional development

1. Introduction

This presentation and study address the components of the Child and Community Context Study and discusses the results and experiences of 150 graduate students enrolled in the Rural Endorsement and Development Opportunities (REDO) Project at Boise State University. The Child and Community Context Study encourages educators to get to know the neighborhood in which they teach by observing and studying the community and interviewing community members. Educators select two English language students in their class, observe these students and engage in informal conversations with them. The highlight of this study is to conduct a home visit to learn about the student's experience as an English language learner. Educators gather all the information and prepare a context study report addressing each component of the study. Project activities are aligned with course readings and completed during the semester with intermediate deadlines and deliverables. Educators who participate will be well positioned to contribute to the learning community and develop a growing understanding of diverse people and contexts, reflecting on what they have learned about school-community-family-partnerships, as well as language, and literacy. It is the goal of these activities to respond to the need for transforming education throughout the world particularly for diverse English language learners and their families who face multiple challenges and will benefit from proactive educational strategies.

2. Review of the Literature

Researchers have found that the key to making the family-community-school relationship a success is by considering it a partnership of equals, and positive school-family partnerships also help cultivate students' social and emotional well-being [1]. In a previous study that addressed teachers' and parents' perceptions of parent involvement in an ethnically concentrated elementary school in a culturally diverse community, analyses revealed that teachers and parents both claim that firm partnerships between them are essential to children's learning [2]. There are numerous studies on how teachers come to understand families and Caspe [3] has developed further research to point out the link between teacher outreach, family educational involvement, and student outcomes. Caspe identifies two key processes whereby teachers come to understand families: gathering information and meaning making. Communication and observation were the two most common methods employed by teachers to collect information about families. As teachers collected information about families, they also made meaning of what they collected. Henderson and Mapp [4] point out that there is strong and steadily growing evidence that families can improve their children's academic performance in school and have a major impact on attendance and behavior. Moll and Gonzales address outreach and conclude that the study of children's family life may lead teachers to better know the cultures from which their students emerge, allowing them to integrate these family "funds of knowledge" into their curricula [5].

3. Overview and Components of the Child and Community Context Study

In this study, graduate level educators will have the opportunity to observe and study the community and get to know the neighborhood including interviews with community members. Two English learner students will be selected, and they will closely observe these students and their learning, and also engage in informal conversations with them. A highlight of the study will be a home visit in order to discover as much as possible about the student's experience as an English language learner. Once educators gather all the information and consider what they have learned, they will prepare a context study report addressing each component of the study and the ways that this assignment has informed them about school-community-family partnerships. On successful completion of this project, educators will be able to:

- Discuss and provide examples about the pre-conditions for equitable and democratic language practices in classrooms and communities.
- Recognize the interrelatedness of language, culture, and schooling.
- Understand their own teaching and/or behavior as social, cultural, and political practices with possibilities for transformative action through an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- Recognize and advocate the importance and benefits of family and community involvement in the academic, social and linguistic success of students.

Teachers identify two English language learners who they will get to know out of the classroom as well as in the classroom and inform the appropriate school/district staff of the students they have selected for their study. Next, they will have an opportunity to make observations in the community to understand the environment in which the student lives and the impact that it has on the school and individual's education. They will spend time walking around and observing in the neighborhood where their students live and record their observations including comments regarding the ways these observations impact the student and school. Then teachers have an opportunity to interview members of the community in order to learn more about their students' environment and culture. Next, teachers will begin recording focus student school and classroom observations and continue their observations weekly until they submit a description of their findings and experiences. In these observations of focus students' daily behaviors, teachers consider their interactions, experiences, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual environment as appropriate. What contexts do they believe have a significant impact on an English learner's development/learning/social integration/self-concept etc. at school?

Within the context of classroom activities, teachers are encouraged to observe the interaction of the children with teachers as well as with peers and note the language(s) used by the children to communicate. Educators determine when the children voluntarily participate in instructional activities and when the children are invited to participate. With whom and where do the focus children socialize during recess and in the cafeteria? What language(s) do they use in these contexts? Additional factors to consider are their involvement in specific English Learner programs, the types of support systems available for the student/family regarding language acquisition, the forms of evaluation used for placement decisions, the parent involvement component in the school and classroom and academic language abilities in content areas. As part of this study, educators will have an informal chat with the students that they are focusing on and write up their experiences.

The culminating activity is to conduct the home visit. Teachers will contact the parent/family to agree on an appropriate time convenient for everyone. It is important to be sure that the parent understands the positive purpose of this visit and assignment and does not think that his or her child did anything wrong or unusual. Teachers will have the opportunity to describe the home visit. What insights did they gain into their focus students' home literacy? How did they relate to the family and how did they respond to the visit? What is the teacher more aware of now about the student than they were before the visit and how does this inform their practice? After gathering all the information, teachers will consider what they have learned and will prepare a context study report addressing each component of the study and the ways that this assignment has informed them about school-community-family partnerships.

4. Outcomes for Educators

The strengths and accomplishments of the Child and Community Context Study are clearly evident in feedback received from students. It is a key component of educator professional development that was carefully designed to engage teachers in developing cultural awareness [6], [7] and intercultural competence [8]. Moreover, the professional development designed approaches for incorporating family and community funds of knowledge gained from home visits, neighborhood walks and community visits. Much of the professional development activities involve teachers' active participation through active learning strategies [9] and working with student data based on a review of professional development programs [10] (Risko et al., 2008) which highlighted that programs that emphasize "learning by doing"

can produce better teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices than programs that only address knowledge and beliefs. This Child and Community Context Study was incorporated into the coursework for the *Rural Endorsement Development and Opportunities (REDO)* grant program. Data gathered from graduate students who are teaching in Idaho schools found that *REDO* participants reported increases in their knowledge, confidence, and use of 49 of 50 instructional practices and competencies focused on English learners. Nearly all participants (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that *REDO* was effective in preparing participants to serve English learners. Nearly all participants (96%) agreed or strongly agreed that *REDO* increased participant knowledge and skills related to parent, family, and community engagement [11]. The Child and Community Context Study in conjunction with other rigorous coursework is credited for being a major contributor to these accomplishments.

5. Conclusions and Future Recommendations

The Child and Community Context Study is a valuable asset that will make English learning come alive and become more relevant as educators experience a firsthand look into the lives of their students. Furthermore, the findings addressing the Child and Community Context Study incorporated into the coursework suggest that *REDO* has met its goals to increase the pool of highly qualified, culturally responsive teachers in Idaho and increase their use and knowledge of evidence-based practices to improve culturally and linguistically diverse students' academic progress, and engagement with parents, families, and communities. As educators expand collaborative educational endeavors, this will empower them to relate to students and impact instruction. Increasing the achievement of English learners is essential and preparing educators to provide quality educational experiences by engaging beyond the classroom is valuable and essential. The innovative strengths of the Child and Community Context Study significantly reinforces transformative action through an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.

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Managing Infinity – Language Teaching in the Post-Digital Age

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Abstract

As language teachers we are deeply aware of the effects of technological developments on society, and on our teaching context. This paper aims to show how post-digital awareness (meaning understanding the social effects of digital technology) should be used to help teachers navigate the complex choices we face, every time we enter a classroom or search for new resources or techniques. The language teachers' task today is to deal with rapid technological development, but also drastic social change and transformations in communicative behaviour. The immediate challenge for teachers is identified as 'the infinite choice problem': the plethora of materials, websites, apps and the sheer availability of text is stressful for teachers and confusing for learners. Feelings of disempowerment or increasing disengagement risk diminishing the importance of language learning. Accompanying this is an ever-increasing pressure to 'do a good job'. This is exacerbated by significant changes in language itself: interactions are more complex than envisaged by traditional linguistics (the spoken-written dichotomy is inadequate to explain language use, and grammar rules founded upon the 'centre' are questioned); the uses of language may be changing; transactional language skills are becoming less important than the ability to present oneself – to express (or create) identity. The paper then attempts to offer solutions to these dilemmas. Firstly, AI is considered, and through reference to research data and current thinking, it is proposed that we educators should accept artificial intelligence and use it to the advantage of our classes. Data collected suggest we will have to alter traditional means of assessment, but do not indicate that 'all is lost'. The huge amount of learning material available leads us to understand the importance of authenticity in every teaching context: the selection of text (in its broadest sense) for learning must be based on local meanings. Teacher training should take complexity into account and help future teachers select and benefit from the richness of textual opportunity on offer. Lastly, language education presents as the ideal forum for discussion of human values in the age of fake news and Tik-Tok superficiality: it develops skills of analysis, and evaluation of meaning and so encourages discernment.

Keywords: *Infinity, teaching strategies, materials, AI, discernment*

1. Introduction

The direct and indirect effects of technological developments on society, and so on our teaching context, are impossible to ignore. Besides feelings of *technological determinism* [1] and the understandable fear of change that might assail the teacher, we can note the dematerialisation of our life spaces (in advanced economies we consume less physical material today than twenty years ago, but consume more digitally), the sheer range of sources of information, entertainment and communication instantly available to us as individuals, and the increased complexity of linguistic channels in use. These new arenas of linguistic interaction must be of the utmost concern to language teachers, both for their primary and secondary effects: information technology exposes our students to cybercrime, hacking, bullying and the like, but also to serious social effects (social disinhibition, injustice, political misinformation and mental health issues) which governments have shown themselves unable to mitigate effectively [2].

At the same time, the linguistic context has also been transformed. Leaving aside the effects of digital communication, it worth pausing to think of the means to publication open today, the different sources of 'facts' and the sudden arrival of AI. It is quite possible that within a few years the vast majority of websites will be generated by AI and not by human authorship. This implies different language skills necessary for our students and, indeed, different sources of language change.

2. Post-digital Awareness

As language teachers we have little choice but to embrace a post-digital mindset, understanding and using technology, but with informed choices and social awareness. It is not enough simply to employ an app or a device in a language class because it offers a new affordance, or just helps us to look up to date. Instead, we should always avoid unprincipled implementation by having a clear, and clearly expressed, rationale for our tech choices. This will help us to avoid the danger of unfulfilled promise that often bedevils first use of technological applications in language learning contexts, but will also lay emphasis on the pragmatic elements in each type of interaction. If a student creates an Instagram story, for example, they need to understand the interplay of picture and text, and to exploit the transience of the medium.

2.1 Choice

A fundamental characteristic of the post-digital is an understanding of choice and how to deal with it effectively. As teachers of language, we are spoilt for choice in the current environment: we have endless resources online (often available free of charge), including support exercises, helpful videos explaining every conceivable aspect of the language, huge textual resources, and easy access to TV shows and auditory entertainment (music, podcasts etc.). In many ways our situation is the complete reverse of thirty or forty years ago, when our students were hungry for any possible contact with the language and so would go to the once-a-month showing of a film in the original language, or ask their teacher to kindly transcribe the lyrics to their favourite song (a two-hour task usually!). But the context has recently changed yet again: now AI can create an infinite range of text items almost instantaneously on any topic. In all fields infinite choice is a real question, but nowhere more so than in language teaching. When we reflect on the fact that we rarely use more than around 70% of the material supplied in the typical coursebook package (in class or as homework), then we can understand how significant the issue of quantity and selection is. In my own experience using a B2 coursebook, the wealth of support material is attractive and impressive [3], but much perhaps remains unused or under-exploited, not to speak of the immense material 'out there' online that we rarely come to see or use.

2.2 The Language Teacher's Task

Obviously, the most pressing task for us is to navigate these choices, find the best opportunities and train our learners in the skills of discernment and selection that will help them throughout their lives. But this is not all. Our decisions as to the use of apps and resources need to be made based, not only on the efficacy of the aids chosen, but also by taking into account the social changes we are experiencing. The modes of communication on offer don't just tell our students something about grammar or vocabulary: they imply social norms and potentially push certain kinds of pragmatic behaviour. And so, our recommendations should reflect our awareness of these more subtle aspects of materials and devices used. There are significant transformations in communicative behaviour currently occurring and our choices should recognise this.

2.3 Language Has Changed

The advent of the internet, social media and personal handheld devices has rendered our traditional approaches to the analysis of language largely inadequate. The simple spoken/written dichotomy (philosophically questioned by Derrida [4]) is hardly valid when we try to describe and assess many communicative moments today. Is a podcast only *written-to-be-spoken*? Is a Facebook post simply written (even though the interplay with photos etc. is probably fundamental)? Are emails and WhatsApp messages closer to spoken rather than written language? With AI the question becomes more pressing and not merely a philosophical nicety: texts are produced instantly (in contrast to the traditional conception of the 'act of writing') and will now be produced in auditory form, should the user so wish. At the same time, our traditional descriptions (or prescriptions) of grammar are under examination: should the centre provide norms for the periphery [5]? Does a lingua franca have a completely different view of how language should be constructed and used [6]?

This implies very different skills on the part of our new language speakers. The future abilities of successful language users might be much less transactional (*i.e.*, can I buy, sell or refuse this in the language?) and more concerned with one of the fundamental skills of post-digital society: presenting and performing one's identity.

2.4 AI the Game-changer

2023 will perhaps be remembered as the year that AI truly arrived. Articles are published almost every day on the topic and its implications (see, for example, *The Observer* in the UK, which published numerous articles on the arrival of AI in September 2023), but it is perhaps interesting to note that we have been using AI for more than a decade now (on our phones, with our emails). But this year AI has

suddenly become unavoidable: we know that texts can be produced instantly and with a high degree of accuracy [7], pictures can be generated with ever-increasing precision and credible dialogues can be maintained for hours. The potential dilatory effects on education are obvious (students doing their assignments through chatbots, copying in examinations etc.), and recent research suggests that in the United States cheating has jumped from 10th place to 1st in an index of concerns in education. At the same time, most translation between common language pairs can be done with remarkable accuracy [8]. All these developments clearly pose a challenge to traditional language teaching.

Conclusion: Some Suggested Solutions

Fear is a reasonable reaction to this transformed language environment, but there are many opportunities for language education. Firstly, AI need in no way be our enemy, but perhaps the tasks we require of our classes should change. It is true that a writing assignment can easily be done in moments with AI, but the skill we should promote is the critical analysis of the texts generated, in particular as regards higher-level discourse aspects and pragmatics. We can use AI to generate ten different answers to our model B2-level question and work with our class on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each. In the same way in a CLIL class we can generate texts in English on the subject at hand, and then fact check them (notoriously the chatbot produced text will be superficially convincing but contain significant inaccuracies).

All texts used in class, from whatever source, should be authentic in having a local meaning and value. They can come from anywhere (potentially), but it is hoped that students will acquire an ability to recognise sources that are more reliable. Teacher training will have to change in order to prepare teachers to navigate the range of resources available and benefit from the text-rich society we live in. There is already literature available to assist teacher development in this sphere [9].

Most of all, as language educators we have a special responsibility to work on the skills of communication, and one of these is spotting fake news and untrustworthy agents. Rather than productive and transactional language, we will be developing discernment in our learners – granting them the ability to identify, select and use truly communicative language.

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The Borrowed Knowledge of LSP Teachers in French Higher Education

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Abstract

In the field of educational studies, little attention has been paid to the analysis of knowledge formation enabling teachers to carry out their pedagogical work. Indeed, knowledge formation is associated with degree contents chosen as a specialty, which then lays at the basis of course content and teachers' professional competence. However, when it comes to languages for specific purposes (or LSPs), the sources and methods of knowledge formation must also encompass the topics that normally accompany the teaching of language skills. Most LSP teachers are not educated in scientific, legal or otherwise professional knowledge they use as subject matters in their language classes and 'borrow' from experts in those fields. The present contribution aims to trace the origins of such a knowledge, define it and assess how it consolidates into a crucial aspect of teacher development in LSP teaching in higher education, based on an ongoing research project involving LSP in a French university. Taking into account the dearth of academic literature around the issue of teachers' knowledge formation, some exploratory and qualitative inquiries were carried out within the University of Toulouse, involving different LSP areas, based on group discussion and discourse analysis. The results should serve as the basis for a more thorough investigation at regional or national level involving more quantitative tools. One of the expected outcomes of this research is also to show that it may somehow collide with professional attitudes and received knowledge about the legitimacy that goes along with teaching in higher education and how it may question teachers' relation with academic knowledge.

Keywords: borrowed knowledge – teaching skills- higher education- France- languages for specific purposes – legitimacy- professional representations

1. Introduction

In the context of growing academic internationalization of study paths, professional outcomes as well as student employability have become key objectives for most European universities, thus sparking off the development of English courses for specific purposes to all categories of degrees, masters and doctorates. Those classes are generally taught by qualified teachers who rarely master the disciplines or skills their language classes relate to. When it comes to teacher development, most research papers are devoted to the enhancement of their pedagogical skills, but not so much to the complex relationship they entertain with the core knowledge of their course content. As we know, languages cannot be separated from real life reference, and this complex connection is studied in the field of both continental and analytical philosophy. In the context of ESP teaching, it has been observed that there is an imbalance between the teacher's linguistic knowledge and the students' content knowledge, as they are already specialized in a particular field, be it science, law or commerce, for instance [2]. In such case, there can be some collaboration between teacher and students if communication skills are better trained and developed in the class. However, this analysis does not deal with the formation of the teacher's knowledge of the specialized content of his ESP course. This will be done in Part One of the present contribution, with the presentation of two key concepts forming the construct of "teacher literacy", i.e., the "borrowed knowledge" and its corollary, the "transactional praxeology". Together with the traditional academic status of teachers and lecturers as knowledge holders, those concepts participate in the shaping of the professional identity of higher education ESP teachers and may explain the nature of their relationship with 'specialized' knowledge. Part Two will then discuss those definitions based on the elements of a study carried out at the University of Toulouse in 2021 among ESP teachers concerning their attitude towards teaching content they did not master and their preferred pedagogical strategies and relationship with their colleagues in other departments and academic fields.

2. ESP Teachers' Literacy Skills

Literacy is a wide, “elastic” field of research [6] that include different actors and skills, such as learning and teaching skills and many other areas of research, as well as a great variety of approaches. In the case of ESP teachers, they possess professional skills and academic skills in the English language and various cultural studies, which form the bulk of their education, but rarely in the academic or professional content they base their language course on, something that necessitates further discussion of its theoretical foundation.

2.1 The Concept of “Borrowed Knowledge”

Following Chevallard [1], this partial mastery of a subject-matter may be referred to as “borrowed” and forever “in progress”. It develops in the context of implicit or explicit collaboration between experts from various fields who accept relying on other specialists' expertise in terms of knowledge and skills. It implies being aware of the existence of boundaries between the disciplines involved, based on the assumption that any established knowledge can be used by an outsider from that field but reduced to its basic or more general elements, an aspect called “beneficial alterity”. It also implies that this layman's version of a hitherto academic or professional knowledge can and should be shared in the context of teaching; thus, it constitutes an instrumental, teaching-based source of pedagogical content for educational purposes used by a language teacher [4]. Furthermore, it means that any teacher in a higher education context may not be considered as an expert in the course content, a position which may be at odds with the current academic standards. This may reflect negatively on ESP teachers, as they may feel out of place in an institutional environment dominated by specialists in other areas, a phenomenon described as “threatening alterity” by Chevallard. Besides, that type of knowledge always changes with time and experience [3]. Generally speaking, the “borrowed knowledge” can be detected whenever some sort of educational process takes place, that is, whenever somebody undertakes to teach anything to another person. It is thus always associated with a specific praxeology enabling ESP teachers to incorporate that knowledge into their course arrangements.

2.2 The “Transactional Praxeology” of ESP Teachers

This phrase, borrowed from Chevallard's seminal article, aims to describe how ESP teachers leave their comfort zone, select their sources and adapt them to their classroom context based on their students' language skills according to the CEFR, which should prevail over content and theme. In that regard it is akin to CLIL approaches, but its added value lies in the possibility for ESP teachers to adopt some teaching techniques borrowed from the specialist field as it is taught in the anglophone sphere, thus providing for an insight into the educational culture of areas other than languages, and incorporating parts of ESP teachers' initial academic knowledge into the actual teaching process [4]. The next step aims to describe how those teachers envisage the formation of their “borrowed knowledge”, “transactional praxeology” as well as the professional representations attached to their teaching missions in higher education.

3. The Preliminary Survey

It was conducted in 2021 among ESP teachers at the University of Toulouse Capitole, which teaches law, economics and business governance and communication. A sample of six teachers agreed to form an informal group where the issues of knowledge formation, didactic approaches as well as professional identity and the place of ESP teachers in a broader, interdisciplinary context were discussed.

3.1 The Sample

The group involved in the discussion of the above-mentioned points comprised Four women and two men, all experienced in ESP, who had been teaching the subject for five to over ten years. The topics included law, economics, business organization. The following synthesis accounts for a three-hour recorded discussion. For the sake of clarity and concision, it has been broken down into the following items.

3.2 Forming One's Borrowed Knowledge

All participants acknowledge that they base their approach to ESP on the professional and academic needs of their students, for which they consult all relevant administrative documents. Regarding their own grasp of the subject matter, which they feel is an essential starting point, they resort to generalist articles online, encyclopedias, press articles or audio/video sources that can be understood by B1 level students. Most stress the importance of the material constraints of teaching hours and students'

language skills to devise a course. All participants agree that it takes a minimum of three years to struggle less with the topic. It was also noticed that teacher-students interactions fuel the learning process for ESP teachers, who feel more like students who can check their own progress.

3.3 Didactic Strategies

Language issues are specifically dealt with in the form of exercises borrowing from existing class material, which means that priority is given to content first. At least half of the participants do not resort to manuals used in an anglophone context, like law, because they initially concern secondary school students, but others do not see it as an obstacle. It all depends on the students' degree of specialization. But all agree that language exercises are useful whenever linguistic proficiency is low or average. Above B2, they can be replaced by project-based learning, or other language-based activities necessitating the learning of a specific methodology, like debating.

3.4 Academic Status and Legitimacy

Although ESP courses are interdisciplinary in essence, there is little to no collaboration with specialist teachers. However, they get help from other language teachers, which means that the disciplinary barrier plays a part in their quest for knowledge and does not foster otherwise fruitful exchanges among academics. What was also stressed is the feeling, among ESP teachers, of not conforming with the usual professional representations of the word of academia, since they are aware of the incomplete nature of their borrowed knowledge in an environment where mastery of a discipline is crucial and is part and parcel of an academic's professional identity. The dominant feeling among participants is their perceived lack of legitimacy as they deal with themes and topics they do not master, as a rule. ESP teachers are thus general practitioners with specialized skills in language and culture. Many, as researchers, deal with very different fields of study, which may place them in a schizophrenic position whereby their research interests are not really considered, and their hybrid teaching status not fully recognized by their peers in other disciplines.

4. Conclusion

Even though ESP is a well-established line of teaching in French higher education, the issue of legitimacy is still a thorny one, and one that bears a brunt of ESP teachers' professional development. However, the situation is by no means fixed, as the promotion of interdisciplinary courses is greatly encouraged by national and transnational institutions like the European Commission. As research evolves in that direction, so does teaching in higher education. This may well be a golden opportunity for ESP teachers as they could use their academic talents and teaching experience to fully embrace their diverse borrowed knowledge to make a difference for students.

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